

"Scattered Leaves: Preserving Our Piece of the Otto Ege Puzzle."

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Third of 3 papers presented in Session 12: Digital Reconstruction of Illuminated Manuscripts: The Ege Project, Sunday, May 7, 2006 1:30-3:00pm

Slide 1

Title slide

Slide 2

This presentation concerns one of the boxes Otto F. Ege titled "Fifty Original Leaves from Medieval Manuscripts". Box number 25 of the set of 40 is owned by the University of Saskatchewan. I shall describe how the university happened to come to own one of these boxes, conservation work that we undertook on the manuscripts, the photographing and subsequent digitizing of the leaves, and conclude with some remarks about the work to date that has been done to facilitate the digital reconstruction of one of the original books and what the next steps are for this initiative.

Slide 3

University Librarian David C. Appelt was responsible for persuading the Walter Murray Chapter of the Imperial Daughters of the Empire, based in Regina, SK, to increase their annual donation of \$125 CA to \$250 CA for a period of 3 years. This total of \$750 CA allowed the library to purchase the box, now worth around \$300,000, in late 1957.

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The gift is recognized in the 1957 Library Annual Report.  
Thank you letter from the University President to the Walter Murray Chapter of the Imperial Daughters of the Empire acknowledging the donation.

Slide 5

The original box containing the set of manuscripts

Slide 6

Shortly after I became Special Collections Librarian at the University of Saskatchewan in 2003 I was approached by English professor Dr. Peter Stoicheff who had had the idea to attempt to digitally reconstruct the manuscripts by collaborating with other box owners. Dr. Stoicheff had been using the set of manuscripts for the classes he taught on the history of the book. I was happy to become involved in this initiative. In order to participate in such a project the library needed to digitize the set that it owned. To understand the present condition of the leaves and how they might best be cared for during and after digitization I engaged a painting conservator to do an analysis of the manuscripts (there was no book conservator in the province) Based on her initial appraisal we determined that the paper matting and box that held the leaves was of an acceptable pH level (low alkaline is the most suitable for vellum, as opposed to paper which requires a low acidity level and is why archival materials are always acid-free.) But the original housing permitted surface contact between the vellum and the matting since all fifty of the leaves were housed on top of each other in the same box, and more significantly, the leaves had been taped to their matting with a vinyl based tape that was severely oxidized and was staining the vellum and the matting. It was

recommended that the leaves be removed from their original matting and be re-housed. This removal permitted us to be able to photograph both recto and verso sides for digitization; a good shot of the verso would not have been possible without removing the tape. So we engaged a book/vellum conservator from Alberta to work with the person who had originally done the analysis. The safe removal of the leaves was painstaking work and took three days.

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Original matting

Slide 8

Damage done to matting by the tape

Slide 9

At this time we had already located some of the other box owners and were in contact with individuals at these institutions about the proposed reconstruction project. One of the people with whom I was communicating as the Curator of the Cary Arts Collection at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, NY, David Pankow. RIT had already digitized their set and displayed them online and David Pankow was at this time coincidentally undertaking a re-photographing of the leaves to bring the digital files up to the standards of the day, and to add the verso sides. He generously shared information about best practices with regard to digitizing the manuscripts. His advice echoed what I had already heard from archivists who recommended using standard photography, shooting 4 by 5 transparencies, and then scanning the slides to produce the digital image. We "interviewed" professional photographers in town and had them shoot samples to compare. The clear winner was a free lance photographer Darrin Langhorst who came to the library and worked with my student assistant at the time, Craig Harkema, primarily there as custodian of the leaves to make sure they were handled correctly and not exposed to too much light and heat during the photographing. The two built a scaffold to hold the camera, determined what the light and colour standards to employ, and solved lighting and shadowing problems by creative improvisation.

Slide 10

Scaffold constructed to hold camera (accessory equipment such as tripods for 4 by 5 cameras is hard to come by as the cameras are old, and the nature of this job dictated very specific distance and angle etc)

Slide 11 and 12

When photographing illuminated manuscripts the reflection of the light source off the gold leaf is a big problem. In order to deal with this issue Darrin used a low intensity direct light in combination with a high intensity indirect light. Here you see Craig directing the high intensity light onto a white surface to reflect it onto the leaves.

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If you reflect too much light the illumination is given a false luminosity and can look overexposed. The example of the left shows this problem, while the one on the right is Darrin's work.

Slide 14

Further detail showing the difference in images

Slide 15

If you reflect too little light the gold leaf appears dark. The example on the left demonstrates this problem while that on the right is Darrin's work.

Slide 16 and 17

Shows progressive detail of the contrast between these two images

Slide 18

Having photographed the manuscripts we needed to re-house them correctly. We used unbuffered matting (low alkaline ph) and built small depressions into the mats so that there would be no surface contact between the leaves and the housing materials, and also used Japanese tissue as an added precaution. The leaves were not attached directly in any way to the matting and we allowed 5 leaves to one box and spread the set over 10 holding boxes

Slide 19 and 20

New matting and holding boxes

Slide 21

We then produced digital images of the manuscripts by scanning the 4 by 5 slides as high resolution TIFF files. The advantage of having the slides is that the scanning process is infinitely repeatable as needed. The high resolution images can be an effective research and teaching tool since they allow a viewer to zoom in on incredible amounts of detail that can provide context and information about the use and creation of the leaves, difficult to see with the naked eye. The ability to display or allow use of life size, life-colour digital facsimiles prevents wear and tear on the original pieces.

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Scanner and transparency slide

Slide 23

Starting in late 2003 we located and contacted as many box owners as we could to gauge interest in a collaborative effort to digitally reconstruct one of the original books from which the leaves were taken. Others had already been thinking along similar lines. We obtained a small SSHRC grant to fund an exhibition of the leaves and a two day symposium, both of which took place in June 2005. The exhibit "Scattered Leaves" was entirely curated by English students from Dr Stoicheff's classes. The symposium Remaking the Book brought together medieval scholars and box owners from Canada and the United States. A day of public talks was followed by a day of closed meetings where a taskforce for the reconstruction project was struck.

Slide 24 and 25

Photographs of the exhibit Scattered Leaves and the online virtual counterpart.

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Homepage for the symposium Remaking the Book

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The taskforce determined to focus on the reconstruction of the "Beauvais Missal" a book created in the late 1200's in Beauvais, France, that has been of interest to scholars. Beauvais was a centre for book production at that time. The book was known to have been intact in the 1920's when it was sold at Sotherby's. The quest for box owners continues. About 30 have now been located in North America. The

taskforce will apply for funding from SSHRC and NEH in order to bring the rest of the box owners together at a second, larger conference to be held in June 2007, where the practical details of reconstruction, image standards, housing the site etc, can be worked through. The exhibit Scattered Leaves will be remounted at that time.

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The "Beauvais Missal"

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Questions.