

## INTRODUCTION TO ANTIQUE BOOKS – TRANSCRIPT

We decided in advance of the publication of Catalog 61 in September of 2011 to do video segments as a kind of supplement to our written catalog and internet descriptions. We've done more than a dozen. This is the longest and the broadest. It's a kind of general introduction dealing with the collecting of books. I've been buying, and selling, and appraising books for 35 years. And I think could be forgiven if I have a kind of whirled, weary, or hard-bitten demeanor. But the truth is book selling for me has been a great deal of fun. And I mention that because book selling and book collecting, in my opinion, are basically the same kind of undertaking. And they have the same kind of pleasure. And fun is at the heart of both things.

I want to divide these general principles, this discussion of general ideas into four parts. I promise that they'll be short on abstraction, long on exemplification, looking at examples of the principles I'm talking about. It's going to be superficial because we don't have a great deal of time. But if you're willing to listen, you get to look at the good things that will serve as examples. The four parts of this introductory of discussion. Why do people collect anything, why do people collect books, how do people collect books, and what is my role as the facilitator for people who collect? Because the truth is, I don't really collect much in the way of books.

First thing, why do people collect anything? There are lots of answers to that question. One of them is that we live in a world that is full of disorder and it's extremely scary. And collecting allows you to kind of impose a certain, I'm sorry, artificial order. Now this is a frightening kind of area. And I don't want to go there. So we won't talk about it.

Second reason for collecting anything, any kind of collectible, it puts you in touch with history. The first opportunity I had to experience this feeling was when I was in my 20s. I lived in Iowa and I used to walk in the spring. In the fields after the first plowing, after the first heavy rain. And I would find aboriginal artifacts like this incredibly beautiful ax head. And I would reach across time 2000 years. Sometimes 6000 years because some of the artifacts were that old. And to be able to make contact with somebody from that age is a feeling that's very difficult to replicate. I had no idea that I would end up being an antiquarian bookseller. But the feeling I get selling books is very much akin to that. And it's a wonderful feeling to have.

The third reason to collect is it allows you to be creative in a personal way. Every collection, no matter what it is, reflects your personality. And the fourth reason, I think to collect, that I want to talk about anyway, is that it's collaborative. It's collegial. Yes, there probably are recluses who don't want people to see their collections and who do scholarly research only on their own. But that's an exception that you don't see very often. And in my own work and in any serious collectors activity, there's always sharing either in trying to find out the story of what it is that you're collecting or in sharing the treasures that you found.

Now, why collect books rather than oil rags? I mention oil rags because . . . You're not going to believe this, but I'm not making it up. I read a story in The Des Moines Register--Des Moines Register has won important journalistic awards; it's not a Podunk paper--But I read a story once about a man who collected oil rags. And I couldn't believe it. But I remember, this was a long time ago, being impressed that if a person can be serious about collecting oil rags, they can collect anything.

Anyway, why collect books rather than oil rags, or porcelain, or whatever? Number one, there's a long established history of collecting books. Sotheby's, which now auctions off Jackie Onassis' jewels, started out selling books only. In their first 40 years of their existence, that's all they sold. Second, books are seriously undervalued. You can take \$10,000, or \$1,000, or \$100. Whatever level you're able to take. And you can buy more in the book area. You can buy better material in the book area than in just about any other kind of seriously pursued collectible. Third, and I think maybe most important, books have a second dimension. They have an intellectual dimension that furniture doesn't have. I mean, you can sit on furniture. You can't sit on books, unless they're really big. But a book is an object. But at the same time, it's full of ideas. It's intellectual property. So you're getting two things for the price of one.

The third thing, how people collect. It's a big topic. I can only talk about a very tiny part of it. People collect authors, author groups like the Bloomsbury Group, genres like The Bible, science fiction, books about women, natural history. I have always felt like I wanted not to exclude myself from any particular area, or author, or period. And so from the beginning, I've looked for whatever I thought I would like. And frankly, that was saleable. This also gives me a wonderful excuse for not knowing what I'm doing. Because I can always say, "Hey, I'm a generalist. How am I supposed to know about ninth century scriptoria in Tours?" It's just . . . I can be excused.

