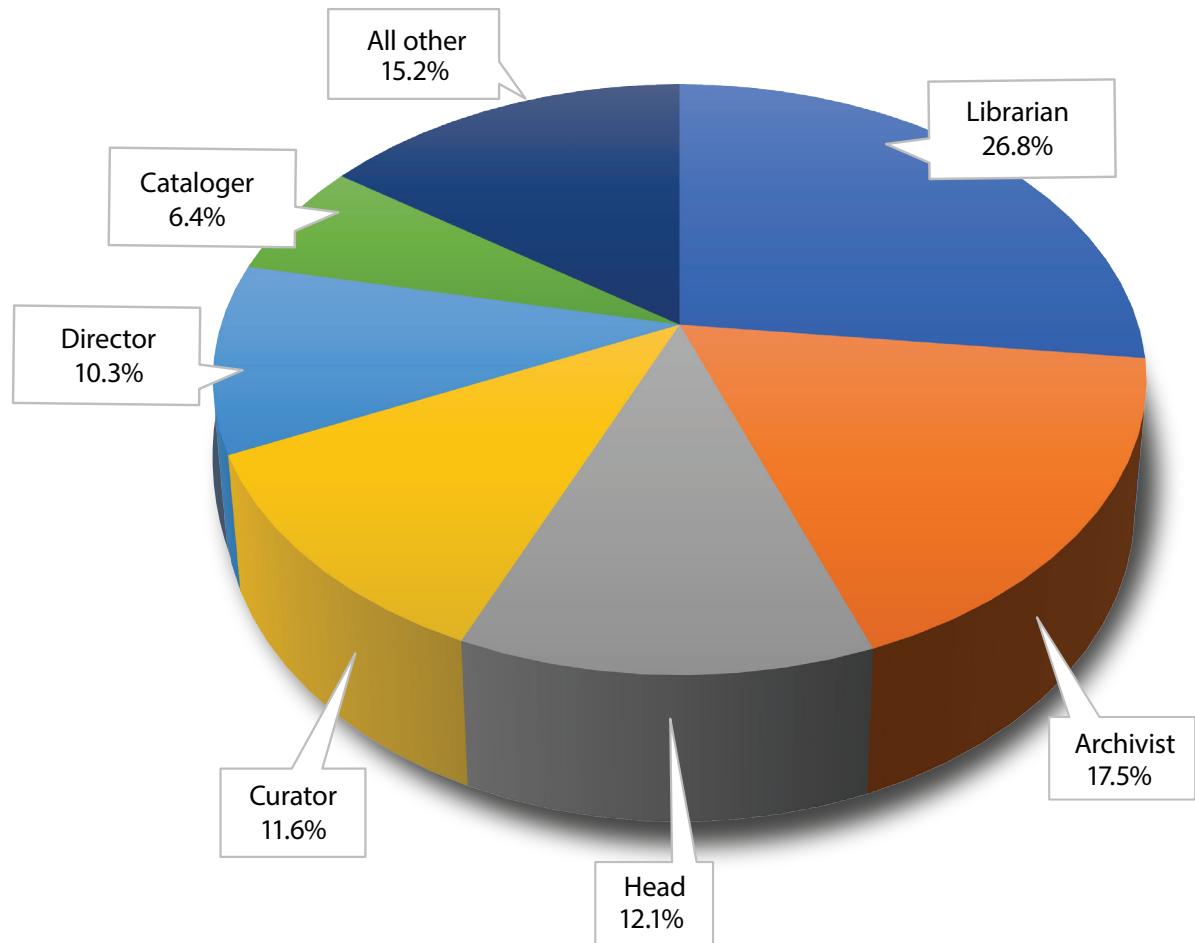


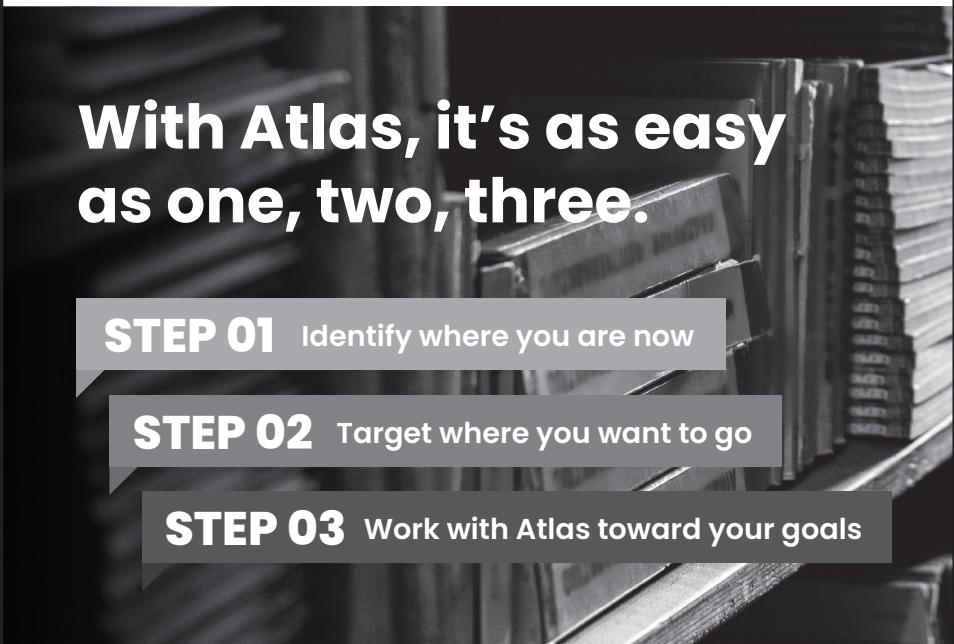
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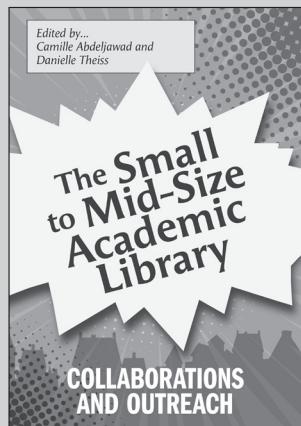


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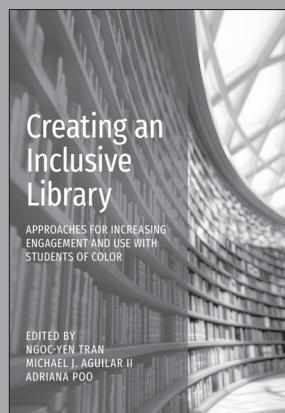
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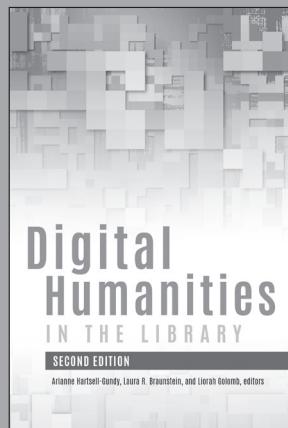
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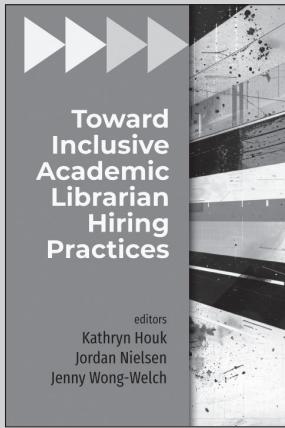
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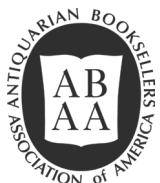
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## On the Cover:

Percentage of positions, by title, advertised on the RBMS News Blog, 2013 to 2021. Adapted from an original graphic by Ikumi Crocoll and Kelli Hansen.

# RBM:

*A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage*

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Diane Dias De Fazio

## Editor's Note

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When composing this Editor's Note in July, I found myself too aware that this issue of *RBM* arrives soon after November's general elections in the United States, and near the end of a year marked by challenges on academic campuses and to higher education, continued extremes in global weather conditions, and prolific expansion of artificial intelligence technologies in research, writing, and art. What will be top of mind for library, archives, and cultural heritage professionals by the time someone reads these words?

*RBM* does not exist in a vacuum, and yet, it does—kind of. The journal represents our field and work, but also serves as a platform for our concerns and causes. It is difficult to be timely, but *RBM* is not a blog, and cannot—for now—financially or practically support production for more than two issues per year. I can only imagine what the RBMS community will do between now and the next issue's deadline. I hope that we uphold a currency that *RBM*'s readers demand.

\* \* \*

Though developed over the last several years, contributors to this issue of *RBM* present fresh perspectives from different aspects of the profession. Volume 25 number 2 brings new work on conservation and preservation, a survey of amate, and this issue's cover story, an intensive assessment of job ads shared on the RBMS News Blog. Additionally, this issue contains what may be its first-ever content warning.

For this issue, the fourteen-person Editorial Board and twenty-six peer reviewers assessed eight submissions in our double-anonymous process (phrasing this publication prefers to otherwise ableist verbiage seen in peer-reviewed journals). The Board, by simple majority in a secret ballot, recommended four articles for publication without substantial revision. And, as if that weren't impressive enough, in the service year that started July 1, the Board has ambitious plans! Between now and this time in 2025, we endeavor to initiate and run a reader survey, document and share processes, form a subcommittee for outreach and marketing, nominate prospective reviewers, and continue to work with authors to develop submissions. What new writing and insights will result from this Mother of All Years? You tell us.

In the meantime, I shall strive to keep *RBM* (mostly) as AI-free as possible. Enjoy the read.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Ikumi Crocoll** has been the Instruction & Engagement Librarian at UCLA's William Andrews Clark Memorial Library since 2021. Previously, she worked as the Manuscripts & Special Collections Librarian at the Daughters of the American Revolution Library in D.C. and as a reference librarian at the Newberry Library in Chicago. She holds a Master of Science in Information from the University of Michigan and a Master of Arts in the Humanities from the University of Chicago.

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**Josephine Jenks** graduated from the NYU Institute of Fine Arts Conservation Center in May 2024, where she specialized in the conservation of works on paper and time-based media. She has held internships at Cooper Hewitt, David Zwirner, and Museum Ludwig. She also worked as a Graduate Conservation Assistant at the NYU Libraries Barbara Goldsmith Preservation & Conservation Department, before spending the final year of her graduate studies at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. In September 2024 she began a one-year Bank of America fellowship at the Brooklyn Museum focused on the conservation treatment of ancient Egyptian papyrus.

**Jessica Pace** is the Preventive Conservator in the Barbara Goldsmith Preservation & Conservation Department at NYU Libraries. She is responsible for ensuring safe storage and handling of Special Collections materials and coordinating emergency preparedness and response, integrated pest management, environmental monitoring, and materials testing and analysis. Jessica is interested in how preservation activities can create new opportunities for meaningful engagement with material culture. She has held roles in objects conservation at the American Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis in Turkey.

**Catherine E. Stephens** is the 2024–25 Pine Tree Foundation Fellow in Book Conservation at The Morgan Library & Museum's Thaw Conservation Center. Cat is a 2021 graduate of the NYU Institute of Fine Arts' Library and Archives Conservation program, and was a graduate intern in the NYU Libraries' Barbara Goldsmith Book & Paper Conservation Laboratory. Cat was the first book conservator to be awarded the Research Scholarship in Photograph Conservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where she conserved photograph albums and investigated the mechanical performance of popular book, paper, and photograph conservation adhesives.

## An Analysis of RBMS News Blog Job Advertisements, 2013–2021

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*While many studies related to library job postings exist, they are often not focused on special collections and archives. Those that are focused on special collections and archives usually offer more targeted research (e.g., a specific kind of librarian role within special collections). In order to begin to tackle the broader question of, “What types of jobs have been advertised to the special collections and archives community in recent years,” the authors chose to focus the study by analyzing job advertisements posted on the RBMS News Blog from 2013 to 2021. Specifically, the authors compiled and analyzed data relating to the geographical location of the job, when positions were advertised by month and year, type of institution where the job was located, position term, required degrees, and position title and responsibilities. This RBMS-specific data revealed that almost all the positions advertised were in the United States, with the top states including California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania; most institutions represented were universities; a majority of the jobs were continuing, rather than term, positions; most positions mentioned library degrees but did not require them; only 1% were specifically designed for recent graduates; most position titles had “Librarian” in their title; and skills related to management and digital projects were well represented in job responsibilities. The authors note discrepancies between job titles and responsibilities that may be indicative of expanding job duties within the profession.*

### Introduction

This study aims to begin to answer the following overall question: what types of jobs are being advertised to the RBMS community?<sup>1</sup> The authors attempted to respond to this by analyzing all of the job advertisements posted on the RBMS News Blog dur-

---

1. By the phrase “the RBMS community,” the authors intend to point toward those who have access to and/or interest in the professional development materials and groups of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association.

ing a nine-year period, from 2013 through 2021.<sup>2</sup> While limited in scope by its focus on RBMS job listings on its website, through this more specific study of a major, US aggregator, of postings, the authors hoped to understand the kinds of job opportunities made available to special collections librarians, and aspiring special collections librarians, with different levels of experience, and in many different geographic locations across the United States and beyond.

## Literature Review

While many studies related to library job postings exist, they are often not focused on special collections and archives. However, studies of academic librarian job postings may offer insights that are applicable to special collections. The general literature is wide-ranging, but recent studies have employed similar methods, gathering data from job boards and analyzing groups of postings for various categories of information, such as location (state), stated duties, required experience and qualifications, salaries, and tenure status.<sup>3</sup>

Studies that focus on special collections and archives have offered more targeted research to shed light on specific aspects of job searching, qualifications, and duties for various subgroups within the field. In a previous investigation, co-author Hansen explored opportunities for entry-level special collections librarians through an analysis of eighty-eight job advertisements, from a variety of sources, over a five-year period from 2004 to 2009.<sup>4</sup> She analyzed advertisements based on location, salary, degree requirements, titles, length of experience, and duties. Hansen found that most entry-level jobs required some experience and that an additional graduate degree beyond the library degree was preferred. Hansen specifically excluded

---

2. The authors acknowledge that those interested in special collections jobs may want to visit a variety of different websites. However, focusing on RBMS News Blog, which posts many major special collections jobs in the United States, allowed the authors to explore different aspects of job postings while not getting further overwhelmed by data. Focusing on the RBMS News Blog also allowed the authors to draw conclusions about positions within a defined professional community. For future studies, data from other sites and listservs could provide useful information on job trends.

3. For examples of such studies, see: Robert Detmering and Claudene Sproles, "So, You Want to Be a Southeastern Librarian? Entry-Level Academic Library Job Trends in the Southeast," *The Southeastern Librarian* 60, no. 1 (2012); Therese F. Triumph and Penny M. Beile, "The Trending Academic Library Job Market: An Analysis of Library Position Announcements from 2011 with Comparisons to 1996 and 1988," *College & Research Libraries* 76, no. 6 (September 2015): 716–739, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.76.6.716>; Beth Seltzer, "One Hundred Job Ads from the Humanities Ecosystem," *MLA Profession* (Fall 2018), <https://profession.mla.org/one-hundred-job-ads-from-the-humanities-ecosystem/>; Xiang Li and Tang Li, "The Evolving Responsibilities, Roles, and Competencies of East Asian Studies Librarians: A Content Analysis of Job Postings from 2008 to 2019," *College & Research Libraries* 82, no. 4 (June 2021): 474–89, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.82.4.474>; Yin Zhang et al., "A Content Analysis of Job Advertisements for Digital Humanities-Related Positions in Academic Libraries," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 1 (January 2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102275>.

4. Kelli Hansen, "Education, Training, and Recruitment of Special Collections Librarians: An Analysis of Job Advertisements" *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, & Cultural Heritage* 12, no. 2 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.12.2.358>.

archivists from this study. The current study is broader, as it includes more than entry-level special collections positions and includes archivists; it also updates Hansen's 2011 analysis.

Other studies focused specifically on archival jobs. Tansey surveyed professional archivist jobs posted between 2006 and 2014, pulling a large number of job advertisements from a single source, the Society of American Archivists' listserv, to understand requirements and trends.<sup>5</sup> Tansey found that most of the positions in her study were at universities and were located in the South, followed by the Northeast and Midwest. Tansey also found that most positions required a master's degree, but that archival certification was not mentioned in a majority of advertisements. She found that most job ads did not specify required years of experience. Most of the ads in her study were for permanent positions.

Similarly, Haack et al. focused on entry-level archivist positions listed on ALA JobLIST, narrowing their analysis of job advertisements to one job type and applicant group.<sup>6</sup> They studied job advertisements posted between August 2006 and March 2013. Like the present study, Haack et al. coded job advertisements based on state location and educational requirements, but they also analyzed skill requirements and job duties to answer questions about what opportunities were available to new graduates, and what types of jobs they were expected to do. They found that archivist jobs overwhelmingly require a library degree and that almost all of the positions were at universities. They also performed a limited content analysis and found that 56% of the job descriptions surveyed contained some form of the word "digital."

Finally, Warren and Scoulas examined job advertisements for public services professionals in special collections environments for a shorter window of time (2017–2019) to understand the relationship between job duties and work burnout.<sup>7</sup> Their study was more focused than the present study in that it attempted to address the roots of a specific work problem in a specific kind of special collections librarianship. Warren and Scoulas analyzed job duties according to the RBMS Competency Guidelines<sup>8</sup> to determine how many public services positions include duties that exceed reference,

5. Eira Tansey, "The Landscape of Archival Employment: A Study of Professional Archivist Job Advertisements, 2006–2014," *Archival Practice* 2, no. 0 (June 5, 2015), <http://libjournal.uncg.edu/ap/article/view/1084>.

6. Allison Haack et al., "New Archivists Seeking Employment: Exploring Entry-Level Jobs in Archives," *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference* 38, no. 1 (January 2017): 19–42.

7. Kellee E. Warren and Jung Mi Scoulas, "A Content and Comparative Analysis of Job Advertisements for Special Collections Professionals Using ACRL RBMS Guidelines," *Journal of Library Administration* 60, no. 6 (September 8, 2020): 613–630, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2020.1748435>.

8. "Guidelines: Competencies for Special Collections Professionals," Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL), March 6, 2017, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/comp4specollect>.

instruction, and outreach. They found that 95.8% of the advertisements they surveyed contained management and supervisory responsibilities in addition to public services duties, and they cautioned administrators against crafting job descriptions that could lead to burnout.

