

A Special Collection Renaissance: The Herlufsholm Special Collection at the University Library of Southern Denmark

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Abstract:

In 2014, investigations were begun into the Herlufsholm Special Collection at the University Library of Southern Denmark. The aim of this endeavor was to find, register, and promote hitherto unknown library materials. Since 2014, more than one hundred medieval manuscript fragments of varying sizes and from different centuries, along with rare pieces of incunabula and early prints, have been found in the collection. In addition, many of the collection's monographies constitute rare and valuable first editions, often with hand colored illustrations and maps. The university library has now initiated the digitization of selected items from the collection, paving the way for new types of material promotion likely in cooperation with the university bookstore.

In collaboration with the Cultural Heritage & Archaeometric Research Team at the SDU, the University Library of Southern Denmark has also initiated micro-xrf analysis on 16th and 17th Centuries book bindings in order to find and – if possible – read and identify medieval manuscript fragments and rare prints, hidden behind layers of paper and/or parchment. The x-ray analysis was inspired by the work of the Leiden University Libraries and Delft University of Technology. The method in question makes it possible to specify the chemical elements of the ink (e.g. iron, copper, zinc etc.) and even create a readable x-ray picture, based on the x-ray fluorescence spectra.

Putting the spotlight on the rare Herlufsholm materials, this paper will probe various possible scenarios concerning the future presentation and promotion of the many special collection treasures.

Keywords: fragments, Middle Ages, x-ray, special collection visibility, digitization

Introduction

At present, university libraries and special collection managers across the world seek to utilize digitization to promote rare materials and special collections per se better. Specific items may be digitally highlighted on a library's homepage or through the means of international portals like the Europeana. Prints of the digital images may be manufactured and used for exhibition purposes along with other physical items. Almost everywhere in

Europe and across the seas, various infrastructure projects for digital materials are being or have already been launched. A positive side effect of the digitization is the reduced wear on fragile library materials.

In 2014, investigations were commenced into the Herlufsholm Special Collection at the University Library of Southern Denmark. The aim of this endeavor was to find, register, and promote hitherto unknown library materials. In many ways, this labor was fruitful and rewarding. Later on, the results also led to digitization projects that now hold the promise of a new and more efficient way of channeling special collection materials to particular recipients.

Generally speaking, the digitization and the subsequent promotion of specific materials and/or complete collections will often target the university libraries' academic users. But there are great advantages for collection administrators in targeting broader audiences as well. Subsequently, images of unique volumes and manuscripts may enter the realms of cultural or heritage tourism and commercial distribution, duly contributing to the increase of rare book and special collection awareness in society.

A university library may choose to facilitate a commercial endeavor by using existing sales channels at the institution, e.g. a university bookstore, or the library may enter a partnership with an external associate and/or company. Either way, the digitization of the materials will be the prerequisite for a wider promotion and a possible rebranding of a special collection.

Upon undertaking such a task – possibly from scratch – a university library today benefits almost automatically from the experience of other libraries that have already accomplished this. This is mostly due to the well-established tradition of information sharing between libraries – a solidary praxis that greatly favors the accessibility needs of society in general.

Nowadays, special collection visibility in a wider public may be paramount when it comes to fundraising, e.g. regarding the ongoing financing of different curatorial tasks. Depending on the library profile, special collections will not always have a high priority when it comes to receiving institutional funding. Along with academic descriptions, digital imaging and digitally based special collection merchandise may be used as a kind of documentation for the particular importance of rare materials. Relying on the circumstances, of course, great images may have an even more profound effect on the decision makers and fund administrators than academic reports.

Naturally, the University Library of Southern Denmark has been considering these aspects of special collection visibility/accessibility and taken the first steps towards a more contemporary *modus operandi*. Hopefully, this will enable “a special collection renaissance”.

A special collection walkabout

Great images only come from great materials. Among the old special collections held at the university library, the one from Herlufsholm in Næstved, Sealand, is an absolute pearl. This collection is rooted in the foundation of the Herlufsholm School in 1565 by the Danish nobleman and admiral Herluf Trolle (1516-1565) and his spouse Birgitte Gøye (c. 1511-1574). The school was established on the premises of an old Benedictine monastery (“Næstved Saint Peter’s Cloister” or “Skovkloster” – that is: the monastery in the woods).

