Translating the Past

Codicology and Incunabula

A Very Brief Bibliography

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Some Disclaimers

Intrepid scholar, do not be under any illusions about what follows. Its purpose is consciously limited. This bibliography is designed for you, as students on this exciting course, solely for the module we will be studying concerning the physical nature of books, both manuscript and printed. In its coverage of both media, it is unusual and ambitious – the worlds of incunabula studies and of codicology rarely collide. Indeed, the subject is so capacious, touching on several topics each of which can keep scholars contentedly productive throughout their careers, that this bibliography is necessarily highly selective. It is also necessarily somewhat arbitrary, reflecting my own interests and reading. As you become expert in these subjects, you will be able to supplement the references given here, and I will be very interested to hear your suggestions of what should have been included. Indeed, I hope that you will continue to send me those suggestions long after you have left Florence: the intention of this bibliography is not that you should master it all during the month you are in Tuscany but that it should continue to assist you as you pursue the lively interest which we hope will have been instilled in you, in the months and years after you have returned home and develop your own research.

Bibliographies and Glossaries

Let us begin this bibliography of certain bibliographical matters with a bibliography: the late Leonard Boyle’s Toronto volume [23] is an indispensable guide to scholarly writing on all aspects relating to manuscripts up to the early 1980s.

Our subjects can sometimes be laden with seemingly impenetrable terminology, sometimes peculiar to an individual scholar. Attempts have been made to ‘regularise’ the language used, though with some resistance (particularly among the British). It was, in good Napoleonic spirit, a codification first attempted in French [99], with an Italian version following [91]. A multi-lingual vocabulary based on these volumes is now available on-line [178]. Meanwhile, monoglot, but also of use, is the glossary provided by the University of Melbourne’s ‘Ductus’ site [171]. More basic, but with the advantage of
clear images, is the British Library glossary [163], based on the work of Michelle Brown [26].

Some of the terminology now used is neologistic – medieval manuscript-makers would have scratched their heads at these later Latin coinages. However, an important study of how one group of manuscript-lovers, the Renaissance humanists, described the books with which they worked is provided by Silvia Rizzo [122].

Our Subject: Codicology – and the History of the Book

The term ‘codicology’ is itself a latterday creation. Like ‘television’, it is a hybrid Greco-Latin concoction, meaning, literally, the study of the codex. It was (it is often pointed out) invented as a term in French in the mid-twentieth-century, but reflects (it is just as often noted) a longer tradition of study, expressed in German as *Handschriftenkunde* (see Gumbert’s preface to [1], or the codicology page of [173]). Some of the elements which we will need to discuss below, particularly the study of manuscript illumination or of bindings, can claim to have an autonomous existence, but, for the large part, the activities of the codicologist have traditionally been subsumed within palaeography (note the title of Boyle’s bibliography just mentioned). More recently, the practices have been festooned with a series of other, arguably more approachable titles – in English, ‘the new philology’, ‘the archaeology of the book’, or ‘the history of the book’ – with differing connotations and with varying popularity or durability in separate niches of academe. The term ‘history of the book’, for instance, is often confined to print (for those who study print sometimes imagine that the book was only born when movable type was invented) but the interests of its leading practitioners, like the late Donald MacKenzie [94], share much with the manuscript codicologist.

The fundamental purpose of codicology is to be able to describe a manuscript in all its physical aspects, and that will be the focus for our course. However, that should not be the limit of a codicologist’s ambition: you should continually ask yourself not just ‘what are the facts?’ but also ‘what do those facts mean?’, what can they tell us about the history of the particular book, and what can the history of that book tell us about the milieux in which it was produced and put to use. Insights can be derived both from individual books and from ‘quantative codicology’, gathering together data from a corpus of volumes. The outstanding example of the latter is highly relevant for our course: it is the study of humanist manuscripts by Albert Derolez [49].