## Method

The RBMS Web Team provided the authors with an XML download of all the positions posted on the RBMS News Blog from 2013 to 2021. The year 2013 was when job data for RBMS News Blog became available,<sup>9</sup> and 2021 was the first full year before the authors began their research. There were 861 postings in all. The authors converted the XML file into an Excel spreadsheet and then broke the text of the position advertisements into the following categories:

- Position title
- Posting date
- Responsibilities/position description
- Required qualifications
- Preferred qualifications
- Salary
- Country
- US state
- Type of institution
- Position term

A web form with associated Google spreadsheet was used for the sake of consistency in data entry. For the “Type of institution” category, a set of radio buttons corresponding to the choices in the 2014 RBMS Member Survey was used. Choices included college, university, public library, historical society, museum, independent research library, private library, other special library, bookseller, and other. Only one choice was allowed per advertisement. For position term, the authors used a set of checkboxes allowing two selections. Choices were part-time, continuing, and limited-term. Positions were assumed to be full-time and continuing unless otherwise specified.<sup>10</sup>

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9. The Web Team is a three-person group of volunteers who are members of the RBMS Publications and Communications Committee. Lara Friedman-Shedlov, email message to authors, February 17, 2022.

10. In addition to the categories above, the authors initially categorized advertisements based on the following criteria: faculty status, tenure eligibility, collective bargaining agreement, years of experience required, years of experience preferred, requirements/preferences not based on skill/ability. However, these criteria were not used in the analysis due to the small number of advertisements that included them.

Simple counts and percentages were performed on the advertisements to analyze them by date, country, state, type of institution, and position term. For titles, responsibilities, and requirements, various textual analysis methods were used. These are detailed in the Findings section below.

## **Findings**

The sample of position listings examined in this study is necessarily limited by RBMS's posting policies and parameters. RBMS began requiring job postings to list salary information in the summer of 2020;<sup>11</sup> the data include many positions advertised before that date for which no salary information was available. It is possible that the sample of positions posted after 2020 excludes institutions with policies that prohibit the public posting of salary information. On either side of the policy change, the data may be incomplete.

The following section is organized according to the aforementioned categories of analysis determined by the authors.

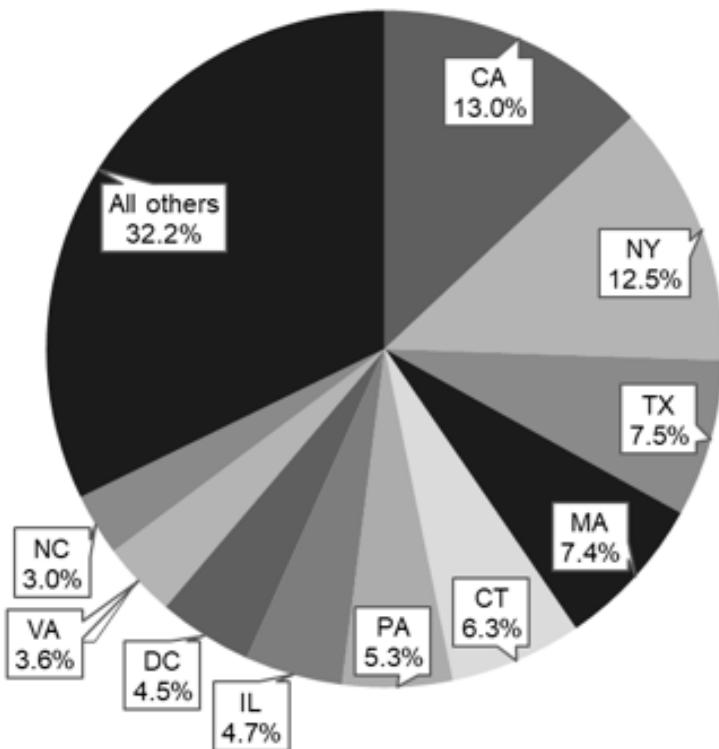
### *Geographical*

Of the positions posted to the RBMS News Blog, 97% were in the United States.<sup>12</sup> States with the highest number of advertised positions were California and New York, followed by Texas, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. Taken together, these six states represent 52% of the total advertised US positions on the RBMS News Blog. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the US positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog by state.

---

11. The RBMS Publications and Communications Committee proposed this new requirement, in line with ACRL's *Guidelines for Recruiting Academic Librarians* (revised 2017, <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/recruitingguide>). It then became codified as policy by the RBMS Executive Committee at a public meeting. The authors have not focused on salary due the incomplete nature of the data in this category, however there are a number of surveys related to salary in the profession. Some examples are included in the "A\*Census II All Archivists Survey Report," while other broader reports—from the *Library Journal*, for example—contain special collections salaries amongst their data (and broken out as a category). See Makala Skinner and Ioana Hulbert, "A\*Census II All Archivists Survey Report," *Ithaka S+R*. Last Modified 22 August 2022. <https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.317224>. Andrew Gerber, "Holding Steady | Placements and Salaries Survey 2022," *Library Journal*, 16 October, 2023, <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/holding-steady-placements-and-salaries-survey-2023>.

12. Fifteen of the jobs advertised were in Canada, and the remaining eight positions were in Australia, Hong Kong, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates.



**Figure 1.** US positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog by state.

### *By Year and Month*

The number of positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog rose sharply from 2013 to 2016, from twenty-seven positions in 2013 to 121 positions in 2016. The years 2018 and 2019 saw the highest number of positions advertised, with 140 and 135, respectively. As the authors expected, the number of positions advertised dropped precipitously in 2020, with only fifty-nine positions advertised. However, 2021 saw a swift rebound to near pre-pandemic levels, with 129 advertised positions. It is important to remember that these numbers specifically reflect the postings on the RBMS News Blog, which, while a major site, may not mirror all special collections postings around the United States. Although some trends appear as expected, such as the decline in jobs during the height of the pandemic, factors like institutional and RBMS posting policies may also play a role.

Taken in aggregate, the months with the most position postings were March (ninety-one) and August (eighty-three). The month with the least postings was December (forty-eight). The dip in December may relate to the observance of various holidays in the United States at that time. The first and third quarters, defined as January–March and July–September, saw 233 position postings each, with the second (April–June)

and fourth (October–December) quarters slightly lower, at 195 and 200 postings, respectively.

### *Type of Institution*

Nearly seventy-two percent (71.9%), or 610 institutions, were universities. This is followed by institutions that self-identified as independent research libraries or as part of the Independent Research Libraries Association (7.9%, or sixty-eight institutions), colleges (6.6%, or fifty-seven institutions), public libraries (3.7%, or thirty-two institutions), other special libraries<sup>13</sup> (2%, or seventeen institutions), historical societies (1.5%, or thirteen institutions), and museums (1.4%, or twelve institutions). It should be noted that the authors endeavored to categorize institutions as they categorized themselves but made some determinations on how best to group institutions, including the “other special libraries.” Table 1 illustrates this complexity.

**TABLE 1**  
**Types of institutions represented in RBMS job ads**

Type of Institution	Number of Job Postings	Percentage of Total <sup>a</sup>
University	610	71.9%
Independent research library	68	8.0%
College	57	6.7%
Public library	32	3.8%
Historical society	13	1.5%
Museum	12	1.4%
Other special library	17	2.0%
Bookseller	8	0.9%
Archival consultant group	6	0.7%
Educational nonprofit	5	0.6%
Partnership of organizations related to history, scholarship, and art	3	0.4%
Private library	2	0.2%
All other types of institutions <sup>b</sup>	15	0.1% each

<sup>a</sup> Percentages rounded to the nearest tenth.

<sup>b</sup> Institution types included in this category: arboretum and botanic garden, auction house, consortium, consulting group genealogical society, library services company, membership organization, nonprofit, privately funded public library, professional staffing firm, radio station, scholarly organization, society for bibliophiles and enthusiasts in the graphic arts, theatrical-producing organization/theater company/archive, and university-affiliated research library.

13. “Other special libraries” was a general category the authors used to designate libraries that did not fit into the other categories.

### *Position Term*

Most positions (85.2% or 734) were continuing; the remaining 13.6% (117), were term positions, and 0.5% (four) were part-time positions. Additional data, including for those positions that had combinations of these types of terms and were less frequently represented, is provided in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**Types of position terms represented in RBMS job ads**

Position Term	Number of Job Postings	Percentage of Total <sup>a</sup>
Continuing position	734	85.3%
Term position	117	13.6%
Part-time	4	0.5%
Term position, Part-time	4	0.5%
Continuing position, Term position <sup>b</sup>	1	0.1%

<sup>a</sup> Percentages rounded to the nearest tenth.

<sup>b</sup>This was a term position that turned into another position, which was a continuing position.

### *Required Degrees*

Required degrees were complicated to analyze because of the numerous different ways of describing them, many different combinations of degrees, and occasional lack of clarity in some of the surrounding posting language. Sometimes, for example, the grammar made it unclear how many components were required and/or in what kind of combination. For this reason, not only did the authors sometimes need significant interpretation of what was intended by job descriptions, but they also decided to

**TABLE 3**  
**Number of jobs with required degrees in RBMS job ads**

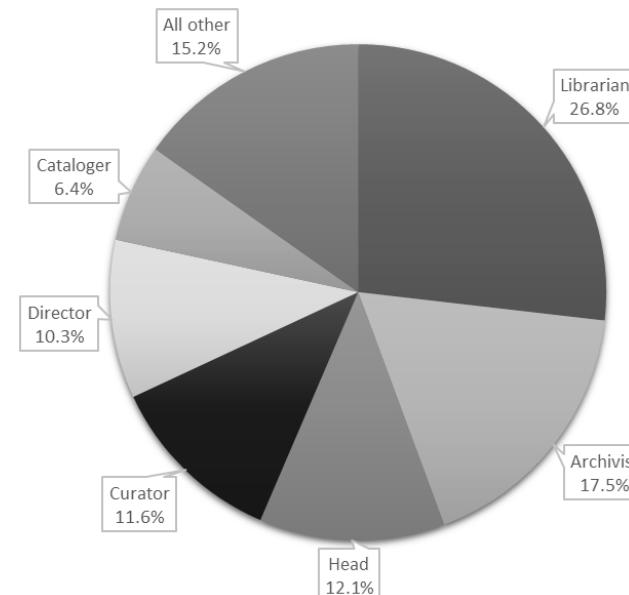
Question	Number of Jobs that Have These Degree Requirements
Is a library degree mentioned?	604
Is a library degree required?	330
Is a PhD mentioned?	44
Is a PhD required?	11
Is experience accepted as an alternative to some or all degree requirements?	52
Is a degree in a specific subject area (not information studies) required?	44
Only require a bachelor or high school degree?	33
Position for a recent graduate?	9

group the data to avoid analyzing every possible combination of degrees. Table 3 contains the questions asked of the data and the number of jobs the authors determined to have degree requirements that fit these questions.

Of 861 positions, 185 did not mention degrees in the posting, or had no accessible description. Therefore, these numbers are based upon 676 postings. As can be seen from these numbers, many of these jobs (604, or about 89.3%) mentioned a library degree. However, not all of these *required* a library degree; they mentioned some kind of alternative (only 330, or about 48.8% required a library degree). Among these postings, a PhD was mentioned forty-four times (about 6.5%) and required in eleven postings (about 1.6%). For fifty-two (about 7.7%) of the jobs, experience was accepted as an alternative to some or all degree requirements. Forty-four (about 6.5%) postings required a degree in a subject area that was not information studies. Thirty-three (about 4.9%) positions required just a bachelor's degree or high school diploma. In other words, most positions required some kind of graduate degree.

### ***Position Titles and Responsibilities***

Position titles were coded according to functional titles such as “Librarian” or “Archivist.” Positions that included more than one functional title were coded by the first title to appear in the job announcement. Eleven titles appeared with some degree of frequency in the job announcements; remaining titles were designated as “Other” and constitute approximately 2% of the total. (fig. 2.)



**Figure 2.** Positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog by position title.

**TABLE 4**  
**Titles and their frequency represented in RBMS job ads**

Functional title	Positions	Percentage
Librarian	231	26.8%
Archivist	151	17.5%
Head	104	12.1%
Curator	100	11.6%
Director	89	10.3%
Cataloger	55	6.4%
Manager	27	3.1%
Other	16	1.9%
Coordinator	15	1.7%
Specialist	14	1.6%
Fellow	13	1.5%
Resident	8	0.9%
Dean	6	0.7%
Conservator	6	0.7%
Professor	5	0.6%
Assistant	5	0.6%
Supervisor	5	0.6%
Chair	4	0.5%
Bookseller	4	0.5%

“Librarian” was the most frequently posted title, with 231 postings (26.8%). “Archivist” was second, at 151 postings (17.5%). “Head,” as in “Head of Special Collections,” or “Head of Research Services,” followed as the third-most-frequent title, with 106 postings (12.1%). All 861 position listings were included in this analysis. Table 4 summarizes all titles and their frequency.

Out of the 861 job advertisements in the initial sample, 841 advertisements contained details about position responsibilities. Using Voyant Tools, the authors performed a basic text analysis, with the extracted position responsibilities sections of the job advertisements loaded as separate documents to make up a corpus.<sup>14</sup> Excluding general terms such as “collections,” “library,” and “special,” the terms listed in Table 5 emerged among the top fifteen words related to job functions. Collocates, the terms that Voyant Tools found frequently nearby, are also listed to provide context.

14. A batch script in Windows PowerShell was used to break the responsibilities section of the authors’ overall CSV file into 841 separate files, which were then uploaded to Voyant Tools.

**TABLE 5**  
**Terms and collocates represented in RBMS job ads**

Term	Word count	Collocates <sup>a</sup> (word count)
digital	1,091	preservation (137), materials (118), projects (108), scholarship (107)
services	1,089	staff (108), reference (99), head (95), research (88)
materials	1,084	cataloguing (108), including (85), rare (71), formats (69), preservation (65)
research	1,076	services (169), teaching (148), support (102), reference (100), learning (67)
university	1,010	archives (204), archivist (90), librarian (82), community (63)
development	851	management (80), digital (74), policies (59), activities (54), including (53)
including	753	digital (72), development (46), research (45), services (44), reference (42)
work	740	closely (79), staff (77), collaboratively (45), digital (40), plans (36)
cataloguing	682	metadata (107), rare (91), materials (91), original (87), services (70)
archives	674	rare (52), digital (45), university (43), materials (42), head (42)
rare	643	books (302), book (223), materials (135), manuscripts (93), cataloguing (87)
management	623	development (74), digital (62), services (55), team (54), preservation (36)
preservation	616	conservation (120), digital (91), access (84), materials (66), digitization (52)
archival	590	processing (112), materials (103), manuscript (71), description (61), access (45)
reference	581	services (181), research (99), desk (69), service (64), instruction (62)

Note: Terms presented are in descending order of frequency.

<sup>a</sup> Words frequently occurring nearby term in column 1.

Upon further review in Voyant Tools, the authors discovered several terms were used with a variety of meanings, depending on the job context. For example, “management” was one of the top fifteen terms analyzed, and was also present in over 300 advertisements. However, some instances referred to personnel management, while others denoted collections management, digital asset management, workflow manage-

ment, and other aspects of work in special collections. To provide more specificity for words that could have different meanings in different contexts, the authors referred to the ACRL Competencies for Special Collections Professionals<sup>15</sup> and devised the following list of terms to search the corpus of job advertisements:<sup>16</sup>

- A. **Collection development:** collection development, acqui\*, purchas\*, apprais\*, donor
- B. **Description and Access:** cataloging, processing, arrang\*, descri\*, metadata
- C. **Information Technologies and Data Management:** data, digital, digitiz\*, born\* (as in born-digital), repositor\*, technolog\*
- D. **Instruction:** instruction, teach\*, curricul\*, education\*
- E. **Management, Supervision, and Leadership:** manag\*, supervise/supervising, lead/leading/leads/leader/leadership, oversee/oversight
  - a. **Management, Supervision, and Leadership – Fiscal:** budget\*, fund\*, grant<sup>\*17</sup>
- F. **Preservation and Conservation:** preservation, conservation, treatment, handling
- G. **Promotion and Outreach:** outreach, promot\*, communicat\*, exhibit\*, social media, blog, publication
- H. **Reference:** reference, researcher, patron, reader

The most common terms from this round of focused searching proved to be “manag\*” (526 positions, 62.5%), followed by “digital\*” (405 positions, 48.2%), variations of the word “lead/leading/leadership” (345 positions, 41%) “reference” (314 positions, 37.3%), and “preservation” (305 positions, 36.3%). A few terms were searched and aggregated because they can be used interchangeably or have similar work contexts, such as “researchers/readers/patrons” (222 positions, 26.4%) and “social media/blog/publication” (200 positions, 23.8%). In addition, authors assigned each term a ratio by dividing the raw count of occurrences across the entire corpus by the number of documents containing the term. This ratio gives an idea of the average number of times a term is used. Terms with the highest ratio—or the most mentions per advertisements in which they appear—were “digital\*” (2.72), “cataloging” (2.66), “metadata” (2.50), “manag\*” (2.48), and “preservation” (2.02). “Digital” and “manag\*” are the only two terms that appeared in both of the top five lists. A full listing of terms, ratios, and percentages can be found in Table 6.

15. “Guidelines: Competencies for Special Collections Professionals.”

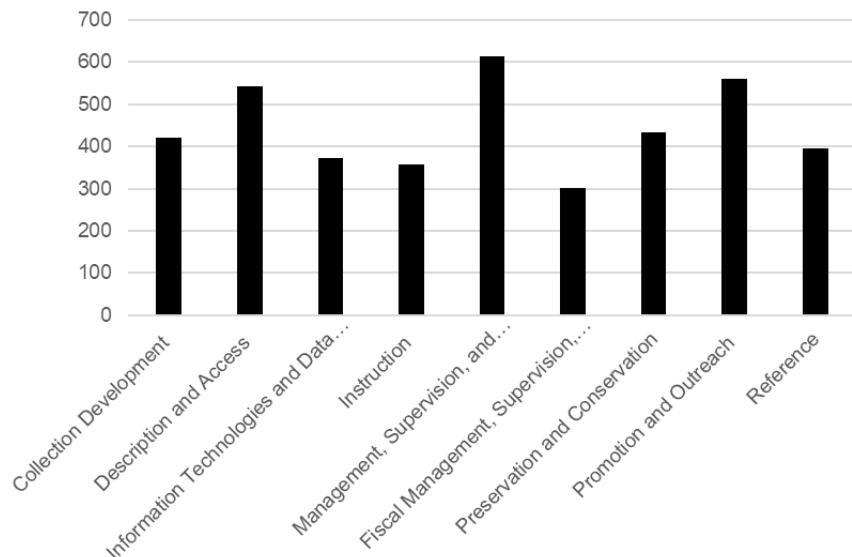
16. The asterisk (\*) is a wildcard character that matches a word ending with any combination of characters. For example, manag\* would match management, managing, manager, and manages. For more on search syntax in Voyant Tools, see <https://voyant-tools.org/docs/#!guide/search>.

