

"Not longwinded, just detailed"

An account of the 'Size Matters: Early Modern Paper in Cross-cultural Contexts' workshop held at the UCL Institute for Advanced Studies, organised by the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters, University College London.

With the assistance of the Sea and Currents fund from UCL, awarded to support collaboration between scholars around the globe, we were pleased to welcome international delegates from UK, US and Turkish universities. We had set as a theme a very flexible exploration of how the surfacing techniques applied to early modern paper might affect the processes of impression; at the printing stage and thereafter. At CELL we are especially interested in examining the interstices of where several fields of study meet in this area, providing purchase points from various paths of research, including historical bibliography, literary studies, economic history, medieval studies and the history of reading. As well as this, we are keen to investigate the areas where chemical processes and techniques for testing them can yield quantifiable data towards collecting sufficient information for detecting patterns of sizing or unsizing and consequently the affect that might have on annotation and marginalia.

We began the 1.5 day workshop with a roundtable, each delegate introducing themselves and stating where their interests lay and how they thought the proceedings may influence/change/complement their own research. This served as an icebreaker, and also happily set the atmosphere for the workshop: a sharing, democratic environment where all participants had equal franchise in the discussion. Sharing ideas of situating studies of sized/unsized paper in context with the valuable work and terminology of Medieval Studies, delegates were also keen to recognise the part of Librarians and in particular cataloguers when it came to questions of testing for size and descriptive terms. The richly diverse interests represented by the delegates produced a textured agenda for enquiry, ranging from textual editing, to different types of paper (and therefore if different surfacing techniques were required, e.g. artists paper, grey, brown and blue paper), provenance and forgery, how these surface techniques might affect how stains, liquids fall/sink/seep/blot the page, and whether we can detect patterns of deliberately unsized material, e.g. broadside ballads, indulgences etc. The session made it clear that we should pay attention to what language we should be using when discussing sizing from both an early modern perspective and contemporary, so that we can build a shared vocabulary of terms to search for. It was also stated that the page

should be considered as a site of decision-making, a decision made at either - or both - the pre-consumer or consumer moment.

Fortified with the knowledge we were dealing with something we thought we knew about, but were keen to know more, we gathered to listen to the presentation given by the keynote speaker Joshua Calhoun, who gave us a preview of how sizing fits into his work on the ecology of the book-making process. Entitled 'Managing Animals: Ecologies of Textual Annotation and Survival', Josh explained how a book requires a stable surface for receiving ink before it can be considered 'functional'. He went on further to reveal that - despite a discourse of linen and rags - paper still needed animal waste to be present in the manufacture and preparation process. We were asked to consider several key points, including how the animal presence (size) allows the marginalist to be present, *ergo* an unsized book is less likely to have marginal annotation. Furthermore, Josh noted that specific genres of books that were routinely left unsized may not survive because the surface of the paper lent themselves particularly well to other uses (toilet paper), or literally read to death. He also noted that with the application of pen to paper in the printed book, it might be useful to expand our studies of 'pen-trials' to include 'paper-trials'.

The talk ended and discussion began immediately, addressing ideas raised by Josh and seamlessly picking up on threads introduced in the first session. How to trace unsized paper? What would we find in a typical sizing pot? What terminology can we use when searching for half-sized or blank books?

The next morning, we reconvened to listen to the next invited speaker, Sjoerd Levelt. Sjoerd took us on a whirlwind tour which served to refresh, or rather reboot, our thinking about paper, especially when considered in context with the printed word. Resituating Huizinga's idea of 'historical sensation', we considered the external factors shaping the material engagement of readers: dimension, fire, tactility. Sjoerd urged us to take notice of blank space, arguing for its reclassification as a functional area for intervention. The discussion which followed was focused on materiality, with questions ranging from how do we digitise that which isn't there, to a conception of the library as theatre.

We moved to a practical session, and took out our knives and set about cutting goose feathers into quills and applying ink to both sized and unsized paper. Josh had brought samples of each from the University of Iowa's Centre for the Book and it was immediately apparent which was which: upon application the ink flowed smoothly and left a clean line when the nib was drawn along the sized samples. When applied to the unsized sample it was difficult even to create a fine smooth line, catching the edge of the nib and immediately

'feathering' or 'sinking'. A key realisation of the practical exercise was that while one can write on unsized paper, it is not easy, quite the opposite for the sized sample, which was a pleasure to write upon.

After lunch we visited the brand new UCL Special Collections reading room, to view a selection of the treasures of the Library. We put our new-found knowledge to the test, seeing if we could ascertain whether there were unsized pages within the pages of the MSS and books. We concluded that, even with a UV torch which showed areas of fluorescence (which we assumed would display anomalies in sizing application on the page), we were still unable to confidently state where the differences lay between sized and unsized paper. However, it was clear that - where annotated - an inspection of the ink will yield valuable information, as ink sinks far more readily on unsized paper. The visit confirmed that for the most part, a definite conclusion about whether a page is sized or not needs to be made at a chemical level rather than by eye, unless internal and external evidence are conclusive.

The final session of the day was a discussion of where we might find and accumulate data of the type that could contribute towards a fundable project. A lively debate followed, which resulted in a clear desire of the scholars present to have access to, and to contribute to, a shared database of information about early modern books, for instance, when encountering an item of interest in a library or archive, to upload information and/or images with appropriate tags. This would begin to stitch together elements of bibliography and book history currently hidden or unexplored in the stacks of libraries archives all over the world. Questions were asked about the maintenance and policing of such a resource, and it was agreed that it needs to be incorporated to the project plan at an early stage.

The workshop ended with several delegates relaxing and continuing their conversation at the UCL Print Room Café, content with the knowledge that we had made new friends and gained a deeper understanding and critical view that size does indeed matter.

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