But anyway, as years have gone along, I have had to specialize in a certain way. And if God said all I could do was one thing, it would be bindings. Or to be slightly broader, the book is a physical object. So my remarks have to be understood knowing that I'm interested in the book as a beautiful thing in terms of its binding, in terms of its illustrations, in terms of its texture. And then also in its connection with history. So those two things, I'm searching always for something that's beautiful, something that's connecting to history. And I'm doing the same thing that collectors do. I'm finding things, I'm finding out what I found. In other words, I'm finding the story behind it. Or residing in it. And as a result, I'm creating value. Even if I don't mean to, I am.

Fourth thing, and then we'll get to some examples. I want to talk about my role as a facilitator. I mentioned I don't really collect books. That's not quite true. When a person collects books, the books are, in a way, his or her children. For me, the books are foster children. I get to keep them, sometimes I don't want to give them up. The bank sends me a statement every month. That helps me. But in any case, I find books. That's my job, to find good books. I'm too old, and too tired, and have always been too limited in staff to want to run a walk in book shop or to a big operation. So I try to find good things.

The second thing I do as a facilitator is I try to describe the things I've found in an interesting way and in an honest way. Third thing is I try to find good homes for them. Okay, I'm not gonna turn anybody's money away. If they want to buy a book, I'm not gonna say, "No, you can't have it." But what I can do is when I get a book that I know would be perfect for somebody's collection, I let the person know. And that way, we collaborate on building libraries.

And finally, I try to make sure that people don't make unwise investments. Books are not, in my opinion, they ought not to be considered as investments because for books to realize the kind of return that you might see in other sorts of more legitimate investments, you have to hold them for a long time. Like 10 years, really, to feel like you're gonna be sure you get your money back. But there's no reason why a collector shouldn't buy things that will hold their value or that will increase. And as in so many cases with so many kinds of collectibles, I try to buy things that are the best you can buy. The best copy. The most interesting copy. The book, the copy with the best story.

Now as an example of connecting with history. I wrote a dissertation at the University of Michigan on restoration comedy, plays that were produced in London in the 1660s. The theaters had just been reopened after the Interregnum. Actresses were on the stage for the first time. It was a really strange and, in a way, brutal and wonderful time. London was falling apart, the town burned down, people were dying from the plague. And a man named Samuel Pepys, who was the secretary of the Admiralty, wrote a diary, kept a diary for 10 years. And I read every word as background for the dissertation I was doing. Ever since then, I've had a personal connection with Pepys' diary.

Here are three editions. Pepys' diary is not difficult to find. But it is difficult to find in a really attractive copy. This is mid-19th century, five volume set, bound by a company called Jenkins and Cecil. And it's bound in attractive tree calf treated with acid so it actually looks kind of like a tree. Undistinguished, except in beautiful condition. And it looks attractive on the shelf. This is a larger format edition.

And this is an edition that's important because it's the first edition where Pepys's account was decoded. He told about historical events, including going to the theater. But he also wrote about his encounters with young women. He was a hopeless womanizer. And he imposed familiarities on one shop girl, and tavern girl, and street girl after another. Always showing a kind of sexual ineptness. And he put the account of these encounters in a code. And it was only in the latter part of the 19th century, that a clergyman actually, decoded what he had said. And this is the first appearance of that particular text. And it's interesting for that reason. It's also interesting because of the binding by Bayntun. Very nice strapwork design, which is very antique. And it's interesting because it's extra illustrated. In addition to the text, inserted into it are plates showing the people who are important in the narrative, including a portrait of Pepys. You can see, he was not a terribly . . . What shall I say? Debonair kind of guy. Not the kind of person who would necessarily attract women.

And then finally, the third set I have is interesting mainly because it's compact. It's three volumes in a lovely Sangorski binding. But is is done on India paper and you can stick it in a small place.

Bibles is a category of collectible books that a lot of people are interested in. People collect bibles because of their religious faith, but for other reasons as well. Good friend of mine decided to begin his collecting of antiquarian books with bibles because he said they were the world's best, best seller. And in fact, that's the case.

I have three here. Just as examples from my current inventory. This one, a two volume set published in Edinburgh 1752. It's of interest mainly because of its condition. And as decoration, there were two distinctive kinds of binding styles done in Scotland at this time. One of them is called the herringbone design. And this is a perfect example of this. The persons who have owned this bible over the years have not used it as a tool for the expression of their devotion, but instead have used it, actually have cherished it, as a little treasure. And I'm grateful that they did.