17. Fiscal management was separated from the more general “Management, Supervision, and Leadership” competency because it allowed the authors to isolate a subset of terms to provide a more focused idea of how many positions included fiscal responsibilities.

**TABLE 6**  
**Terms and collocates represented in RBMS job ads**

Term	Count	Documents	Ratio	Percentage of positions
manag*	1307	526	2.48	62.5%
digital*	1101	405	2.72	48.2%
lead*	669	345	1.94	41.0%
reference	581	314	1.85	37.3%
preservation	616	305	2.02	36.3%
outreach	415	301	1.38	35.8%
promot*	460	295	1.56	35.1%
exhibit*	531	288	1.84	34.2%
supervise supervises supervising	365	274	1.33	32.6%
descri*	470	269	1.75	32.0%
cataloging	682	256	2.66	30.4%
social media blog publication	377	250	1.51	29.7%
acqui*	429	248	1.73	29.5%
processing	466	247	1.89	29.4%
instruction*	436	247	1.77	29.4%
oversee oversees oversight	376	241	1.56	28.7%
researcher* reader* patron*	374	222	1.68	26.4%
digitiz*	353	210	1.68	25.0%
donor/donation	283	208	1.36	24.7%
teach*	312	198	1.58	23.5%
metadata	458	183	2.50	21.8%
collection development	240	183	1.31	21.8%
grant*	203	170	1.19	20.2%
fund*	239	169	1.41	20.1%
conservation	314	164	1.91	19.5%
communicat*	200	142	1.41	16.9%
budget*	170	138	1.23	16.4%
technolog*	183	135	1.36	16.1%
arrang*	169	121	1.40	14.4%
education*	125	94	1.33	11.2%
data	119	81	1.47	9.6%
born*	139	74	1.88	8.8%
handl*	84	71	1.18	8.4%
apprais*	80	67	1.19	8.0%
curricul*	75	62	1.21	7.4%
treatment	66	60	1.10	7.1%
purchas*	52	45	1.16	5.4%
repositor*	51	41	1.24	4.9%

By concatenating the search terms, the authors searched in Voyant Tools to find the number of job ads containing evidence of each competency.<sup>18</sup> The Management, Supervision, and Leadership competency is by far the best represented in the advertisements included in this study, with 77.6% of job advertisements containing any form of the terms associated with this competency. (fig. 3.)



**Figure 3.** Number of positions by competency in RBMS job ads.

Promotion and Outreach was the next highest competency (65.6%), and Information Technologies and Data Management was represented in 64.2% of advertisements. The least represented competency was Fiscal Management, which appeared in 35.5% of advertisements.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The geographic distribution of the job postings closely mirrors results reported by Healey and Nykanen in the 2015 RBMS Membership Survey, which found that the five states with the highest representation were California, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Connecticut. Those five states accounted for 38% of the RBMS survey population.<sup>19</sup> This indicates that RBMS members may often be the ones posting the

18. Search syntax was used to match separate terms as a single occurrence. For example, the search string for Management, Supervision, and Leadership was manag\*|supervise|supervising|lead|leading|leads|leader|leadership|oversee|oversight. An advertisement containing all of those terms would have been counted once. An advertisement containing only the term “supervise” would also have been counted once.

19. Elspeth Healey and Melissa Nykanen, “Channeling Janus: Past, Present, and Future in the RBMS Membership Survey,” *RBM: a Journal for Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* (April 10, 2017): 61, <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.17.1.461>.

positions on the RBMS News Blog, which is to be expected. Moreover, some of the highest numbers of positions are in very populous states, which naturally may have more institutions, staff, and local people to serve.

However, these results contrast somewhat with those found in previous studies. Tansey found that the South had the largest share of ads, followed by the Northeast and Midwest. Haack et al. found that the highest number of jobs were in California, followed by Georgia and Indiana. Because Tansey and Haack et al. focused on job advertisements for archivists, it may be that positions for archivists have a different geographic distribution than jobs for special collections librarians. While most of the positions in Hansen's study of entry-level special collections librarians were in the Northeast, only 13.6% were in the West, meaning that California must not have been well represented. It is unknown whether this data reflects normal fluctuation in the job market or represents broader geographic trends. It is also important to emphasize that each of these studies has a slightly different focus and date range from the current one so that the results may also differ; there are limitations to the authors' ability to compare geographical results.

The fact that most of the jobs were in the United States is not surprising, considering RBMS is part of the American Library Association. Another study would need to be done (comparing numbers of special collections postings in different countries, for example) if conclusions were desired about how these postings compare to those in other countries.

The authors were also unsurprised to find an overwhelming majority of the jobs at universities, considering the number of special collections that are part of universities.<sup>20</sup> Colleges, as another type of institution within academia, represented a significant number of positions as well, coming third among the authors' categories. The data demonstrate that special collections positions are closely tied to academic environments. However, unlike hiring in related academic fields, there appears to be a fairly even distribution of job postings on the RBMS News Blog throughout the year, with no one season dominating. That independent research libraries came second in the number of postings is also noteworthy, since they are not affiliated with a university/college but nevertheless are a significant source for jobs.

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20. Some different surveys of archives and special collections reflect similar university leanings, such as Skinner and Hulbert and the OCLC Survey of Special Collections and Archives in the US and Canada (<https://www.oclc.org/research/areas/research-collections/hiddencollections.html>). See also Healey and Nykanen, "Channeling Janus," 53–81. The Healey and Nykanen article includes data about the institutional affiliation of RBMS members.

This study also finds that the overwhelming majority of the RBMS job ads were for continuing (i.e., permanent), not term, positions. This might reflect the need for such positions, as well as a push against term positions.<sup>21</sup> While the ratios are somewhat different, the emphasis on continuing, rather than term, positions is reflected in Healey and Nykanen's survey of current special collections and archives professionals, as well as Tansey's study of archives job ads.<sup>22</sup> The authors hope that reliance upon permanent positions will continue to grow, and that this report's demonstration of the number of permanent positions puts pressure upon institutions to follow this "standard" practice of hiring for continuing work.

The emphasis on required graduate education in the data is consistent with previous studies by Hansen, Tansey, and Haack et al., all of which found that graduate education is a requirement for employment in the special collections and archives field. Nine (about 1.3%) positions were specifically designated for recent graduates, which does not preclude positions that are open to, but not exclusively for, recent graduates. The mostly low numbers in required academic training (outside of the library degree) could indicate that there is a fair amount of flexibility, perhaps substituted by preferred degrees or required experiences. This could reflect an attempt at creating more inclusive positions, but it should also be noted that this is just one aspect of what inclusivity might look like in a job description.<sup>23</sup> While this may be obvious, it is important to note as a limitation to this project that this analysis does not cover what degrees may or may not be required for specific types of positions. For example, a curatorial position may be more likely to require a PhD. However, this study was not focused on specific types of positions but rather intended as a broad survey.

Turning the analysis toward the data on job duties, this study exposes possible discrepancies between job titles and responsibilities. The data clearly show that digital skills are in high demand. Variations of "digital" appear in nearly half of job advertisements, and are used 2.72 times, on average, per those advertisements. More than 500 job postings contained evidence of the Information Technologies and

21. The problems of temporary employment in special collections and archives are a significant topic within the field(s), particularly discussed with archivist positions. See "Best Practices for Archival Term Positions.Docx" (February 2, 2022), <https://osf.io/j9d8f> and Peter Monaghan, "Are Temporary Appointments a Threat to Archiving?," *Moving Image Archive News* (blog), accessed December 11, 2023, <https://www.movingimagearchivenews.org/are-temporary-appointments-a-threat-to-archiving/>.

22. For examples, see the OCLC Survey of Special Collections and Archives in the US and Canada and Healey and Nykanen, "Channeling Janus," 53–81.

23. Although discussed in other areas of hiring, one of the more thorough discussions and assessments of specifically special collections job descriptions occurred during the RBMS 2024 conference, the panel presentation, "But do they really want ME?: An Exploratory Diversity Audit of Job Postings" by Ruth Xing and Yuzhou Bai. Some other special collections-specific resources can be found on RBMS's Diversity Committee's webpage, including its Diversity Toolkit.

Data Management competency, based on the terms listed above. The term “digital,” however, only appears in forty-nine, or about 5.7%, of job titles. At least among the positions advertised on the RBMS News Blog, there does not seem to be an emerging position type based solely on the Information Technologies and Data Management competency. Instead, these findings indicate that the traditional responsibilities of special collections librarians and archivists are expanding to incorporate work with digital collections, born-digital materials, and digital scholarship. While this result is consistent with the 2017 findings of Haack et al., more research is needed to uncover and understand the trends related to this issue.

Expanding responsibilities and roles also appear under other competencies. The prevalence of keywords related to management and leadership in the overall corpus of job responsibilities is incongruent with the number of managerial titles such as Head, Director, and Manager, which appeared in around 25% of position listings. In context, the authors observed, anecdotally, that many instances of the term “management” seemed to correspond to section III.E.10 in the RBMS Competencies—which applies to project management skills—and many uses of the term “lead” referred to leadership of programs and initiatives.<sup>24</sup> The collocates appear to reinforce this idea. Collocates for “manag\*” differ slightly from the ones for “management,” which are listed in Table 5. The top collocates for “manag\*” are digital (116), services (109), development (eighty-nine), staff (eighty-one), and team (seventy-six). The number of occurrences is higher for project-related terms, such as “digital” and “services,” than for personnel-related terms, such as “staff” and “teams.”

These results appear to bear out the observation by Warren and Scoulas that the “specialized competency that most exceeded that of the traditional duties of a public services special collections librarian was that of Management, Supervision, and Leadership.”<sup>25</sup> However, this observation cuts across all of this study’s specializations, and is not limited to public services competencies. As noted above regarding the Information Technology and Data Management competency, the prevalence of management keywords in ostensibly non-management job descriptions may be a symptom of the ever-expanding range of duties librarians are required to perform at all career levels. Several recent studies have reported expanding job responsibilities and receding profes-

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24. “Guidelines: Competencies for Special Collections Professionals.”

25. Warren and Scoulas, “A Content and Comparative Analysis,” 625.

sional support across the field of librarianship.<sup>26</sup> This trend is concerning when viewed within the context of the conclusions Warren and Scoulas made in their 2021 follow-up study: “job creep” can lead to work-work conflict, damage work-life balance, and hinder efforts to cultivate diversity and equity within the profession.<sup>27</sup> More research is needed to ascertain whether librarians with managerial duties at all levels are being provided with the training, resources, and compensation appropriate for their roles.

Additional possibilities for future research include surveys of other popular job sites and more specific examinations of the elements discussed here. For example, additional studies may examine the number of job postings in other countries’ major job sites, required degrees for specific types of special collections positions, etc., or additional fields of the job description not included as part of this study.<sup>28</sup> One might also further analyze how more elements of job descriptions changed from year to year. Moreover, considering the latter period of this research, doing a breakout study solely focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could be useful. While this study begins to point toward the potential impact on numbers of positions, the authors did not assess how the pandemic may have affected other areas of job ads.

Ultimately, this particular study provides a broad overview of the many major elements of job descriptions on a well-known professional site in the United States in recent years. These results might inform job seekers about the kinds of jobs they are likely to see in the field, while also informing institutions and hiring managers of trends and potential pitfalls in job descriptions and advertisements.

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank, in particular, the many people who gave them the idea to do this project and began it with them: specifically, Gioia Stevens, Amy Chen, Leslie Winter, and Zoe Dobbs.

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26. See, for example: Xiang Li, and Tang Li, “The Evolving Responsibilities, Roles, and Competencies of East Asian Studies Librarians: A Content Analysis of Job Postings from 2008 to 2019,” *College & Research Libraries* 82, no. 4 (June 1, 2021): 474–489. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.82.4.474>; John J. Meier, “Are Today’s Science and Technology Librarians Being Overtasked? An Analysis of Job Responsibilities in Recent Advertisements on the ALA JobLIST Web Site,” *Science & Technology Libraries* 29, no. 1/2 (January 1, 2010): 165–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01942620903579443>; Amanda McCormick, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Tenure-Track Librarians,” *Portal: Libraries & the Academy* 22, no. 4 (October 1, 2022): 879–917. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0046>.

27. Kellee E. Warren and Jung Mi Scoulas, “Excessive Workload in Special Collections Public Services Librarianship: Challenges, Feelings, and Impact,” *Journal of Library Administration* 61, no. 3 (February 2021): 312–331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2021.1883369>.

28. Zhang et al. act as one example in their research into digital-humanities positions, analyzing the number of jobs posted per institution, among other categories of data. Yin Zhang et al., “A Content Analysis of Job Advertisements for Digital Humanities-Related Positions in Academic Libraries,” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 47, no. 1 (January 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2020.102275>.

Jessica Pace, Lou Di Gennaro, Josephine Jenks, and Catherine E. Stephens

## Artist Interviews as a Tool in the Preservation of Artists' Books

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*The artist's book is a collecting area that continues to grow in academic and research libraries. While guidelines exist for collecting and cataloging artists' books, there is a shortage of practical models for the care of these often unique and challenging materials. This article presents three case studies in which interviews with the artists informed the preservation of artists' books. In all three cases, the interviews deeply informed the subsequent preservation actions and sometimes upended the conservators' initial assumptions about the appropriate course of treatment. Interactions with the artists helped conservators to understand the materiality and history of the works and devise preservation plans that respect the intentions of each work.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

Since the 1960s, the production and acquisition of artists' books by academic institutions have grown significantly. In 2017, McLeland wrote, "During the last fifty years, artists' books have become a well-established and worthwhile area of collection development within libraries."<sup>2</sup> Alongside this growth in collecting rose challenges to collection development, processing and cataloging, and preservation.<sup>3</sup> The physical care of artists' books deserves further attention in conservation and library studies.

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1. Editor's note: This article includes the title of an artwork that includes sensitive language. Its inclusion is not intended to offend but to provide information. Reader discretion is advised.

2. D. Courtenay McLeland, "Artists' Books Collection Development: Considerations for New Selectors and Collections," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 18, no. 2 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.5860/rbm.18.2.80>. <https://rbm.acrl.org/index.php/rbm/article/view/16818/18408>.

3. See Stephen Bury, "1, 2, 3, 5: Building a Collection of Artists' Books," *Art Libraries Journal* 32, no. 2 (2007), 5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s030747220001912x>; Andrea Chemero, "How Libraries Collect and Handle Artists' Books," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 19, no. 1 (2000), 22–25. <https://doi.org/10.1086/adx.19.1.27949052>; Simon Ford, "Artists' Books in UK & Eire Libraries," *Art Libraries Journal* 18, no. 1 (1993), 14. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s030747220000818x>; Terrie L. Wilson, "Collection Development Policies for Artists' Books," *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 21, no. 1 (2002), 27–29. <https://doi.org/10.1086/adx.21.1.27949176>; and McLeland, "Artists Books."

Publications on the topic often address the importance of custom housing, environmental controls, handling training, and access restrictions.<sup>4</sup> While these actions are crucial, some artists' books demand care that cannot be met by collection care or standard book conservation practices. For example, Metzger and Smith described "food, glass, cigarettes, rubber, fireworks, human hair, and matches" that were used in the manufacture of artists' books in their collection, as well as books with unique and nontraditional structures, shapes, sizes, and format.<sup>5</sup> Just as contemporary artists use an expansive range of materials and formats to examine and sometimes subvert established genres of art-making, book artists apply many of these practices to their treatment of the book. Viewed from this perspective, the challenges posed by artists' books are similar to those found in modern and contemporary art. Thus, contemporary art conservation practices should be consulted as a resource for artists' book preservation.

In her analysis of standards in modern and contemporary art conservation, Beerkens identified three thematic categories of questions that inform major issues in modern and contemporary art conservation: 1) "the actual material of the artwork . . . [including] new materials, non-traditional making techniques, and artistic processes;" 2) "the artist as producer . . . mental owner . . . and first-hand source of information;" and 3) "various issues regarding . . . originality, authenticity, reversibility, reconstruction, repainting, or retouching" that are the tasks of the curator and conservator.<sup>6</sup> Using these categories to frame questions around the care of artists' books can help chart a preservation roadmap, particularly for books made of more challenging materials or formats.

Between 2020 and 2023, conservators in the Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department at NYU Libraries treated three artists' books whose unique material, construction, and condition problems required creative approaches to treatment and storage. These were *20 Slices of American Cheese* by Ben Denzer;<sup>7</sup> *Isaac Newton's Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* by Didier Mutel;<sup>8</sup> and *Roe* by Meredith Stern.<sup>9</sup> Devising preservation plans for the three items required conservators to explore questions that fell squarely into Beerkens' three categories,

4. Chemero, "How Libraries Collect," 22. The authors acknowledge the work of Taichman et al. in *Art Documentation*, which was published during the editorial process of this essay.

5. Consuela (Chela) Metzger and Michelle C. Smith, "Preserving Movement and Meaning in Artists' Books," *Parenthesis: The Journal of the Fine Press Book Association*, no. 41 (2021), 36–49.

6. Lydia Beerkens, "Side by Side: Old and New Standards in the Conservation of Modern Art. A Comparative Study on 20 Years of Modern Art Conservation Practice," *Studies in Conservation* 61, no. Supplement 2 (2016), 12–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393630.2016.1155336>.

7. Ben Denzer, *20 Slices of American Cheese* (New York, New York: Catalog Press, 2018). This publication applies a longer variation of the title, which differentiates it from another work of a similar title by the same artist.

8. Didier Mutel and Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (Paris: Atelier Didier Mutel, 2011).

9. *Roe* is part of the work by Meredith Stern, *I Can't Believe I Still have to Protest this Fucking Shit: 20 Years of Reproductive Justice Artwork* (Brooklyn, New York: Booklyn, 2022).

as the items comprised non-traditional materials and formats, were acquired from living artists, and their preservation required various stakeholders' input on issues of authenticity, reconstruction, and access.

In each case, artist interviews informed the approach to caring for uncommon materials and structures and helped to balance artists' intents with user access and preservation. At times, their input altered the course of treatment. Preservation plans that grew out of these interactions gave conservators, curators, and artists shared agency in the continued care of the work and incorporated the works' physical alterations into their existence in the collections. This paper outlines a methodology for integrating artist collaboration into the care of artists' books. It also explores the limits of applying standard book preservation practices to unique objects and argues for re-evaluating artists' books based on their material and manufacturing techniques, beyond their categorization as "book."

