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Studying the Binding of Portland State's Codex to Localize Production

Abstract: This paper examines Portland State's codex as a material object by studying the stamp designs on its covers to determine where and when it may have been bound. Four stamp designs are discernible, and these were compared to rubbings of stamp designs from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century incunable bindings in the Einbanddatenbank and Scott Husby Database. The findings from this study point to Erfurt, Germany, and more specifically the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg (active 1477–1506), as the probable binding site.

The loss of original bindings on medieval incunables “is a widespread problem thanks to the predilection of collectors through the centuries to disbind and rebind editions.”¹ In fact, it has been estimated that only about a quarter of incunables in U.S. collections have their original bindings.² The removal of bindings is often well intentioned, done with the aim of preserving the text. However, there is much that can be learned about the history of an incunable by approaching it as a material object rather than focusing on the content of the text. For historians, decorated bindings serve as “reliquaries or microcosms of the past,” enabling them to study the production and movement of individual incunables and their cultural significance.³ That bindings were decorated at all indicates that medieval incunable covers played far more than a purely utilitarian role, and are valuable artifacts apart from the texts they contain. As the historian David

¹ Lucy Lewis, “For No Text is an Island, Divided from the Main: Incunable Sammelbande,” in *Light on the Book Trade. Essays in Honour of Peter Isaac*, ed. Barry McKay, et al (London, 2004), 15.

² Scott Husby, “Bookbindings on Incunabula in American Library Collections: A Working Census,” in *Early Printed Books as Material Objects*, ed. Bettina Wagner and Marcia Reed (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 208.

³ Gary Frost, “Material Quality of Medieval Bookbindings,” in *Scraped, Stroked, and Bound: Materially Engaged Readings of Medieval Manuscripts*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 131.

Pearson writes, “bookbindings play an important functional role in the life of every book, but their impact and potential to affect the values associated with books goes beyond this.”⁴

Luckily, not all original incunable bindings have been lost—Portland State University’s codex retains its original binding, dated to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Bound within its covers are the second edition of the *Malleus maleficarum*, printed in Speyer, Germany, in 1490 by Peter Drach, and the *Fasciculus temporum*, which Johann Prüss printed around the same time in his Strasbourg, France, workshop. This study looks at the codex as an object rather than the texts it contains, using the cover decorations to determine where the binding may have been produced. Two binding databases, the Einbanddatenbank (EBDB) and Bookbindings on Incunables, the Scott Husby Database (SHD) at Princeton University, were used to compare decorative elements on the covers of Portland State’s codex to those on other incunables.

Development of the EBDB began in 2001 as a collaboration between libraries in Stuttgart, Wolfenbüttel, and Berlin. Since then, other institutions across Germany have joined the project.⁵ The EBDB includes digital images of rubbings taken from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century incunable bindings. In 1999, Scott Husby of Princeton University began cataloging the school’s incunable bindings in an electronic database, which now includes over 27,000 records from about thirty institutions across the United States.⁶ The decorative stamps on Portland State’s codex were compared with records from both the EBDB and SHD. Findings from this

⁴ David Pearson, “Bookbinding,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Book*, ed. Michael F. Suarez and H. R. Woudhuysen (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵ Ulrike Marburger, “The German Database of Historical Bookbindings (EBDB): Aims and Perspectives of a Cooperative Research Tool,” in *Early Printed Books as Material Objects*, ed. Bettina Wagner and Marcia Reed (De Gruyter, 2010), 191–203.

⁶ “About,” Bookbindings on Incunables, The Scott Husby Database, Princeton University Library, https://husby.princeton.edu/husby_about.php.

research point to Erfurt, Germany, and perhaps more specifically the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg, as the location where the binding was produced.

Four unique stamp designs are discernable on the covers of Portland State's codex. Photos and rubbings of these designs were taken, and the clearest examples were used to compare with records in the EBDB and SHD. Many of the impressions left by stamps on the codex are now worn, and do not appear to have been pressed very deeply into the binding material (which is presumably pigskin) when it was originally produced. As a result, a combination of photos and rubbings was necessary in some cases to clearly distinguish features of the designs. In the EBDB, stamps are called tools, and individual tools are identified by distinct tool numbers. Stamp designs (i.e., what the stamps depict) are called motifs. Helpfully, the EBDB contains a "Terminology" page with a motif thesaurus so that users can try to identify stamps using visual descriptions of their designs, for example by searching for "heart" or "crown."

