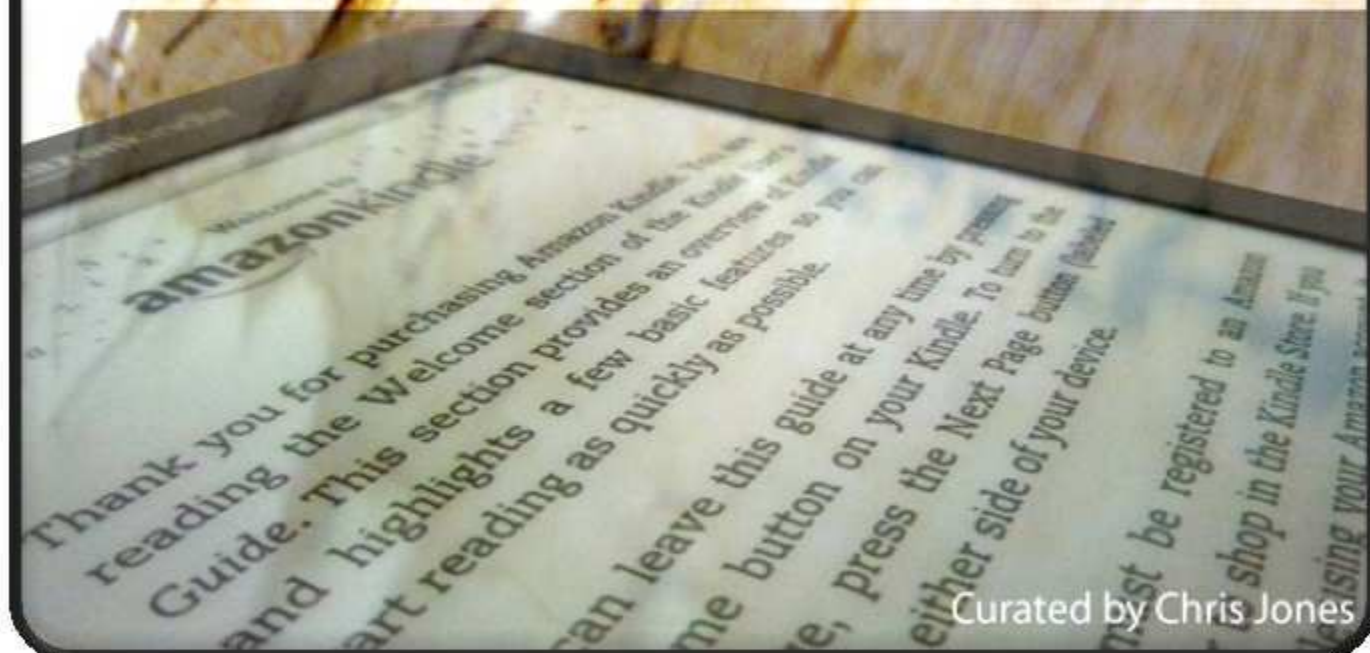




From Papyrus to Kindle:

a glimpse at the history of printing in the Western world



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Introduction

Books all over the world continue to undergo an evolution, which began many centuries ago, to achieve the appearance that we are familiar with today. In both the Eastern world and the West, practically every aspect of the printed book has changed. From the physical appearance of the book, to the location of the title page, to the variety of production methods and uses of illustrations, and from papyrus scrolls, to bound volumes, to e-readers, books today may bear no resemblance to their previous incarnations.

Follow along as we examine some of the aspects of the evolution of printing in Western culture.

Physical Format

As with computer technology, the vessel of the printed word shows a tendency to shrink as time goes on. For example, Johannes Herolt's *Sermones discipuli de tempore, et de sanctis* (case 2), printed in 1477, with its solid wood covers and manuscript scrap spine cover and weighing just shy of nine pounds, would probably have been read and used on a reading stand or desk, rather than held in one's hands or lap. The rubrication (red letters and characters) and decorated initials, added by hand, hint that the book might have been commissioned by a wealthy patron. While printed using a movable type printing press, the typeface still resembles a scribe's handwriting.

In the wake of the Renaissance, which saw the publication of Herolt's *Sermones* and the invention and increased popularity of Johann Gutenberg's printing from movable metal type, a new period of thought and deed emerged. By the time of the 1671 edition of Lily's *Short Introduction of Grammar* (case 2), a number of discussions, publications, and lectures had taken place that would help guide the European continent toward a new age: the Enlightenment. This new era, with its new ways of thinking

about – and looking at – the world, would bring with it a renewed thirst for intellectual stimulation and communication. People were clamoring for new information, which meant a higher demand for books. As a result, many publishers/printers (at this point, the same person usually still carried out both jobs) found it to be cheaper and faster to create books that were smaller and less “pretty.” Also in the name of ease of access and portability, there was a movement away from using real wood in the covers of books in favor of a pressed paper material. The pressed paper could be covered with leather and maintain its durability, yet be small enough and light enough to be convenient to carry. The use of a variety of pressed paper or cardboard is still common today. All of these factors contributed to more members of the literate public having easier access to new knowledge and new ideas.

By the 18th century, the style pendulum had begun to swing in the other direction, and a there arose an increased desire for books from which a certain aesthetic pleasure could be derived, while still placing a value on intellectual content. Two examples of this can be seen in the 1773 edition of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury’s *Characteristicks of men, manners, opinions, times* and the 1766 edition of Virgil’s works. In each instance, the college

libraries' copies are bound in leather and feature gilt tooling and gilt edges. Inside each volume, the margins are wide and the text is preceded by large engraved frontispieces. These copies, therefore, would likely have been owned by someone who was at least as interested in having beautiful books as in the content of those books.

