

MEDIA RELEASE

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Rare piece of 11th century history uncovered in book from the QVMAG Library

Parchments of manuscript dating from the 11th century have been uncovered in a 16th century book belonging to the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery's Library.

The Library acquired a copy of *Plutarch's Lives*, published in Germany in 1541, which is itself a remarkable item and extremely hard to find on the Australian book market.

Plutarch's Lives is one of the most important and comprehensive collection of biographies of famous Greek and Roman figures. Furthermore, the 1541 German printing was the first complete German edition ever printed of *Plutarch's Lives*.

What was not known at the time of purchase was that the book was hiding an intriguing secret.

When the book was inspected by Tasmania's foremost expert on early books and manuscripts, Emeritus Professor Rod Thomson of the University of Tasmania, he noticed something interesting about a slender strip of text on the inside of the front cover.

Professor Thomson observed what appeared to be strips running underneath the end papers on the inside of the covers. These strips would no doubt have been used to strengthen the binding by the book's binder.

QVMAG's Conservation team set about carefully peeling away these end papers and uncovered two pasted-down strips of manuscript, one on the inside of the front and back covers, each measuring 30cm in length and 6cm and 9cm in width respectively.

Strips of manuscript were also confirmed as being concealed beneath the length of the spine and under the front of the covers. To reveal these would mean destroying the book's binding, which QVMAG staff decided to avoid.

The parchments of manuscript were reliably dated by Professor Thomson as being written sometime during the 11th century, making them the oldest examples of European manuscript confirmed as being held by a public institution in Tasmania.

They are part of the *Enarrationes in Psalmos (Exposition of the Psalms)*, which was authored by Augustine of Hippo (354 CE – 430 CE), who was an early Christian theologian and philosopher.

The Launceston Mayor Albert van Zetten says QVMAG is offering the community a chance to view this exciting discovery.

"The book and its previously concealed manuscript will be put on public display in the entryway to the Museum at Inveresk from today until 16 May."

For more information or to arrange a photo opportunity, please contact Claire Campbell on the details below.