

Local Matters: Digital Humanities, Student Scholars, and an Unknown Leaf Book

Large-scale research projects making use of the collections of multiple major libraries garner a lion's share of attention in press coverage of the digital humanities. However faculty members, students, and librarians at smaller institutions can turn to their own collections in order to carry out original, collaborative research. Art historians, Classicists, historians of the book, and librarians at Tufts University, beginning with a single leaf book in the rare books collection, have built a program of instruction and undergraduate research in primary sources.

Print and manuscript materials provide unique insights not always possible for researchers to gain from digital or microform surrogates (Tanselle 43). Locally held rare books and manuscripts have proven to be successful tools for student engagement in original scholarship, as in the case of the Tisch Library *Miscellany*, which was edited, translated, and analyzed collaboratively by students and published online (http://www.library.tufts.edu/tisch/ematlocalstorage/miscellany_collection/dcManuscripts.xml).

There are no provenance records for the *Miscellany*. It contains individual manuscript and printed leaves from books ranging from the 12th to the 20th Centuries. Leaf books are a familiar form in the realms of libraries, museums, and antiquarian book collectors (de Hamel). In the context of leaf books with known provenance held in research libraries, such as the famous Otto Ege folios (Edwards 13), the *Miscellany* can be interpreted as a record of progress in the book arts: beginning with the Medieval period, marking the introduction and progress of printing technology in its early centuries, and coming full circle with examples of fine press printing in the 20th Century. Topics of the source texts include politics, history, religion, and literature. Pedagogical and critical approaches to the collection vary by discipline.

Each item in the *Miscellany* is associated with unattributed, handwritten descriptive notes. The work of student researchers has contributed to a fuller understanding of the collection, in some cases verifying the descriptions, or contradicting them, and in every case adding new information. Text, embellishments, and illustration provide scope for faculty members to lead their students through a variety of interpretive models. Beyond the classroom, teaching and research with the *Miscellany* has built support for expanding staff and collecting resources devoted to rare books, and has helped to drive the evolution of services to faculty and students in response to new approaches in scholarship.

Bibliography

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