This 19th century, mid-19th century bible is ornate. Like the other two bibles here, it's in remarkable condition because bibles tend to be a wreck. They tend to be read to death because most people who buy bibles use them regularly. And this bible is distinguished and distinctive because of its scholarly apparatus. So many bibles are of importance to their owners because of the notes or the scholarly apparatus that comes with it. This has a half a million. I'm not making it up. A half a million marginal references or notes. In addition to the ornate binding, in addition to the plethora of scholarly annotations, this volume has a wonderful surprise when you fan out the vast fore-edge, you see revealed a teaming scene of the Thames full of vessels, painted by a man named Martin Frost.

And finally the large fellow here is one volume of seven of the Macklin Bible, which is the most prodigious edition of scripture in English. Six volumes printed in 1800, the Apocrypha in 1816. It's a big picture book. And because the illustrations are full of interest, the book is normally found in dreadful condition. This one, obviously, is not in dreadful condition. And in addition to the fact that it's remarkably well-preserved, its binding is of very considerable interest. It's a very good example of an early neoclassical binding, which was a style just coming into vogue at the time that the binding was done. In England, two binders named Staggemeier and Welcher were popularizing the neoclassical binding. In Stockholm, there was a guy named Standlander. And in Vienna, there was a binder named Georg Friedrich Krauss. And he's the man who did this binding. We know this by inference because it was done for Duke Albrecht of Saxe-Teschen. And his monogram, AS, is on each of the spine compartments.

Now Saxe-Teschen, Albrecht of Saxe-Teschen, married one of the Empress Maria Theresa's daughters. And it was her favorite daughter. Another not-so-favorite daughter was Marie Antoinette. And he married the daughter, the only daughter that the empress allowed to marry for love. And they were given the Duchy of Teschen, which was a nice plum. And the man was obviously very rich. And he put together a wonderful library. He also founded the Albertina Museum, which now is the museum with the largest number of prints in the world.

One other thing about this particular set, the Macklin Bible is an English thing. And for it to appear in a binding that was done for a German duke and this kind of money lavished on a binding like that indicates that it was obviously a book that had interest outside of the British isles.

The best example of connecting with his and finding something beautiful currently in my inventory is this 18th century edition of Orlando Furioso by Ariosto. It's a singular and bizarre narrative. 50,000 lines long, 26 years in the making. And it provides a vehicle for imagination when it comes to illustration. And through the years, it has been produced as an illustrated book at various places in various times. This set was printed by John Baskerville, a famous Birmingham printer. But it was done for an Italian publisher. And it was illustrated by French artists and engravers.

So this is a very good example of the conjunction of several sources of pleasure involving at least three locations, Italy, France, and England. The printer, John Baskerville, was in a way, a private press printer. He put out books that were issued in limited numbers and were always beautifully designed and printed with great care. And they're always beautiful objects in terms of typography and layout. The book was bound by Derome le jeune, Derome the younger. There were 17 binders in the Derome family over a long period of time. But Derome le jeune was the one who was at the top of the heap. Sometimes his bindings are extraordinarily decorative. Sometimes they're just elegantly simple. And that's the case with this binding. We know it's by him because it has his ticket in it with his address. So often, bindings are ascribed to Derome when, in fact, it's just a guess. This time we know. And the illustrations are wonderful. They're by a series of French artists and designers. And so with the binding, and the printer, and the illustrator, you've got three wonderful reasons to buy this and cherish this set. Finally, it was originally bound for the Earl of Clare, who was the chancellor of Ireland at the end of the 18th century. So it has a distinguished provenance as well as a wonderful binding and an important printer and illustrators being involved.

As a final part to this introductory segment, I want to talk about more specifically creating value. Now, value, to me, and creating it is important because I am concerned about profit. The book collector himself is not necessarily involved with that. But nevertheless, it's important that a collector find out as

much as he can, he or she can about what the story of the book he owns is. And that's where creating value comes in. It's an inevitable result of simply coming to understand what it is that you own.

I have three books here. In most cases with books that we get in our inventory, the uncovering of value is basically straightforward. Occasionally, we are able to find a story that someone else wouldn't have found. And that, of course, always gives us special pleasure. This is a book that is a collection of symbolist poetry. And it has a wonderful binding that I actually talk about in a different segment that has a doublure, a leather covered inside front cover, with an image that is puzzling. It looks like a moon rising with a sensor full of incense with smoke coming up in ribbons up towards the top. And I had no idea when I looked at the binding what this could mean. And so I asked my chief cataloger, Cokie Anderson, "Can you figure out what this could possibly represent?" And she didn't have to go very far. And again, as I said, finding out the stories of your books is sometimes quite straightforward. She didn't have to go very far. But she turned to the first page. And there's a poem by Edgar Allan Poe, or an excerpt from Edgar Allan Poe's poem.

