Toward a Network of Marks: Exploring and Exposing Readers’ Marginalia in the Naseeb Shaheen Antiquarian Bible Collection

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Why Look at Marginalia?

- Added value/ uniqueness
- Not usually described by library catalogers
- Presence valued in some scenarios (e.g., famous author)
- Practice of making marks valued/Used to study trends in reading
- Documents how books are connected
What we want to know about marginalia

What varieties of marginalia might we find in a rather homogenous collection of books?

Is there a way to keep track of, and give access to, what we find?

Can we teach our methods to students?

Can the marks in books tell us about the relationship of readers & documents over time?

...Is it worth it?
The collection: 221 books from 1519-1986

**Publishing Date of Collection Volumes**

- 16th Century: [Bar Graph]
- 17th C.: [Bar Graph]
- 18th C.: [Bar Graph]
- 19th C.: [Bar Graph]
- 20th C.: [Bar Graph]

**Language of Collection Volumes**

- English
- Greek
- Latin
- French
- Italian
- German
- Syriac

**Genres of Collection Volumes**

136 Bibles
29 religious commentaries/ texts
56 other (drama, historical, reference, poetry)
Methods:

Merge metadata from library catalog with Shaheen’s own list.
Methods:

Carefully and systematically browse Shaheen Bibles page by page, taking photographs with iPads.
Methods:

Batch rename photographs to reflect what volume they come from. Pool photographs into shared directory.
Methods:
Findings

221 books
171 books had reader-added marks (77%)
71 had ownership marks (32%)
53 had scholarly/reverential marks (23%)
38 had pen tests/scribbles/practice writing (17%)
19 had family histories (9%)
Layers of Added Content

Modern Marks

Reader Added Marks from 1530-1850

Early Glosses
Ownership Marks

Ownership marks
• The most common type of marks in books
• May give dates and places.
• Older Bibles had multiple owners over time: Multiple owners mean multiple ownership notes.
• Sometimes indistinguishable from handwriting practice

Often Found:
• Beginning of volumes, first or last pages of books.
Scholarly & Reverential Marks

- Corrections
- Check marks, arrows, underlined text
- Translations
- Quotes from other books
- Notes on history, doctrine and narrative.
- Declarations of faith
- Scheduling of prayer.

Often Found:
- Interleaved blank pages
- Side margins
- Front and end pages for summary, index or table of contents.
Pen Tests, Scribbles & Children’s Marks (and mystery marks/stains)

- “Random” marks
- Minimal connection in terms of intention and/or context

**Often found:** Beginning or end pages & between books, or any significant white space.
Family Histories

• Almost an extension of ownership marks, family histories record names, dates and places of births and deaths.

Often Found: Beginning of volumes, the first or last pages of books.
Notes and marks made circa 1900 and beyond

Most likely to concern the unique characteristics of the volume itself, or offer details on sale or for purpose of sale.

**Often Found:** Usually limited to very beginning and end pages.
Pull out the most interesting examples for blog, exhibits and classes. Keep data on patterns arising in collection.
Ownership Marks
Posted on July 23, 2015

As we said in our types of marks post, the owner-added marginalia in the Shaheen Antiquarian Bible Collection fall into roughly six categories. Today we’ll talk about the most common of the six: ownership marks.
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What’s next

Exploring other collections

Having students come work with us

Investigating marginalia feasible and sustainable

Connecting with others
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https://themarginsproject.wordpress.com/

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