Of the four stamps used on the covers of Portland State's codex, the design of Figure 1a, a four-petaled flower, was the most easily recognizable. Using the motif thesaurus, this stamp design was compared to examples in the "Flower" and "Blossom" categories. By clicking on, for example, the "Blossom" motif in the thesaurus, the user can access a detailed view of that motif. This is useful for identifying similar examples because the user can search for increasingly more specific motifs. By selecting the "Blossom" entry, a list of sub-motifs is generated which includes, for example, trefoil blossoms, rose blossoms, or four-leaf blossoms. Rubbings identified by each of these new, more specific motifs can then be viewed. This allows the user to start their search with a broad, general term—for example "Blossom"—and narrow it according to specific details, which increases the likelihood that similar stamps may be identified.

Although the four stamp designs on Portland State’s codex’s covers are each visually unique and identified by different tool numbers, the EBDB groups them into two descriptive categories (motifs): “pomegranate without outer leaves” and “blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves.” On our codex, each motif is set inside a rhombus. The two stamps identified by the “blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves” motif measure approximately 1.4 centimeters across (see Figure 1a and Figure 1b) and 1.7 centimeters (see Figure 2a and Figure 2b), respectively. Of the two stamps that fall under the “pomegranate without outer leaves” motif, one measures approximately 2.8 centimeters across (see figures 3a–3c) and the other 1.7 centimeters (see Figure 4a and Figure 4b).

The four stamp designs on the covers of Portland State’s codex appear to match four stamps in the EBDB—see figures 1c, 2c, 3d, and 4c for rubbings of each design. In addition to strong visual similarities, these examples also match the dimensions of the stamp designs on our codex’s covers. All four of these stamps are associated with the workshop of Nicholas von Havelberg in Erfurt, Germany, which was in operation from 1477 to 1506.⁷ Additionally, bound into the codex are six blank pages, including a half-page with handwriting in sixteenth-century German. Part of the page is missing, making the text difficult to read; however, the year 1504 is clearly referenced in the last line. In addition to the material evidence that points to Nicolaus von Havelberg’s Erfurt workshop as the site where the codex was bound, this date suggests that it was potentially bound between 1504 and 1506.

The EBDB and SHD have thirty-one binding records connected to Nicholas von Havelberg’s workshop. Although several records are incomplete, this workshop bound texts that were printed across Germany, France, and Italy in cities like Ulm, Nuremberg, Strasbourg

⁷ “Workshop detail view w000072,” Einbanddatenbank, Berlin State Library, last modified July 23, 2012, <https://www.hist-einband.de/en/werkstattdetails.html?entityID=w000072>.

(where the copy of the *Fasciculus temporum* in Portland State’s codex was printed), and Venice. It is not unusual that texts from numerous, geographically-diffuse printers were bound by a single workshop; Claire Bolton, for example, examined 500 volumes bound by Ulm bookbinder Conrad Dinckmut and found that the texts came from eighty-four different printers.⁸ Table 1 and Table 2 include all of the records from the SHD and EBDB associated with the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg that were found in the course of this research. The data contained in these tables reflect the information that was available in the two databases, which was not always complete. Perhaps significantly, one of the texts from Strasbourg bound at this workshop was a copy of Robertus Caracciolus’ *Sermones quadragesimales* that was printed in 1490 by Johann Prüss.

Numerous binding examples from Nicolaus von Havelberg’s Erfurt workshop appear to contain some or all of the stamp designs used on our codex (see Table 1 and Table 2). For example, the binding on the copy of *Sermones quadragesimales* printed by Prüss includes both examples of the “Pomegranate without outer leaves” motif and one of the “Blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves” designs that have been identified on our codex (see Figure 5). These three stamp designs also appear to have been used to decorate the covers of Bernardinus de Busti’s *Mariale*, printed in Strasbourg in 1498, and Virgil’s *Bucolica*, printed in Leipzig, Germany, in 1499 (see Figure 6 and Figure 7, respectively). Three incunable bindings, all from the EBDB, include what appear to be the same four stamp designs used on our codex. Unfortunately, two of the records are incomplete, so information about the texts is unknown; the records only include the stamps used on the covers and the workshop—Nicolaus von Havelberg’s—where the texts

⁸ Claire Bolton, “Links between a Fifteenth-Century Printer and a Binder,” in *Early Printed Books as Material Objects*, edited by Bettina Wagner and Marcia Reed (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 178.

were bound. The third incunable, however, is listed as *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis* by Bernard of Clairvaux, which was published in Basel in 1495 (EBDB identification number k002735).

