

History of Books: A Syllabus

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Meetings: Wednesdays, 10-noon, at Temple Beth El
Ten weeks, September 11-November 20 (No class October 9)

Course Description: Digitized reading seems the wave of the future. Okay. I've got a Kindle; so do you. But still, some of us like to look at old books, we think they're important—the wave of the past. So, we'll be looking at the production of all those books—in particular, special books—and how bookmaking evolved from papyrus scrolls to Penguin paperbacks, with particular attention to some earliest-of-genre types—cookbooks, map books, music books, travel books. We'll take a couple of library field trips. We'll find our way among many riches. What we discover and discuss should interest us, delight us.

Course Assumptions: Books have been a fundamental part of communication systems. They gather thoughts, fix those thoughts onto paper, and distribute the result to a reading public. How a process of manufacture and delivery gets done affects how (and how much) we digest those ideas. There are some books anybody simply ought to know about, even if you're not much interested in the content. Gutenberg's Mainz Bible is one. So, we're not particularly interested in texts. I enjoy reading the stories of Anthony Trollope (yikes!), but for our purposes a Victorian-era Trollope novel interests us as an example of serial distribution within an expanding literate population. Content analysis isn't our thing.

Course text: Martyn Lyons, *Books: A Living History*

Lyons's book is a resource; class sessions aren't exactly based on it. Nonetheless, course participants are encouraged to obtain and read the entire book as soon as possible and review the appropriate chapter assignment each week. You can order the book from Amazon or your favorite local bookstore (perhaps Books on the Square, nearby). The Amazon price for the book hovers around \$25. The book-search website www.bookfinder.com can supply you with options from \$10 to \$15.

Field Trips:

At least two of these: plans are pending, but on October 16 we'll move the entire morning meeting to Brown's Hay Library, and similarly on November 6 we'll visit the Providence Public Library.

Classroom structure: Check out the extensive list of subjects that I've suggested and pick two to report on (plus an extra, in case your first choices are taken). You'll talk about your topic for 20-25 minutes. Ideally, your remarks will accompany a PowerPoint slide presentation. Your comments should generally inform us and along the way deal with these questions:

- What makes this book special?
- When and where was it produced?
- How was it produced? What bookmaking technology?
- Why this pick? What has made this book (or subject) especially interesting to you?

Class members should supply the class coordinator—walker.rumble@gmail.com—with their report choices, in order of preference, as soon as possible. Some topics may be more popular than others. I'll try to accommodate your choice.

Class Schedule and Report Topics

Select from among the **red subjects** for your class reports.

SEPTEMBER 11

SESSION 1. Housekeeping and Some Slides

SEPTEMBER 18

SESSION 2. Bookmaking: *Papyrus and Parchment* (consult: Lyons, *Books: A Living History*, chapter 1)

- **Gilgamesh** (Nineveh, cuneiform, 669-631 BCE)
(the Flood story; the oldest epic of them all)
- **Maxims of Ptahhotep/Prisse Papyrus** (Thebes, 1900 BCE)
(earliest known book, written on papyrus)
- **Nag Hammadi** (Upper Egypt, 333 CE)
(earliest complete bound and covered codex)
- **Diamond Sutra** (China, 868 CE)
(the earliest surviving dated, printed book)
- **Codex Sinaiticus** (Sinai, 330-360 CE)
(there are hundreds of canonical Bible editions, this one's the first)

SEPTEMBER 25

SESSION 3. Bookmaking: *Scribes and Scriptoria* (consult: Chapter 1)

- **Lindisfarne Gospels** (Ireland, 715-720); **Book of Kells** (Ireland, 800)
(remote Irish monks and the greatest illuminated manuscripts of them all)
- **Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry** (France, 1412-1416)
(fabulous book illumination; this is a book of hours—daily, hourly prayers)
- **Roman de la Rose** (France, 1230; Bruges, 1500)
(illuminated books of hours were pious; this was an illuminated book of love)

OCTOBER 2

SESSION 4. Bookmaking: *Scroll and Codex* (consult: Chapter 1)