Partly because it is an area of study that has only been christened in the past half-century or so, and partly because its subject-matter is so varied, few have yet tried to provide codicology with a text-book. The best and most substantial attempt is the recent (but now out of print) work of Maria Luisa Agati [1]; in English, the most useful introduction which could serve as your textbook is Clemens & Graham [36]. Also of use are the earlier and shorter volumes by Jacques Lemaire (who is not shy to take issue with his peers) [86] and Marilena Maniaci (whose range takes her far beyond medieval Europe) [90].
Our Subject: Incunabula

The term ‘incunabula’ (Eng.: incunables) was a seventeenth-century coinage for those books produced using the new technology between its invention, c. 1450, and the year 1500. The sort of detailed technical understanding, equivalent to codicology, for printed books is called bibliography, a discipline for which there are several introductions (you will find particularly useful that by Philip Gaskell [60]). Bibliography is a study of minutiae – some might say pedantry – but without its findings, there would be no bedrock for the trend we have already mentioned – ‘the history of the book’; it would be built on sand.

Despite the level of learned activity in the study of early printed books, there is no single approachable textbook that describes their nature or their development. There are, instead, a growing series of essay-collections, with two recent examples in English being that edited by Kristian Jensen [76] and the festschrift to Lotte Hellinga edited by Martin Davies [41].

In modern scholarship, unlike the world they inhabited, the fifteenth centuries of print and manuscript studies are often divorced. This is, partially, one of the consequences of the thesis that the ‘print revolution’ transformed society – a thesis associated with Elizabeth Eisenstein [51], but also present in the work of Febvre and Martin [52]. Eisenstein’s thesis was controversial from the first publication of her work in 1979, as is reflected in reviews like that of Antony Grafton [66]. A helpful development out of that backlash has been that some recent scholars, like David McKitterick [95] and Brian Richardson [121] have sought to emphasise how print developed within a mindset of the manuscript. Some, like Paul Saenger [126] and Margaret M. Smith [138], have tried to provide more subtle estimates of the detailed but highly influential changes to the book that came with print. Others have looked further into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries at the continuing production of manuscripts: in an English context, significant are the works of Peter Beal [13] and Henry Woudhuysen [149].

Production of Books

Scholarship continually strives to place books into their context, and their most immediate context is that of their production. When handling a book – any book – think about how it came into being and how it ended up on your desk. That is to say, production is not simply about book-making: it is about the process from the first decision to create a book to its arrival at a reader’s desk. The range of topics it can cover are suggested by the leading historian of the book in eighteenth-century France, Robert Darnton [39]: his focus is naturally on a period later than ours but, with some intelligence, the same sorts of questions can be asked of our subject-matter.

For manuscripts, a short and readable introduction to the production of the book is provided by Christopher de Hamel [43]. A sense of the range of contexts in which scribes worked and their development over time is provided, for the English context, by Malcolm Parkes’ succinct and learned overview [108].
There is a tradition of scholarship that reconstructs the cultural activity of a particular locale through a detailed study of the palaeographical and codicological evidence furnished by manuscripts produced there. The locale might be a particular monastery: notable examples include Francis Newton’s heavy-weight study of a half century in the life of Monte Cassino, the leading centre of Beneventan script [102]; Rod Thomson’s succinct survey of the twelfth-century renaissance at the abbey of England’s protomartyr, St Albans [142], and David Ganz’s study of manuscripts and their annotations from the Carolingian monastery of Corbie [58]. Alternatively, the milieu could be a specific city, as in the Rouses’ monumental investigation of the Parisian book-trade [123]; the directory of the London book-trade compiled by Paul Christianson [27] is on a lesser scale but, like the Rouses’ work, does include both manuscript and printed-book producers. Another example worth mentioning, though it remains unpublished, focuses on a Florentine book-seller who despised print: it is the doctoral dissertation of Tilly de la Mare on Vespasiano da Bisticci, known nowadays also for the Vite of famous contemporaries he wrote in retirement. The riches of her research into Florentine scribes of humanist manuscripts are reflected in her later articles (most notably [44]).

