

The Three P's: Papyrus, Parchment, and Paper

Cover to Cover: Exposing the Bookbinder's Ancient Cra

The Papyrus Roll

A typical papyrus roll was usually constructed of papyrus sheets of varying quality. The best sheets, from the plant's innermost pith layers, would be used for its ends, since they received the most wear and tear, while the lesser quality sheets were used

sheep but also those of calves, lambs and kids. Others suggest that the skin of any small animal (young or old) can be made into parchment. Still others believe it was the skin from young animals, particularly calves, that was used to make vellum only, not parchment. To some extent these are all true but here's what we really do know:

Today, the terms 'parchment' and 'vellum' are often used interchangeably to mean the skin of an animal that has been de-greased and specially treated for use either in writing or printing or in binding.

Neither parchment nor vellum is tanned, so in a way they are not true leather. Their preparation with lime renders their surface much more paper-like; it certainly shares a similar look and feel.

Vellum, as a general rule, is manufactured from the entire skin of the animal; the skin is not split into two layers as with parchment made from sheepskin.

Vellum can usually be distinguished from parchment by its grain and hair marks which give rise to a somewhat irregular surface. Having been scraped so thin, parchment tends not to exhibit these characteristics.

Paper

Histoire philosophique et politique...Guillaume Thomas Raynal. 1774 Rag paper of a pale blue hue, said to be the result of coloured rags used in the papermaking process

The invention of paper is attributed to Ts'ai Lun of China, who in 105 A.D. reported to Emperor Ho that experiments in papermaking from fibre (likely of disintegrated cloth) had been perfected. It would be a further 500 years before the Japanese learned of this paper through communications with Korea. Sheets of it, fabricated from the bark of the paper mulberry, were introduced to the country by Buddhist monks, and by the Nara period (708–806 A.D.) the Japanese were making paper in nine different provenances. It took over a thousand years from its first invention for the craft of papermaking to find its way to Europe. In the 12th and 13th centuries the Spanish and Italian papermakers practised a distinctly different process, one in which macerated linen and cotton rags were dipped in a solution of gelatine made from the hoof, horns and hides of animals. That animal glue, combined with the rags, formed an opaque, impenetrable surface which perfectly suited the European manner of writing with a quill pen.

Like their Asian counterparts, European papermakers found the hand-mould, the shallow wooden frame that was dipped into the vat of pulp, to be the most important tool in forming paper. The Chinese wove mould, comprising a square of coarsely woven cloth, held within a bamboo frame, is thought to be the first such tool.

placed in the sun for drying and the paper pulled away once the moisture had evaporated. The threads that ran lengthways and those which ran at 90 degrees to them (known as the warp and woof) leave an impression in much the same way that watermarks are formed in today's hand-made paper.

*A collection of English proverbs. John Ray. 1678. Handwritten. ~~Handwritten~~ ~~Handwritten~~
just visible on the pastedown.*

Unlike the wove mould, which had no supports under its cloth, the laid type of mould had a distinct

Paper Sizes

Handmade paper can be created in any size. It depends solely on the size of the mould. Some of the most well-known sizes are:

Crown (15 x 20 inches). A standard size paper watermarked with a regal crown.

Elephant (23 x 28 inches). This paper also comes in Double Elephant and is used as a plate printing and drawing paper. Originally it was watermarked with a rudimentary figure of an elephant.

Emperor (48 x 72 inches). One of the largest papers ever to be made in Europe

Foolscap (approx. 13 x 17 inches). A printing and writing paper dating from the 1400s. It was named after its watermark which traditionally resembled a court jester wearing the distinctive bell-shaped, multi-pointed cap.

The Deckle Edge

Essai sur la conformite de la medecine des anciens... John Baker. 1749.
The original 'deckle' edge. Note that some of the pages also remain uncut.

The term 'deckle' refers to the narrow rim or fence which is placed inside the paper mould frame to prevent the wet fibrous mass from flowing over. The deckled effect occurs after the mould has been dipped into the vat of slurry and the excess water drained off. When the deckle is removed so that the sheet of paper can be couched (laid out), some of the mat ed slurry would pass under the deckle and form an irregular but thin edge. Before the 19th century this type of edge was unavoidable; the deckle simply couldn't make a perfect seal against the mould frame. This meant that the binder would need to trim off the deckle edge as part of the binding process. In recent times the deckle-edge has made a comeback, with a number of books on machine-made paper now exhibiting the artificially produced edge.

Note: A deckle edge is completely unrelated to the 'uncut' or 'unopened' page edge which must be cut



The First Text Printed on Paper

The world's first text printing on paper occurred in approximately 770 A.D. Six years earlier, the Empress Shōtoku of Japan had sanctioned the printing of a million paper prayers (dhāra

The Hyakumantō dhāra have long been considered the oldest extant examples of printing in the world but a recent discovery of a similar dhāra in a stone pagoda in a Pulguksa Temple in Korea has lately cast doubt upon this. Some scholars believe it predates the Temple, completed in 751, but we wait to learn more. Stay tuned...

Papermaking in Australia

Papermaking in Australia had its origins among the convicts who were transported to Sydney, New South Wales. A number of these convicts gave their former occupation as papermaker, but it was John