Through the saecula, book donations made the school library expand. The greatest and most valuable donation, numbering approximately 6.000 volumes, was made by the count and

school administrator Otto Thott (1703-1785), and it included a relatively large number of books from the 16th and 17th centuries that had been purchased all over Europe. In 1968/69, the oldest part of this collection was bought by the former University Library of Odense for the sum of 1.4 million Danish kroner – in many ways a bargain considering the scope of rare materials. Containing approximately 40.000 volumes and several other types of material, including rare maps, the Herlufsholm Special Collection was an early cornerstone of the newly established academic library (1965) in Odense. However, in these early years, the collection was never thoroughly investigated nor properly cataloged by the university library staff – possibly due to lack of resources, a well-known problem for many libraries.

There is also the challenge of the non-existence of an adequate library catalog to be used as a master for modern cataloging: The Herlufsholm School did publish a catalog in 1882 with an 1897 supplement and you may find the main part of the special collection materials in this work. But a closer look at the 1882 catalog and a physical comparison with the actual collection will show that many important facts about the library materials aren't mentioned or may be imprecise. Today, only approximately 30 % of the Herlufsholm Special Collection is electronically cataloged (using SirsiDynix Symphony). As a result, many special items in the collection will be relatively unknown to the university scholars and to the public.

In addition, and for some reason, a substantial amount of Herlufsholm materials, which in the 19th century would definitely have been known by the school library staff, has been omitted in the old printed catalog. For example, this applies to handwritten works of music from the 16th and early 17th centuries. At present, many of the handwritten works of rare music are fortunately registered in the RISM Online Catalogue of Musical Sources as well as in the university library catalog. However, projects have been launched to facilitate further cataloging – pro tempore using a MARC-format for the handling of metadata. Physically, the collection is stored in a special climate controlled storage facility at the university in Odense. The only way to detect unknown rare materials is to manually sift through the collection.

The Herlufsholm Special Collection is remarkable in many ways and filled to the brim with rare editions of exquisite works. In the collection, you can find 9 incunabula from the period of 1482-1500, e.g.: the *Legenda Aurea* by Jacobus de Voragine, Lübeck 1492; the *Nuremberg Chronicle* by Hartmann Schedel, Nuremberg 1493 and even *Revelationes S. Birgittae*, Lübeck 1492. Many of these works are beautifully illustrated with woodcuts. Generally speaking, and as a scholarly bonus, you may find several annotations by previous readers and book owners adding valuable and unique information to the basics of these works. Typically, Herlufsholm books were owned by Danish and foreign notabilities prior to the school donation. The French minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) is an example.

In the geographic and/or topographic section of this special collection, many valuable works can be found: A hand colored 1592 Latin edition of Abraham Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* with a beautiful map of Denmark by Cornelius Antoniades (Image 1); numerous first editions of the Dutch merchant Jan Huygen van Linschoten's travel books, including his *Itinerario* of 1596; a first edition of the nautical atlas *Le Neptune François* 1693, and a hand colored first edition of *Nouvel atlas de la Chine, de la Tartarie chinoise et du Thibet* 1737 by the French Geographer Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville, who also worked at Diderot's great encyclopedia. The latter is also found in the Herlufsholm Special Collection.

Within the field of natural sciences, one can find first editions of the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe and of his even more famous assistant, Johannes Kepler. The collection

materials also include the monumental illustrated work (incomplete) of the Dutch pharmacist Albertus Seba, on his own cabinet of natural curiosities. Among the rare works with a natural science as well as an artistic dimension, one must mention a copy of the first printed edition of Leonardo da Vinci's *Traité de la peinture* 1651. Furthermore, the collection holds a complete first edition of the grand work of Phytanthoza *Iconographia* (1737-45) by Johann Wilhelm Weinmann with mezzotints and hand coloring. The University Library of Southern Denmark is now seeking to spread the word about these fantastic items which are, generally speaking, in a pristine condition. In the process, new technologies may come in handy.