The most recent posthumous work of the late Prof. de la Mare reflects another tradition of close study, that which concentrates on a particular scribe, in her case the master of the script known in English as ‘italic’, Bartolomeo Sanvito [46]. My own small foray into this type of study is endeavored to de la Mare’s work and discusses the palaeography and codicology of manuscripts by one English humanist scribe of the fifteenth century [125]. This tradition of study tends most often to be presented in article form rather than at book length, and the quattrocento is the most fruitful period for such study, because of the increased in signed manuscripts and the greater possibilities of identifying a scribe’s œuvre. But there are works on earlier centuries, like Christine Franzen’s work on the anonymous Worcester scribe of the thirteenth century known to scholars as ‘the tremulous hand’ [56].

The parallel in research on printed books is an interest in the working habits and products of specific printing houses. The man credited with inventing print, Johannes Gutenberg, has received biographical attention (for instance [78]), though much scholarship concentrates on his most famous product: the Gutenberg Bible is discussed by Martin Davies [40] and placed in context by an important set of essays [127], but note that our knowledge has been challenged by recent technical discoveries by Blaise Agüera y Arcas and Paul Needham [2]. Perhaps the early printer whose career has attracted the most interest is the Venetian, Aldus Manutius, on whom the best English introduction is the study by Martin Lowry [88]; this can be supplemented by the useful Florentine exhibition catalogue [18]. Aldus is particularly associated with printing in Greek, a subject discussed by Nicolas Barker [9]. Martin Lowry also wrote on another leading printer of Venice, though not of local origin: Nicholas Jenson [87].

These figures, alongside Vespasiano, appear in any discussion of the development of the book-trade in the fifteenth century. Angela Nuovo considers the subject in its Italian context [103]; the recent work of Andrew Pettegree has highlighted the uneven
geography of printing across early modern Europe, both in an important article [111] and in a later book [112].

The history of the book trade does not start in the fifteenth century, as is shown by the Rouses work on Paris, mentioned above. Another aspect which should be mentioned is the practice developed by stationers in medieval university towns known as the pecia system – a process intended to assist the production of multiple copies of a text, first documented in 1228. Graham Pollard provided a classic essay on this subject [116] and, the system has excited interest far beyond the quantity of surviving ‘pecia copies’, reflected in the bibliography provided by Leonard Boyle in his contribution to the topic [24], which can now be heavily supplemented by conference proceedings [11] and collections of documents [98].

While the preceding paragraphs hint at the vitality of research on the production of books, there remain many questions to which we have, at best, only tentative answers, particularly for the world of manuscripts. For instance, it is worth asking how quickly a scribe could write: J. P. Gumbert [71] and Michael Gullick [68] have attempted to hazard a response to that query. Similarly, while there is plentiful evidence for the price of printed books, there have been few attempts to gather together the information from diverse sources for manuscripts: there is an old article by H. E. Bell, working from English evidence [14]. In short, there are plenty of discoveries yet to be made.

Libraries, Librarians and Catalogues

Before we consider how we would describe a manuscript deposited in a modern library, we should think about the libraries and catalogues that could have been their first home. A study that is now over a century old but is still useful for its range of reference and attention to the physical details of libraries is the work of J. W. Clark [33]. There are important and helpful essays in the new Cambridge History of Libraries [85], but their focus is only on the British Isles. There is also a suggestive lecture, unprinted but on-line, by Richard Sharpe, which is insightful about both the medieval librarian and the later fortunes of the stock once in the librarian’s charge [176]; the same scholar has provided a brief but helpful discussion of medieval shelfmarks [131]. Similarly useful is the same authors’ discussion of English post-Conquest library catalogues, which draws some parallels and contrasts with the continent [132].

