

Conservation Treatment of Early Printed Books: Possibilities, Methodologies and Outcomes

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Introduction:

Development of treatment strategies for conservation is challenging when an object has undergone many campaigns of repair in its lifetime. Determining the appropriate level of intervention requires an understanding of the object's history, coupled with achievable goals for preservation and improved function. *Historia Troiana*, an incunabule from 1486, and the *Geneva Bible* from 1597 are two books that show an opportunity for contrasting approaches to treatment.

Broken cover to text attachment, and prior rebinding was seen in the *Historia Troiana*, providing an opportunity to restore functionality to the book with a full leather rebind that better relates to the period of the printed text. In contrast, the *Geneva Bible* suffered mainly from a protruding gathering near the center of the text. The bible, retained its initial binding. Though significantly worn, the structure was functional and provided a visual account of the history for the piece.

Historically books have always been treated as an alterable commodity. Bindings offered protection and function to the valued content within. Today, changes in thinking in library and archives settings place greater emphasis on the physical book as a valued artifact, while digital surrogates allow alternative means to access textual information. As modern-day book conservators shift their focus from commodity to artifact, implications for treatment require new examination as well.

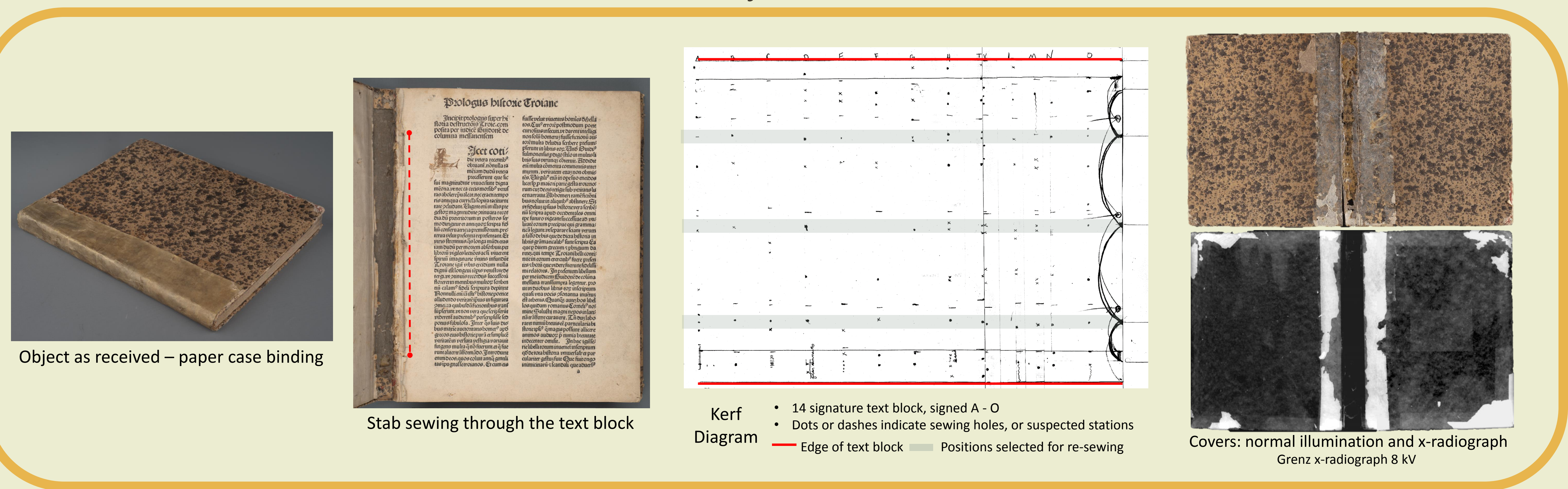
Geneva Bible, 1597 – Buffalo History Museum