Image 1: Map of Denmark (left page) in *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Thott donation)



Fragments and x-ray

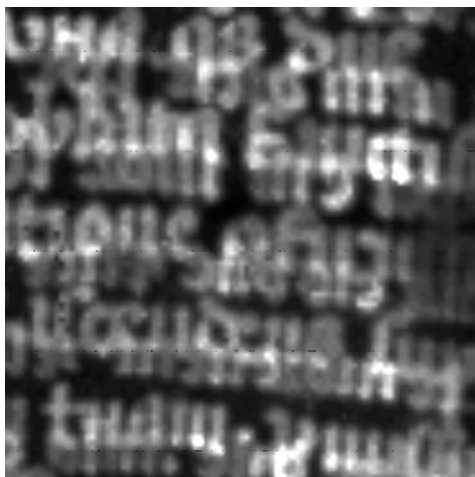
Lately, the University Library of Southern Denmark has recovered more than 100 hitherto unknown fragments of medieval manuscripts. This has made it possible to develop the library's special collections further and support the University's scholars. The number of newly found pieces is growing rapidly. The majority of these fragments have been located inside the bindings of 16th and 17th-century books. As a consequence of the European Reformation (1536 in Denmark), a large portion of the manuscripts of the Roman Catholic Church were cut to pieces and reused as binding materials. Barbaric as this may seem, the recycling of the medieval manuscripts has actually helped preserve the fragments extremely well. Such fragments constitute time capsules that can provide the scholars with a variety of information.

Some of the Herlufsholm fragments are clearly visible, being placed as decoration on the book perms or as part of the book covers. But most of them are hidden beneath layers of paper or parchment. For that reason, the university library, with technical assistance from the

Cultural Heritage & Archaeometric Research Team at the University of Southern Denmark, has undertaken the task of testing micro-x-ray-technology (μ -XRF) on selected ancient volumes. This has led to the spectacular reading and identification of a small number of medieval manuscript fragments. The technique is still being adjusted and was inspired by similar proceedings and very interesting results at Delft University of Technology in cooperation with Leiden University Libraries.

The x-ray technology presents one (at this point still crude) way of digitizing the hidden materials without having to cut open the book bindings. The images are created from a gradual spectrometric analysis, refined into graphical views (Image 2) by the x-ray machinery's software and control system. X-ray fluorescence makes it possible to identify the chemical elements of the ink (e.g. iron, calcium, zinc and copper).

Image 2: Looking through a layer of paper at a medieval manuscript fragment, used as binding material. Please note the dual layers of text (showing both sides of the leaf).



The potential for the practical use of this technology or similar scanning technologies is enormous, given the fact that possibly every fifth 16th and 17th-century book will contain medieval manuscript fragments (and/or pieces of rare prints and incunabula). The existence of these fragments is – of course – not limited to the University Library of Southern Denmark but is deemed to be consistent with collections in European libraries in general.

Big Data and the Digital Humanities have made it possible to rapidly identify the fragmentary medieval works that have been surfacing – with or without x-ray analysis – in the Herlufsholm Special Collection. The identification technique relies on the fact that a large quantity of the medieval manuscripts will be copies of known works that are already searchable on the internet. Creating a search matrix by dissolving the medieval fragments' abbreviations and ligatures may lead to a positive ID. One can mention a manuscript fragment of a Carolingian copy of Bede's homilies (Image 3) along with a piece of the homilies of Origen. Both were found on the inside of the oaken perms of a copy of *Opera omnia Ioannis Pici* [...], Basel 1557, and both fragments were identified within seconds by using a common search engine and the Big Data-method. Lately, fragments of a 14th Century copy of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, used on the cover of two Herlufsholm volumes of music (c. 1600), have also been identified by using a special search matrix on the internet. The medieval scholars at the University of Southern Denmark and their international colleagues

have dated the Bede fragment to the 9th Century, placing it as by far the oldest item in the University Library of Southern Denmark.

Starting in 2016, the university library has conducted a small scale project, creating digital versions of approximately 75 special collection items/call numbers in cooperation with the University of Copenhagen and The Royal Library in Denmark. This endeavor has provided the university library in Odense with high quality image files that can now be used for a variety of purposes. The major part of these digitized materials stem from the Herlufsholm Special Collection. Naturally, the Bede and Origen fragments were digitized. The digitization has also included medieval manuscript fragments of Justinian law (Image 4).

Image 3: A section of the recovered Carolingian Bede fragment. 9th Century parchment.

