Rare Books Well Done

A ridiculously short introduction to rare book cataloging
What is Rare Book Cataloging?

Rare book cataloging pays special attention to certain features that make a particular imprint or copy unique:

- Books from the letter-press period (pre-1845), which were produced using pre-industrial technologies
- Special editions with numbered prints
- Publications that are of specific significance to an institution (faculty publications)
- Individual books that have important inscriptions or were owned by a significant person

Rare book cataloging often describes the “book as artifact”
DCRM(B)

- **Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books)**
- Published 2007 as successor to DCRB (1991) and BDRB (1981)
- Created and maintained by the Rare Book and Manuscript Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)
DCRM(B) and RDA

• The Bibliographic Standards Committee is neutral regarding RDA, neither encouraging nor discouraging agencies regarding implementation of RDA-acceptable DCRM records.

• The Bibliographic Standards Committee is currently working on Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (RDA Edition) (DCRMR) and an accompanying set of policy statements to RDA. (See DCRM RDA Revision section for more details.) For now, agencies creating DCRM records should proceed as follows (apply one of the following)

• Continue to catalog according to DCRM(B) and AACR2 for descriptive cataloging, using RDA guidelines for access points; or

• Create RDA records by applying the provisions for rare materials included in the RDA BIBCO Standard Record (BSR). This instruction applies also to agencies not producing BIBCO records.
  • If used, the BSR for rare materials should be followed consistently throughout the entire description; it is not to be applied only to selected areas or elements.
  • The MARC record leader should be coded as following ISBD (coded i in LDR/18), with both ‡e rda and ‡e dcrmb (directly after the language of cataloging (‡b)) in the 040 field.

BSC statement on DCRM and RDA (Updated April 15, 2020)
MARC Fields and Subfields

• In addition to the usual MARC fields in cataloging, the following fields warrant special attention

• 040 ǂe dcrmb
• 246 Variant titles are more important in dcrmb, due to transcription rules, spelling ambiguities, half-titles, caption titles, etc
• 300 Note pages or leaves if numbered as such, if unnumbered leaves are printed on one side, pages on both sides
• 500 Notes (very important in dcrmb, include signature count if feasible)
• 510 Citation/reference note
• 561 Ownership, custodial history (provenance)
• 562 Copy and version identification
• 563 Binding information
• 590 Local notes
• 700 ǂe printer or ǂe former owner
• 752 Hierarchical place (place of publication; Country > City)
Researching and Processing Special Collections Books
Determine what you have

- Watch for changed forms of names or Latinized names
  - Common English or German names may have –ius appended, which can change to –ium, -io or –ii when used grammatically
    - E.g. Sebastianus Schmidius = Sebastian Schmid
    - E.g. per Thomam Morum = by Thomas More
  - Some names may be translations into Latin or Greek
    - E.g. Latin Sartorius = English Tailor = German Schneider
- u/v and i/j may present problems in transcription
  - Typographically, a capital U is usually represented as V and capital J as I
  - Titles using only capital letters may use V throughout
  - A final lowercase i is often represented as j
Editions and Printings

- Editions are usually characterized by editorial or redactional involvement.
- Since new printings usually required new typesetting, differences between imprints are more significant in letterpress printing.
- In addition to information provided in the printing statement, imprints may be distinguished by:
  - Spelling
  - Illustrations
  - Typographic layout
To identify a particular printing and to help distinguish it from other printings of the same work, a citation is made to a published bibliography, index or database (ESTC, VD16, etc.)

Citations are typically noted in a 510 field

The standard citation form of a bibliographic source is found in http://rbms.info/scf/ (also useful for finding bibliographic resources for identifying rare books)
Abbreviations

Titles are sometimes preceded by Latin abbreviations

- AMDG – *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* = For the greater glory of God
- VDMIA = *Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternam* = The word of the Lord remains forever
- QDBV = *Quod Deus Bene Vertat* = May God grant success

- These are mottoes and are not part of the title (do not enter in 245, but record in a 500 note)
Collation and Format

- Folio (folded once)
- Quarto (4to; folded twice)
- Octavo (8vo; folded three times)
Signatures

- Small letters or symbols followed by a number used to mark a leaf’s place in a gathering or collation
- Each gathering has its own letter or symbol
- Leaves with a gathering are numbered sequentially
- Usually printed at the bottom of the recto of a leaf
  - Recto = front of leaf (odd page numbers)
  - Verso = back of page (even page numbers)
Collation and Format