- Travel books: **Nuremberg Chronicle** (Germany, 1493) *an early printed blockbuster*
Baedeker Guides (Germany, 1827) *the mother of tourist guidebooks*
- Cookbooks: **Apicius** (Rome, 830) *the earliest dedicated cookbook*
Soyer, Modern Housewife (London, 1849) *the birth of the “celebrity chef”*
- Map books: **Ptolemy Geographia** (Alexandria, 150)
(the father of mapping invents latitude and longitude)
- Reference books: **Diderot Encyclopédie** (Paris, 1751-65) *how the Enlightenment got done*
Samuel Johnson Dictionary (London, 1755) *the words that described it*
- Music books: **St. Gall Cantatorium** (Switzerland, 922-25)
(tenth-century notation in neumes)
Constance Gradual (Switzerland, 1473)
(the earliest instance of a printed music score)
Ottaviano Petrucci, **Harmonice Musices Odhecaton** (Italy, 1501)
(the first notated music book entirely printed with movable type)
Bay Psalm Book (Cambridge, 1640)
(the earliest printed book in British North America)

OCTOBER 16

SESSION 5. Bookmaking: *Printing with Movable Type* (consult: Chapters 2-3)

- Johann Gutenberg **Mainz Bible** (Germany, 1455)
(Gutenberg, the “man of the millennium”—or maybe not?)
- Gershon Soncino, Moses ben Jacob of Coucy’s **Sefer Mitzvot Gadol** (Italy, 1488)
(Soncino brothers and the spread of printing in Hebrew)
- Aldus Manutius, **Hypnerotomachia Poliphili** (Italy, 1499)
(a lover’s dream world; a printer’s masterpiece)
- Science I: Johannes Oporinus’s **Vesalius**, *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (Basel, 1543)
(the first modern study of anatomy)
- Science II: Isaac **Newton’s Principia** (London, 1687)
(the foundation of modern science)

OCTOBER 23

SESSION 6. Bookmaking: *Type* (consult: Chapter 3)

- **Caslon**, through the years
- **Jenson**, the first and classic “roman” type
- **Bodoni**, the “modern” machine face

OCTOBER 30

SESSION 7. Bookmaking: *Linotype* (consult: Chapter 4)

- **Theodore Low De Vinne**, De Vinne Press (New York, 1883-1908)
(tycoon in printerdom)
- **Elbert Hubbard**, *Justinian and Theodora* (East Aurora, New York, 1896-1917)
(the Roycrofters; America’s Kelmscott?)
- **Oscar Harpel**, *Harpel’s Typograph* (Cincinnati, 1870)
(graphic design before graphic designers)
- **Dard Hunter** (*Old Papermaking*, 1923)
(the ultimate printer-artisan; Hunter made his entire book)

NOVEMBER 6

SESSION 8. Bookmaking: *Mass Distribution* (consult: Chapter 4)

- **Dime novels**: Beadle and Adams, *Deadwood Dick*, *Buffalo Bill* (New York, 1860)
(“binge” reading for all)
- **James Fenimore Cooper**: *Last of the Mohicans* (Philadelphia, 1826)
(the original American blockbuster novel)
- **Harriet Beecher Stowe**: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Boston, 1852)
(the best-selling novel of the 19th century)

NOVEMBER 13

SESSION 9. Bookmaking: *Lithography* (consult: Chapter 5)

- **Everyman's** Library (London, 1906); **Penguin** paperbacks (London, 1930)
(launching the paperback revolution)
- **E. E. Cummings**, *No Thanks* (New York, 1935)
(Golden Eagle Press: modernist poetry; modernist typography)
- **Jan Tschichold**, *Die neue Typographie* (Berlin, 1928)
(print modernism: sans serif type, asymmetry, and white space)
- **Dust jackets**: *Friendship's Offering* (1830); *The Great Gatsby* (1925)
(what in the world is a "paratext"?)
- **Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass***: Grabhorn Press (1930)
(limited edition, fine printing)

NOVEMBER 20

SESSION 10. Bookmaking: WAYZGOOSE!