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Editor's Note

After the 30th anniversary “digital vs. physical” issue in the Spring, we didn’t set out to have a theme for this one. There is no link between any two articles in this issue, beyond their relationship to special collections. Many of our peers are doing such interesting work and scholarship, covering a spectrum of activities related to our discipline, that we didn’t want to restrict the types of submissions we received. When I say “spectrum,” that’s precisely what these articles offer—illumination of the world of special collections, from the precise to the infinite, viewed through the lens of these authors.

Gordon’s article focuses on verification of anthropodermic bibliopegy (for those of you who may not be familiar with the term, the practice of binding books in human skin). His analysis places this unusual and specific type of collection material under a microscope, in some cases quite literally, and highlights the ways the care of these items requires consideration of both ethics and preservation.

Moving away from a close inspection of individual items, we can view our collections through a prism of outreach, refracting them in multiple directions. Garner, Goldberg, and Pou cast a glow upon their own collections, exposing others to rare materials through a successful social media campaign. Then, directing the beam outside the physical special collections space, Vong explores a constructivist approach to instruction and how it can be applied when teaching students how to research using special collections.

Finally, we must look into our telescope, pointed halfway around the world, to witness an example of special collections’ potential to enlighten. In this case, one woman’s effort to collect materials during wartime has helped preserve a nation’s cultural history, as you’ll see in the Moustafa article.

I think that this luminous metaphor is an appropriate one for our profession. Our collections have the power to awe, inspire, and illuminate, and the deep connections that we form with those materials reflect a fiery passion for what it means to work in and with cultural heritage collections. Fortunately, this sort of flame poses no risk to the legacy we protect. Stoke the fire and let it burn.

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