



# "Current policy" in "Forming Harvard's collection of incunabula"

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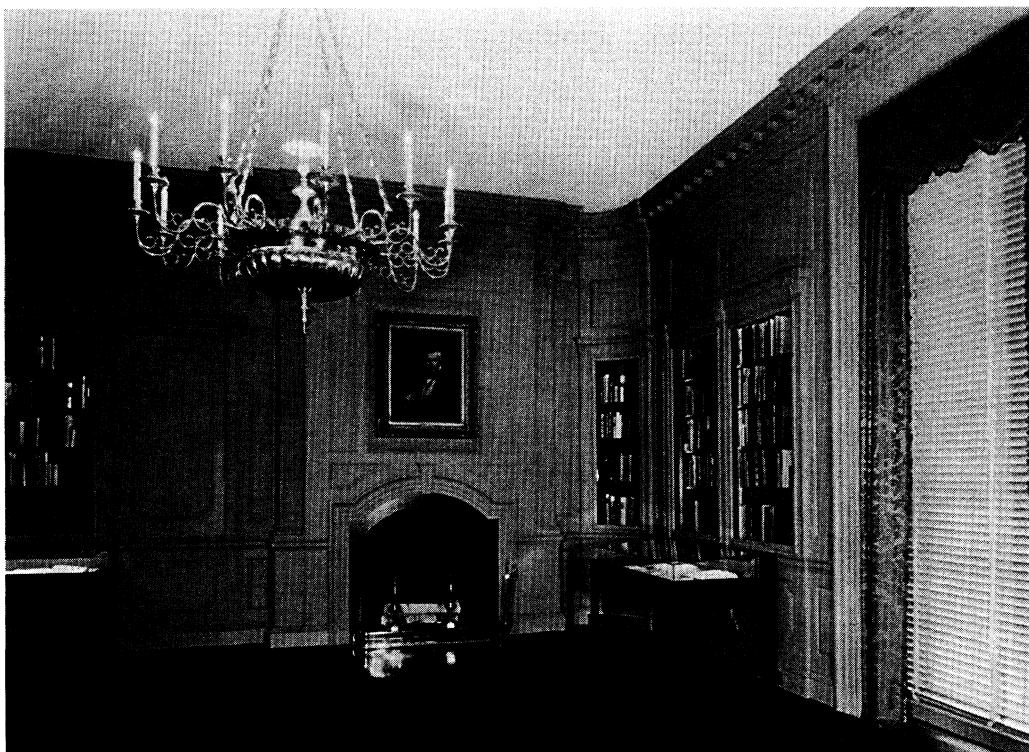
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## Current Policy

**I**t remains to say a word about current acquisition policy as it relates to buying incunabula to add to the collection in the Houghton Library. Budgetary considerations, while primary, are not the only ones that apply to that policy. The Harvard Library serves a world-renowned university in which teaching and research, both immediate and long-term, are pursued in many different fields of scholarship. The library curators responsible for building book-collections have necessarily to take a long view. They must be concerned not only with providing material for the faculty and students of their own time but for those generations yet unborn who will look to Harvard University and its Library for the training that will enable them to enter the fellowship of educated men and women. We need only remember how much of the present greatness of the Library is owed to our eighteenth- and nineteenth-century predecessors—faculty, librarians, donors of collections, establishers of funds—to realize how weighty an obligation rests upon their successors in every generation to maintain and increase that greatness. The utmost care and discrimination must therefore be exercised in seeing that books and manuscripts now being added to the shelves of the Library have the potential to serve present and future scholarly needs—something not always easy to determine, for what may be considered trash by one man may be another's treasure.

From the time he was called to Harvard to take charge of the Treasure Room in 1938 (and four years later to become the first Librarian of the newly-opened Houghton Rare Book Library) until his death in October 1964, William A. Jackson was mainly responsible for deciding which rare books and manuscripts should be added to the collections. His friend and colleague Philip Hofer, Curator of the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, who was called to Harvard at the same time as Jackson, did much of his own selecting, most of it at his own expense, but there was always a close and familial collaboration between the two men. Both Jackson and Hofer had a keen eye for quality and a sense for what was important in their respective fields; they were also fully aware of the obligation hinted at above to maintain the high standards of their predecessors. Their discriminating choice of what to buy can be clearly traced in the series of annual reports of acquisitions that Jackson continued to write throughout his Harvard career. Large sections of those reports had to deal not with purchases but with gifts, for Jackson had the great ability to attract important donations of both books and money. One has only to review what has been written in this history about such collectors as Davenport Brown, David P. Wheatland, William K. Richardson, Harrison D. Horblit, Ward M. Canaday, Imrie de Vegh—to name only a few—to realize how influential Jackson was in persuading these men to direct their collections to Harvard. Not for nothing was Jackson termed “the Grand Acquisitor” in the citation of the honorary degree Harvard bestowed upon him in 1964.



