

# From Scribe to Binder

History, Process & Roundtable

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# Intro

Who: Jenevra de Carvalhal, “Patent-pending” bookbinder, mundane MLIS

What: Process of taking calligraphed and illuminated pages and binding them

When: Pre-printing press (1440)

Where: Europe/ Roman Empire

Why: Ensure artwork can be safely bound, add dimension to recreated books

How: Show, Tell, Discuss

# Setting the Scene

## ❖ Woodblock printing

- On cloth dates to ~200-220 C.E. in China
- On paper (for documents & books) to 7th C China
- By 1000 C.E. in Eurasia on both cloth and paper, common in Europe by 1300 C.E.
- Full pages for books in Europe mid-15th C

## ❖ Movable type

- Porcelain type invented in China ~1040 C.E. Wood was tried and failed at the time, and did not return until a new method for creating the type was invented in 1298 C.E.
- Metal type invented in Korea in 1377 C.E.

## ❖ Printing press

- Woodblock printing on screw-presses common in Europe by 14th C.
- Gutenberg's metal movable-type printing press 1450 C.E. in Germany

# Setting the Scene

## ❖ Illumination

- Earliest extant pieces to ~400 C.E.
- Some early illuminations on parchment survive
- From 13th C, parchment, vellum
- Paper from late middle ages, earliest extant piece is 11th C with paper from Al-Andaluz

## ❖ Bookbinding

- Scrolls
- Codex
- Incunabula

# The Beginning

- ❖ Patron/Agent negotiates production, price and delivery date with a Scriptorium or Agent
  - Text (Bible, Book of Hours, et al), size, decorations, personalizations (device, favored saints, family, meaningful symbols), materials (calf, goat, sheep, other animal for parchment, vellum, leather; wood, precious metals, gems, embroidered silk etc)
- ❖ Text to copy is acquired/assigned to the selected scribe
- ❖ Materials procured
  - Cut to size/prepared as needed
    - Pages, inks, paints, boards, cover material, sewing threads, gilding, headbands, decorations/furniture

# Preparing the pages for eventual binding

- ❖ Sheets are sized and folded into quires
  - A quire is the typical section in a medieval manuscript, 4 sheets making 8 leaves, 16 pages
    - Recto = right hand page, verso = left hand page
  - If parchment/vellum, fold and gather so that the coarse side meets course, smooth side meets smooth
  - If handmade paper, there won't be a grain, fold and cut minimizing waste
  - If machine-made paper, you want the grain to be vertical - parallel to the spine - *on each sheet*
    - Paper folds more easily along the grain
  - Fold and crease using a bone folder
    - If you prefer to work flat, MARK your pages (# or catchword) so that they remain in the correct order and think about imposition (more later)

# Lifecycle of a Manuscript

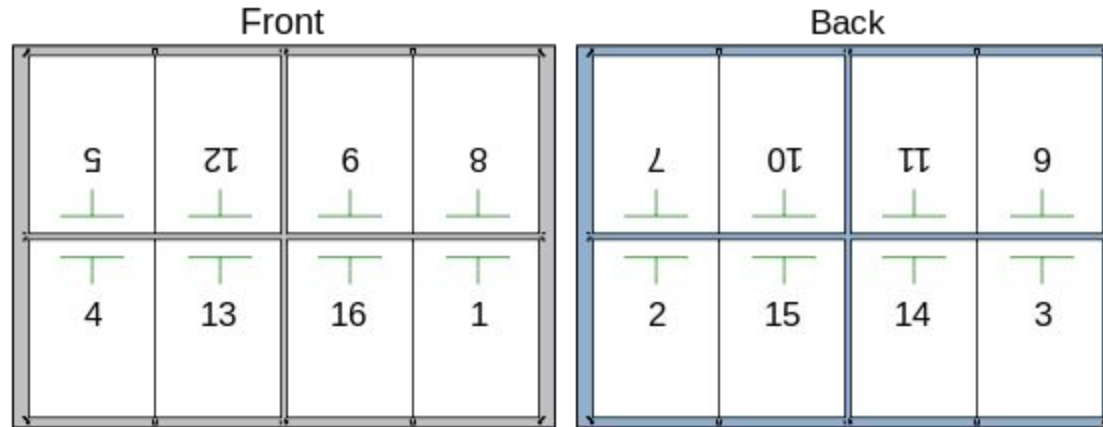
- ❖ Page layouts determined (See Notes)
- ❖ Calligrapher - the bulk of the text
- ❖ Rubricator - the red text, headlines, initial caps, notes, captions, headings
- ❖ *Gatherings*
- ❖ Illuminator
- ❖ Folios gathered and ordered and double-checked
- ❖ Quires tacked together - basically like a basting stitch
- ❖ Sent to binder for finishing
- ❖ Delivered

# Notes on Imposition

- ❖ Imposition is the placement and orientation of multiple pages on a sheet BEFORE it is worked, folded, bound and cut.
- ❖ How you place each page depends a couple of factors. What size sheets are you using? What is the planned finished size of the book? How many sheets in each gathering? 6 as in England or 4 as in the Continent? How many folds? A quarto, octavo, more?
- ❖ Make a 'dummy' to test your placement. Use inexpensive paper to mock-up your gatherings - same number of sheets, same number of folds. Number the pages in the orientation the text will have. Unfold and separate your dummy sheets - surprised?



# Imposition Sample



In the example above, a 16-page book is prepared for printing. There are eight pages on the front of the sheet, and the corresponding eight pages on the back. After printing, the paper is folded in half vertically (page two falls against page three). Then it is folded again horizontally (page four meets page five). A third fold completes this process (page nine meets page eight).

# Margins

- ❖ When pages are stacked and folded, they feather at the edge - they don't line up as there is allowance for the thickness of the material at the fold. That feathering will be trimmed off after the text block is sewn in later period books.
- ❖ If you want your text block to line up in the same place as you turn the pages, then you need to compensate for this margin creep, especially with thicker materials. The goal is to not lose any text or images. The outer margins should be equal after binding. How much do you need to shift your text? Do you? How period is it?
- ❖ Formula for creep:  
Total pages in book, divided by 4 (assumes a 4 sheet quire), times sheet thickness. Divide that number by the number of flat sheets in your book.

# Notes on Binding Styles

- ❖ The style of binding planned will affect the layouts of your pages, primarily regarding margins. While imposition is still a thing in all bindings, some bindings give you much greater access to the gutter (aka valley, the inside page margins at the spine).
- ❖ Most books are sewn through a folded page - but not all. It was a known thing to glue a tab onto a damaged or just big enough scrap of parchment so that it could be folded and sewn or stab-bound. It is not, however, ideal - it does no good for the spine and neighboring pages.

# Notes on Binding Styles

- ❖ Coptic stitch - these books lay flat no matter what page you open them too. Margins can be much narrower as spine access is great.
- ❖ Tape, thong or cord bound - these require a greater margin at the gutter as they do not open all the way to lay flat.
- ❖ Tab/Stab - can make use of odd shapes/scraps of parchment by cut or by gluing a tab for sewing through.
- ❖ Softcover bindings such as ledger bindings (leather) will open wider than hardcover (wood).

# Random Thoughts

- ❖ Sewing thread is usually linen and most always waxed. If it rubs against your work during sewing - what would happen?
- ❖ What about bookmarks?
- ❖ The use of glue - modern or period (hide glue, wheat paste) will impact the structural movement of the book. This is primarily a concern with leather covered wood board books.

What else can you think of?

Thank you for coming!  
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