Many medieval and sixteenth-century catalogues of medieval libraries have received later editions. For example, the inventories of the French royal library were brought together by the leading French manuscript scholar of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Léopold Delisle [48]. In Britain, there is an on-going project, under the watchful eye of Richard Sharpe, to edit the extant medieval book-lists, the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues – these range from catalogues of individual libraries, like Syon Abbey [65], to collections of lists for the two English universities and their colleges (Cambridge alone is published to date [34]), to the medieval ‘union catalogue’ by Henry of Kirkesteede [73]. Meanwhile, in Italy, and especially relevant for our purposes, are the catalogues of the library of San Marco of Florence [144], and of the
collection of Pope Nicholas V, which became the base of the Vatican Library [92]. It should be noted that, in the catalogues of Syon Abbey and San Marco, manuscripts and printed books appear side by side.

Cataloguing Manuscripts and Incunables

As latter-day cataloguers, we are the heirs to forbears, both medieval and early modern. An overview of the history of post-medieval manuscript cataloguing is provided by Armando Petrucci [113]. His book includes a set of extracts from earlier writers (from Montfaucon to Ker) outlining their principles for manuscript descriptions. We will be looking at some of these – in particular, Neil Ker’s template – in more detail; others are worth reading in full, especially the volume of Léopold Delisle’s instructions and examples for describing both manuscripts and incunables [47]. Notably absent from Petrucci are the German guidelines followed in recent catalogues for describing manuscripts; these are now available on-line at the Richtlinien Handschriftenkatalogisierung pages of the important ‘Manuscripta Mediaevalia’ website [169].

Cataloguing printed books necessarily follows a different set of rules from that for manuscripts. The most accessible introduction to the history of incunable cataloguing is provided by a Japanese website (with, you will be reassured to know, English pages) [159]. The various modern incunabula catalogues are known by various abbreviated titles and acronyms. Here is a selective list of the most commonly used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Coates</td>
<td>see Bod-inc</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GW</strong></td>
<td><em>Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke</em>, 11 vols to date (Stuttgart, 1968 – )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hain</td>
<td>L. Hain, <em>Repertorium bibliographicum</em>, 2 vols (Stuttgart, 1826 – 38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISTC</td>
<td>[British Library], <em>Incunabula Short Title Catalogue</em> (on-line)</td>
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Modern catalogues of incunables are well-served by servers, so to speak: **GW** [165] and **ISTC** [168] are both available on-line, as well as several more localised catalogues. There is no equivalent to a project like **ISTC** for manuscripts, but there are many catalogues now on-line. Some of the most impressive recent ones include the complete digitisation of the manuscripts themselves: this is the case with the collection of Corpus Christi
College, Cambridge, which is well worth viewing, if your institution has a subscription [174]. In many cases, libraries have provided only select images of their manuscripts, often concentrating on their illumination, as discussed in the relevant section below.

Meanwhile, some famous individual incunabula have been fully digitised and are available on-line: the Gutenberg Bible has received this treatment several times – the British Library website [164] allows you to compare two copies, one on paper, the other on parchment, as well as having links to the other on-line presentations. Other incunables available in full on-line include William Caxton’s printings of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales [157] and the enigmatic classic from the press of Aldus Manutius, the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili (though this last concentrates on the text at the expense of the physical nature of the book) [166].

Describing a book: the materials

The material most often used in the Middle Ages for the folios of a book was parchment, that is prepared animal skin. Saying anything more specific than that enters into areas of debate: some of the controversy can be sensed from the various essays in the volume which is the most scholarly introduction to the subject [124]. There is an older, readable outline of the production of parchment [119].

The other material that, over time, spread across Europe and was to become the main support for the printed book, was paper. A scholar of Islamic culture, Jonathan Bloom, has provided a history of the material in medieval societies which places its late arrival in western Europe in context [22]. One of the Italian centres of paper-making, Fabriano, in Le Marche, has a well-known Museo della Carta e della Filigrana which provides a website introducing its subject and its materials (better read in Italian than in its broken English) [162]. There is a conference publication that discusses aspects of paper’s earliest history in the West [151]. Of prime importance is also the recent consideration that has been given to the cultural milieux which may have promoted the use of paper, with an attractive and thus influential – but problematic – hypothesis presented by Erik Kwakkel [82].