### Artist Interviews at NYU Libraries

The artist interview process at NYU Libraries benefited significantly from the rich resources regarding best practices for conducting interviews and Jessica Pace's participation in the VoCA (Voices in Contemporary Art) Artist Interview Workshop.<sup>10</sup> Interviews are conducted over video conference and recorded. Interview transcripts are created using the Konch automated transcription platform, and are reviewed and edited by the interviewer using the technique outlined by Debik.<sup>11</sup> Transcripts are saved on NYU's Ultraviolet repository.<sup>12</sup> The Preservation Department shares a consent form with interviewees; the form was drafted with the help of the NYU IRB Consent Form Generator and reviewed by the Library's legal department.<sup>13</sup>

The interviews in the following case studies are defined as "Case Interviews" because they focused on specific works.<sup>14</sup> The interviews were structured around the eight aspects laid out in *The Artist Interview*—"creative process," "materials and technique," "meaning," "context, conveyance and public," "aging, deterioration and damage," "conservation and restoration"—although the emphasis is often placed more on some aspects over others.<sup>15</sup> While structure guided the interviews,

10. Jonathan Debik and Sarah Giering, *The Artist Interview in Conservation—A Guide*. Translated by Sharon Larner. Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5165/hawk/504>; "Archive for Techniques and Materials of Contemporary Artists," accessed June 28, 2024, <https://artemak.art/en/>; Lydia Beerkens and Liesbeth Abraham, *The Artist Interview: For Conservation and Presentation of Contemporary Art, Guidelines and Practice* (Heyningen: Jap Sam Books, 2012); <https://voca.network/artist-interview-workshops/>.

11. "Konch," accessed June 28, 2024, <https://www.konch.ai/>; Debik et al., *The Artist Interview*, 25.

12. "NYU Ultraviolet," accessed June 28, 2024, <https://ultraviolet.library.nyu.edu/>

13. "NYU IRB Consent Form Generator," accessed June 28, 2024, <https://pages.nyu.edu/irb/forms/consent/>.

14. Beerkens and Abraham, *The Artist Interview*, 31.

15. Beerkens and Abraham, *The Artist Interview*, 35.

it was applied loosely, allowing space for the interviewee to elaborate and introduce their trains of thought.

### **Work 1: *20 Slices of American Cheese* by Ben Denzer (b. 1992)**

Ben Denzer created *20 Slices of American Cheese* (*20 Slices*) in 2018 and NYU Special Collections acquired the work from the artist in 2020. The volume comprises twenty Kraft Singles American Cheese Slices,<sup>16</sup> adhesive-bound into a hard case covered in yellow book cloth. “20 SLICES” is hot stamped in blue onto the cover; “AMERICAN CHEESE” and the Catalog Press logo are hot stamped onto the spine in the same blue color. At the time of acquisition, no information about the item or its care accompanied the work.<sup>17</sup>

Upon the item’s arrival, staff noted dark biological growth within the cheese, and green mold was noted in two locations on the edges of the cheese slices. (fig. 1.)



**Figure 1.** Ben Denzer, *20 Slices of American Cheese*. [New York]: Catalog Press, 2018. *20 Slices* with mold growth, 2020.

16. Kraft Singles American Cheese Slices is a trade name for a pasteurized prepared cheese product manufactured and sold by the Kraft Heinz Company. The authors use “cheese” hereafter in reference to the individual leaves of the book.

17. Upon arrival, the item was housed in a re-closable plastic bag with silica gel packets. Conservators and collections staff were initially unsure whether these items were part of the work. They were retained until the interview with Denzer confirmed that they were not part of the work.

The work is used frequently for teaching and in workshops and tours, thus storing the book in a refrigerator or a freezer was not a viable option because of the degree to which it prohibits access. The book was immediately placed in a stable 35 percent relative humidity and 65 degrees Fahrenheit environment to discourage mold proliferation. Unfortunately, mold continued to spread to previously unaffected cheese slices. In 2021, conservator Catherine E. Stephens surface-cleaned the book using cotton swabs, brushing, and vacuuming to reduce mold and created an airtight housing containing silica gel conditioned to 15 percent relative humidity. Unfortunately, the cheese continued to shrink and darken. Although there was no visible mold growth after the initial cleaning and rehousing, by 2022, all slices were significantly embrittled and shrunken. Numerous slices changed from warm yellow to a dark brown color. (fig. 2.)



**Figure 2.** 20 Slices with darkened and shrunken slices, 2021.

During this period, conservators evaluated three treatment plans that aimed to balance preservation with access and user safety:

Option 1: Replace all contents with unspoiled Kraft Singles American Cheese Slices. Store the book in a low-humidity environment that allows it to be viewed and taken out when needed. This cycle may be repeated as the cheese ages. Keep additional cheese in cold storage for future use.

Option 2: Store the object in a sealed container and allow it to deteriorate. The disadvantage is that the artwork cannot be handled or exhibited out of the box due to the risk of mold exposure. The mold is likely to accelerate the deterioration of the binding. This complicates switching to Options 1 or 3 at a later date.

Option 3: Replace the cheese with a replica that looks like cheese but is more stable. This eliminates the possibility of mold growth and supports access but changes an integral component of the work.

The use of food as art material emerged around the same time as artists' books, and growing literature on the conservation of artwork made of perishable foodstuff emphasizes the importance of preserving the artist's intent as part of caring for these works.<sup>18</sup> *20 Slices* was no different. While all three options are achievable, they raised questions about authenticity and the artist's intent. For example, is the deterioration of the cheese intentional? If so, what is the expected lifespan of the book? How might replacing the cheese impact the work's meaning? How important are branded Kraft Singles American Cheese Slices to the work's integrity if the cheese is replaced?

### Interview

Jessica Pace interviewed Ben Denzer on December 17, 2020 over Zoom.<sup>19</sup> The conversation was organized around the following aspects from Beerkens and Abraham: materials and techniques, aging, deterioration and damage, conservation and restoration, and conveyance and public—more specifically, *20 Slices* in other collections.

### Materials and Techniques

Pace asked Denzer to discuss the material used in the work and where he obtained it. He spoke about using Kraft Singles American Cheese Slices, purchased in sixteen-slice packs, from the 7-Eleven convenience store located "near the Center for Book Arts" in Manhattan.<sup>20</sup> For *20 Slices*, he selected the most uniformly shaped slices, and bound them together along one edge using E6000 adhesive.<sup>21</sup> Denzer covered the spine with a thin piece of open-weave fabric he referred to as "cheesecloth," and con-

18. Claudia María Coronado García, "Can we use the Concept of Programmed Obsolescence to Identify and Resolve Conservation Issues on Eat Art Installations?" in *Living Matter: The Preservation of Biological Materials in Contemporary Art: An International Conference Held in Mexico City, June 3–5, 2019*, eds. Rachel Rivenc and Roth Kendra (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2022), 39–46; Miriam Basilio, Sydney Briggs and Roger Griffith, "Impermanence and Entropy: Collaborative Efforts Installing Contemporary Art," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 47, no. 1 (2008), 3–13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27784619>.

19. Jessica Pace, Interview with Ben Denzer, December 17, 2020. The interview was the first conducted in the Preservation Department at NYU, and was administered via Zoom, but not recorded. Pace took notes from the conversation, which were shared with Denzer, and saved as part of the conservation record.

20. Pace, Interview with Ben Denzer.

21. A styrene butadiene block copolymer.

nected it to the hard case using polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) adhesive.<sup>22</sup> The books were made in one batch in an edition of ten with two artist's proofs.

### *Aging / Condition and Deterioration*

When asked about the book's deterioration and changes in appearance, Denzer stated he was comfortable with the book growing moldy, as long as it was not discarded. He noted that he believes the meaning of the work is not completely up to him and he supports users interacting with it as they choose. However, he stated that work's obsolescence, resulting from deterioration, was not something he intended or desired.

While discussing the original elements used, and whether they were integral to its meaning, Denzer stated he liked the absurdity of it being American cheese, specifically. Denzer said he was comfortable with replacing the cheese, and that replacement did not need to be the same brand. Regarding substitution with synthetic material, Denzer said if the options were limited to using a cheese replica versus the book no longer being seen, he preferred the replica.

### *Conservation and Restoration*

Denzer liked the idea of having conservators "renew" the object because of the performative aspect of the work and liked the accessibility provided by the work being in a library's collection. When asked about conservators using adhesives that were not original to the work, Denzer said he was comfortable with this as a part of future conservation treatments.

### *Conveyance and Public*

During the interview, Denzer noted that he worked with other institutions that held this work and was aware of varying condition issues. Denzer shared the contact information for seven institutions, which made it possible to compare the condition of other copies of *20 Slices*, as well as solutions for storage and handling. Of the institutions that responded to the authors' queries—four university libraries, and one small museum—several struggled with long-term preservation of the work. All institutions provided specialized storage for the object. One used refrigerated storage, and others stored their copies in plastic or archival board containers with packets of silica gel. Institutions that did not refrigerate their copies noted physical changes in their copies, including brittleness and white spots. One copy was discarded and deaccessioned after becoming very moldy.

### *Treatment*

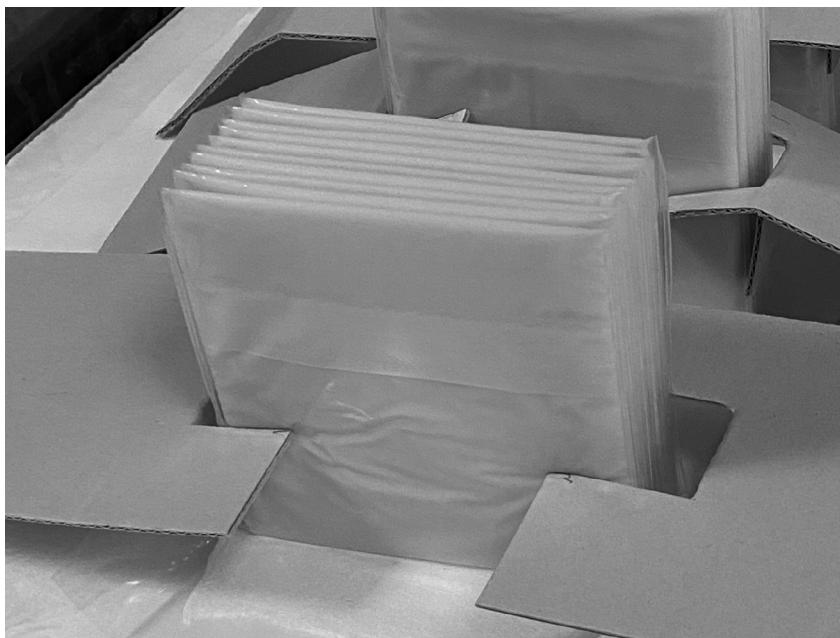
Denzer's perspective on the significance of cheese, his openness to conservation intervention, and his aversion to obsolescence guided conservators to treatment Option

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22. Pace, Interview with Ben Denzer.

1.<sup>23</sup> Conservators also discussed the plan with the Director of NYU Special Collections, Charlotte Priddle, to ensure that treatment and housing supported the object's intended use in the collections.

Pace carried out the treatment, which included the removal of the original cheese from the cloth lining and tissue backing materials, strengthening the spine lining, and attaching twenty new Kraft Singles American Cheese Slices. New slices were stacked in the same orientation as the originals and joined to a piece of Harukaze SM4 backing paper using E6000 adhesive, the same adhesive that Denzer used in the work. (fig. 3.) Using backing paper helped prevent errors in alignment, and provided a tear layer, which will reduce damage to the original binding should the cheese need replacement again. After the adhesive dried, the stack and backing paper were joined to the binding using Jade 403 PVA adhesive and kept under weights until dried.



**Figure 3.** New cheese slices being prepared for attachment, 2022.

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23. Garcia describes this type of treatment as “planned obsolescence,” in which perishable components of an artwork are replaced when they no longer fulfill their intended function in an artwork, much as the way that a lightbulb needs to be replaced when it burns out. See Garcia, “Eat Art Installations,” 44–45.

Lastly, housing was created for the item, consisting of a transparent polypropylene plastic bin with a gasket lid that provides an airtight seal while providing visibility for study and condition monitoring purposes. (fig. 4.)



**Figure 4.** 20 Slices in relative-humidity-controlled housing, 2022.

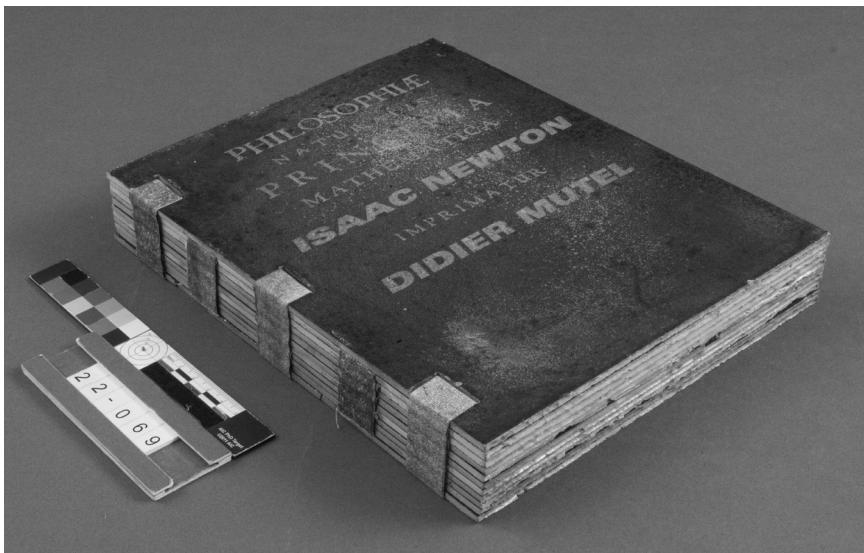
The lower section contains removable silica gel packets conditioned to 30 percent relative humidity.<sup>24</sup> The upper section is a tray on which the book rests, on its back cover, next to a relative humidity indicator. The original cheese used by Denzer—and forty slices of cheese purchased by the University Library in 2022—were packed in Marvelseal 360, an aluminized polyethylene and nylon film that acts as a protective gas and vapor barrier; these slices are currently kept in a dedicated collections freezer.

### **Work 2: *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* by Didier Mutel (b. 1971)**

Didier Mutel's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (*Principia*) is an homage to Isaac Newton's influential treatise. The book comprises twenty-two leaves of fiberglass-reinforced concrete, bound with woven textile strips colored using aquatint ink. (fig. 5.)

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24. The relative humidity was raised to 30 percent from the 15 percent used in the prior housing, as it was suspected that lower relative humidity might have contributed to the shrinkage of the cheese.



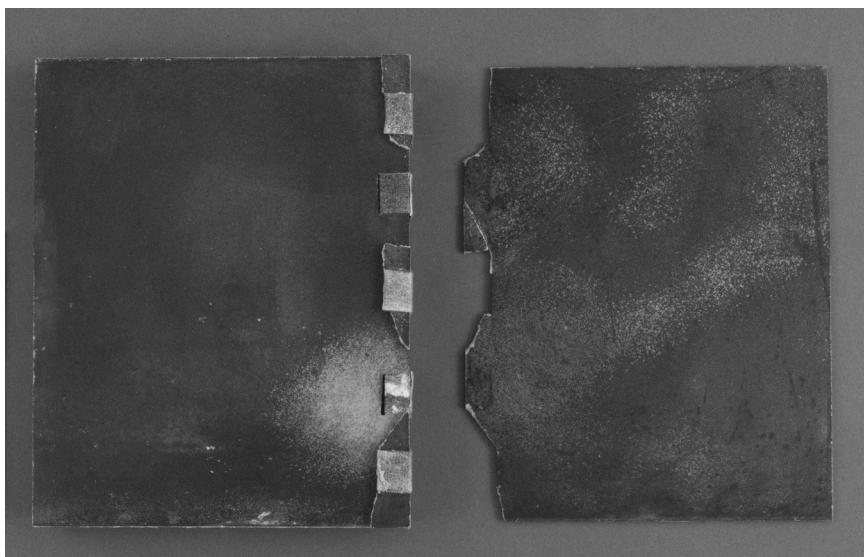
**Figure 5.** Mutel, Didier, and Isaac Newton. 2011. *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*. Paris: Atelier Didier Mutel.

Text on the front and back was laser-engraved into the concrete. Individual leaves were etched using the aquatint process. The work is housed in a ray skin (galuchat) slipcase.

Immediately after its acquisition in 2011, *Principia* came to the Preservation Department for custom housing. Conservators made a drop-spine box for the book to allow it to be handled without having to move it in and out of the slipcase. At the time, conservators also noted a small crack near the binding edge of the last leaf, though no treatment was undertaken.

In 2020, the item returned to the lab when Special Collections staff noticed powdering and cracks along the binding of the last leaf. Upon closer examination, the leaf had fully broken along the three textile straps due to the stress the binding straps exerted onto the edges of the page when the work was opened and closed during use. (fig. 6.)

Damage to the object resulted from mishandling and insufficient housing. Unfortunately, prior care strategies underestimated the significance that the object's material and manufacturing techniques had on its use and preservation and instead focused on its codex format. For example, conservators created custom protective housing using a design that was standard for rare and fragile books. However, that design did not incorporate shock absorption material that would have been appropriate for brittle concrete. At the same time, handling guidelines did not account for the additional care and physical support necessary for the rigid leaves or the tight binding structure.



**Figure 6.** *Principia* (detail). Breaks in the concrete leaves, 2020.

At this juncture, the preservation plan consisted of reattaching the broken leaf, stabilizing cracks using adhesives, and, possibly, adding a concealed supportive mount to reduce the stress along the repairs. The plan also included new housing which incorporated impact-absorbing materials. Conservators were interested in interviewing Mutel to learn about materials and manufacturing techniques, which would inform the conservation treatment, including appropriate adhesives for repairing the broken elements. However, a conversation with Mutel identified the need for a more collaborative approach.

### *Interview*

Pace interviewed Mutel via Zoom on February 9, 2021.<sup>25</sup> The interview was coordinated with the help of Priddle, who purchased the book, and Gerald W. Cloud Rare Books, which represents Mutel.<sup>26</sup> This conversation was organized around the following Beerkens and Abraham aspects: creative process, materials and techniques, meaning, deterioration and damage, and conservation and restoration.