The Houghton Library Exhibition Room, where incunabula are shelved.

When Jackson died, William H. Bond was named his successor as Librarian of the Houghton Library, and one of his first acts was to call Roger E. Stoddard from Brown to be his assistant and to be chiefly responsible for acquisitions—a wise appointment that the Library continues to benefit from today. As for current acquisition policy as it relates to incunabula, this is largely a continuation of the one established by Jackson during his twenty-six years as head of Houghton: no incunable is ever bought simply because it was printed before 1501; other considerations, not least qualitative, necessarily enter in. Over the past thirty years (a long enough time to be representative) a total of fifty-six incunabula have been purchased with funds available in the Houghton Library (no account need be given of the far larger number of incunabula received as gifts). Of this group nine were acquired simply because they became readily available from the American Antiquarian Society, which was weeding its shelves of books outside its collecting scope, and the prices were nominal. Eleven were bought with funds—Friedman and Lincoln—no longer available for our use. Five could be bought with funds provided by the Friends of the Harvard College Library and reserved for important but expensive items that the Library could not otherwise afford: a four-volume set of Froissart's *Chroniques*; Faber de Werde's *Proverbia metrika* in a combination of Latin and German, added to our strong proverb collection; the first edition of the *Donatio Constantini*, an extremely rare little book and of great importance in the history of the papacy and the Reformation; a breviary containing printed calligraphic initials with elaborate ascenders and descenders, an unusual printing phenomenon; and *Directorium statuum*, unique in being filled with manuscript extracts from a number of sources and authors. One illustrated incunable was bought with the Osgood Hooker fund, restricted to purchases for the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts; another, from the library of William Morris, with a leaf of his manuscript notes inserted, was bought with the H. S. Howe fund, designated for books of association interest;

another with the P. P. F. Degrand fund, restricted to French works on the exact sciences. The remainder, amounting to half the total, were acquired by the use of five less restricted funds: Duplicate (built up, as the name suggests, by the sale of duplicates), C. T. Keller, Amy Lowell, S. A. E. Morse, and H. D. Smith.

A brief description of some of the books represented by these purchases will indicate a few of the criteria used in their selection. One volume is of particular interest for the history of Eastern Europe, a field in which, thanks to the Riant Collection, we are especially strong; another represents our sole example of printing in the Dutch city of Delft; another, printed in 1474, contains references to Johannes Gutenberg and to printing at Mainz; yet another was printed by the rarely-encountered Johannes de Vollenhoe of Zwolle, whose very existence has been denied by some; another is a broadside containing a papal bull canonizing S. Leopold, which has only survived by the accident of having been used to stiffen a binding; another and even more interesting broadside from the bibliographical point of view contains four separate settings of an unrecorded papal indulgence, obviously intended to be cut apart but surviving intact by the same accident of the entire sheet having been used in a binding. Other incunabula were acquired for being of interest in the literary output of their authors—neo-Latin writers such as Baptista Mantuanus, Jacobus Wimpeling, Gregorius Tifernas, Publius Faustus Andrelinus, and others. One incunable was bought as a replacement for a copy lost in the fire of 1764. Only rarely is an exceptional bookbinding bought to expand our collection for teaching purposes.

This will perhaps be sufficient to show that when it is possible (and when funds are available) we are concerned to add to collections in which we are already strong—neo-Latin and vernacular literature and history, illustrated books, bibliography, practices of the early printers, and the like. If we had more unrestricted money to spend, we could do much more than we now can; but the income from book funds is not fully indexed to inflation, with the result that less and less money tends to be available for the purchase of rare books as their prices rise. So in buying incunabula we have to weigh pros against cons very carefully. As the old saw has it, we must cut our coat according to our cloth.

#### INCUNABULA AT THE FRANCIS A. COUNTWAY LIBRARY OF MEDICINE

The largest collection of incunabula outside the central core at the Houghton Library at Harvard is that at the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, located on the Longwood campus of the Harvard Medical School in Boston. Numbering over 800, this collection of medical incunabula ranks as one of the most important in the world and contains some of the greatest rarities.

The Countway Library itself, built in 1964-65, was formed by combining the libraries of the Harvard Medical School and the Boston Medical Library. The Medical School, though it had a nominal connection to the University as early as 1783, did not become an integral part of it until 1869 when Charles W. Eliot was named president of Harvard. Medical education in the United States at that time was badly in need of improvement, and Eliot was blunt in saying so: "The ignorance and general incompetency of the average graduate of American Medical Schools," he wrote, "at the time when he receives the degree which turns him loose upon the community, is something horrible to contemplate."

