

BY CLAYTON DEKORNE

The Book of Trades

First published in 1568, *Das Ständebuch* (which is typically translated as “The Book of Trades,” but is more exactly translated as a book of rank or class) by the German woodcut artist Jost Amman illustrates 113 professions, beginning with the Pope and ending with the Jester, each with a short verse written by Hans Sachs. It follows a Renaissance tradition of “encyclopedias,” which cataloged knowledge of the sciences in lists of known things like plants, animals, and constellations. Some included geographies with illustrations of the customs, costumes, and professions of each land’s people. One of the most famous and comprehensive encyclopedias, the *Historia Naturalis* by Pliny the Elder, is mentioned in the introduction to the *Ständebuch* by the publishers, who felt that Pliny’s treatment of ethnography and anthropology left out an immense variety of human arts and crafts.

The *Ständebuch*, according to its publishers, was intended to expound the “virtue of all people who served God.” In the final verse by Sachs, the intention of the book is described as a model for the great varieties of trade and craft people who should refrain from idleness, avoid all vices, and “praise and love God Who feeds us all.” Yet unlike the elaborate religious allegories of the time, in the *Ständebuch*, “it is the craftsmen themselves who replace abstract

allegories as the vehicles of moral content,” writes Benjamin Rifkin in his introduction to the Dover edition.

Some evidence of this moral content is especially evident in the example of the Carpenter, shown below among three examples from the building trades. Lying on a sawhorse in the foreground is a large feathered wing, a symbol of Daedalus. In Greek mythology, Daedalus is an architect and craftsman credited with the invention of carpentry. As the legend goes, his nephew was also a gifted inventor who was inspired to replicate the spine of a fish in iron to create a saw and who connected two pieces of iron rod with a rivet to make a scribe. Seeing these, Daedalus grew envious of his nephew’s talent and threw him off a building. Daedalus was convicted of attempted murder and exiled to the island of Crete, where he lived in hiding with his son Icarus. As the authorities kept watch on the ships leaving the island, Daedalus was unable to escape, so he built sets of wings for Icarus and himself. While Daedalus managed to fly to safety, his son Icarus tried to fly to the sun, which melted the wax holding the wings together, and the boy plunged to his death. The wing lying in front of the Carpenter serves as both a symbol of the trade’s mythological origins and a reminder to stick to the work at hand and not fly too high.

1 Der Zimmermann.



2 Der Schreiner.



3 Der Steynmetz.



Among the many trades represented in *Das Ständebuch* are Der Zimmerman, carpenter (1); Der Schreiner, joiner or cabinetmaker (2); and Der Steynmetz, stone mason (3).