Evolution of the title page

The title page, one of the most familiar parts of a book, has not always appeared the way it does today. In fact, it was not uncommon for early printed books to have no title page at all. Instead, the information that we are used to finding on the title page was found on the very last page of a book in a paragraph called a colophon. The title, author, and year would have been printed in the same font size, while the printer garnered a little more attention with the use of a printer's mark, as seen in the Boethius example (case 3). As time passed, some of this information was more heavily emphasized by moving it forward to the first leaf of the book, which would become the title page. For example, in *Polyanthea* (case 3) one can see that the title and some of the publication information is now on

a page in the front. Furthermore, the title is in a larger font, found at the top of the page, and is printed in a different color. What may be considered a printer's device was also retained: the men working at a printing press with the name of the printer on the machine. However, some of the information is still in a colophon, including the date of printing. And as more time passed, more of the information moved to the title page as the colophon shrank in size and popularity. By the time Hooker published his work in 1617 (case 3), it would have been rare to find a colophon in a book, as most, if not all, of the publication information had been moved to the title page. Even though the use of a printer's device steeply declined by the end of the 17th century, the 1732 printing of Newton's *Arithmetica* (case 3) still displays such a device. As the printing and publishing professions began to diverge and become more distinct from one another, publishers continued to use a device to make their works unique, which is a practice still used today. One example would be the image of a penguin used by Penguin Paperbacks.

Illustrations

Much like the physical aspect of the book and the title page, illustrations have also undergone their own evolution. The history of the illustration is as long and varied as the history of the printed word, and in fact the two are closely intertwined.

For several hundred years, scribes in the West decorated their manuscripts by hand. The scribes were frequently paid by the well-to-do to decorate their books or codices, though occasionally a scribe would take it upon himself to doodle in the margins or add small scenes, called miniatures, to illustrate a phrase or passage from the text being copied.

It wasn't until Gutenberg developed his famous press that illustrations in books developed in popularity and began to be viewed as an art in their own right. Wood-cut illustrations existed prior to the Gutenberg press. The Chinese, for example, are known to have printed illustrations using carved wooden blocks over 1100 years ago. But after the invention of the printing press the illustrations created from the wood-cuts began to be much more widely available, thanks to the volume

of books and the speed with which they were being printed on the press.

In the early 1500s a new method of creating illustrations began to develop: artists and metal workers began cutting images into the surface of a copper plate. Using this method, called intaglio, more shading of an image was possible, allowing more detail and nuance to be included in the image. While the wood-cut method of illustrating text did not fade completely from the scene, copper-plate illustrations certainly became the most common method of illustrating works.

However, in the early 19th century, wood-cut illustrations experienced a resurgence. Many artists began to draw their designs directly on the block of wood before engraving them, which became such a popular method of engraving that it grew into a technical trade that was carried out in many shops. A “white line” method of wood block printing was also developed, in which the lines of an image were engraved on a piece of wood, leaving the final print with a black background and the lines of the image white. This resurgence of wood-engraving was heavily influenced by the arrival of photography in the middle of the 19th century. Now, instead of drawing designs on the wood block, a photographic

image was able to be developed directly onto the block, which was then engraved into the wood.

In fact, the period beginning in the late 18th century and lasting through the end of the 19th century saw many advances in illustrative material. Aloys Senefelder invented lithography (the process of using a smooth, flat surface, typically stone, on which the image to be printed is ink-receptive and the blank area ink-repellent) in the final years of the 1700s and continued to refine his new method into the 1800s. In addition to lithography, the invention of – and innovations related to – the camera led to changes in creating wood block prints as well as photo-engraving. Though some of these methods of creating illustrations are centuries old, each of them continues to be used in some form or other today.

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Acknowledgements

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Works included in the exhibition

Case 1

Amazon Kindle. (Gift of Joel Spiegel '78.)

The book of common prayer, 1717.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The works of our ancient, learned, & excellent English poet, Jeffrey Chaucer*, 1687. (Gift of George F. Pinne.)

Morris, William. *Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair*, 1895. (Gift of George F. Pinne.)

Reinke de Vos. *Opus poeticum de admirabili fallacia et astutia uulpe culae Reinikes*, 1567.

Schulz, H.C. *French illuminated manuscripts*, 1958. A leafbook containing a fragment of an original manuscript dating from the last half of the 15th century.

Case 2

Herolt, Johannes. *Sermones discipuli de tempore, et de sanctis*, 1477.

Lily, William. *Short introduction of grammar*, 1671. (Gift of Peter Ridgeway Jordan.)

Melanchthon, Philipp. *Initia doctrinae physicae*, 1563.

The new cyclopaedia : or, Universal dictionary of arts and sciences, [18--]

Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of. *Characteristicks of men, manners, opinions, times*, 1773.

Virgil. *Publii Virgilii Maronis Bucolica*, 1766. (Gift of George F. Pinne.)

Case 3

Boethius. *De consolazione philosophiae*, 1489. (Gift of George F. Pinne.)

Hooker, Richard. *Of the laws of ecclesiastical politie*, 1617.

Nani Mirabelli, Domenico. *Polyanthea : opus suauiissimis Floribus exornatum*, 1512. (Gift of Peter Ridgeway Jordan.)

Newton, Isaac. *Arithmetica universalis*, 1732.

Case 4

Books of Jeremiah and Baruch, early 15th century. Manuscript fragments of the Old Testament books.

Darwin, Erasmus. *The botanic garden*, 1795.

Fermin, Philippe. *D. Phillip Fermins Abhandlungen von der Surinamischen Kröte oder Pipa*, 1776. (Gift of H.W. Norris.)

Nuremburg chronicle leaf, 1493.