Scattered Leaves: preserving our piece of the Ege Puzzle

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A leaf blew our way...
Conservation...
Photography...
Re-housing...
Digitization...
Reconstruction...
“These Ms. Leaves are for exhibition and illustrative purposes rather than for study. They have been extracted from damaged volumes which were no longer of any use as books” (David C. Appelt, University Librarian, 1945 – 1979, memo to President W.P. Thompson, 29th January, 1958)
Gifts. The major gift since the last meeting has been a collection of leaves from mediaeval manuscripts, presented by the Dr. Walter Murray Chapter, I.O.D.E., who will pay the cost of $750 over a period of a few years.

February 14, 1958

Miss Dorothy Wheatland, Secretary,
Dr. Walter Murray Chapter, I.O.D.E.,
c/o Y.W.C.A.,
Saskatoon, Sask.

Dear Miss Wheatland:

Our Board of Governors were very pleased to learn that the Dr. Walter Murray Chapter of the I.O.D.E. have undertaken to buy for the Murray Memorial Library a collection of 50 mounted leaves from mediaeval manuscripts. This is a very generous gift, and on behalf of the Board I would like to thank you and your fellow members most sincerely for it.

Very truly yours,

W. P. Thompson,
President.
Conservation...

- Conservation analysis
- Acid free vs low alkaline
- Surface contact
- Taped hinges
- One box
Photography...

- Traditional vs digital
- Choice of photographer
- Equipment
- Size and color standards
- Care of leaves
- Lighting
- Shadowing
[Imagery and text from an ancient manuscript in Latin, with ornate borders and decorative elements. The text is densely packed and written in a cursive script commonly used in medieval scriptoria.]
Requiem. Alme qui

Exsultet

Amen
Re-housing...

- Unbuffered matting
- No surface contact
- No attaching
- Series of holding boxes
Digitization...

- Scan from 4 by 5 slides
- High resolution TIFFs
- Infinitely repeatable
- Research/teaching tool
- Facsimiles for preservation
Reconstruction project...

- Contacted box holders
- SSHRC “Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada,” $10,000, Jan. 2005
- “Scattered Leaves,” June, 2005
- “Remaking the Book,” June 2005
- Formation of taskforce
Remaking the Book
Digitally Reconstructing the Otto Ege Manuscript Portfolios
June 13th and 14th, 2005 University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon

In the early decades of the 20th century, a Cleveland book collector named Otto Ege (pronounced eg-ee) removed the pages from 50 medieval manuscript books, dividing the pages among 40 boxes, and sold the boxes around the world. Most of the boxes now reside in university and public library collections in the United States and Canada. The remainder have yet to be located, and are very likely in private collections. The pages contained in each box were created between 1100 and 1600 A.D. in medieval scriptoria in Europe and England. They were written by hand (the printing press was not invented until 1450), usually by monks, on parchment and vellum. Some are beautifully illustrated in the margins, others are illustrated with gold. Almost all of the 50 pages in each box are religious in content: bibles, hymnals, breviaries and masses compose the majority of texts from which the pages were removed. Many of these books attracted little or no attention for the first half-century of their existence, largely because scholars were interested in more famous or unique manuscripts. Also, many libraries, having purchased the boxes in the 1940s and 1950s, lost track of them until the 1990s, when facility upgrades, or whole scale moves into new archival premises, unearthed the boxes once more.

It is now apparent that many of the leaves in the Ege books have real significance for scholars and the general public. They tell us much about the history of text production in the medieval period, when the book began its rise to prominence and about the monastic culture that produced them. Many are exquisitely illuminated, all reveal the human labor and devotion that went into their creation.

Remaking the Book will gather representatives from Ege manuscript-holding institutions in Canada and the United States. We will discuss how to create an "Otto Ege Medieval Manuscript Database" whose purpose will be to digitally reconstruct some of the books from which the pages were originally cut, including the valuable "Beauraing Missal" of northern France from the late 13th century. Scholars with expertise in fundamental aspects of the Ege manuscripts will speak about manuscript production and circulation, and about the process by which Otto Ege collected, disassembled and sold the leaves. Concurrent with the Symposium is Scattered Leaves, a public exhibit of the University of Saskatchewan's Ege manuscripts at the University's Gordon Sondgrove Gallery from June 7-23 and a public lecture on the manuscripts and their collector by Dr. Barbara Shaylor, former Director of Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, on the evening of June 13th.

Remaking the Book is funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
Next steps...

- Focus on Beauvais missal
- Continue to locate box holders
- U.S. (NEH) and Canadian (SSHRC) funding
- “Remaking the book,” June 2007
- “Scattered leaves,” June 2007
Questions?