

PHILLIP J. PIRAGES

Fine Books and Manuscripts

is pleased to announce
the publication of a leaf book,
available in May, 2019:

Letters from the 15th Century:

ON THE ORIGINS OF THE KELMSCOTT CHAUCER TYPEFACE

A Study, with Specimen Leaves, of the Influence of the Early
German Printers on William Morris' Masterpiece.



Details:

Text volume: ii, 75 pp. 244 x 154 mm. (9 1/8 x 6 1/8").

Traycase: 502 x 372 mm. (19 3/4 x 14 5/8").

165 COPIES FOR SALE. In one of four bindings (indicating progressively more deluxe leaves). The book printed letterpress on Zerkall Book Laid Vellum paper by Arthur Larson at Horton Tank Graphics, bound (and with a large traycase constructed) by Amy Borezo. Book layout by Jill Mann. EACH COPY WITH FIVE LEAVES: ONE FROM THE KELMSCOTT CHAUCER AND ONE EACH FROM THE PRESSES OF PETER SCHOEFFER, JOHANN MENTELIN, GÜNTHER ZAINER, AND ANTON KOBERGER. The incunabular leaves—assembled over a period of six years from defective copies—in consistently excellent condition, with only minor flaws, and the Kelmscott leaves (never part of a bound volume) in very fine condition.

This unique leaf book combines three elements—a significant private press production, a substantial scholarly commentary that contributes to a further understanding of printing history, and a collection of five leaves: one from the Kelmscott Press “Works of Geoffrey Chaucer” and four from books issued by German printers Morris most admired.

Written and issued by Phillip J. Pirages, the essay has been produced by gifted professionals; the study addresses a topic of significance to typophiles in a considerably more thoroughgoing way than has been done before; and the assemblage of leaves represents a powerful visual reinforcement of the commentary.

The text will present information about Morris’ life and library, pull together previous relevant observations in an entirely new way, and provide remarks about the early printers and the leaves included as part of this production. Most important, the study will show, as objectively as possible, likenesses between the early letterforms and those of the Chaucer by comparing each of Morris’ letters with each of the corresponding letters in the typefaces of Schoeffer, Mentelin, Zainer, and Koberger. And because of the assemblage of leaves, readers will not only be able to learn from the text about the influence on Morris of his typographic forebears, but also to compare with their own eyes the resemblances between the Kelmscott leaf and the leaves from four centuries earlier.

From the Text:

(from p. 64)—The chart is a numerical summary of the possible degrees of influence exerted by our four printers, based on the similarities of each of the Kelmscott letters with the corresponding letter in each of the early type cases. The results in the chart were arrived at by assigning a number to each letter reflecting one of four levels of resemblance: “3” for “very close to identical,” “2” for “rather like,” “1” for “at least vaguely similar,” and “0” for “not similar at all.” This, of course, involves some level of subjective judgment, but it is surely more objective than looking at a mass of letters on a page and pronouncing that they look “a lot like” or “not very much like” the Kelmscott types.

(from p. 74)—It is surely wrong to say [as his daughter had claimed] that Morris made up the Chaucer typeface “out of his head,” that he created it on his own. Of course, Morris’ head (and Walker’s head) were involved, not as the origin of the Kelmscott characters, but as a conduit through which 15th century letterforms passed, altered or unaltered. And there clearly was much more creative imagination exerted in the gothic than in the roman Kelmscott typefaces. The various sources of inspiration were, in fact, processed, and the creative genius and aesthetic sensitivity enlivening Morris’ consciousness were indisputable agents in the production of typography that both acknowledged the skill and beauty of the past and played a role in revolutionizing the history of modern printing.

Prices and Ordering:

32 copies in linen-backed paper boards featuring Kelmscott leaves with text only or with small initials: **\$1,950-\$2,150**

84 copies in black floral cloth in the Ebony Cray pattern designed by Morris featuring Kelmscott leaves with six- and 10-line decorative initials: **\$2,500-\$3,000**

47 copies in flexible vellum with ties, 10 of these copies featuring Kelmscott leaves with initials and full borders: **\$3,500**; 37 of these copies featuring Kelmscott leaves with borders and one or two large woodcuts: **\$4,500-\$5,500**

Two special copies in elaborately tooled pigskin featuring Kelmscott leaves from a vellum copy (including one with border and large woodcut), Schoeffer leaves from a vellum copy, Zainer leaves with historiated initials in contemporary color, and the other leaves with prominent painted or illuminated initial): **SOLD**

For more information, visit www.pirages.com and enter inventory number ST15039 in the search box on the top right side of the home page.

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PHILLIP J. PIRAGES

Fine Books and Manuscripts

1709 NE 27th Street, Suite G
McMinnville, OR 97128

P: (503) 472-0476

Toll Free: (800) 962-6666

F: (503) 472-5029

info@pirages.com

www.pirages.com