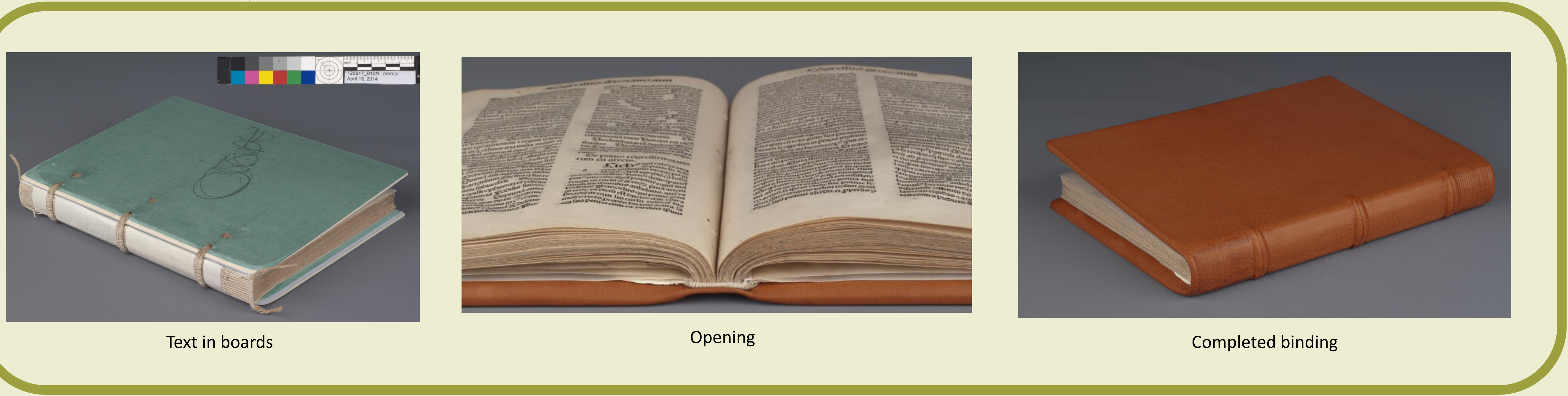
Methodology

- This book demonstrates the effect of use on the construction of the artifact. The *Geneva Bible* is the bible of the Reformation, and was designed as a smaller, more personal format, set in a Roman typeface, and meant to be more accessible to the reader. It may have traveled distances with its owner. This was the bible of Puritan exiles who opposed the Church of England and pursued religious freedom in the American wilderness. It is interesting to consider the life this book may have lived.
- Geneva's* binding has physical features consistent with it's period of production as a 16th century binding. The full leather binding is decorated with metal bosses and clasps on the boards. The parchment spine was a later addition.
- Close examination revealed what was thought to be a loose section, was in fact a deliberate alteration combining two separate rounded and backed texts into a single binding.
- Treatment to reshape the text block would be damaging to the unique features of this combined text.
- Current condition does not impair careful use or limit the function of this volume.
- The book was ultimately left untreated and preserved with a custom fit drop spine box and recommendations for handling and storage.

Historia Troiana Guidonis, 1486– Buffalo History Museum



Historia during and after treatment



- The History of the fall of Troy, is a prolific text that has passed through many translations and forms over time. This Latin translation of *Troy* has undergone a series of interventions:
 - Received in 19th C. style paper case binding.
 - Multiple sewing campaigns were noted through the text including a stab sewing through the text block.
 - Text has been trimmed, determined by copy comparison and kerf positions.
 - Reuse of the boards as evidenced by x-ray.
- Main concern for this object is to protect the printed text block, not the actual binding.
- Current condition and function DO impair use. Safe use is limited by broken cover to text attachment along inner hinge, and stab sewing that restricts opening.
- Rebinding was determined to be appropriate treatment for this volume. Original covers were retained and housed with the object.
- Treatment for *Troy* focused on creating a good opening, access to the text, and a sound binding structure. Steps included: removing stab sewing and releasing the text block from the binding, guarding sections, re-sewing onto double cords. Cover boards were created out of laminated binder's boards and mat boards to achieve the correct thickness, and then shaped with a wood plane. Covering was in full goat skin leather. Binding follows 15th century Gothic binding style.
- Primary wound endbands were added with linen thread. Parchment transverse spine linings created additional board attachment with tabs pasted to the inside of the boards.
- The completed treatment improves function, preserves the text, and aesthetically relates to the period of production for the object.

Conclusion:

As seen in *Troy* and *Geneva*, sometimes altered elements further the story of a text, as in the combined texts seen in *Geneva*, and sometimes those alterations do not, as seen in the anachronistic rebinding of *Troy*. Making determinations whether to treat or not treat a book will always be subjective, but as more attention is drawn to the retention of original elements, perhaps a greater sympathy to the book as artifact will develop. The book conservator plays a role in shaping this future by applying their technical skills with thought, sound reason, and good judgment, as an advocate for both the content and containers of their collections.

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