To confirm the hypothesis that Portland State’s codex was bound by the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg, it was necessary to determine if other incunable binding collections had information on Havelberg’s workshop, and if so what stamp designs were associated with it. The University of Erfurt has a collection of documents from Adolf Rhein (1885–1964), a bookbinder and binding researcher whose work focused on Erfurt. Among his papers on late medieval Erfurt bookbinders were two sheets of stamp designs from Havelberg’s workshop. All four of the designs from Portland State’s codex appear to be included (see Figure 8 and Figure 9).⁹ This source corroborates the records in the EBDB and SHD, which strengthens the hypothesis that the codex was bound by Havelberg’s workshop.

This hypothesis was tested further by determining whether or not the stamps used on Portland State’s codex were unique or generic. If numerous binding workshops used these stamps, it would weaken the degree of certainty that Havelberg’s workshop was the binding site of our volume. Using the EBDB, the stamps associated with five other Erfurt binding workshops—w000092, w000804, w000118, w000958, and w002600—were examined. None of the designs found on the covers of Portland State’s codex are associated with any of these workshops, nor were there examples of stamps from these workshops that match those associated with Nicolaus von Havelberg. This seems to suggest that the designs are unique rather than generic, which supports the hypothesis that Havelberg is our binder.

⁹ Adolf Rhein, “Stamp Lists,” Estate of Adolf Rhein, Erfurt University Library, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:gbv:547-201200176>. Thank you to Mr. Weigert at the Stadtarchiv Erfurt for bringing our attention to Adolf Rhein and his digitized papers held by Erfurt University Library.

A very similar stamp design to one on the covers of Portland State's codex, also listed as a "blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves" motif, is associated with the Erfurt workshop of Wolfgang Herolt (see Figure 1d). However, it can be distinguished from the stamp used on our codex's covers because it lacks the score marks inside the four petals and it measures one centimeter in diameter, while the design on our codex measures 1.4 centimeters. As a decorative element, contemporary examples of the "blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves" motif can be found on other incunables bound in Erfurt (see figures 1e–1g). Other contemporary examples of the "pomegranate without outer leaves" motif can also be found in Germany, although again they do not exactly match the motif on our codex (see Figure 3e and Figure 3f).

There are examples of incunables bound in Erfurt that contain similar stamp designs to those on Portland State's codex. For example, the cover of Alexander de Hales' *Summa universae theologiae*, printed in Nuremberg in 1482, appears to have one of the same "blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves" motifs that was used on our codex (see Figure 8). Where exactly this was bound is unknown, but the SHD record associates it with either EBDB workshop number w000804 or w002590, both of which were in Erfurt. Another similar example of this stamp design was found on the cover of Bonaventura's *Opuscula*, which was printed in Strasbourg in 1495. This binding is associated with a different Erfurt workshop, EBDB number w000112 (see Figure 9). In both cases, it is difficult to determine from the available photos whether these designs match those on our codex. If they do, it may weaken the hypothesis that our codex was bound by Nicolaus von Havelberg's workshop. However, as indicated in the previous paragraph, there are other examples of the "blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves" motif from a number of Erfurt binderies, so a closer examination would be necessary to

determine whether these designs match the design linked to Havelberg, or if they more closely match examples from other workshops.

Ultimately, only hypotheses can be made about the location where Portland State's codex was bound. While the evidence that points to Erfurt, Germany, and more specifically to the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg, appears to be convincing, a definitive conclusion is not possible at this time. Rather, the goal has been to put forward a plausible interpretation of the evidence. There is plenty of room for further research that could either support or refute the interpretations in this paper. The findings could be studied in light of questions including, for example, how common was copying or imitating stamps? If binding workshops made stamps with designs virtually identical to their competitors, that may weaken the argument that our codex was bound by Nicolaus von Havelberg's workshop, but may also help explain why bindings from numerous Erfurt workshops included very similar designs (as in figures 1d-1g). A broader look at regional binding decorations would be useful as well. Can bindings be identified by certain regional designs, and if so does our codex reflect those unique to Thuringia and Erfurt?¹⁰ Additionally, a better grasp of book production and trade networks in western Europe during the late fifteenth century would be useful for understanding how texts printed in Speyer and Strasbourg ended up getting bound together at a workshop in Erfurt. While these reservations are important to keep in mind, the visual evidence nonetheless compellingly points to the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg in Erfurt, Germany, as the site where Portland State's codex was bound.