- Collation numbering differs from printer to printer.
- Signatures are usually more reliable than page or leaf numbers and may be important pointers to an incomplete volume.
- In long books, the first 23 gatherings are typically designated A-Z and subsequent gatherings follow a variation:
  - AA-ZZ, a-z, Aa-Zz, etc.
- Preliminary materials (preface, dedication, etc.) often follows a separate pattern, using a different set of letters or symbols (¶, *, α).
Collation and Format

Quarto volumes with 4 leaves in each gathering, usually have signatures numbered in 4’s
• Typically only leaves 1-3 are signed

Octavo volumes with 8 leaves in each gathering, usually have signatures numbered in 8’s
• Typically only leaves 1-5 are signed

Folio volumes can be numbered in any multiple of 2, but are frequently numbered in 6’s or 8’s
Signature Formulas

• Shorthand description of gatherings in a book
• Typically cited in a note field (500)
• Superscript numbers designate gatherings, regular size numbers designate specific leaves
  • $A^4$ = a gathering with 4 leaves
  • $A4$ = the fourth leaf within a gathering
• W is not used in signatures, I and J are represented by the same letter as are U and V
• Unsigned gatherings at the beginning of a signature sequence are designated $\pi$ (pi), unsigned gatherings elsewhere within a signature sequence are designated $\chi$ (chi)
Examples of Signature formulas

- A-E⁸ = 5 gatherings (A-E) with 8 leaves each (40 leaves or 80 pages)
- A-D⁴ (-D⁴) = 3 gatherings (A-C) with 4 leaves each and 1 gathering (D) with 3 leaves (15 leaves or 30 pages)
- a-z⁸, A-F⁸ (F⁸ verso blank) = 29 gatherings with 8 leaves each (232 leaves or 464 pages)
Book Binding

• Until the middle of the 19th century, publishers and printers were not involved in book binding
• All books were essentially issued as paperbacks and then bound by the owner
• No “original binding” prior to the 19th century

Sammelband

• A collection of separate publications bound together by a former owner
• Some collections are topical, some are based on a common author and some are simply based on the fact that the titles are of similar size
• Each title must have a separate bibliographic description
  • However, some publications may have distinct title pages for various parts of a book, i.e. the presence of a title page may not indicate a separate publication
  • Check for other clues (continuous pagination or signatures)
  • If possible, confirm extent of publication in reference database (ESTC, VD16, etc.)
Binding Features

• Segmented spine, resulting from cords used to tie the gatherings
• Clasps & catches
• Leather stretched over wooden boards (later paperboard)
• Half binding = Spine and corners, often over marbled paperboard
• Tooled leather
Binding Materials

- **Vellum**
  - High quality of processed leather, usually made from split calf skin, but may be from other animals

- **Pigskin**
  - Similar to vellum, but not as smooth or refined

- **Sheepskin**
  - Usually the lowest quality of leather (sheep = cheap), often scraped or flaked

- **Morocco**
  - Grained, goat skin, very high quality, can be dyed easily and retains color
Provenance:

Former Owners

Evidence of Provenance

• Inscriptions
• Bookplates
• Bookdealer labels
• Accompanying records (ideal, but rare)
Thank you

Questions?
Free Online Resources for Rare Book Cataloging

Rules and Instructions

• Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books) (DCRM(B)
  https://rbms.info/dcrm/dcrmb/

Names and Places

• Virtual International Authority File http://viaf.org/
• RBMS Latin Place names https://rbms.info/lpn/
• Orbis Latinus http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/Graesse/orblata.html
Free Online Resources for Rare Book Cataloging

Databases and Online Catalogs

- Universal Short Title Catalog (USTC) https://www.ustc.ac.uk/
- English Short Title Catalog (ESTC) http://estc.bl.uk/
- Bibliography of 16th Century Books in German Speaking Countries (VD16) http://vd16.de
- Bibliography of 17th Century Books in German Speaking Countries (VD17) http://vd17.de
- 16th century Italian imprints http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web_iccu/ehome.htm
- 16t century French imprints https://bp16.bnf.fr/
- Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC) https://data.cerl.org/istc/_search
- Material Evidence in Incunabula (MEI) https://data.cerl.org/mei/_search
Other Sites and Resources

- RBMS Web Resources for the Rare Materials Cataloger [https://rbms.info/cat-resources/](https://rbms.info/cat-resources/)
- CERL Resources [https://www.cerl.org/resources/main](https://www.cerl.org/resources/main)