Was it not Fate that, on this July midnight. Was it not Fate, whose name is also Sorrow, that bade me pause before that garden gate to breathe the incense of those slumbering roses?

And around the outside of the doublure are roses, which appear to be slumbering. Easy enough to create value there. It's a pretty binding. But if you can tie this binding on a book by a French symbolist that, frankly, a lot of Americans don't know, to Edgar Allan Poe, suddenly the book has a wider audience, a wider appeal, a wider interest, has a more interesting story.

So we can learn from that example that to understand the story behind the book that you own, you have to take a look at it. This is a better example. This is a book that I bought in a lot at auction. Because I thought there might be a hidden treasure here. I bought it at a London auction even though I didn't attend. But I suspected that although it's a pretty binding, there might be more to it. It's a book by a man named Thomas Moore, a 19th century friend of Byron's, called Lalla Rookh. And Lalla Rookh is a title that oftentimes is decorated with a fore-edge painting. A painting along the fore-edge. And the auction house did not think that there could possibly be a fore-edge painting here because the fore-edge is gauffred. It's decorated with little gouges, with little carvings. And this would normally make a fore-edge painting indistinct. But when the book arrived I said to myself, "What's it gonna hurt to fan out the fore-edge and see if there might possibly be a painting underneath?" And son of a gun, there is.

Final example, and this involves a little bit of experience. I mentioned that I have been selling books for 35 years. And if you sell books for that long and you have a computer where you record things, chances are that you build up a kind of experience that could come in handy. This is an amateur binding on a book by Tolstoy called Resurrection. It's full of guilt decoration. Not done with tremendous precision, but still a pretty book.

At the front, there's an inscription. To Molly at Christmas from Margot. And then underneath in a different hand, probably in the hand of the recipient, it says hand bound, designed, and tooled by Margo, and then we can't read the name. Something like Laughedu. Age, 19 years. Tutor, Miss Whyte, W-H-Y-T-E. And that little phrase, tutor, Miss Whyte, she was the one who tutored Margot, that opened a door that someone else might not have known how to open. Because we know that Miss Whyte has to be Madeline Whyte. Madeline Whyte was the only female student of Thomas J. Cobden-Sanderson, the most important figure in the history of modern English book binding. He tried to teach his daughter, Stella, she was not interested. Madeline Whyte was his only pupil. After she worked with him, she went

on to teach book binding in St. Andrews. And it's clear that Margot whoever was a student of hers. So instead of having a kind of interesting amateur binding, we've got an interesting amateur binding that has a connection to a grand figure in the history of book binding.

I mentioned earlier in this general discussion about why people collect books and how they collect books. The idea of collegiality or collaboration. And it's important for me to state what a lot of book collectors and book dealers know already. That it's not what you know that allows you to succeed as a bookseller or collector. But it's who you know who can tell you what it is that you don't know, but that maybe you suspect. When I saw this leaf as part of the structure of a book, of a later binding, my instincts told me that I should buy it. I knew from my experience that it was early. I couldn't have said that it was the ninth century. That it was from the ninth century. It was certainly before the 13th century. Certainly before the 12th century. But then my experience doesn't give me the right answers. And that's where I turn to my colleagues. And that's where collegiality and collaboration come in. That's where I call Professor Edwin Hall, a retired professor of medieval history at Wayne State University in Detroit. That's where I send an email to Christopher DeHamel and to Tim Bolton who work for the Illuminated Manuscripts Department in Sotheby's. And then I get to the bottom of the issue. Then I have the questions answered.

And it's important to state, and I'm sure many people are already gonna understand this. But I'm not a person who's operating on his own. I will die knowing less than 10% of what I ought to know as a bookseller. And particularly about early Medieval and Renaissance manuscripts. This is material that I find terribly romantic, terribly fascinating. Partly because there's so much to learn. Partly because there's so little that at this point I know. And that's when I rely on colleagues who are generous beyond description in giving them their time and expertise.