

VELLUM THROUGH THE AGES – TRANSCRIPTION.

This segment, I think, could be entitled Vellum through the Ages. It ought to begin with what may seem like a startling statement that there were books long before there was printing. Most people think about books as printed objects, but we have always dealt with and been fascinated with illuminated and decorated manuscripts, the earlier the better. The more splendid the better in terms of their decoration.

The earliest book that we have in inventory right now is a 13th century lectionary. It was produced in Lombardy. It's got 220 leaves, and it is a monster. It's 445 – Well, you can see how tall it is. 445 millimeters tall, 221 leaves. It's got lots of decorative initials. It's a liturgical book, a book that would have been used in an Ecclesiastical context. Finding single leaves from a book like this in today's marketplace happens from time to time, but to find a book this grand, basically intact – There are eight leaves missing, but 221 that are there – is a special kind of experience. The book later belonged to a 16th century humanist named Paolo Giovio, whose name is important, especially if you're interested in history and illustration.

The oldest item in inventory now is leaf from the ninth century. We think it was probably done about 850. A time not far removed from a special moment in the Carolingian Renaissance. Charlemagne, in 796, appointed Alcuin of York to be the supervisor of the scriptoria at Tours. In the scriptoria at Tours, he supervised what was basically the evolution of the Carolingian Minuscule. The Carolingian Minuscule basically was a revolutionary handwriting.

Before Charlemagne, before Alcuin of York, there were a lot of regional scripts that were all crammed and difficult to read. This was a standardized script. It was beautifully fluid and clear. It could only facilitate learning across Europe because it was readily embraced, because why not. It could be read, and it could help in the dissemination of text. This leaf, you may notice, is not entirely there. This column is all there except maybe at the top or bottom; that's because it came from the lining of a book.

Most manuscripts, once printing began, were considered to be obsolete. Not only without much use, but in a way undesirable. They were put to use – It's a very strong substance, vellum. They could be used as structural elements to make books sturdier. This has come from the lining of a book. It's important, even though it's a single leaf, because the manuscripts at Tours are basically all gone, or mostly gone. 1592, the scriptoria, the monasteries were sacked by the Huguenots. Elements took care of the rest of the manuscripts. When the elements and the Huguenots were done, then the French Revolution wiped out the rest so even a single leaf from the ninth century is special.

I have two more examples of vellum illuminated manuscripts. One is from about 1470. It's what called a Book of Hours. It's a prayer book that would have been used not in an ecclesiastical context, not in a monastery, but in a private home. These Books of Hours tend sometimes, or tend usually, to be decorated, to be illuminated, to have miniatures if they could be afforded. If you were a person of means, you would not be self-respecting unless you had a Book of Hours full of wonderful pictures to look at.

This is a very substantial Book of Hours. 331 leaves, 662 pages. It's got 13 full page illuminated borders and 33 historiated initials, initials that have history in them. Pictures I think almost entirely of Saints who are being venerated in prayers where the miniatures are located.

The production of illuminated manuscripts did not stop with the Renaissance. They continued up through modern times. Of course, there were many fewer of them. Vellum is an expensive material. A lot of sheep died for that lectionary on the table. But for people who were interested in preserving the book arts, and interested in retraining a sense of the middle ages and the renaissance, we continue to see the production of, and the purchasing of, illuminated manuscripts.

This is done about 1905. In fact, it is done in exactly 1905 because it's signed in the back by a woman named Ibbs, I-B-B-S. Her work is not particularly prolific. She's only known to have illustrated four books, but boy is it beautifully done. Done in the manner of the 12th/13th century. The quality of the illumination is just outstanding.

Now I'm going to go backward a little bit because what I have in my hand here is a vellum leaf from 1460. It's not a manuscript, but it's a printed leaf. I wanted to organize this presentation into manuscripts and into printed items, as opposed to chronological. But this is a very good example of the fact that printing and illuminated manuscript production were taking place at the same time. When this 1470 Book of Hours was being commissioned and produced, printed books were also being issued. A person forming a library would have a choice between the newfangled technology or the tried and true way of producing books.

This is a vellum leaf again recovered from the binding of a book, which comes from a work on Canon Law. It was printed by two guys named Fust and Schoeffer. 1460 is a very, very early book, very, very early printed book. Not surprising, Fust and Schoeffer have a very direct connection with Gutenberg, the person responsible for the Gutenberg Bible, which is generally considered to be the first important book printed in the western world.

Schoeffer worked for Gutenberg. Fust lent him money. When Gutenberg couldn't pay it back, Fust foreclosed on his print shop. Then Fust and Schoeffer went into business for themselves, cemented by the fact that Schoeffer married Fust's daughter. Anyway, this book was printed in 1460, Canon Law. It's probably printed on vellum, a good friend of mine says, because earlier books on Canon Law would have been in vellum and it makes sense that this book, which is going to join them on the shelves, would be on vellum as well, even though it's a lot more expensive than printing on paper, also technologically a lot more difficult.

From the beginning with early printed books, printers usually issued most copies on paper but they kept a few, printed a few, on vellum for very special clients like the Pope. Down through the ages, printers who were interested in reaching clients who were interested in putting together libraries full of luxury items would issue books in the same way; mostly on paper but with a few copies on vellum.

This is a book by a Frenchman named Gresset, printed in France in 1867. It could hardly be more luxurious, certainly hardly more limited, because it's one of only two copies printed on vellum. It's the poems of Gresset. It's a kind of a humorous story. It was very well received. Gresset, the author, was an Ecclesiastic. His poems were popular enough that he wrote more. Some of them were slightly risqué. He got thrown out of his order and he spent the rest of his life in deep remorse.

But it's a beautiful book; both in terms of the vellum, the illustration, and the binding. It's no surprise that because of its binding, and because of its limited luxurious nature, it was owned by a man named Robert Hoe and a man Mortimer Schiff. Robert Hoe was America's most famous book collector, founder

of the Grolier club. He owned a Gutenberg Bible on paper, one on vellum. When his library was sold, it fetched more money than other library ever had. The record's held something for like 50 years. Mortimer Schiff specialized in fine binding, bought a lot of books that Robert Hoe had owned.

Finally, we get into what we can call modern private press books. Again, the same principal holds. The number of books issued in a private press run would typically be small, 200, 250. Of the 200 or 250, a certain smaller number, 10, 12, 15 sometimes, would be printed on vellum. Here is Spenser's *Epithalamion* and *Amoretti*, two of the most famous poems in English in a binding by an outfit named Bumpus. Bumpus is not in the first rank of binders, like Riviere, and Sangorski, and Sutcliffe, and Zaehnsdorf, but very high up in the second rank. It's a lovely binding with lots of inlays. It's simply a beautiful book and that's the end of the story.

Last, and in way grandest, at least in a certain way, is the Ashendene Apuleius, printed in 1924. This is one of I think 16 copies on vellum. In a special bidding done by W. H. Smith. Because it's a large book and printed in black, red, and blue, it is simply a wonderful thing to look at, and a wonderful thing to touch. It has a kind of buttery feeling, the vellum, because there's all kinds of vellum; some that's rough and scratchy and not much fun to touch, and some that's like this.

The Ashendene press was one of three presses in the forefront of the arts and crafts movement in England. There was William Morris' Kelmscott Press. There was Cobden-Sanderson's Doves Press. And there was Hornby's Ashendene Press. For my money, the Ashendene Press had the most beautiful books and this is one of the most beautiful Ashendene books, especially on vellum.