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# A Brief History of Paper: Craftsmanship, Then and Now

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# A Brief History of Paper: Craftsmanship, Then and Now

## **Keywords**

papermaking, parchment, watermark

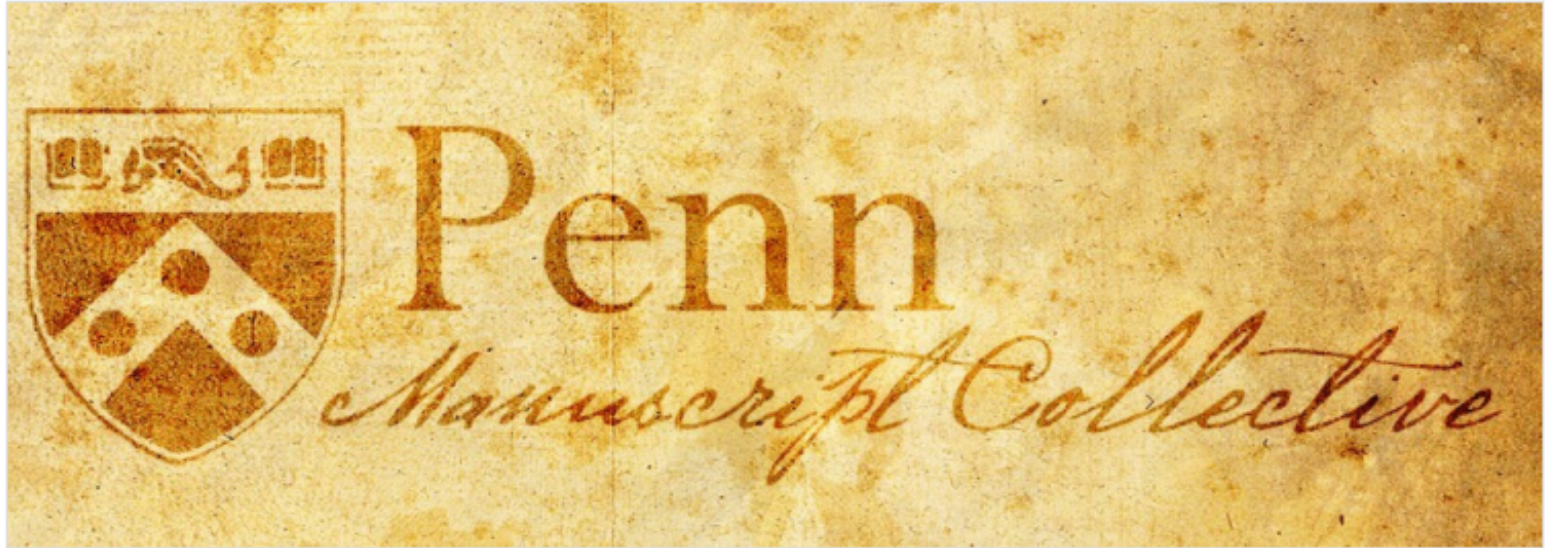
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## *A Brief History of Paper: Craftsmanship, Then and Now*

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The recent history of paper in European manuscript and print culture was the subject of our second meeting. We had the chance to compare the feel of parchment (animal skin) to rag paper, and looked at some watermarks through a lightbox.

But first, the Collective had the opportunity to listen to Anne Dutlinger Kahn, our very own manuscript-inspired artist of Penn to Press fame, explain her creative process. Anne integrates the artistry of the manuscripts themselves into her own artwork; in a way, she is continuing an ancient practice. This was especially evident in a workshop oriented around the craft of paper making.

I gave a short presentation on the background of paper making:

### What is “paper” made of?

- Parchment
  - Vellum (calf skin)
  - Other animal skins used: sheep, goat...

- Rag paper
  - Established as a European tradition in the thirteenth century
  - First in Spain and Italy, then in France, Germany, England (much later)
  - The invention of printing accelerated use

## Making Parchment

- Fresh skin is washed in cold water
- The hair falls out naturally
- Or: hair artificially loosened by soaking skins in a vat of lime and water for 3-10 days
- Skin is stretched out and hair scraped away with a *lunellum*
- Skin is dried slowly while stretched on a frame until very tight
  - Flaws: tiny holes (different than wormholes), hair side vs. flesh side of paper

## Is it LAID or WOVE paper?

- Laid paper: Has chain and wire lines
  - Chain lines run parallel to the shorter side of the original sheet
  - Wire/laid lines are thinner than chain lines, more closely spaced
  - Folio: chain lines are vertical
  - Quarto: chain lines are horizontal
- Wove paper: Has no chain or wire lines. (May still have clear lines in one direction used to guide writing)
  - Invented in the 1750s, not commonly used until the 19<sup>th</sup> century

## Making laid paper

- Seventeenth century: linen fiber
- Pulped by beating then heated in vat
- A mold dipped into the vat to form each sheet of paper
- The paper dries on top of this mold then is cut
- Stacked onto a sheet of felt to dry
- Deckle edges: the edges of uncut paper

## What is a watermark?

- A pattern created by the paper making mold, used as a trademark
- Placed in the center of the left-hand half of the mold
- Often incorporates crests or other national symbols
- Countermark: initials of the paper maker
- Often deceptive!

Next, we did some watermark exploration! One of our members, Martin Smith, graciously shared his work on a seventeenth/eighteenth century manuscript play with us. The Collective gathered round to look at some of its pages through a lightbox, which illuminated at least two different watermarks—signaling the use of at least two different sheets of paper. A seemingly insignificant feature of the manuscript, such as a watermark, can in fact greatly add to our understanding of the work. Watermarks can sometimes suggest a date when the paper was produced, allowing a work's date of origin to be estimated.

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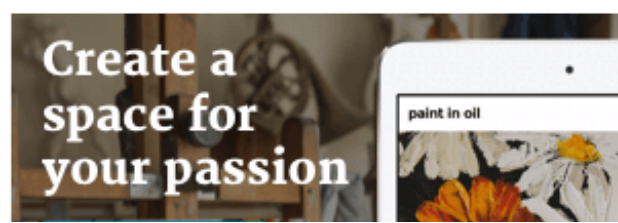
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