



The bear that travelled through time and space

Books tell a story about the people who printed them. From investigating the artistic practices of early printing houses we can construct an account of early printing socio-economic customs. What is most surprising in this narrative is the spread of particular practices across decades and nation states. The case study presented in this paper supports the claim that printers readily exchanged knowledge and designs in unique and unexpected ways.

This paper draws upon evidence from the artistic practice in the spread of specific tailpieces across time and space. Three different tailpiece case-studies will be explored. Two notable possible conclusions can be drawn from this investigation.

Firstly, the spread of a particular tailpiece indicates that craftsmen regularly undertook extensive travel. While long-distance travel was relatively rare for the general population, craftsmen, including printers, travelled extensively during the 16th and 17th centuries. Artisans, tradesmen and craftsman skills were in demand. They often travelled vast distances to seek and engage in work. The ornamentation of printed volumes throughout this time can provide evidence to support this statement.

Secondly, the saturation of a particular tailpiece across the volumes of many printing houses indicates that craftsmen operated from a framework of collaboration and co-operation. While printers, like any other manufacturer, may have been in competition with each other, the tailpiece trail described in this paper demonstrates the development of personal and business relationships that created a tight-knit community unimpeded by geographical constraints.

As binders we have a basic understanding of the processes involved in the sheets we bind. But do we think about the artistic practices in early book publishing that tell a fascinating economic story about what was thought to attract and entice the reader. Working within historical constraints, printers developed and followed trends in artistic practice for designs that were considered to create retail appeal. This tailpiece case-study indicates that as they developed new knowledge of their technology and success in their trade they supported the industry as a whole through cooperative techniques.

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Erika is a bookbinder, researcher and teacher. Originally a woodworker, she developed an interest in paper crafts and learned basic bookbinding under Neale Wootton at the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). Her subsequent binding education comes from a wide variety of sources. Erika regularly participates in workshops offered by both the Canberra and NSW Guilds where guest teachers are invited to demonstrate a variety of techniques, finding that a great deal of learning occurs when using her new knowledge in her own binding projects.

Erika taught bookcraft at CIT for six years until the course was shut down. She has a particular interest in Japanese bookbinding and in the History of the Book. She was awarded the Kenneth Binns Travelling Fellowship from the NLA which allowed her to attend the London Rare Book Summer School in 2012 as well as visit conservation laboratories. As a result, Erika wrote and published two books on historical bindings and their watermarks. She runs EFM Press.