### *Creative Process / Meaning*

When asked about the book's concept and how he selected materials, Mutel said he chose concrete for its rigidity, weight, and symbol of strength. The dimensions of his work are based on Beinecke Library's copy of Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis*

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25. Jessica Pace, Interview with Didier Mutel, February 9, 2021.

26. Cloud also participated at the interview to assist with French and English translation.

*Principia Mathematica*.<sup>27</sup> The artist explained:

Mutel [00:00:38]: In that book, Newton has written . . . the law for the whole universe . . . I [chose] the concrete for two or three reasons. First, because it is heavy and also, we are talking about law . . . Moses, laws, the tablet. . . . There is a connection. So, the will was to inscribe on stone these laws. This was very important also to have a book [be] very heavy. . . . And another point. To make leaves not with paper, but with concrete is changing fundamentally the physic[al] approach of the book. Because the leaf, paper, we can fold it. . . that is the point, and we cannot with concrete. . . . And of course . . . it was exciting for me to see if I could find a way to merge all these ideas. And then the book, the *Principia*, there is no text, but I was working with one of the techniques I really like—etching and aquatint—and all these dots of aquatint was like an invitation to go so far in the universe. To discover other worlds . . . to go far, far, far away.<sup>28</sup>

### *Materials and Techniques*

Asked to describe his process for printing on the concrete, Mutel said that he did not use a press. Instead, he etched a copper plate, inked the plate and, while the ink was wet, closed three edges of the plate, poured concrete on top in a thin layer, and allowed it to dry. Mutel chose a commercially made concrete that contained fiberglass, which helped counteract the brittleness. Mutel experimented extensively with this process and showed many of the pieces he still had in his studio. Mutel also explained that he printed the textile binding straps, to give them a worn mottled texture, before he laced them through the concrete leaves and adhered them in place with adhesive similar to PVA.

### *Damage and Deterioration*

Told about the current condition problems of NYU's copy of the work, Mutel was dismayed and apologetic. He discussed the work's fragility: because the experimental binding structure is tight, he showed how the book should only open at a narrow angle, for the user to peek inside. (fig. 7.)

Since NYU owns the first finished copy of the book, Mutel acknowledged that the binding might be more taut than intended. Mutel stated that the fragility meant that one should handle it as they would a religious relic:

27. *Philosophie Naturalis Principia Mathematica* / Auctore Isaaco Newtono. 1726. <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2111691>.

28. The interview transcript can be found in NYU's Ultraviolet repository. <https://ultraviolet.library.nyu.edu/>.



**Figure 7.** Screen grab of Mutel, via videoconference, demonstrating with his hands how far the book should open, 2021.

Mutel [00:16:07]: When we carry it we have to pay so much attention—more than even with another book because we are carrying something—I would almost say something holy, “*que chose de saint*.” So, we really have to take it with extreme care. That is part of the of the thing. Otherwise, it will break and break and break.”

### *Conservation and Restoration*

Mutel was asked about the possibility of conservation intervention for the broken pieces. Unexpectedly, he said he did not think what was broken could be repaired, and he offered to make new leaves as replacements. This offer opened a previously unimagined treatment path, as well new considerations. In the interview, Pace and Mutel discussed what to do with the broken pieces after they are replaced:

Pace [00:17:56]: One of the questions it would raise is, how would we refer to the object . . . is it the *Principia* from the original date with added leaves from a later date? Does that change the naming of the object, and can we retain the older, the broken leaves, as part of the object?

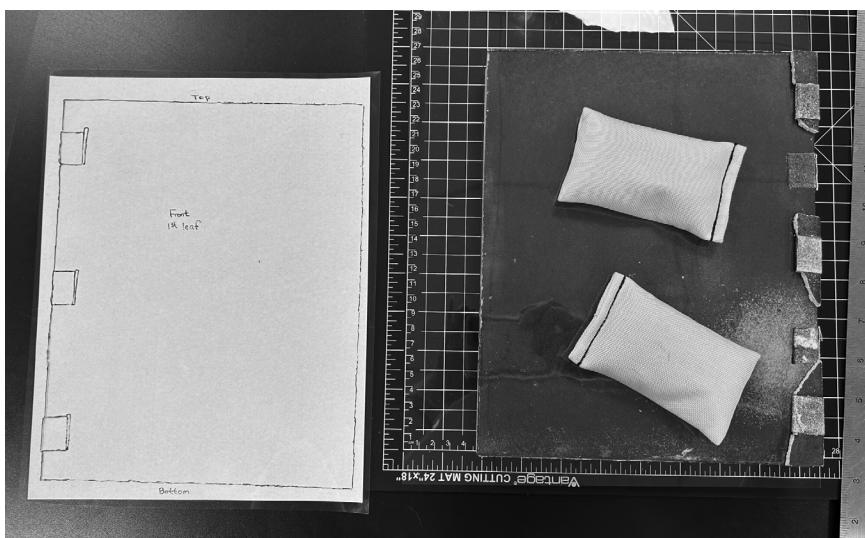
Mutel [00:20:41]: For me, the best is just to keep the broken pieces. I have kept all my broken things. [laughs] . . . So, if I send you a new unbroken piece. I would say that of course, you keep the broken leaves. And we can write a statement just to explain. And you will add this into the box

because it's part of the story of your copy. And by this it will, I would say, make it a little special.

### *Treatment*

After the initial interview, curators and conservators at NYU Libraries discussed Mutel's proposal and accepted this idea. This option was attractive because it acknowledged the artist's relationship with the work and gave him a role as the work changes over time. The result is more structurally sound—and safer to handle—than an object with repaired breaks. To acknowledge its history, NYU Libraries Special Collections retained the broken pieces along with the book. The Preservation Department also documented this change, in the same way as a conservation treatment, so the information could be incorporated into the teaching and display of the work.

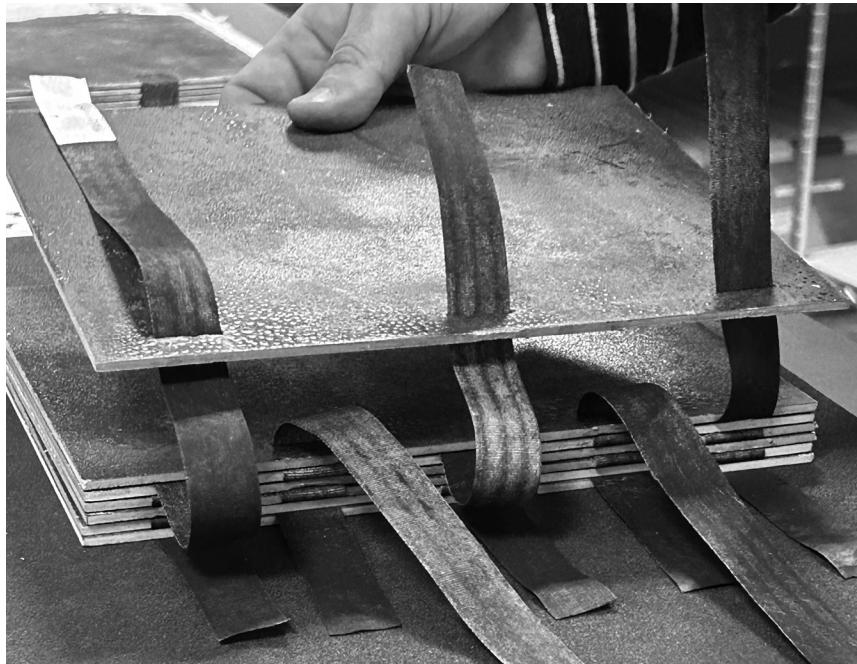
Between spring 2021 and fall 2023, conservators and Mutel collaborated on the manufacture of the replacement leaves and new binding straps. This included discussions about binding structure and materials and sharing templates of NYU's broken leaves for Mutel to create replacements. (fig. 8.)



**Figure 8.** Tracing of the book made in the NYU Libraries' conservation lab, 2022.

In November 2023, Mutel and Cloud arrived at the NYU Libraries conservation lab with two sets of replacement concrete leaves and binding straps. Conservators Pace, Di Gennaro, Laura McCann, Preservation Librarian Lindsey Tyne, and Director Priddle discussed and observed the process. The visit was recorded and photo-

graphed.<sup>29</sup> Mutel first released the original binding straps, then removed each leaf and placed them in order on a table. Using replacement straps, Mutel then laced the individual leaves together, beginning with the two new replacement leaves. (fig. 9.)



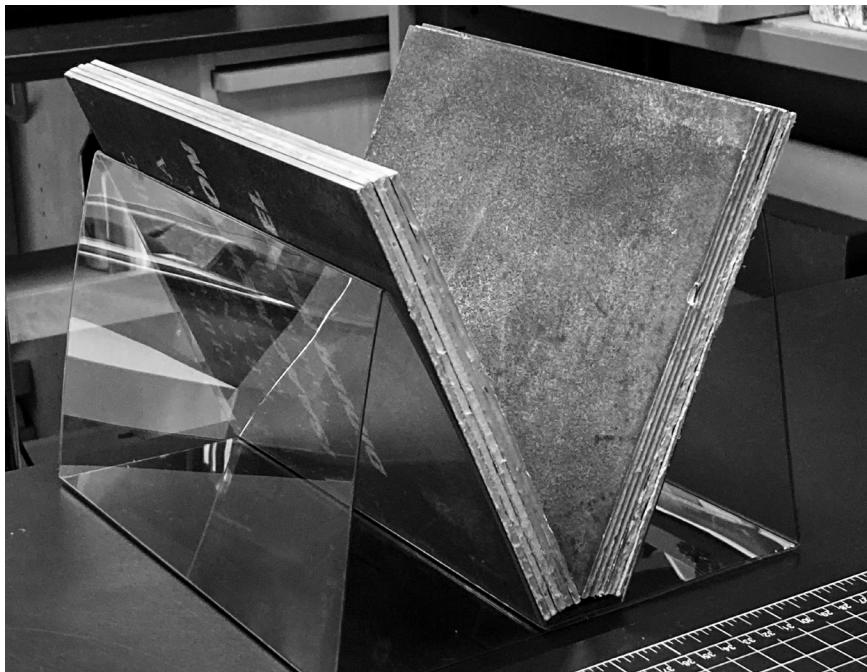
**Figure 9.** Mutel lacing the leaves back together with new straps (detail), 2023.

During the lacing, Mutel occasionally consulted with Di Gennaro about the binding's tension and tightness, which Mutel noted needed to be "tight, but not too tight."<sup>30</sup> After lacing, the ends of the straps were adhered on the spine with PVA.

After the treatment's completion, Di Gennaro consulted with Priddle regarding planned use scenarios for the object. Her feedback informed the designs for a custom housing—with added shock absorption—for all elements of the work, including the broken leaves, as well as a cradle made from polyethylene terephthalate glycol (VIVAK) that provided support and visibility while preventing it from being opened past capacity. (fig. 10.)

29. Charlotte Priddle and Jessica Pace, "Images and Recordings of Mutel Visit," 2023. This documentation resides in NYU Special Collections and Preservation Department records and is for internal use only.

30. Priddle and Pace, "Images and Recordings of Mutel Visit," 2023.



**Figure 10.** *Principia* in its custom cradle, 2024.

As of June 2024, the book is available for use in Special Collections.

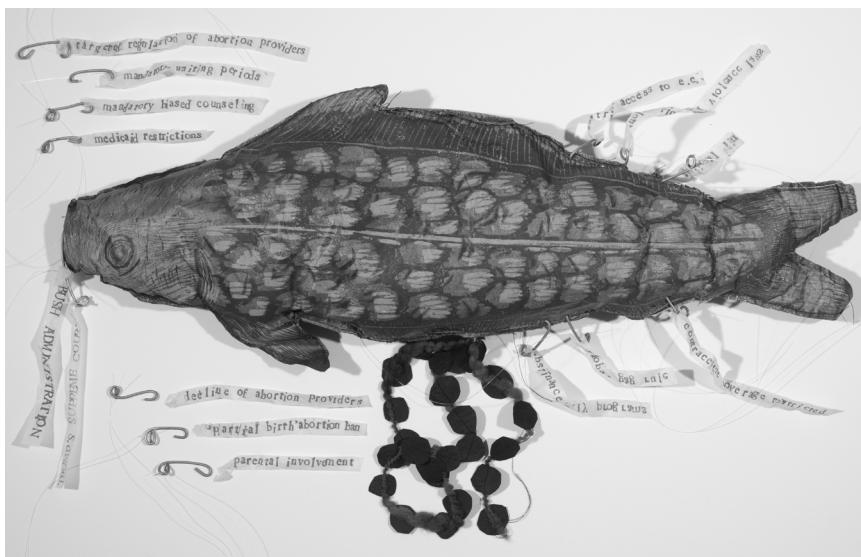
### Work 3: *Roe* by Meredith Stern (b. 1976)

*Roe* (2006–2016) depicts a fish with roe (eggs) spilling out of its body. The work's title refers to the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Jane Roe, et al. v. Henry Wade, District Attorney of Dallas County*. It is made of two pieces of printed paper stitched together and stuffed with polyester fill material. The roe is red and purple yarn and round pieces of black paper. The fish's body is punctured by fourteen metal hooks, to which narrow strips of paper are attached, on which are printed references to legal regulations such as "parental involvement," "mandatory waiting periods," and "gestational limits." (fig. 11.)

*Roe* is part of the larger mixed-media portfolio *I Can't Believe I Still Have To Protest This Fucking Shit: 20 Years of Reproductive Justice Artwork* (2022).<sup>31</sup> While *I Can't Believe* is formatted as a portfolio, it was cataloged bibliographically.<sup>32</sup> The portfolio was sent to the Preservation Department for custom housing immediately after acquisition in 2023. *Roe* exhibited numerous small tears, particularly along the seams, and

31. Meredith Stern, *I Can't Believe I Still Have to Protest This Fucking Shit: 20 Years of Reproductive Justice Artwork* (Brooklyn, New York: Brooklyn, 2022).

32. In NYU's catalog, it is listed as "no. 5" under the MARC 505 (Contents) field, rather than as an individual artist's book.



**Figure 11.** Before treatment image of *Roe* from Meredith Stern, *I Can't Believe I Still Have To Protest This Fucking Shit: 20 Years Of Reproductive Justice Artwork* (Brooklyn, New York: Booklyn, 2022).

about half the hooks had detached. Conservators initially intended to mend the tears and reattach the hooks to stabilize the item. They reached out to Stern with questions about the configuration of the hooks and about materials used to construct *Roe*, which would guide the selection of compatible repair materials. As with *Principia*, surprising elements of Stern's response altered the course of treatment.

### Interview

Conservators Josephine Jenks and Pace interviewed Stern over Zoom on August 14, 2023.<sup>33</sup> This conversation was organized around Beerkens and Abraham's aspects of: creative process, materials and techniques, meaning, damage and deterioration, conveyance and public, and conservation and restoration.<sup>34</sup> Part of the conversation also occurred via e-mail between Jenks and Stern, who discussed the work's meaning as presented through signs of aging, deterioration, and damage.<sup>35</sup>

### Materials and Techniques

Stern used mulberry paper, a standard substrate, purchased from McClain's Printmaking Supplies. The surface design was applied with oil-based printmaking ink and spray paint. The text was hand-stamped using water-based ink from ColorBox ink pads.

33. Josephine Jenks and Jessica Pace, Interview with Meredith Stern, August 14, 2023.

34. The interview transcript can be found in NYU's Ultraviolet repository. <https://ultraviolet.library.nyu.edu/>.

35. Josephine Jenks and Meredith Stern, E-mail correspondence, August 9, 2023.

### *Meaning/Aging/Deterioration and Damage*

One assumption that conservators made was that the paper should be mended to support the work's long-term stability. However, Stern indicated that some of the perceived condition issues were both intentional and integral to the meaning of the work:

My goal was to have the condition of the fish reflect the condition of "Roe v. Wade"—while I created it, access to abortion was being chipped away . . . so, the fish, as a metaphor for the law, is damaged as well . . . for example, my sewing was done imperfectly, with the thin paper broken in various places, parts of the fish are bent and folded, and the stuffing is hanging out and coming loose in places.<sup>36</sup>

Stern's response revised the treatment to minimal interference with the object's appearance.

When asked about the hooks, Stern said there was no particular order for their placement, and that conservation mends to those specific tears were acceptable.

### *Treatment*

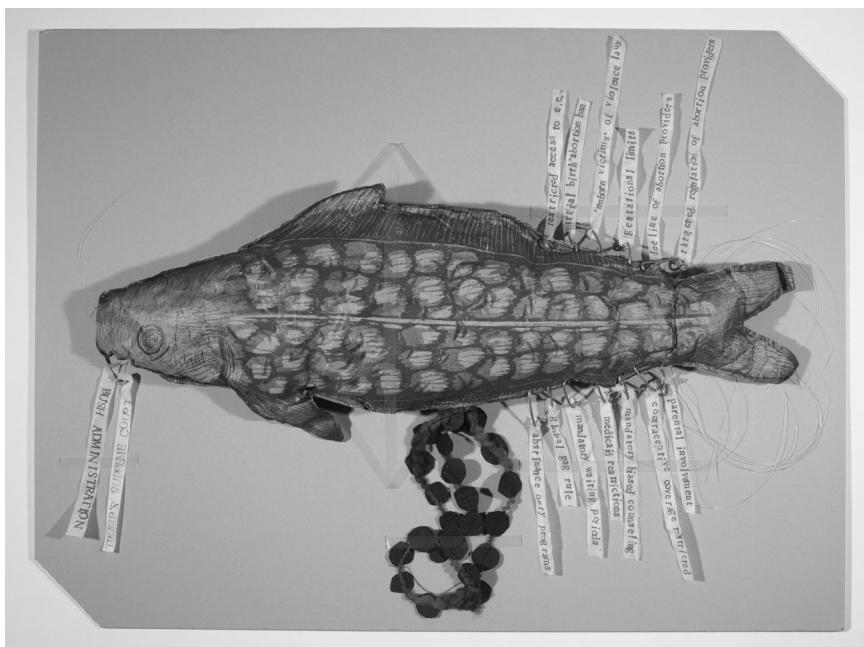
As a result of Stern's feedback, Jenks only mended where structurally necessary and made no aesthetic improvements. To preserve the tears in the fish's body, Jenks reattached the displaced hooks to the stitching edge using black polyamide thread which blended with the original thread. The hooks appear to be attached through holes in the paper but do not apply stress to the fragile paper. Jenks also created new housing using B-flute blue board and transparent polyethylene straps that hold the fish, paper strips, and roe in place. The paper strips were arranged so their phrases were easily legible. (fig. 12.)

