

REVIEWS

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Barbara Heritage and Ruth-Ellen St. Onge. *Building the Book from the Ancient World to the Present Day: How Manuscript, Printed, and Digital Texts are Made; Illustrated from the Teaching Collections of Rare Book School at the University of Virginia*. Ann Arbor, MI: The Legacy Press, 2022. xxi + 309 + [2] pp. \$44.95. Hardcover (ISBN 978-1-953421-10-4).

Reviewed by Daniel J. Slive

For the past half century, the Book Arts Press (BAP) and Rare Book School (RBS) have promoted the study of written, printed, and digital artifacts through close study of the material forms of texts. This includes processes and technologies utilized in the creation and dissemination of these objects and physical evidence of ownership, use, and additional post-publication interventions. In recognition of the fiftieth anniversary in 2022 of these two interconnected bibliographical institutions, RBS Director of Collections and Exhibitions Barbara Heritage and former RBS Associate Curator and Special Collections Librarian Ruth-Ellen St. Onge co-curated “Building the Book from the Ancient World to the Present Day” as an exhibition at the Grolier Club in New York. The resulting profusely illustrated catalog focuses on the RBS teaching collections and how these materials are employed in the school’s courses for antiquarian booksellers, archivists, binders, collectors, conservators, curators, librarians, and academics concerned with book history. Explored throughout the volume is the school’s focus on teaching the analysis and identification of books (broadly

defined culturally and geographically) as physical objects and how such close study can inform humanistic inquiry.

Founding RBS Director Terry Belanger provides a brief history of the school in the foreword, starting from its genesis at the School of Library Service of Columbia University to the present program based at the University of Virginia. He describes the development of the master’s-level concentration in rare books, special collections, and antiquarian bookselling; the challenges encountered in pursuing the hands-on teaching of books as physical objects, particularly rare books with accompanying issues of scarcity, fragility, and value; and the growth of BAP collections of bindings, illustrations, paper, typography, and other topics documenting the materiality of the book. Following the program’s first decade, RBS was established in 1983 as a summer institute with intensive five-day non-credit courses focused on rare books and related subjects. After Columbia closed the library school, Belanger moved the RBS program and collections to the University of Virginia in 1992. Approximately fifteen thousand students have taken courses at Columbia, Virginia,

Daniel J. Slive has, since 1988, developed and curated collections and exhibitions focused primarily on the history of the book in Europe and the Americas for a range of cultural heritage institutions. He has co-taught “The History of the Book in Hispanic America, 16th–19th Centuries” at the California Rare Book School utilizing primary source materials at UCLA Special Collections, Huntington Library, and Getty Research Institute.

and several satellite sites, and the collections presently comprise more than one hundred thousand items.

In developing the exhibition and catalog, the curators found the concept of constructing a building an appropriate analogy for describing the processes and materials integral to the physical creation of a book, particularly when displaying Western hand-press period codices and a diverse range of texts produced in other time periods and geographic regions. Materials, processes, technologies, and tools are discussed throughout the volume as the authors delineate various elements and techniques. After an introductory chapter 1, "Overview: The Changing Form of the Book," the remaining chapters use the overarching metaphor of construction to investigate more closely the numerous layers and labors involved in building a book. These include "Substrates" (ch. 2) as foundations, the surfaces conveying the languages, images, and codes that provide the physical form of books; "Formats" (ch. 3) as underlying structures allowing the volume to function properly; "Letterforms" (ch. 4) presenting texts in particular styles that convey language and provide insight into cultures and technologies; "Printing Surfaces" (ch. 5) akin to the variety of construction equipment needed to assemble a structure; "Bindings" (ch. 6) viewed as similar to the exterior of a building, presenting a book's identity; and "Marks in Books: Individual and Institutional Interventions" (ch. 7) that provide evidence of ownership and use once construction is completed.

The catalog comprises 209 entries representing single or multiple items highlighting the school's collections. Each entry, illustrated by one or more photographs and identified by exhibit number and headline, includes concise identification of books, manuscripts, materials, and objects, while accompanying descrip-

tions discuss material features, technical processes, historical and cultural contexts, and the use of these items in RBS courses. These descriptive texts, generally between a half page and a page in length, explain specific material in individual entries and place these items within the larger historical and technical narrative of the catalog. Brief introductions for each chapter provide additional context, and while additional essays by the curators or outside contributors are not included, RBS Executive Director Michael F. Suarez, S.J., reflects in the afterword on communicating the importance of the world's documentary heritage for current and future generations.

Selections in each chapter are nearly always presented in chronological order, providing a consistent organization and flow. This is particularly helpful given the vast chronological range of materials from the twentieth century BCE to twenty-first century CE and geographical scope of items from Asia, Europe, and North America. In entries concerned with non-Western materials, the inclusion of non-roman types such as Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Korean, Arabic, and Hebrew, often accompanied by transliterations into roman characters, is also welcome. While the emphasis is on teaching with primary sources, non-original teaching aids such as text facsimiles, models, and replicas of three-dimensional materials are also discussed. Specific classes and instructors are regularly mentioned and several faculty members are quoted as authoritative sources. The curators provide endnotes and a separate listing of these 223 print and online sources. Readers will find the glossary and compilation of works cited useful references and the extensive index helpful in navigating the book.