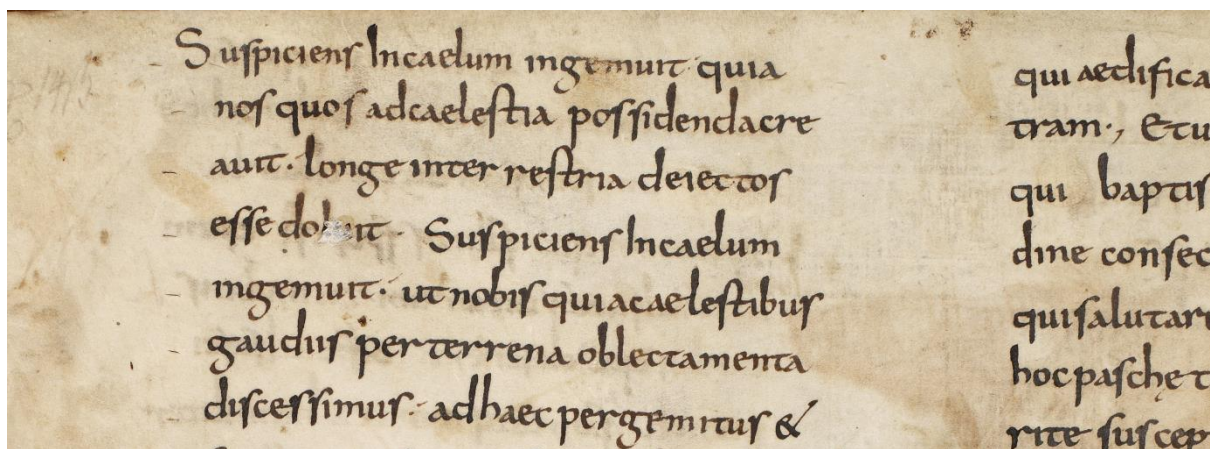
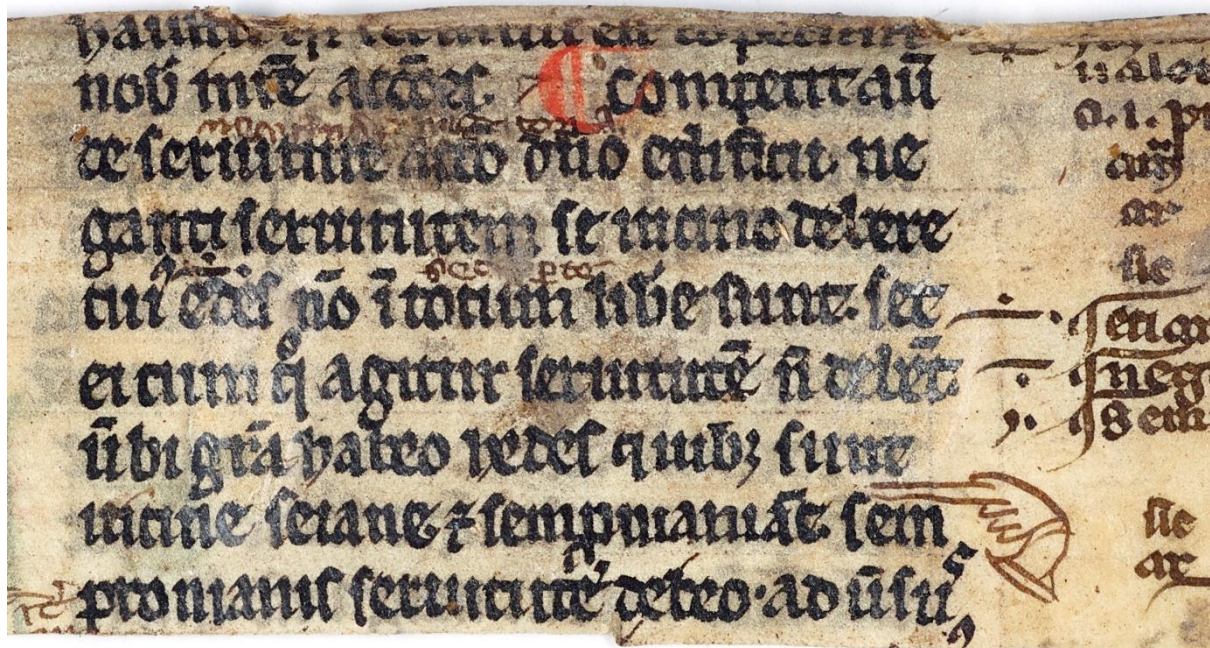


Image 4: Medieval copy of Roman law, containing parts of Justinian Digest, Liber 8. 13th–14th Century parchment. This and similar texts seem destined for merchandise.