Pace and Jenks also asked Stern about the housing design and Stern replied:

Meredith Stern [00:19:28]: The tray is really interesting to me . . . because I've thought about the idea of the fish on the hook. It's how it's freshly caught. But . . . at this point, it's sitting, getting decayed. One idea that was running through my head was, should it be wrapped in cellophane, as if it's being sold in a store, or is it even beyond that level of decay? So, the tray idea is really fitting to me in terms of presenting it as an object in that way. . . .

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36. Josephine Jenks and Meredith Stern, E-mail correspondence, August 9, 2023.



**Figure 12.** After treatment image of *Roe*, 2024.

Her response gave conservators fresh perspective on the relationship between the artwork and its housing, specifically, how the housing can impart new meaning to the artwork.

## Conclusion

Without consultations with the artists, treatment plans for these artists' books had—or would have—caused damage to the work. In the case of *20 Slices*, letting the cheese molder would have led to the book's decomposition and worked against Denzer's intention of maintaining access to this work. *Principia*'s initial custom housing was not designed to address the needs of brittle concrete and therefore did not sufficiently protect the object. If conservators had not contacted Stern before treating *Roe*, the treatment would have obscured signs of wear and changed the work's meaning.

Artist interviews are not common in libraries and archives, which may be due to differences in collecting practices and to the fact that stewards of the traditional codex did not need to engage with the printer or bookbinder to properly care for the material: the intended function was fairly self-explanatory. The three case studies presented here represent examples that intentionally flout the standard codex. By foregrounding the books' materiality as a central component of their meaning, the works require an approach to preservation that draws from practices in contemporary art, wherein the artist's voice and vision are key values in guiding preservation. Although these

examples focus on work carried out by conservators, taking a collaborative approach in the care of artists' books is by no means restricted to the world of conservation. Curators, archivists, collection managers, and other stakeholders often have expertise and relationships with artists that can inform preservation.

Since the first interview with Ben Denzer in 2020, conservators at NYU Libraries have interviewed six other artists whose works reside in the bibliographic and archival collections. The need for interviews arises when there are questions regarding—but are by no means limited to—manufacture, materials, use before acquisition, authorship, and intended function. Interview requests occur when new acquisitions are sent to the Preservation Department by curators or accessioning archivists, or when past acquisitions are being processed. At NYU, conservators first contact the curator to discuss questions regarding the object and the viability of interviewing the artist, since curators are familiar with the artist and in some cases have built years-long relationships with them. The process works best as a collaboration and the authors urge practitioners to pool their knowledge.<sup>37</sup>

While face-to-face interviews are recommended by many sources, this recommendation should not serve as a limiting factor.<sup>38</sup> Interviews can take place via email, video chat, or in person. They might take the form of a questionnaire or be translated in real time from one participant's language to another. The variable and open-ended nature of the artist interview mirrors the rich diversity of artists' books and their conservation needs. By opening a dialog between makers and caretakers of cultural heritage, interviews have the power to capture the unique complexity of artists' books and challenge assumptions about their preservation.

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37. Debik et al., *The Artist Interview*, 13.

38. Beerken and Abraham, *The Artist Interview*, 21.

Remy Jackson

# From Mesoamerican Codices to Twentieth-Century Otomí Artists' Books: Amate Papers in Rare Book Libraries and Special Collections Departments

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*Amate, a proto-paper traditionally made from the inner bark of trees from the Moraceae family of flowering plants, has an extensive history with origins in ancient Mesoamerican cultures from the region of present-day Mexico. In the 1500s, Spanish invasion of the region prompted rapid cultural loss and transformation resulting in devastating consequences, including the systematic destruction of Indigenous books. To further suppress Indigenous cultures, Spanish authorities prohibited the production of amate and replaced it with European papers. However, the tradition of creating amate survived, was passed down through generations, and remained significant among Indigenous communities of Mexico. In the twentieth century, amate became a popular substrate for paintings, artists' books, and bookbindings. Because of amate's fragility, uniqueness, and hand-made nature, many rare book libraries and special collections departments own various significant manuscripts and documents composed of it. This article examines amate at ten such collections and provides suggestions for related future outreach and exhibitions. From Mesoamerican codices to twentieth-century Otomi artists' books, amate materials provide opportunities to promote meaningful community engagement, enhance collective expertise, preserve cultural heritage, and enrich researchers' understandings of the book- and paper-making practice in Mesoamerica and Mexico.*

## Introduction

Amate (Spanish: *papel amate*, Nahuatl: *amatl*) is a proto-paper traditionally made from the inner bark of native trees from the *Moraceae* family of flowering plants, including wild fig and mulberry trees.<sup>1</sup> Amate has an extensive history, with origins in

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1. Sidney E. Berger, *Rare Books and Special Collections* (Neal-Schuman, An imprint of the American Library Association, 2014), 81–82. The language spoken in Tenochtitlan and surrounding areas was Nahuatl, an Amerindian language of the Americas. In twenty-first-century Mexico, particularly the central region, this language is spoken by about 1.5 million people.

ancient Mesoamerican cultures from the region of present-day Mexico.<sup>2</sup> In the 1500s, the Spanish invasion of the region prompted rapid cultural change, loss, and transformation resulting in devastating consequences, including the systematic destruction of Indigenous books. To further suppress Indigenous cultures, Spanish authorities prohibited the production of amate and replaced it with imported European papers.<sup>3</sup> However, the tradition of creating amate survived, was passed down through generations, and remained significant among several Indigenous communities of Mexico. In the early twentieth century, amate became a popular substrate for paintings, artists' books, bookbindings, and other works of art.<sup>4</sup> Because of the fragility, uniqueness, and hand-made nature of amate, many rare book libraries and special collections departments own various significant manuscripts and documents composed of it. This article examines amate at eleven such collections, including The Latin American Library at Tulane University, Newberry Library, and the Thomas J. Watson Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; a survey conducted for this article found amate in over one hundred collections worldwide.<sup>5</sup> From Mesoamerican codices to twentieth-century artists' books, amate materials provide opportunities to foster meaningful community interactions, preserve cultural knowledge, and deeply enrich researchers' understandings of pre-Hispanic cultures, languages, and customs.

## Amate Production

Although amate is described as "bark paper," several scholars, such as Dr. Sidney E. Berger, categorize it as a "proto-paper." Proto-paper is defined as "a material that is not paper (i.e., it was not produced from macerated and matted fibers) but that looks like and can function like paper."<sup>6</sup> The process of making amate has several steps.<sup>7</sup> Once the inner bark is stripped from the tree, it is boiled until it is pliable.<sup>8</sup> The clumps of string-like fibers are then sorted, with the lighter and darker fibers separated. A stone is used to pound, soften, and flatten the moist fibers to create an even,

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2. Both terms—*amate* and *amatl*—are used in scholarly literature, though the former is more familiar and more commonly used. The Spanish term derives from *amatl*, which refers to both the paper and the tree it came from, a species called *amacuahuitl* (*cuahuitl* means "tree" in Nahuatl).

3. Bodil Christensen, "Bark Paper and Witchcraft in Indian Mexico," *Economic Botany* 17, no. 4 (1963): 360–67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4252464>.

4. Other works of art include drawings, cut-paper figures, and collages. In Indigenous traditional practice, collages are composed of amate cut-out shapes pasted onto an amate substrate.

5. The author acknowledges that, while their survey found amate in over one hundred collections worldwide, this estimate is likely higher, especially considering private collections, museum art collections, and smaller institutions.

6. Sidney E. Berger, *The Dictionary of the Book: A Glossary for Book Collectors, Booksellers, Librarians, and Others*, 2nd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), 366.

7. Mustafa Eck, "Watch: Two Thousand Years of Paper Making Continues," Getty News, November 15, 2022, <https://www.getty.edu/news/amate-codex-paper-video-aztec-maya-mexico>.

8. The bark was soaked for a day or more. In the twentieth century, the fibers were boiled in ash-water or lime water.

thin sheet or strip.<sup>9</sup> Customarily, the stone (Nahuatl: *amahuitequini*) has an “ovoid or rectangular shape with a slot on each side for easier handling.”<sup>10</sup> Afterward, the sheets and strips are laid out carefully on a wooden board and set out to dry naturally in the sun and air. The sheets are produced as solid, or “woven” with strips of amate fibers that create an open framework consisting of a pattern (e.g., crisscrossed or circular). The fibers are “woven” by separating vertical strips from each other, with distance between the horizontal strips, as well, to form small holes throughout the sheet. In praxis, amate is created in three colors—a standard light cream, a dark brown (or “chocolate amate”), and “one version mixing light and dark pulps into what is called “marbled amate.”<sup>11</sup> Contemporary amate may be dyed in a variety of colors, including pinks, reds, or light blues. In addition to colors, amate is sometimes produced in long strips to create patterns, such as a large circle made from dark- and cream-colored radii extending from the center.

Despite the introduction of European technologies and papers in the colony of New Spain, amate production endured. In his study of *Mexica* and Maya papermakers, Victor Wolfgang Von Hagen included a detailed description of the process of making amate.<sup>12</sup> This description, written by Francisco Hernández de Toledo (ca. 1515–1587), provided insight into similarities between historic and then-contemporary processes of producing amate. Under the orders of Philip II of Spain, Hernández, a naturalist and court physician, embarked on a seven-year expedition to Mexico.<sup>13</sup> During one of his frequent visits to Tepoztlán, he studied Mexica papermaking and the process of manufacturing amate. He wrote:

To fashion the paper, they cut the larger branches from the tree . . . these are softened in water and allowed to soak all night on the river banks. On the following day, the outer bark is removed and cleaned of its outer crust with rock ‘plances’ shaped for the purpose, grooved with striations, and with a bunch of willow twigs passed through a hole and twisted for a handle. The bark is beaten out thoroughly with these stone beaters. It is thus rendered pliable. After this it is cut into strips, which are easily joined together by beating the bark again with a smoother stone. They are then polished (by means of a *xicaltetl*—a certain varnish of white stone, upon which was painted or gilded; or a certain smooth stone which served for

9. This was an ancient technique. Paper beaters have been found in many archaeological sites across Mesoamerica. They are often found in households, which indicates that papermaking might have been a household activity.

10. Bodil Christensen and Samuel Martí, *Witchcraft and Pre-Columbian Paper / Brujerías y Papel Precolombino*, 2nd ed. (Ediciones Euroamericanas, 1972), 70.

11. Berger, *Rare Books and Special Collections*, 81–82.

12. Victor Wolfgang Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers* (J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1943), 36.

13. Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers*, 35.

polishing) and so finally fashioned into sheets of two dodrans [18 inches] long and one and one-half dodrans [13.5 inches] wide.<sup>14</sup>

The process of producing amate remains largely unchanged since its Mesoamerican origins, with only a few contemporary adaptations. With Indigenous artisans in Mexico—such as Alfonso García Tellez (Mexican/*Otomí*, active 1970s–80s), Camila Hernández (Otomí, b. 1937), and Marcial Camilo Ayala (*Nahua* [San Agustín Oapan], 1951–2016)—drawing upon millennia-long practices, amate demonstrates the flexibility and adaptability of Indigenous paper- and book-making customs in Mexico.<sup>15</sup>

## Mesoamerican Origins

Using amate represents an enduring Mesoamerican convention of recording knowledge and conducting ceremonial rites.<sup>16</sup> Tracing back to at least the Classic Period (250–900 CE), Mesoamericans encoded information into books and manuscripts composed of amate.<sup>17</sup> In the pre-Hispanic Basin of Mexico, the Mexica empire controlled a vast expanse. Built on an island in the middle of the western swamps in the shallow Lake Texcoco, the capital, Tenochtitlan—now known as Mexico City—was the “hub of an urban network” and “the cynosure of the [Mexica] empire.”<sup>18</sup> To manage this political, economic, and religious center, the imperial administration relied on paper for documentation, communication, and transmission of knowledge.<sup>19</sup> The books and docu-

14. Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers*, 36.

15. In 1995, the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago hosted the exhibition “The Amate Tradition: Innovation & Dissent in Mexican Art,” which showcased sixty contemporary amate paintings created by Nahua artists. See Jonathan D. Amith and Mexican Fine Arts Center–Museum (Chicago), *La Tradición del Amate: Innovación y Protesta en el Arte Mexicano*, Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum; La Casa de las Imágenes, 1995. Further, in 2021, the Museo Nacional de las Culturas Populares in Mexico City hosted the exhibition, *Nzahki. Espíritus de la Milpa*, which showcased ceremonial uses of amate alongside contemporary artists’ use of amate as a medium. See “Papel Amate/Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares,” *Proceso*, April 2021, <https://www.proceso.com.mx/cultura/2021/4/24/papel-amatemuseo-nacional-de-culturas-populares-262670.html>, *North American Women Artists of the Twentieth Century: A Biographical Dictionary*, (Taylor & Francis, 2013), and Pierre Déleage, “Les livres d’Alfonso García Tellez” in: *Traverser*, Chantier littéraire, Bois-Colombes: Carnets Livres, 2015: 118–129. (Also: <https://pierredeleage.wordpress.com/2015/11/08/les-livres-dalfonso-garcia-tellez/>).

16. Residents of Tenochtitlan referred to themselves as “Mexica,” rather than “Aztecs.”

17. According to scholars, the earliest recorded date of papermaking in Mesoamerica can be traced to the beginning of the first millennia, C. E. The earliest book remains come from the Maya site of Uaxactun. See Nicholas P. Carter and Jeffrey Dobereiner, “Multispectral imaging of an Early Classic Maya codex fragment from Uaxactun, Guatemala,” *Antiquity* 90, no. 351 (2016); Hayley Woodward, “The Codex Xolotl: The visual discourse of place and history in early colonial Mexico,” (PhD diss., Tulane University, 2023), 23, [https://library.search.tulane.edu/discovery/delivery/01TUL\\_INST:Tulane/12440754560006326](https://library.search.tulane.edu/discovery/delivery/01TUL_INST:Tulane/12440754560006326).

18. Barbara E. Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City* (University of Texas Press, 2015), 1. Many scholars described Tenochtitlan. See José Luis de Rojas, “De Tenochtitlan a La Ciudad de México,” *Mélanges de La Casa de Velázquez* 53, no. 2 (2023): <https://doi.org/10.4000/mcv.19643>, and *Tenochtitlan: Capital of the Aztec Empire*. (University Press of Florida, 2012); Clementina Battcock and Jhonnatan Alejandro Zavala López, “La Conquista de Tenochtitlan: Multitud de Voces, Visiones y Elaboraciones En Torno a Lo Real,” *Korpus 21: Revista de historia y ciencias sociales* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.22136/korpus2120212>; and Leonardo López Luján and Judith Levin, *Tenochtitlán* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

19. Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan*, 1.

ments created in Tenochtitlan were often connected to the management of the empire. They were created with various materials such as animal hide, *maguey* (agave), amate paper, and, later, European paper. After preparing the substrate, scribes, or painter-scribes (Nahuatl: *tlahcuilohqueh*), recorded information using “a complex graphic communication system of heavily standardized drawn forms.”<sup>20</sup>

Within the Mexica empire, amate was predominantly used for religious documentation, trial records, annals, calendars, and ceremonial dress.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, it was integral to lists for the tribute system: apart from its expansive trading network, the city of Tenochtitlan required immense quantities of tribute from regions it had conquered; amate was one of the most valued tributes.<sup>22</sup> Imperial administrators kept a record of “precisely written tribute lists” of what was due.<sup>23</sup> For example, the *Codex Mendoza* (ca. 1541),<sup>24</sup> created by sixteenth-century Nahua scribes, specifies that “twenty-four thousand resmas of [amate] are to be brought yearly to the storehouse of the ruler of Tenochtitlan.”<sup>25</sup> (fig. 1.)

Further, *Codex Mendoza* identified “forty-two centers of papermaking and records that two cities, Amacoztitlan (literally, *amatl-* [paper], *coztic-* [yellow], *tlan-* [place of], i.e., “Place of the Yellow Paper”) and Itzamatitlan (*itztli-* [obsidian], *amatl-* [paper], *tlan-* [place of], i.e., “Place of the Obsidian, or Black, Paper”) paid a tribute of nearly half a million sheets of paper every year.”<sup>26</sup> Although not composed of amate paper, it is one of the “earliest, most detailed, and most important post-conquest accounts” documenting imperial tribute lists, historical narratives, and practices of daily life among the Mexica.<sup>27</sup>

20. Woodward, “The Codex *Xolotl*,” 2. The Nahua scribes were “highly skilled intellectuals, artisans, and priests who were literate and likely multilingual.” See “Mesoamerican Painted Manuscripts at the Latin American Library,” Tulane University Digital Library, [https://library.search.tulane.edu/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01TUL\\_INST%3ATulane&collectionId=81432618320006326](https://library.search.tulane.edu/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=01TUL_INST%3ATulane&collectionId=81432618320006326).

21. Beyond historical narratives and cartographies, amate was used in the documentation of “methods of divination, cures for diseases, methods for learning to read the codices, information on plants and animals, paintings recording land ownership, poetry, songs, and agricultural calendars.” Alan R. Sandstrom and Pamela Effrein Sandstrom, *Traditional Papermaking and Paper Cult Figures of Mexico*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1986). <https://ia800301.us.archive.org/16/items/traditionalpape00sand/traditionalpape00sand.pdf>.

22. Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers*, 9.

23. Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers*, 9.

24. MS. Arch. Selden. A. 1 – Part A (fols. i-ii, 1–72), ‘Codex Mendoza’: Mexican pictorial manuscript. Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/2fea788e-2aa2-4f08-b6d9-648c00486220/>.

25. Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers*, 9. Twenty-four thousand resmas, or rolls, of amate is equivalent to 480,000 sheets of amate.

26. Christensen and Martí, *Witchcraft and Pre-Columbian Paper*, 53. Supplies for amate came from the state of Morelos, and the towns of Cuauhnáhuac (Cuernavaca), Amatitlán, Tepoztlán, Amatlán, Oaxtepec, Yautepec, and Itzamatitlán on the Yautepec River were production centers. Additionally, Amacoztitlán was the first to produce paper in sheets. Omar Arroyo Arriaga, “El Papel de amate,” *Artesanías de América*, no. 41–42 (1993): 268–285, <http://documentacion.cidap.gob.ec:8080/handle/cidap/872>.

27. Daniela Bleichmar, “Painting the Aztec Past in Early Colonial Mexico: Translation and Knowledge Production in the *Codex Mendoza*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (2019): 1362–1415, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26897304>.



