

Paper Trails

A Material History of 16th and 17th Century Icelandic Books from Paper Production to Library Collection

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This research project follows the paths of Icelandic paper from its production in Central and Northern Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries via the processes of writing and printing books in Iceland to present repositories in Islandica collections on the continent.

As there were no paper mills in Iceland, paper had to be imported. Where was it produced? Who started the import of paper? Where and for what purpose was it bought? To answer these questions, we will be carrying out comprehensive watermark analyses. Our cooperation partners are the manuscript department of the National and University Library of Iceland and the Institute for Conservation Science of the University of Applied Sciences, Cologne.

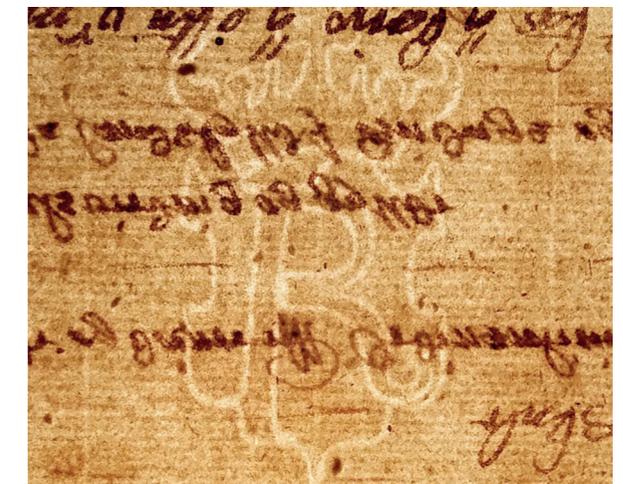
What happened after the import? Were different qualities of paper used for different purposes? Who handled the material? And, how was it treated? For this part of the project, a centre of literature in the West Fjords (Vatnsfjörður) of the 17th century was selected to map out the routes text and paper took on the island.

Who was and is interested in Icelandic books and texts outside Iceland? Three Icelandic collections will be investigated within the framework of our project: the Sir Joseph Banks Collection at British Library, London; the Fiske Collection at Cornell University, Ithaca, NY and the Erkes Collection at University and City Library, Cologne. The biography of Icelandic paper from its metamorphosis into written and printed, and often bound, material until it has reached its current material condition will thereby continued to be written. Special attention will be given to

signs of usage, provenances, restoration as well as bindings that have not been investigated much in Iceland until now.

The findings of the project will be incorporated into both existing and new databases, and form the basis for a number of conferences, workshops, monographs and articles.

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