The new president lost no time in instituting measures to remedy the situation, and though he encountered opposition from entrenched conservatives, he soon succeeded in raising standards for admission to the Medical School and for improving the quality of instruction given to those admitted.

Like all of the Harvard libraries, that of the Medical School had small beginnings. Its growth was not rapid, largely because the Boston Medical Library, an independent institution dating back to the early years of the nineteenth century, made its extensive holdings available to students and teachers alike. What this meant in practical terms can be seen by the fact that by 1900 the Harvard Medical School Library could boast a total of only 2,240 volumes. With the passage of time, however, and the increase of knowledge in the medical sciences made possible by improved tools and methods of research, this arrangement with the Boston Medical Library became less and less convenient for both institutions, with the result that small departmental libraries began to be formed in the buildings of the Medical School. This necessarily involved duplication of books and periodicals on a fairly extensive scale and was soon perceived to be wasteful of both space and money, neither of which were in plentiful supply for either library. As early as 1913, Archibald Cary Coolidge, the great director of the Harvard University Library, proposed a merger of the library of the Harvard Medical School and the Boston Medical Library, but opposition to the proposal was great, and the idea was dropped. It did not wholly die, however, but kept cropping up periodically over the next forty years, during which time the Medical School Library increased in size and importance while the Boston Medical Library, for all the greatness of its collections, was finding it increasingly difficult to justify maintaining a separate existence alongside another collection of medical books in a relatively small geographic area of Boston. Both institutions came to realize that joining forces would have great advantages for each, and in 1960 a covenant of union was signed that guaranteed the autonomy of the Boston Medical Library, its right to manage its own funds, and its ownership of its collections. For its part, Harvard agreed to build, furnish, and maintain the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine in which the holdings of the two institutions would be intershelved to form one of the great medical libraries of the western hemisphere.

The collector whose name is inseparably linked with the Boston Medical Library holdings, not only of incunabula but of books and manuscripts of other periods as well, is that of William Norton Bullard. Graduating from Harvard with the class of 1875, he enrolled in the Harvard Medical School in the same year and received his M.D. in 1880. He served as medical intern at the Massachusetts General Hospital in 1879-80 and in July 1882 was named District Physician to the Boston Dispensary. He was a specialist in neurology and practiced in Boston from 1882 until his early retirement because of poor health in 1902. As a book collector Bullard concentrated on incunabula, gradually at first and eventually exclusively. His success can be judged by a glance at the provenance index in the final volume of the Harvard incunabula catalogue. His first gift of an incunable to the Boston Medical Library was in 1910. On his death in 1931 he bequeathed to the same institution all of his incunabula, his personal medical library, and the sum of \$50,000, of which the income and up to half the principal were designated for the purchase of books and manuscripts antedating 1700.

## INCUNABULA AT THE HARVARD LAW LIBRARY

On 14 May 1817 Isaac Parker (H 1786), Royall Professor in Harvard College and Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, laid before the Harvard Corporation a plan for a law school. It was promptly adopted, and Asahel Stearns (H 1797) was appointed University Professor of Law with the mandate to open and keep a school in which students could follow a set course of study, hear lectures, and be examined for a degree in law. Thus was founded the oldest of the existing law schools in the United States.

Like all fledgling institutions, the Harvard Law School started out on a small scale, and nowhere is this clearer than in its Library. Although in its first year of organization the not inconsiderable sum of \$681 was spent on books, early growth was slow and probably as much by donation as purchase. A catalogue published in 1826 contained 763 titles, of which some were marked with an asterisk to indicate that they were a part of the College Library; another, compiled by Charles Sumner in 1834, who also figures in these pages as a collector, listed more than 3,500; and by 1847 the Library had grown to 12,000 volumes. The expenditure for books from 1817 to 1846 was stated by the treasurer to have been \$32,493.87, or a little over \$1,100 a year. Then came a period of neglect during which the Library was not kept up, and many books were lost by inadequate oversight of the shelves and reading room.

In 1872 John Himes Arnold was appointed the first permanent librarian of the Law School. He continued in that position for the next forty years, and it was under his administration that the foundation was laid for Harvard's preëminence among the law libraries of the world. Describing his achievement in 1930, Roscoe Pound, at that time dean of the Law School, wrote:

It tells little of his achievement to record the bare fact that the Library grew from 15,000 volumes to 150,000. He set out to make a complete collection of the legal materials of the English-speaking world, and, buying with sure judgment and searching for the books which he required in out-of-the-way places, at a time when there were few competitors in the field, was able to realize his ambition.

Arnold made a number of book-hunting tours abroad during his tenure and succeeded in building the collection of English common law to a point where it had no rivals in this country or, very likely, in the world. The collection of civil and foreign law was likewise attended to, with equally good results.