**Figure 1.** An illustrated catalog of the annual tribute paid by the towns of the empire to the last empire, Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin (Montezuma II, 1466–1520). The catalog includes the amount of amate required as tribute in the lower right corner. Folio 23v of the *Codex Mendoza*, ca. 1541, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Arch. Selden. A. 1: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/2fea788e-2aa2-4f08-b6d9-648c00486220/>.

Photo: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, CC-BY-NC 4.0.

Apart from recording bureaucratic processes, the Mexica used amate to create documents recording authorized accounts of their history and official cartographies.<sup>28</sup> The *Codex Xolotl* (<1542) is a significant example of “Nahua history-writing and map-making.”<sup>29</sup> Throughout ten pages of amate, it records “three centuries of migration,

28. Barbara E. Mundy, “Books in the Contact Zone: Between Amatl Papers and the Printing Press, Mexico, 1500–1600,” The Sol M. and Mary Ann O’Brian Malkin Lecture, June 23, 2023, posted November 13, 2023, by Rare Book School, YouTube, 56 min., 42 sec., <https://youtu.be/isE9vJbLA34?si=YbbsyZ6O4kvLZj0x>. In many cases, historical annals were set along long strips of paper called *Tira*, which were “long strips of amate paper covered with gesso upon which figures were set.”

29. Mexicain 1-10. *Codex Xolotl*. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Paris. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b103038228>. Woodward, “The Codex Xolotl,” 1.

community foundations, genealogies, ethnic alliances, and martial conflict, amongst other events.”<sup>30</sup> Another notable example is *Ordenanza del Señor Cuauhtemoc* (*Ordenanza*, 1520), housed at the Latin American Library at Tulane University.<sup>31</sup> The *Ordenanza* includes a map of properties in Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco copied from an ancient original. The manuscript also features drawings and texts regarding land and fishing rights dating from about 1430 and reaffirmed by Cuauhtémoc (1497–1525) in 1523. Further, the *Ordenanza* includes a migration map tracing the history of the Mexica to the rule of Itzcóatl (1380–1440).

Within the worldview of the Mexica, amate was sacred. Mundy explained that amate “was conceived of as a kind of skin—a place where things happen, an essential to the being.”<sup>32</sup> The recognition of amate as a type of “skin” derives from the material used in its production: tree bark. In the religious thought of the Mexica, the ‘skin’ (paper) enabled one to transform into a sacred being. Priests and ritual specialists often used brightly colored and folded amate adornments to transform themselves into powerful supernatural entities.<sup>33</sup> For example, in the *Codex Borbonicus* (ca. 1519–1521),<sup>34</sup> one of the screen-folds that preserves knowledge of the priests provides an image of “a ritual specialist who’s been carefully dressed to become the embodiment of a deity. Most of the costume that enables this [embodiment] . . . is made out of amate paper.”<sup>35</sup> (fig. 2.)

The costume and adornments included an “*amacalli*, an amate crown on the head, and *amacuexpalli*, long colored streamers that descend from the headdress meant to imitate hair.”<sup>36</sup> In their research on papermaking traditions of Mexico, Sandstrom and Sandstrom expanded on the notion of amate as a sacred material and noted that Mesoamerican peoples

used [amate] to make books concerning their religious beliefs, adorn statues of the deities and decorate temples, fashion priestly regalia, accompany the dead on their journey to the afterlife, dress sacrificial victims before putting them to death, make offerings to the deities in their pantheon, and divine the future.<sup>37</sup>

30. Woodward, “The Codex Xolotl,” 1.

31. *Ordenanza del Señor Cuauhtemoc*, 1520, [https://library.search.tulane.edu/discovery/delivery/01TUL\\_INST:Tulane/12432943610006326](https://library.search.tulane.edu/discovery/delivery/01TUL_INST:Tulane/12432943610006326), LAL Manuscripts, William Gates Collection 2, The Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans.

32. Mundy, “Books in the Contact Zone.”

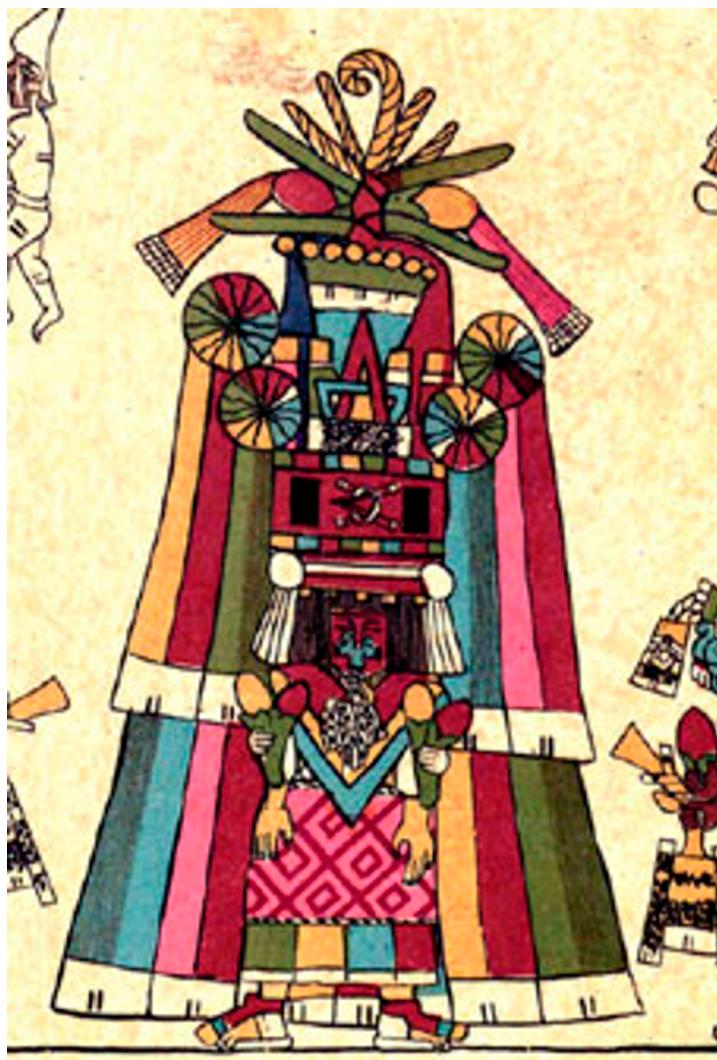
33. Mundy, “Books in the Contact Zone.”

34. La Bibliothèque et Ses Chefs-D’œuvre, Le Fonds Ancien, *Codex Borbonicus* (fin XVe siècle), <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/7gf-borbonicus.asp>, Bibliothèque de l’Assemblée Nationale, Paris.

35. Mundy, “Books in the Contact Zone.”

36. Mundy, “Books in the Contact Zone.”

37. “Aztec Papermaking,” Mexicolore, September 26, 2016. <https://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/writing/aztec-papermaking>. Sandstrom and Sandstrom, Traditional Papermaking, 9–12.



**Figure 2.** Festival of Ochpanitzli, detail of priest wearing amate costume and adornments. *Codex Borbonicus*, p. 30, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Codex\\_Borbonicus](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Codex_Borbonicus)

Indeed, throughout the Mexica empire, amate was regarded as a highly prominent and sacred material. It was used in various ways, from cartographies to ceremonial costumes, to manage the empire's vast political, religious, and economic activities.

### **The Spanish Invasion and Survival of Amate**

In 1519–1521, the Spanish invasion of the region prompted significant cultural loss and transformation, including the systematic destruction of Indigenous books. By 1521, Tenochtitlan and the Mexica political state were toppled by Spanish conquis-

tadors. During their eradication of pre-Hispanic objects from this region, Spanish colonists and Roman Catholic clergy recognized the significant role of amate and worked to systematically destroy it by confiscating and burning thousands of sacred books.<sup>38</sup> Upon the 1529 arrival of Juan de Zumárraga (1468–1548), the first Bishop of Mexico,

books from every quarter [were collected], especially the ‘royal library’ at Texcoco, and [Zumárraga’s agents] had them brought to the marketplace at Tlatelolco. There, the [books] were piled mountain-high. Monks approached from all sides and set the torch to this gigantic pile of [knowledge].”<sup>39</sup>

To further suppress Indigenous knowledge and culture, Christensen explained, the Spanish authorities prohibited the production of amate and replaced it with imported European forms of paper.<sup>40</sup>

In the colony of New Spain, Indigenous artists and writers adopted many new European technologies, including alphabetic writing, European papers and inks, and bookbinding structures.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the Colonial Period (1521–1821), Indigenous artists and writers created hundreds of manuscripts. Surviving examples from this period, including the “Codex Aubin” (ca. 1576)<sup>42</sup> and the *Codex Azcatitlan* (1530),<sup>43</sup> demonstrate that artists and writers deftly learned new technologies, languages, and writing conventions. However, while some conformed to European standards, others employed historical techniques, signifying resistance.<sup>44</sup> A fascinating example that illustrates the complexities of cultural contact is *Siguense unos sermones de dominicas y de santos en lengua mexicana* (ca. 1540–1563, a.k.a. the “Newberry manuscript”).<sup>45</sup>

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38. See Sandstrom and Sandstrom, *Traditional Papermaking*.

39. Von Hagen, *The Aztec and Maya Papermakers*, 32. These destructive book-burning programs resulted in only fourteen surviving books from this period, as of 2024. Mundy, “Books in the Contact Zone.”

40. Christensen, “Bark Paper and Witchcraft in Indian Mexico,” 361.

41. Mundy, “Books in the Contact Zone.”

42. *Object: Xiuhpohualli of Tenochtitlan Codex | Códice Aubin*, 1576, The British Museum, Museum number Am2006.Drg.31219, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=codex&keyw\\_ord=aubin](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/search?keyword=codex&keyw_ord=aubin). The British Museum offers the following on the naming used for this item “Associated Title: Aubin Codex (Manuscript formerly named after Joseph Aubin, who owned the book in the 1800s and published a reproduction in 1893. Change of name proposed by Raul Macuil Martínez, Nahua archaeologist. ‘Xiuhpohualli’ refers to the pre-Columbian calendar used by Nahua Peoples and used in this book.”

43. *Codex Azcatitlan*, [Place of Publication Not Identified: Publisher Not Identified, 1530], Pdf. National Library of France, World Digital Library collection, The Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021668122/>.

44. The Newberry manuscript contains sermons, written in Nahuatl, which were created in order to impose Catholic doctrine on Indigenous peoples. See Bernardino de Sahagún, *Siguense unos sermones de dominicas y de santos en lengua mexicana* (Ayer 1485), ca. 1540–1563, Edward E. Ayer Collection, (Chicago, Newberry Library).

45. This essay refers to the work as *Siguense*.

The creation of this codex was overseen by Bernardino de Sahagún, a Franciscan friar who organized the creation of the *Florentine Codex*.<sup>46</sup> Although the Indigenous co-authors used the format of European codices, they demonstrated subversion by using native materials, likely amate, as the substrate.<sup>47</sup> Despite the destruction of books and the prohibition of amate, the methods continued, were passed down, and survived among Indigenous cultures, including the Otomi.

## The Otomi of San Pablito, Pahuatlán, Mexico: From Tourist Items to Artists Books

In the rural, mountainous town of San Pablito, Pahuatlán, located in the state of Puebla, Mexico, generations of Otomi artisans continue to manufacture amate.<sup>48</sup> For the Otomi, this is an “expression of indigeneity, an assertion of the collective rights of the community, and a connection to the past through techniques passed from one generation to the next.”<sup>49</sup> Samuel Correa, coordinator of the association *Ya Mumpot Ei Pati* (“those who make the healing amate paper”), emphasized the ways in which amate production is maintained through oral legends and contemporary artisanry by Otomi healers (*curanderos*) in San Pablito.<sup>50</sup> Curanderos cut amate into intricate representations of figural spirit entities (*muñecos*, dolls, or figures; singular: *muñeco*) for cures, treatments, rituals, and religious ceremonies.<sup>51</sup>

Beginning in the late 1960s, Otomi artisans began making materials and crafts composed of amate to sell in Mexico’s tourist markets.<sup>52</sup> The artworks presented in the markets included amate-based paintings, drawings, and collages. Amate became a highly commercialized staple within the local economy which led

46. The *Florentine Codex* is an encyclopedia of Mexica life and provides detailed information on the ceremonial use of paper in Mesoamerican civilizations. Bernardino de Sahagún and Indigenous collaborators, *General History of the Things of New Spain*, also called the *Florentine Codex*, vol. 1, 1575–1577, watercolor, paper, contemporary vellum Spanish binding, open (approx.): 32 x 43 cm, closed (approx.): 32 x 22 x 5 cm (Medicea Laurenziana Library, Florence, Italy). Mundy pointed out that the manuscript was “most likely not authored by Sahagún himself but rather co-authored with a group of highly trained Nahuatl-speaking intellectuals who worked in a Franciscan friary within Mexico City.” Barbara E. Mundy, “A Treasure Trove of Rare Native Paper,” The Newberry Library, August 2022, <https://www.newberry.org/blog/a-treasure-trove-of-rare-native-paper>.

47. Mundy, “A Treasure Trove of Rare Native Paper.” The materiality of the manuscript has not elicited any comment by scholars because, Mundy wrote, “it is unobtrusive . . . almost as if one of the goals of the papermaker was to perform a disappearing act.”

48. Eck, “Two Thousand Years of Paper Making Continues.”

49. Stephanie J. Beene et al., “Tomes! Enhancing Community and Embracing Diversity Through Book Arts,” *The Radical Teacher*, no. 112 (2018): 55–66, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48694676>.

50. Lizeth Gómez De Anda, “Papel amate, arte curativo,” *La Razón*, September 4, 2010, <https://www.azon.com.mx/cultura/papel-amate-arte-curativo/>. See also Beene et al., “Tomes!”

51. Robyn Fleming, “Power Paper: The Amate Manuscripts of Alfonso García Tellez,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, April 17, 2019, <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/in-circulation/2019/power-paper>.

52. María Eugenia D’Aubeterre Buznego et al., “Producción de papel amate y migración a estados unidos: los otomíes de San Pablito Pahuatlán, Puebla, México,” *Iberoamérica*, 15, no. 1 (2013): 271–312. [https://www.lakis.or.kr/upload/userFile/2015/4/30/09-Maria\\_Eugenio\\_DAubeterre\\_Buznego\\_Produccion\\_de\\_papel\\_amate\\_y\\_migracion\\_a\\_estados\\_unidos3.pdf](https://www.lakis.or.kr/upload/userFile/2015/4/30/09-Maria_Eugenio_DAubeterre_Buznego_Produccion_de_papel_amate_y_migracion_a_estados_unidos3.pdf).

to an overharvesting of native *Ficus* trees.<sup>53</sup> The Otomi learned that *Ficus* trees needed time to regrow the bark until another harvest. In response, the community sought alternative methods for creating amate: changing types of bark used, logistics of bark collection, and treatment of the bark fiber.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the people of San Pablito adapted to using other types of trees, such as the Jonote tree (*Helicarpus appendiculatus*), which can be debarked and processed into amate all year.<sup>55</sup>

Otomi artists, including Alfonso García Tellez, created artwork that expanded beyond the demands of the tourist market. Between the 1970s and 2000, García Tellez, a self-described curandero, produced a series of bound books made from light-cream and dark-brown amate with cut-out muñecos pasted onto amate substrates including *Historia de la Curación de Antigua de San Pablito Pahuatlán Puebla*.<sup>56</sup> Each muñeco is a mirror image, the result of “a long-established technique of folding pieces of amate in half and then cutting them to the desired shapes.”<sup>57</sup> These artist’s books include handwritten descriptions of the muñecos, the spiritual entities they represent, and the ceremonies in which they were used.<sup>58</sup> According to Fleming, “Over nearly four decades and with the help of members of his family, García Tellez made hundreds of copies of each book . . . however, no two copies are exactly alike—each copy is, by design, unique.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, throughout his work, García Tellez demonstrated the intrinsic relationship between amate and the preservation of ancestral knowledge.

### Conclusion: the Significance and Challenges of Amate in Rare Book Libraries and Special Collections Departments

The examples discussed herein are a few among many in institutions that own amate materials. As a delicate, unique, and hand-made material with ancient and contemporary uses, amate will take many forms in library collections—including fragments, documents, manuscripts, cut-out figurines, artists’ books, and bookbindings.<sup>60</sup> These collections illustrate “the important connections between the spoken word, hand-

53. Rosaura Citlalli López Binnquist, “The Endurance of Mexican Amate Paper: Exploring Additional Dimensions to the Sustainable Development Concept” (PhD diss., University of Twente, Netherlands, 2003), 172, [https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/279526376/thesis\\_Lopez\\_Binnquist.pdf](https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/279526376/thesis_Lopez_Binnquist.pdf).

54. López Binnquist, “The Endurance of Mexican Amate Paper,” 102–103.

55. López Binnquist, “The endurance of Mexican Amate Paper,” 174.

56. Alfonso García Tellez, “*Historia de la Curación de Antigua de San Pablito Pahuatlán Puebla (History of the Healing of the Ancestors of San Pablito Pahuatlán)*, L.2019.19,” private collection, Princeton University Art Museums collections online, <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/135868>. See also Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, Two manuscript amate books of Alfonso García Tellez, MS. 17014/1, <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/3488>.

57. Fleming, “Power Paper.”

58. Fleming, “Power Paper.”

59. Fleming, “Power Paper.”

60. It is important to note that amate is “shelf stable” with no inherent vice and will last a long time in a collection under proper conditions—the same conditions recommended for books and manuscripts.

made substrates, and cultural memory—in books and artworks.”<sup>61</sup> However, one significant challenge arises when these materials become institutionalized in rare book libraries and special collections departments. Although these institutions prioritize the preservation of fragile and valuable works, this practice inherently “disrupts access to collections.”<sup>62</sup> For example, because of the fragility and significance of the material aspects of *Siguense*, it is one of few items for which the Newberry Library restricts access. The Newberry Library mitigated some access restrictions by fully digitizing the manuscript and making it accessible online.