A particular feature of paper is its makers’ use of watermarks, which can help to date and to localise the material and thus, possibly, the book produced from it. The classic catalogue of watermarks was compiled by the son of a French paper-maker, Charles-Moise Briquet [25]. There is an on-going project to put that, and other catalogues, on-line, at the same time as it is being superseded by new on-line resources. Access to many of those is provided by the Austrian Wasserzeichen des Mittelalters site [179]. Also available on-line is another relevant work of Briquet’s, his study of watermarks in the Genovese archives [180]. There are also recent projects to use the watermarks in incunabula to date those printed books which are undated: the Low Countries project has an informative and detailed website [181]; there is a similar project for Spanish incunabula [182].
Describing a book: structure

A manuscript is compiled of quires, a printed book of gatherings – in both cases, a collection of sheets folded and tied together. Those quires of a manuscript could then form a booklet, a fascicule or a whole volume. The construction of these quires is susceptible to study themselves, as Léon Gilissen showed in detail [63]. A good example of how tiny details can lead to larger conclusions is provided by a wide-ranging article by Mildred Budny: taking as her starting-point a set of tiny marks in the Carolingian Vivian Bible, she considers the range of marks used by manuscript-producers to assist assembly and organisation of their books [29]. One method of ordering quires that developed (and was later imitated in printed books) was the placing of the first word of the next quire at the bottom verso of the previous – the development of these catchwords was discussed by Jean Vezin [145] and their use in humanist manuscripts is expounded by Derolez [49].

Describing a book: layout of the page

The details of how the text is presented on the page – part of the mise-en-page [63] – can provide evidence about the dating of the manuscript, as well as intended purpose. For instance, at the very beginning of our period, it has been argued that the impulse to order world history in a Christian mind-set inspired innovations in the presentation of multiple narratives on the page [67]. Or, nearly a millennium later, in the mid-thirteenth century a change occurred in ruling a manuscript so that the text moved from being written ‘above top line’ to ‘below top line’ – the classic brief discussion of this appears in Neil Ker’s collected essays [79]. Similarly, there is a seminal essay by Malcolm Parkes on the cultural influences that changed the layout of manuscripts from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries [106].

The methods of ruling itself also have their own history. The basics of the practice of pricking – puncturing the folio to provide a guide to ruling – have been described [77], but, under that heading, there is variation, described in outline by J. P. Gumbert [70] and detailed by Derolez both in his magnum opus [49] and in a later article [50].

Describing a book: script and type

Any manuscript description will give a brief designation of the script used in the manuscript. A description is not the place for a detailed discussion of the palaeography – the basic that is required is a mention of type and grade of script. However, it is also useful to mention whether there are any features that make the script idiosyncratic or identifiable as a work of a particular scribe. This may include features of punctuation. Some manuscript cataloguers give a separate section in a technical description to a discussion of punctuation: this habit was pioneered by Malcolm Parkes in his catalogue of Keble College, Oxford [105]; he has also written a history of medieval punctuation [107].

Another topic which is gaining increased attention is the ink used by the scribe. There is a wide-ranging history of ink, placing the experience of medieval Western Europe into a
much broader context [150]. Alongside ink, we should also consider the implements scribes used to write, and this, in turn, might lead us to think about the immediate physical contexts in which they worked: the surfaces, the desk, the seating. A useful short and general overview of these issues is provided by a calligrapher, Ewan Clayton, bringing his own experience to bear on the topic [35]. Others have discussed the evidence provided by depictions in miniatures or art more generally – for instance, for fifteenth-century England [129], and (at greater length) for Renaissance Italy [143].

For incunables, the equivalent of script is, of course, type, but catalogues often reduce the information about it to little more than one or two letters – R, It or G, for roman, italic and gothic. This information is preceded by a measurement of size (giving the height of twenty lines of text). There was also a tradition of giving each printer’s types their own order of numbers, with the formula based on the German Typenreprintorium [72]. There is, of course, more that can be said about individual types and, for some, an interesting history of their origins can be written, as in Nicholas Barker’s discussion of Aldine italic [8].