Benefactors of the Law Library in its early days were not as numerous as those of the College Library, but of course the alumni of the Law School at that time were far fewer than those of the College. But the names of Christopher Gore (H 1776), Joseph Story (H 1798), Nathan Dane (H 1778), and Samuel Livermore (H 1804) are recorded with gratitude for their gifts. In 1903 Edward James Drifton Coxe gave the library of his father, Brinton Coxe, consisting of 3,225 volumes of English, American, Roman, and canon law, the largest and most valuable gift of books received up to that time; and in the same year Learned Hand (H 1893) gave 1,421 volumes from the library of his father, Samuel Hand, Associate Judge of the Court of Appeals. From that time on gifts of both books and money continued to improve the holdings of the Library and to increase its purchasing power.

In 1912 the great collection of some 14,000 books on public international law collected by the Marquis de Olivart of Madrid was put up for sale. Thanks to

*The Stolberg bookplate*

quick action on the part of the Law Library's agents, it soon arrived in Cambridge and now forms an important part of the collection of international law.

A very important collection of manuscripts and printed books of English law from the beginning of written record to the seventeenth century, formed by George Dunn of Woolly Hall, near Maidenhead, twenty-five miles west of London, was to be put up for auction in 1913. This comprised the first 355 lots of the 684 listed in the Sotheby sale catalogue of 11-14 February. The law books were to be offered together as one lot, but if the reserve price, estimated at between £3,500 and £4,000, were not realized, each lot was to be sold separately. That amount of money, approaching \$20,000 at the exchange rate of the day, was not readily available for the purchase of books, but Law School professors Joseph H. Beale and Roscoe Pound, realizing the importance of the collection and the desirability of its being kept together, took it upon themselves to raise about \$10,000 in less than a month. Their efforts were successful, and the Dunn law books were secured for Harvard for £3,750 (\$18,750). Although by far the greater part of the collection comprised sixteenth-century books, ten of the English incunabula recorded in this catalogue come from the Dunn library. Dunn did not restrict himself to law, however, as a glance at the before-mentioned provenance index will show. The second and third portions of his library were sold at Sotheby's in February 1914 and November 1917; these were described by the auctioneers as "early manuscripts and printed books and old bindings" and included many continental incunabula.

A much more extensive collection of incunabula came to the Law Library with the acquisition of the "Staats- und Rechtswissenschaften" portion of the great library formed by the Counts and Princes of Stolberg-Wernigerode in the Harz Mountains. This library, in existence for almost four hundred years, numbered about 125,000 volumes; but the ruinous German inflation in the 1920s after World War I, and subsequent financial reverses, forced the Stolberg family to close it down and look for purchasers in the 1930s. Too large for any single individual or institutional purchaser, it was divided into several sections, of which the Law Library in April of 1932 acquired the legal portion described above. This comprised about a tenth of the whole, or some 12,500 volumes and pamphlets. A total of 63 incunabula were included in the collection, among them no fewer than twelve editions of Bartolus de Saxoferrato on the various

parts of the *Corpus iuris civilis*, four editions of the *Corpus* itself, three of Eike von Repgow's *Sachsenspiegel*, and a great many other works of civil and canon law, many of great rarity. Taken all together, the Stolberg-Wernigerode collection is one of the most important ever acquired by the Harvard Law Library.

The years of the Second World War and the period immediately following, while a tragedy in human terms and devastating to the economies of Europe, did provide an opportunity for the Law Library nearly to double its holdings of incunabula. During the period from 1939 to 1953, a total of 266 fifteenth-century books were acquired, the larger part after the Bretton Woods Monetary Conference of 1944 had stabilized the rates at which currencies were to be exchanged. Naturally enough, considering the relative conditions of the United States and Europe, this agreement favored the strong American dollar against the weaker European currencies and enabled the Library to purchase books at prices one can only sigh to contemplate today. In 1939, before the war had begun in earnest and while lines of communication between the United States and Europe were still open, a total of 28 incunabula were acquired, many from Maggs, Rosenthal, and other European dealers. In 1940 the number fell to 10, in 1941 to 1, and in 1942, the peak of the German U-boat activity in the Atlantic, none. Things began to look up a bit in 1943, when a half-dozen incunabula were received, and in 1944, with the outlook for victory beginning to improve, the number jumped to 36, many bought from American firms such as Lathrop Harper and the recently-established H. P. Kraus. In 1945, with the defeat of both the Axis powers and Japan and the gradual reestablishment of European connections, no fewer than 46 incunabula came in to the Law Library. That was the high point, but the rate of acquisition of fifteenth-century books continued high during the post-war period, gradually falling off as prices began their inexorable rise. Activity on the part of the Law Library curators continues, however, as is obvious from the 1986 acquisition of one of the foundation stones of an English legal collection, Sir Thomas Littleton's *Tenores novelli* (London, John Lettou and William de Machlinia, 1482).