Stephanie J. Beene, Lauri M. González, and Suzanne M. Schadl challenged museums and cultural heritage stewards to rethink their approach to diversity and inclusion, asking: Instead of viewing rarified collections as dusty wares to be carefully preserved, how might we, as stewards of communal spaces and artworks, provide better access and outreach so that communities can interact with pieces that richly symbolize their homes, their traditions, their native languages, and their families? Many universities, museums, libraries, and archives write mission statements that speak to multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity, but words on the page mean little without context. How do we leverage these noble goals into performing better outreach and engagement with our communities and their collections, which are entrusted to us?<sup>63</sup>

Pegno and Farrar took this a step further. They advised that institutions turn toward

collaborating with partners and individuals in ways that do not privilege singular or dominant narratives [where] individuals become producers of knowledge, where exhibitions are being planned through a constellation of perspectives, and the objects displayed are created as a product of dialogue and collaboration.<sup>64</sup>

Another way for institutions to increase community interaction and engagement is through workshops and activity days. For example, the *Museo Nacional de Antropología* (Mexico’s National Museum of Anthropology) offers workshops encouraging children and adults to engage with amate traditions. In one workshop, participants learned about the journey of the Mexica from Aztlán to the Valley of Mexico and the formation of Tenochtitlan and were also taught how to create a

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61. Beene et al., “Tomes!”

62. Eva Athanasiu, “Belonging: Artists’ Books and Readers in the Library,” *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 34, no. 2 (2015): 330–38. <https://doi.org/10.1086/683388>.

63. Beene et al., “Tomes!”

64. Marianna Pegno and Chelsea Farrar, “Multivocal, Collaborative Practices in Community-based Art Museum Exhibitions,” in *Visitor-Centered Exhibitions and Edu-Curation in Art Museums*, ed. Pat Vileneuve and Ann Rowson Love, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 169.

small replica, using amate, of the *Boturini Codex* (ca. 1550, also known as *Tira de la Peregrinación*).<sup>65</sup>

Rare book and special collections librarians should provide enhanced access to amate materials through digital collections, collaborative partnerships, and community empowerment. To increase accessibility, rare book and special collections librarians should reconsider approaches to exhibits and outreach initiatives.<sup>66</sup> The Latin American Library at Tulane University uses its extensive collection of Mesoamerican, colonial, and modern amate materials in exhibitions and class instructions. By incorporating amate materials in object-based library instruction, librarians can create interactive experiences that encourage critical engagement and active learning. As Arnold pointed out,

Given its long history in Central Mexico, paper can serve as the point of orientation for examining radically different worldviews. Paper serves as the material point of conjunction that navigates between Indigenous and colonial contexts. The place of paper in materially orienting these distinct worldviews moves us into a direct, and often uncomfortable, confrontation with the otherness of Nahua understandings.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, the use of amate materials can enhance understanding and appreciation of Nahua, Mesoamerican, and Mexican cultural heritage, identity, and history.

Amate was, and continues to be, an integral element in Indigenous religious systems, the transmission of information, and the preservation of knowledge and cultural heritage. It is essential for rare book and special collections libraries—particularly those specializing in Latin America—to prioritize the collection of amate in all its diverse forms. As both physical and cultural objects, amate materials offer rare book and special collections librarians the opportunity to promote meaningful community engagement, enhance collective expertise, thoughtfully preserve cultural heritage, facilitate the transformative use of primary sources by researchers, and enrich our understanding of the book- and paper-making traditions in Mesoamerica and Mexico.

65. *Códice Boturini / Tira de la Peregrinación*, Lorenzo Boturini: Colecciónista, <http://mediateca.inah.gob.mx/repositorio/islandora/object/codice%3A605>, Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Dr. Eusebio Dávalos Hurtado, Mexico City, Mexico. For an example event, see: Museo Nacional de Antropología, “Comunicación Educativa. Códice Boturini: taller familiar I.,” [https://mna.inah.gob.mx/agenda\\_detalle\\_v3.php?pl=Codice\\_Boturini\\_Taller\\_familiar](https://mna.inah.gob.mx/agenda_detalle_v3.php?pl=Codice_Boturini_Taller_familiar), archived August 31, 2024, at [https://web.archive.org/web/20240831195945/https://mna.inah.gob.mx/agenda\\_detalle\\_v3.php?pl=Codice\\_Boturini\\_Taller\\_familiar](https://web.archive.org/web/20240831195945/https://mna.inah.gob.mx/agenda_detalle_v3.php?pl=Codice_Boturini_Taller_familiar).

66. Beene et al., “Tomes!” The authors recognized the significance of collaborating with communities and using multisensory components in the design of their exhibition at the University of New Mexico.

67. Phillip P. Arnold, “Paper Ties to Land: Indigenous and Colonial Material Orientations to the Valley of Mexico,” *History of Religions* 35, no. 1 (1995): 29.

## Book Reviews

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*RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* reviews books, reports, new periodicals, databases, websites, blogs, and other electronic resources, as well as exhibition, book, and auction catalogs pertaining directly and indirectly to the fields of rare book librarianship, manuscripts curatorship, archives management, and special collections administration. Publishers, librarians, and archivists are asked to send appropriate publications for review or notice to the Reviews Editor.

It may not be possible for all books received to be reviewed in *RBM*, but the reviews appearing in the print journal are supplemented by a larger number of reviews published digitally on the *RBM* digital platform at <https://rbm.acrl.org/index.php/rbm/pages/view/reviews>. Books or publication announcements should be sent to the Reviews Editor: John Henry Adams, [j.adams@missouri.edu](mailto:j.adams@missouri.edu), Research and Instruction Librarian, University of Missouri, Columbia MO, 65201.

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**Georgios Boudalis.** *On the Edge: Endbands in the Bookbinding Traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean*. Ann Arbor, MI: The Legacy Press, 2023. Hardcover, xii, 334p. \$80 (ISBN 9781953421111).

In the preface to the original 1986 edition of *Headbands: How to Work Them*—long considered by many to be the first stop on the bookshelf when faced with an endband conundrum—Jane Greenfield and Jenny Hille assert that, “the number of variants [of endbands] is so great that it would be impossible to identify and describe them all.<sup>1</sup>” Georgios Boudalis—at least as it concerns the Eastern Mediterranean manuscript world—has given Greenfield and Hille a run for their money, and then some. From their modest twelve, Boudalis takes us to a bountiful fifty, all documented, described, and diagrammed in meticulous detail.

*On the Edge: Endbands in the Bookbinding Traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean* is a book of colossal scope. Begun as an article describing a handful of endbands found on Byzantine bindings in the journal *The Paper Conservator*, the endeavor expanded via the author’s doctoral work at the libraries of St. Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai, Egypt, and Iviron Monastery in Mount Athos, Greece. The present volume benefits from the close examination Boudalis was able to conduct of those collections, as well as those held in other repositories. More than 300 manuscripts from across the Eastern Mediterranean world from Late Antiquity to the twentieth century have been cited.

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1. Jane Greenfield and Jenny Hille, *Headbands: How to Work Them* (Oak Knoll Books, 1986), vii.

If the book's scope is colossal, its approach is comprehensive. It is a remarkable accomplishment to create order, to classify, to name the observed, and to understand its functionality. Fittingly, the book begins with a Linnaean aphorism, "If you do not know the names of things, the knowledge of them is lost, too" (xii). And like Linnaeus, Boudalis has crafted a systematic, descriptive taxonomy. With scientific precision, Boudalis groups endband types and variants into seven families that reflect their methods and materials of construction: loop stitch and blanket stitch; wound; bead; chevron; warps and wefts; stitched and stuck; and braided and interlaced.

Because similar techniques can be evident across multiple geographies, time periods, and cultures, the organizational schema is based purely on these technical aspects; Boudalis deliberately avoids names with specific religious or cultural connotations apart from points of clarification (i.e., Armenian, Islamic, Syriac, etc.). Rather, the endband names reflect the experience of the maker (i.e. front-and-back-bead, wound-without-core, split-chevron). This is as logical as it is descriptive and holds true to the materiality of the object although, admittedly, by the time one gets to full-wrapped-on-multiple-additional-cores-flat-and-vertical-twined, one does find oneself a bit knotted.

The book is organized into three sections, accompanied by three appendices and an extensive bibliography. Part 1, General Information sets the intention: previous scholarship is discussed, along with the purpose and function endbands serve as binding components, their evolution, and their literary and iconographical evidence. Boudalis' taxonomy is laid out and presented in chart form. Notably, the codices under consideration here generally do not include printed books, as Boudalis chooses to focus on binding structures made according to Eastern Mediterranean traditions and many bindings on printed books from Eastern Mediterranean lands bear imported influences from Western Europe. Hybridized bindings, such as the *alla Greca* style of binding found in Italy and France during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are touched upon, however. Of particular interest is a section that draws connections between endbands and textiles, which, as the author notes, is certainly an area worthy of further research. Later in the book, specific comparisons are drawn between endband working and tunic, curtain, and mat edges, as well as basketry, and even fence making.

Part 2, Definitions, Materials, and Processes offers exactly that, all with extensive diagrams and illustrations (more on these later); it gives the reader a basic understanding of the intricacies to come. It is in its third and most substantial part that the book comes into its own: The Endbands. Working through his seven identified families of endbands—generally, from simple to compound, primary to secondary components, fewer cores to many cores, with some interesting extra twists—Boudalis details each endband and variant in turn. The entries include: previous bibliography when available (many never before published); class (simple or compound, primary or second-

ary); historical context and dating (with citations of specific manuscripts upon which the endband appears); remarks (regarding method, design, comparisons to other examples, and other points of interest); materials (cores and threads); and technique (in step-by-step illustrated detail that is both a dissection of the process and a very followable set of instructions).

This leads us to a discussion of one of the most remarkable facets of the book: its 424 diagrams, illustrations, and color photographs. The endband diagrams were first sketched by the author in pencil, then refined in pen, and finally rendered digitally in the open-access software Inkspace (139). Boudalis intends them to be “a visual synopsis of their making” (67), and indeed they are, with the finished product to the left and an “exploded view” (67) to the right, as if the endband were being worked from left to right. Directional arrows show thread movements; numbers correspond to steps in the explanatory text describing the technique, while circles indicate points at which one thread rests while the action is taken up by another. An accompanying profile diagram gives a view of the endband construction from the side, in a cutaway fashion that instantly communicates the composition of cores and how those cores relate to the bookblock.

The diagrams are intricate and detailed, yet practical; they are, in fact, essential for comprehending how these complex objects were fashioned. Similarly, the photographs are chosen with care to illustrate concepts in the text and encourage the reader to linger, to trace, to follow along. The labor-intensive nature of creating the diagrams is evident; moreover, one is struck by the fact that the author has not only identified and classified the endbands but recreated them. He knows and understands their composition as a maker and that knowledge benefits his scholarship. When an endband’s construction remains unclear or elusive, reasonable speculation (always identified) is made as to how it might have been done, with reference to modern binding practices and most likely method. The inclusion of this abundance of rich material is to the credit of the Legacy Press, which does not disappoint in its typical luxury treatment in producing a book (yes, the volume has endbands—how embarrassing if it didn’t!—although they are regrettably the modern decorative type as opposed to any sort of Byzantine splendor). As a point of mild criticism, the text might have done with some additional proofreading in terms of spelling, word choice, and punctuation, but that is not to detract from its quality or effectiveness.

Although the emphasis thus far has been on the technical, the book’s approach, as stated in its introduction, is two-fold: to offer the material examination traditionally sought by bookbinders, book conservators, and conservation scientists, and to provide the historical and textual context necessary for book historians, with emphasis placed on the utility of understanding endbands in the context of, for example,

codicological description and provenance research (5). With its focus on endband construction, the book artist interested in historical forms and techniques could also gain inspiration from the endbands' inherent beauty. There is, of course, no denying the book's technicality—it is not a breezy introduction and assumes some previous knowledge of book structures—but the non-technician should certainly not shy away nor be intimidated by the diagrams. There is much to be learned here for readers from a variety of backgrounds, and the book will particularly appeal to those who are eager and enthused that such thorough, evidence-based work has been undertaken by an expert.

Boudalis' impeccable scholarship will make *On the Edge* an authoritative work on the subject for some time to come, although the author is clear to state that more discoveries are yet to be made—even providing helpful guidance on identifying and describing endbands according to his taxonomy in one of the appendices. Indeed, the mind turns to other repositories with Eastern Mediterranean manuscript holdings to explore; with the recent increase in binding descriptions included in catalog records and binding images in digitization initiatives, more potential is becoming available all the time. For now, the author is to be congratulated on unraveling the mysteries of these intricate, often lovely—even dazzling—components of these important bindings. — Diane E. Bockrath, Hagley Museum and Library

**Jessica Brantley.** *Medieval English Manuscripts and Literary Forms*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. Hardcover, 346 p. \$65. (ISBN: 9780812253849).

A handbook for the use and understanding of medieval English manuscripts is a significant undertaking. A good version of such a handbook is even more significant—but it can pay dividends for a generation as it introduces a new crop of students to the field, while also advancing scholarship. In addition, the benefits of creating a central repository for information relating to such manuscripts include the very significant opportunity to allow those who don't have access to the physical manuscript the ability to participate in its examination and interpretation. Even in the age of digitized manuscripts, this is important. The new monograph from Jessica Brantley is one such book; *Medieval English Manuscripts and Literary Forms* ably threads the needle of providing content of interest for scholars and teachers, while remaining an accessible work for students. Of note, it is also at times visually arresting with sixteen pages of well-printed full color plates.

Brantley's book is made up of two parts: 'The anatomy of the medieval manuscript,' followed by twelve case studies. The first part provides an introduction to important

concepts, amply illustrated by examples, while the case studies are themed examples: Case Study I is titled ‘Literature’ and uses “The Moore Bede” (Cambridge University Library MS Kk.5.16), Case Study X is titled ‘Mediation’ and uses the example of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (BL MS Add 61823). The final section includes a glossary, a bibliography of primary works cited, and suggestions for further reading. Throughout, the writing is admirably clear with descriptions of technical or visual concepts that are easy to understand.

The first part of this book works through the various parts of a medieval manuscript, including the method of their creation and how they were used; Brantley describes this as “anatomiz[ing] medieval manuscripts into their component parts” (113). This gives the reader all the tools they need in order to understand and interpret medieval English manuscripts—whether a first-time student, or a more experienced researcher needing to deepen or refresh their knowledge. Brantley’s approach is to rigorously define terms initially, as illustrated by the introduction, which begins by asking questions such as, “What does it mean to read medieval books? . . . What does it mean to *read*? ” (Page 3, emphasis original). Brantley answers these and other questions in a serious yet approachable way, ensuring that readers understand important terminology and the meaning and context of manuscripts and how to read them. At times the history of writing can seem over-detailed: first- or second-century wooden tablets from Vindolanda seem to be quite far removed from medieval manuscripts, but it’s a tough balancing act to provide context without going overboard, and Brantley, mostly, succeeds.

The glossary and definitions are copiously illustrated and range from ‘medium,’ to tools used in book production, to the scripts and abbreviations used. These are illustrated with examples from a variety of repositories (primarily Yale and the British Library). Some of these illustrations are particularly noteworthy, such as that of Bodleian Library MS Lat. Liturgy. E. 17, fol. 19r (74) which includes instructions for an illuminator that were never fulfilled, resulting in a large empty space on the page. Among other practical sections is a ‘Template for manuscript description’ (110) which is used in practice in the twelve case studies, and can easily be used in an introductory course for manuscript study as the template for a student assignment.

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The second part of the book is made up of twelve case studies. Brantley describes the twelve manuscripts as ‘exceptional outliers’ that help to illustrate, through the characteristics that make them exceptional, important points about medieval literary practice and study. Within each case study, there are several sections, including a ‘catalog-style description’ followed by a thorough essay providing a summary and context for the manuscript’s importance, as well as a selection of images and an in-depth bibliography. This structure enables the reader to treat Brantley’s work simultaneously as a reference work (paging through the glossary and definitions), and a scholarly work in its own right. It should be said, however, that Brantley’s writing is very clear and readable, so this work can be easily read front to back. Each of the case studies is included to demonstrate a theme, including ‘afterlives,’ ‘ownership,’ ‘authorship,’ and ‘editing.’ Case study VIII (‘Writing’ – The Ellesmere Chaucer, Huntington Library MS EL26 C9) is a good example of the benefits of this approach. It expands significantly on terms introduced earlier in the work (there is a short section on writing on pages 31–35, which introduces terms such as “scriptorium,” “hands,” and “scribes”), and gives the reader the opportunity to see these concepts used in practice. This structure works well to create an opportunity for readers to think more deeply about the topics raised by the manuscript in question, while also seeing the manuscript in context.

Importantly, Brantley’s case studies are all manuscripts that have been fully digitized and are freely available online. Making use of these digitized manuscripts enables readers to more fully interact with and explore the works that Brantley selected, viewing them in their totality. The images included in the book are extremely clear—those provided to illustrate terms and concepts clearly do so; those images that accompany the case studies are brightly and lushly reproduced. They provide a great way of attracting the interest of those who may not have had in-person interactions with medieval manuscripts before. In the preface Brantley states that “I hope that this book will make a wide-ranging introduction possible, *especially at institutions with small collections of rare books, geographically distant from large repositories*” (xiv, emphasis added). Each case study includes a bibliography divided into the following sections: Digital facsimile, Catalogs and editions, and Secondary studies. This allows scholars of all levels to find out more, and to further explore the manuscript for themselves.

It is worth mentioning that, unfortunately, six of the twelve case studies selected by Brantley are housed at the British Library (BL), and thus their digitized facsimiles were not available at the time of writing this review, due to the BL’s ongoing issues with a cyber-attack. While this is a blow, it is hopefully temporary, and images and facsimiles of these manuscripts exist elsewhere in most cases. This demonstrates the point noted above: that even when one can generally rely on digitized copies of manuscripts being available, there is value to including images of key plates in works such as this one. While this could not have been predicted or planned for, it is deeply

unfortunate because Brantley rightly gave a lot of thought to only including works that are fully digitized, as working from the full manuscript certainly enhances the power and interest of this book.

In summary, Brantley's work is one that is useful, timely, and appropriate for readers looking for an introduction to the discipline, as well as those seeking something that allows them to experience the beginnings of what it means to study a manuscript in depth. It could be particularly useful as a teaching tool for students of medieval English manuscripts and would work well in conjunction with the digitized manuscripts that Brantley makes use of, or other manuscripts that students are able to interact with at their home institution. As well as being a teaching tool or introductory work for students new to the study of manuscripts, it may also be of use to those more experienced in the study of manuscripts from other geographic areas who might need a brief introduction to what makes English medieval manuscripts unique. *Medieval English Manuscripts and Literary Forms* makes use of modern digitized manuscripts while also hosting enough images and plates of manuscripts to give the reader a real sense of what it means to use medieval English manuscripts. —*Joshua Hutchinson, University of Southern California Libraries*