Reintroducing rare materials

Presently, SDU merchandise is sold solely by the university bookstore. Promotion activities that involve university merchandise must be approved by the university management. In addition, promotion activities as such must comply with the general university objectives in facilitating education and research, but also by cooperating with the surrounding society and contributing to the development of international collaboration.

The decision for the present merchandise strategy has been made at the highest administrative level. It has been emphasized by the communications department at the University of Southern Denmark that new developments in university [and e.g. university library] merchandise must be coordinated with the responsible departments in order to streamline and standardize the design and the quality of the merchandise.

The university bookstore gains a fixed percentage of profit from the current sales of SDU merchandise which is shipped from a central warehouse.

Considering the university's abovementioned guidelines for SDU merchandise, the present sales setup does not seem to constitute any obstacle for the launch of new types of merchandise from a source within the university. On the contrary, it would be fairly easy to adapt to the promotion of special collection materials. One would have to consider the range of commercial items and possibly have to adjust or add merchandise. For the moment, it is possible to buy clothes and rain coats, caps, mugs and water bottles with the SDU logo (Image 5). The university bookstore management has stated that they would indeed welcome new types of merchandise as part of the general product development. When it comes to copyright, the use and reproduction of the main part of the special collection materials will not be subject to it. Copyright will usually extend 70 years following the death of the copyright holder, cf. EU Directives <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/eu-copyright-legislation>. This makes possible the reproduction of many spectacular materials from the Herlufsholm Special Collection.

For example, you may take François Pierre de la Varenne's iconic French cookbook *Le Cuisinier françois* (1664-edition (1651), published in Hague) and even the anonymously published *Nouvelle Instruction pour les Confitures, les Liqueurs et les Fruits* [...], Paris 1698 (1692) (second edition, by François Massialot). It would seem appropriate to take some of the famous recipes of these gentlemen and copy them onto different kitchen utensils, e.g. on a chef's hat or an apron. La Varenne is known as the inventor of sauce hollandaise and Massialot is credited with crème brûlée. Both chefs who incidentally supplied the French court belong to the small and elite group of "founding fathers of the French cuisine".

Quite many of the Herlufsholm monographies have splendid works of art as illustrations – typically in the form of engravings by renowned artists. In the special collection you can find a first edition of *Opticorum Libri Sex* by the Belgian physicist François d'Aguilon, published in Antwerp 1613. Within this work, one may behold 6 elaborate illustrations by Peter Paul Rubens. These engravings would also fit nicely on SDU merchandise, e.g. on office utensils. One must also mention the famous Polish doctor and natural scientist Jan Jonston and his widely known natural history in several parts, e.g. *Historiae naturalis de quadrupedibus libri*, Amsterdam 1657 – among other things containing splendid illustrations of unicorns (copper engravings by Matthäus Merian). One could imagine these etchings as templates for children's coloring books.

If the special collection merchandise is presented e.g. in combination with cabinet exhibitions of the original items – and as a way of supplementing the accessible digital image files (Open Data) at the library – one could reach new target groups and hopefully make the university library more attractive to cultural or heritage tourists.

In the near future, the university bookstore will be relocated to a location next to the university library at the university campus, thus making it even more appropriate and useful to cooperate – with the expected benefits of synergistic effects.

From a research librarian's and a rare book enthusiast's point of view, the Herlufsholm Special Collection definitely deserves a renaissance. The cataloged works still hold secrets and the un-cataloged items have turned out to be a constant source of new discoveries. In conclusion, this will be an appeal to university libraries and special collections around the world: Find the resources to manually sift through your special collections and benefit from the recovery of long forgotten materials that may, once again, enlighten and astonish society.

Image 5: Showing examples of current SDU merchandise in the university bookstore.



Acknowledgments

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