Describing a book: illumination

A manuscript – or, indeed, a printed book – may include illumination of which some notice must be given in any description. However, the literature on illumination is so extensive this bibliography cannot begin to do justice to it. The study of illuminated manuscripts has become established as a noble element in the discipline of art history, thought that was not always the case. There is, indeed, a history to be written of the development of interest in illumination, as reflected in sales and exhibitions; that history is being written by Bill Stoneman [140]. For the time being, there is a suggestive and broad overview provided in an exhibition catalogue from Northwestern University, Illinois [75].

The present perception of illuminated manuscripts as works of arts allows them to receive the treatment accorded to objects of that status. So, they can be considered a worthy subject for gallery exhibitions. In particular, illumination from the fifteenth-century (and later) has appeared on display in several ‘block-busters’: in the mid-1990s, there were near-contemporaneous shows in Paris, on late medieval French miniatures [7], and in London, on humanist illuminated books [4]. A couple of years later and the Laurenziana in Florence had a ground-breaking display on humanism and the Church Fathers [62]. More recently, in Los Angeles (and later London), there has been an exhibition on the Burgundian contribution to Renaissance illumination [81]. Not all recent major shows have had the same narrow chronological focus: one British exhibition in 2005 brought together manuscripts from across centuries which share a present location: The Cambridge Illuminations [19] (with an accompanying collection of conference papers [104]).

What the catalogues from these exhibitions have in common is that they combine new scholarship with attractive illustration. The most lavish reproduction is, of course, the tradition of the facsimile but that is now supplemented by the burgeoning on-line
digitized images of manuscripts, which tend to concentrate on their illumination – sometimes to a frustrating degree. So, with the British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts [154], you will be able to see the style of each volume’s initial, but you might not be able to catch a glimpse at its script. Other large projects include that of the National Library of The Netherlands [172], or the French project, Enluminures, bringing together images from French public libraries [161]. Indeed, the websites have become so numerous that they need websites to provide e-bibliographies to them: one useful on-line tool is UCLA’s Catalogue of Digitized Medieval Manuscripts, but this confines itself to manuscripts that have been uploaded in full, rather than presented only with selective images. Another is the Digital Scriptorium, the links from which are not confined to illuminated manuscripts but are limited to a range of American collections. A personal listing, citing both exhibition sites and those for individual manuscripts, is provided by Siân Echard of the University of British Columbia [177].

As with the production of the book generally, so the methods of creating an illuminated page is worthy of study: the most useful book on the subject in English is J. J. G. Alexander [1]; there is also much on this, and more besides, in the highly engaging volume by de Hamel [42].

Some medieval treatises on the preparation of pigments and on illuminating more generally survive, and have been edited. Andreas Petzold discusses one [114], dating probably from the eleventh century and known as De coloribus et mixtionibus; another, De clarea, has a recent edition [30]. Kathleen Scott has provided a listing of contemporary terms for illuminating codices, drawn from English manuscript evidence [128].

As alluded to above, illumination does not end with the arrival of print – Lillian Armstrong [6], and Sandra Hindman [74] provide important examples of scholarship in this area. There is also a useful on-line exhibition of woodcuts [183].

Describing a book: marginalia

Interest in marginalia as a subject of study in its own right is a fairly new phenomenon; at least one conference devoted to the subject has resulted in an eclectic set of essays that suggests the range of possibilities of research [53]. The sort of annotations that can be studied do not have to be verbal. The most frequently-sighted sign in the margin is the pointing hand or manicula; for its early-modern history, see [136]. Marginalia, of course, provide a sub-set of any reader’s responses to the text, but their format can hint at the changing practices of reading and of note-taking; a recent article [21] gives a suggestive introduction to those practices in the early modern period, when scholars lived in fear of an overabundance of books.

