A New Awakening

The publication of Andreas Vesalius' *De humani corporis fabrica* in 1543 has come to mark the beginning of our modern understanding of human anatomy. Before this book was published, however, the study of anatomy was already being transformed by physicians who dared to study the human body through dissection.

One of these physicians was Jacopo Berengario Da Carpi, a surgeon and anatomist at the University of Bologna from 1502 to 1527. He was associated with many of the great intellectuals of the era and had strong ties to the Medici family. A book he published in 1530, *Isagoge breves et exactissimae in anatomiam humani corporis*, represents the state of pre-Vesalian anatomy texts. While Berengario was a pioneer in the study of anatomy through observation and experimentation, the woodcuts in this book are rough, abstract, and offer little insight into the functions of the body. Vesalius, thirteen years later, was able to match his scientific experience with artists who were able to faithfully represent intricate details, at last providing the breakthrough in anatomical imaging that transformed our knowledge of the body forever. Although Vesalius’ achievement was great, books like Berengario’s show that a scientific approach to anatomy had been developing for some time in Europe.

The Ebling Library Copy  WZ 240 B488i 1530

Our copy of *Isagoge Breves* provides an excellent example of an early printed book as a physical artifact. It is in very poor condition and its binding has been removed. This reveals the structure of the book, including an example of binder’s waste. A leaf from an older book, printed in the fifteenth century, has been ripped out of its original binding and sewn into the gatherings of this copy of *Isagoge Breves* to reinforce the binding. This was a common practice during the early years of the printed book, and our collection contains many examples, including vellum manuscript fragments. Look for more examples in future issues! *Isagoge Breves*, along with our other rare books, may be viewed in the Historical Reading Room at the Ebling Library.