Special collections librarians, collectors, and dealers whose interests include the materiality of the book and

physical processes involved in textual creation, distribution, and utilization will encounter much useful information presented in an accessible style and format. In the introductory overview and chapters on substrates, formats, and letterforms, the breadth of the selections from a range of time periods and regions present numerous opportunities to enrich one's cultural, historical, and technical understanding of the history of the book, encompassing traditional Asian book production, hand-press and industrial printing, and digital publishing. The extensive chapters on printing surfaces and bindings are noteworthy with clear, detailed, and well-documented descriptions. Printing surfaces comprise forty-two entries in four separate sections on "Relief," "Intaglio," "Planographic," and "Photography, Stencil, and Digital," with images of original materials dating from 1562 to 2015. The entries are particularly helpful for understanding nineteenth-century mass production processes such as lithography, chromolithography, stereotyping, electrotyping, and photomechanical printing. The sixty entries dating from ca. 1400 to 1992 in the binding chapter are found in three sections devoted to "Before 1800," "After 1800," and "Tools, Stamps, Dies, Leather, and Kits." Here also informative descriptions of the industrial aspects of book production will be appreciated. Librarians teaching with special collections will find *Building the Book* particularly helpful when planning primary source instruction sessions. In addition to historical, cultural, and technical content, the entry sequences and specific items in various chapters provide models to consider when reviewing current holdings and contemplating possible areas for expansion. Private and institutional collectors may find selections that lead to future acquisitions, while dealers may also

be inspired to consider future offerings based on individual exhibition sections.

While the authors regularly emphasize the use of RBS collections for teaching, personal and professional acquirers will still encounter many works that would be welcome additions to their collections. Representing the chronological, cultural, geographic, and technological range documented in the volume, selected highlights include Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Tibetan Buddhist texts from the ninth through twentieth centuries; early European printing, including a fragment of the 1459 Mainz Psalter printed by Johann Fust and Peter Schöffer and an illuminated 1510 Book of Hours printed on parchment in an unusual duodecimo agenda format; and bindings such as a luxurious seventeenth-century English embroidered binding on a 1635 Bible, a nineteenth-century Cottonian binding of Robert Southey and his daughters covered in bright cotton fabric, and three mid-nineteenth-century striped-cloth bindings on American imprints. Notable examples of contemporary fine press printing include a 1992 set of progressive proofs of a six-color wood engraving by Gaylord Schanilec and a unique set of four copies, including three working proofs, of Walter Hamady's 1991 *Gabberjab 6* extensively inscribed by the printer, papermaker, and artist to RBS Founding Director Terry Belanger.

The catalog is well designed and handsomely printed with color reproductions of the photographic illustrations. Additional proofreading and editing would have been helpful in eliminating some sixty minor textual errors and inconsistencies. As RBS continues to expand its collections, courses, and programs to engage more fully with an increasingly diverse, complex, and interdependent world, lacunae outside the current focus on Europe, the United States,

and East Asia should be addressed. Discussion of hand-press period practices in Europe and North America, specifically concerning format terms and sewing frames for hand bookbinding, need to be expanded beyond Mexico to include all of Latin America and the Caribbean as well as regions such as the Indian subcontinent and Oceania where colonial and early missionary presses were operated. The inconsistent description of religious sources from different faith traditions, particularly concerning content, purpose, and public and private uses, should also be noted. While

the discussions of Christian and Buddhist texts are informative, less so is the information provided for the Hebrew Torah and Islamic Qur'an. These limitations aside, the volume will strongly support the interests and labors of readers engaged in developing and servicing collections concerned with the history, materiality, use, and appreciation of primary sources. In recognizing and celebrating the numerous contributions RBS has made to the understanding of original textual materials, *Building the Book* has the unique potential to inform, instruct, and inspire.

Anthony Grafton. *Inky Fingers: The Making of Books in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020. 392 pp. \$22.95. Paperback (ISBN 978-0-674-27121-0).

Reviewed by Nick Wilding

So prolific, varied, and sustained are Anthony Grafton's contributions to intellectual history that it is forgivable to forget that he is, at core, a historian of the book. Yet it is this aspect that comes to the fore in *Inky Fingers*, which offers a mostly fascinating series of interventions into the history of the material transmission of texts. Way back in 1980, the then assistant professor at Princeton University wrote a sparkingly astute review of Elizabeth L. Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Social Change* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), reminding the emerging discipline of the importance of primary sources such as Hieronymus Hornschuch's *Orthotypographia* (Leipzig, 1608). Grafton's genius and his lasting contribution to the discipline lies in his ability to relate the material to the intellectual, to

explore the rings, bars, beams, matting, Lycra, and bleachers that make mental gymnastics possible.

It is the transmitters and their tools, both physical and intellectual, that interest Grafton in *Inky Fingers*. A recurrent theme is the absolute necessity of recognizing the transformation wrought by transmission in order to make sense of humanism: this is not a song of loss, but of creation, with agency manifested in a contested but coherent group of activities including collection, collation, copying, editing, curating, archiving, restoring, conserving, forging, translating, excerpting, excising, compiling, note-taking, commonplacating, printing, and reading. Some of these practices are still in use; artificial intelligence may be reviving others. This book, for the seriousness with which it considers the history

Nick Wilding is a Professor of History at Georgia State University.