Sometimes – and those times are not necessarily that long ago – a manuscript would be ‘cleaned’ or improved by the removal of its marginalia [135]. We might prefer our books ‘dirty’ but the activity of cleaning is a reminder that the provenance of a book – an ‘association copy’ – has not constantly been prized.
Describing a book: bindings

Like the experts in manuscript illuminations, the scholars of book-bindings form their own tribe, whose works have multiplied like the sand and who are governed by their own particular customs. For instance, this is one area of study where the distinction between manuscript and printed book has little significance: judging a book from its outside, they are not overly worried whether the pages contained are hand-written or in type. This is also an area of study which has embraced the internet warmly. With such a fertile area of study, the listing here can be nothing more than highly cursory.

Book-binding was not always so blessed: Graham Pollard, writing late in life in the 1970s, complained about how rarely bindings were noticed in catalogues, in an article which itself provides an insightful introduction to the subject [115]. Nowadays, for Anglophones, there is a both basic introduction to the subject [93] and a more detailed discussion of the history of binding and the state (and future) of their cataloguing [96]; both include useful glossaries and both stretch far beyond our period. There is also a more detailed overview of the different types of medieval bindings [141]. To master book-binding’s private language, there is a detailed Italian guide [89], with (sometimes inaccurate) translations of terms into French, German and English.

Recent years have seen a series of major projects to record and research historic bindings, and some sense of the range of those is provided by the proceedings of a 2003 conference [84]. The results of some of those are being mounted on the web: for instance, the British Library Database of Bookbindings [155], or the display provided by Florence’s Biblioteca Riccardiana [152].

As well as the nature of the binding itself, a scholar should check whether the externals of the book provide any further evidence for its history: for instance, is there any sign that it once was held in place in a library by a chain? On chains and chains staples, see the brief articles by Ker [79]. Is a title or some clue to provenance marked somewhere on the binding or on the edges of the pages themselves, suggesting how it was stored? On non-verbal painting on book edges, there is a short discussion by Mirjam Foot [55]. You must also check inside the covers to see what has been used as pastedowns and flyleaves – sometimes earlier manuscript folios or printed pages have been cut up and used for this purpose. Indeed, as Neil Ker showed in a classic study, recently reprinted with addenda, Oxford in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century was a centre of book-binding particularly given to this habit [80].

Identifying the text

As well as providing a description of the physical book, the cataloguer needs to give clear information about the volume’s contents. This may not be as easy as it sounds, as a manuscript itself might provide incomplete or misleading evidence. The information provided in the books themselves and in the medieval catalogues that record them often worked by different standards from our own expectations of bibliographical data. The
process of identifying texts is discussed in its intricacies by Richard Sharpe [133], and there is also some guidance in the volume overseen by Jacques Berlioz [16]. There are also modern tools to assist with identification, in particular the listings of opening words. Of specific relevance for us is Ludwig Bertalot’s collection of humanist incipits initia [17]. A more general and significant on-line resource is the Brepols database, In Principio [167], though it should be noted that its coverage is in large part dependent on printed catalogues.

A book often does not include a text simply on its own: it might provide an index, or a contents list, or an added preface – all of which are covered by the recent coinage, paratext. The word was invented, and the topic discussed, by Gérard Genette [61]. Bill Sherman provides a characteristically insightful discussion of paratext and the architecture of the printed book [134]. Others have discussed particular types of paratext, the title-page, for instance, [139] or errata lists [20]. A range of the ways in which the concept is being exploited by scholars of early ‘print culture’ is collected together in a recent volume [137], but it should be remembered that the principles of paratext have relevance also for the world of manuscripts.

Provenance

The final part of any description should be the evidence for the volume’s own particular history. A useful introduction to the techniques that can be used for researching provenance is provided by David Pearson [110].

A manuscript can sometimes be up-front about its origins – or, rather, at-the-back, as the information is usually included in a colophon. There is a handily available listing of colophons brought together from references in printed catalogues – meaning that the collection is both outsize and incomplete [15]. It is supplemented by Lucien Reynhout in his meticulous study of the changing fashions in the wordings of colophons (an enterprise in quantitative codicology) [120]; there is a useful collection of essays, both discussing particular examples of colophons and considering their significance [37]. For some images, from printed books, manuscripts and papyrus, there is a Spanish website **.

From the definite we can move to the probable or possible. Colophons can be used both for their naming of their scribe and for their dating. For Greek copyists, there is an on-going project, intended to attribute unsigned manuscripts to scribes on the basis of their signed codices [57]; a parallel at the heart of our area of study would be the designation of hundreds of humanist manuscripts to specific Florentine scribes by A. C. de la Mare [44]. Meanwhile, dated manuscripts are valued for their acclaimed ability to provide a palaeographical chronology, and so there are catalogues of ‘Dated and Datable’ manuscripts being produced in most Western European countries.

Another detail which can be of use in identifying the provenance is the first word or words of the second folio, known nowadays as the dictio probatoria; some medieval catalogues from some countries use these words (in manuscripts and, occasionally, in printed books) to identify their specific copy. The uses, and pitfalls, of using them as a
source for provenance are discussed by Daniel Williman [147]. Moreover, counter-intuitive though it may seem, the use of the *dictio probatoria* continued to be relevant in the world of incunables, as James Willoughby has recently shown [148].

More generally, it is true that those medieval printed books we call incunabula, on the one hand, lack the inherent uniqueness in each copy that a hand-written volume necessarily has, and, on the other, can be more explicit about the specific commercial context of their production. That does not mean, though, that the individual specimen of a printing is devoid of information of the book’s early life, as is shown by both Bod-inc (see Cataloguing Manuscripts and Incunables above) and by a recently-established database of ‘Material Evidence in Incuncabula’ [170].

The history of a book does not stop with the end of the Middle Ages (whenever that might have been): its post-medieval fortuna should also be considered. It is rare for a book to have remained always in the same place, and its travels can provide an interesting history in itself. Writing from the English perspective, there is an important essay on the ‘migration of manuscripts’ by Ker in his collected essays [79]; significant also are the works of Andrew Watson, with his collected essays being the best starting-point [146]. The particular cataclysm in England was the impact of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, eloquently discussed recently by James Carley [31] and by Nigel Ramsay [117].

This example serves to remind us that what we have lost is much greater than what survives. On the history of destruction of libraries, from antiquity to the twentieth-century, there is a recent set of essays [118]. The impact of destruction is witnessed also in the survival of manuscript fragments, on which there is an interesting volume of conference proceedings [28]. It should be remembered that the process of destruction – and of re-use – did not begin with the sixteenth century [83]; in addition, it is not only manuscripts that suffer this fate; many incunables, if they survive at all, survive only in single copies [101]. The process of destruction has not ended – a reminder that the work of the cataloguer, the codicologist and the historian of incunabula can have an immediate relevance, and an urgency.
Listing

I: hard-copy works

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http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/glossary.asp (last accessed 24th May 2013)

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[165]. GW on-line: http://www.gesamtkatalogderwiegendrucke.de/ (last accessed 25th May 2013)


[167]. In Principio, database of incipits available only by subscription at:
http://www.brepolis.net/ (last accessed 24th May 2013)

[168]. ISTC, the British Library Incunabula Short Title Catalogue:
http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/istc/ (last accessed 13th May 2013)


[171]. Melbourne University’s on-line palaeography course, Ductus:
http://ductus.asu.edu/ (accessed 25th May 2013)

[172]. National Library of The Netherlands’ Illuminated Manuscripts Catalogue:
http://manuscripts.kb.nl/ (accessed 21st May 2013)


[174]. Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, all manuscripts digitized by Stanford (subscription only):

[175]. Salamanca’s on-line Exhibition of Colophons:

[176]. Sharpe, R. ‘Le bibliothécaire médiéval et son héritage’, unpublished lecture given on 18th September 2003:
http://www.history.ox.ac.uk/sharpe/bibliothecaire.pdf (last accessed 25th May 2013)

[177]. Siân Echard’s listing of Medieval Manuscripts on the Web:

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