¹⁰ It appears that there were, in fact, region-specific stamp designs. John T. McQuillen, in his study of the Scheyern Abbey bookbindery near Augsburg, Germany, writes that "the palmette is a common motif (and near hallmark) of many Augsburg bindings ... not just the stamp itself but [its] placements [on Scheyern bindings] are a common stylistic feature of Augsburg bindings." John T. McQuillen, "Fifteenth-Century Book Networks: Scribes, Illuminators, Binders, and the Introduction of Print," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 107, no. 4 (2013): 514.

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<https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606536.001.0001/acref-9780198606536-e-0017>.

Appendix

Table 1. Bindings associated with the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg in Erfurt (records from the Scott Husby Database).

Goff ID Number	Author, Title	Publication Information	# stamps in common with PSU's codex
A-871	Antoninus Florentinus, <i>Summa Theologica</i>	Anton Koberger, Nuremberg, 1477	1
A-871	Antoninus Florentinus, <i>Summa Theologica</i>	Anton Koberger, Nuremberg, 1478	1
A-871	Antoninus Florentinus, <i>Summa Theologica</i>	Anton Koberger, Nuremberg, 1478	1
B-498	Johannes Bertachinus, <i>Repertorium iuris utriusque</i> , vols. 1 & 2	Anton Koberger, Nuremberg, 1483	1
G-382	Gratianus, <i>Decretum</i>	Georgius Arrivabenus, Venice, 1490	1
C-163	Robertus Caracciolus, <i>Sermones quadragesimales</i>	Johann Prüss, Strasbourg, 1490	3
B-927	Bonaventura, <i>Opuscula</i>	Martin Flach, Strassburg, 1489	0
A-966	Aristoteles, <i>Opera</i>	Johannes and Gregorius de Gregoriis, de Forlivio, Venice, 1496	0
B-1335	Bernardinus de Busti, <i>Mariale</i>	Martin Flach, Strasbourg, 1498	2
A-1221	Aurelius Augustinus, <i>Opuscula</i>	Martin Flach, Strasbourg, 1491	1

A-780	Antoninus Florentinus, <i>Chronicon</i> , vol. 1 only	Nicolaus Kesler, Basel, 1491	1
V-206	Publius Vergilius Maro, <i>Bucolica</i>	Wolfgang Stöckel, Leipzig, 1499	3
C-170	Robertus Caracciolus, <i>Sermones quadragesimales</i>	Henricus Ariminensis, Strasbourg, 1473	0
P-477	Petrus Lombardus, <i>Glossa Psalterii</i>	Johann Sensenschmidt and Andreas Frisner, Nuremberg, 1478	0
V-277	Vincentius Bellovacensis, <i>Opuscula</i>	Johann Amerbach, Basel, 1481	0
G-385	Gratianus, <i>Decretum</i>	Georgius Arrivabenus, Venice, 1493	3

Table 2. Bindings associated with the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg in Erfurt (records from the Einbanddatenbank).

EBDB ID Number	Author, Title	Publication Information	# stamps in common with PSU's codex
k006176	—	—	4
k013154	—	—	1
k002739	John Marchesinus, <i>Mammotrectus super Bibliam</i>	Strasbourg, no later than 1485	0
k002737	ed. Bruno (bishop of Würzburg), <i>Psaltery</i>	Wuerzburg, 1485-89	0
k002735	Bernardus Claraevallensis,	Basel, 1495	4

	<i>Sermons de tempore et de sanctis</i>		
k003967	—	—	0
k002745	Bernardus Bottonius, <i>Casus longi super quinque libros Decretalium</i>	Strasbourg 1493	0
k003602	—	—	2
k002743	Albert Magnus, <i>Sermons de tempore et de sanctis</i>	Johannes Zainer, Ulm, not after 1478	0
k002258	—	—	1
k002741	Justinianus, <i>Corpus iuris civilis</i>	Venice, 1488	0
k003399	—	—	4
k003397	—	—	1
k003395	—	—	1
k002261	—	—	1

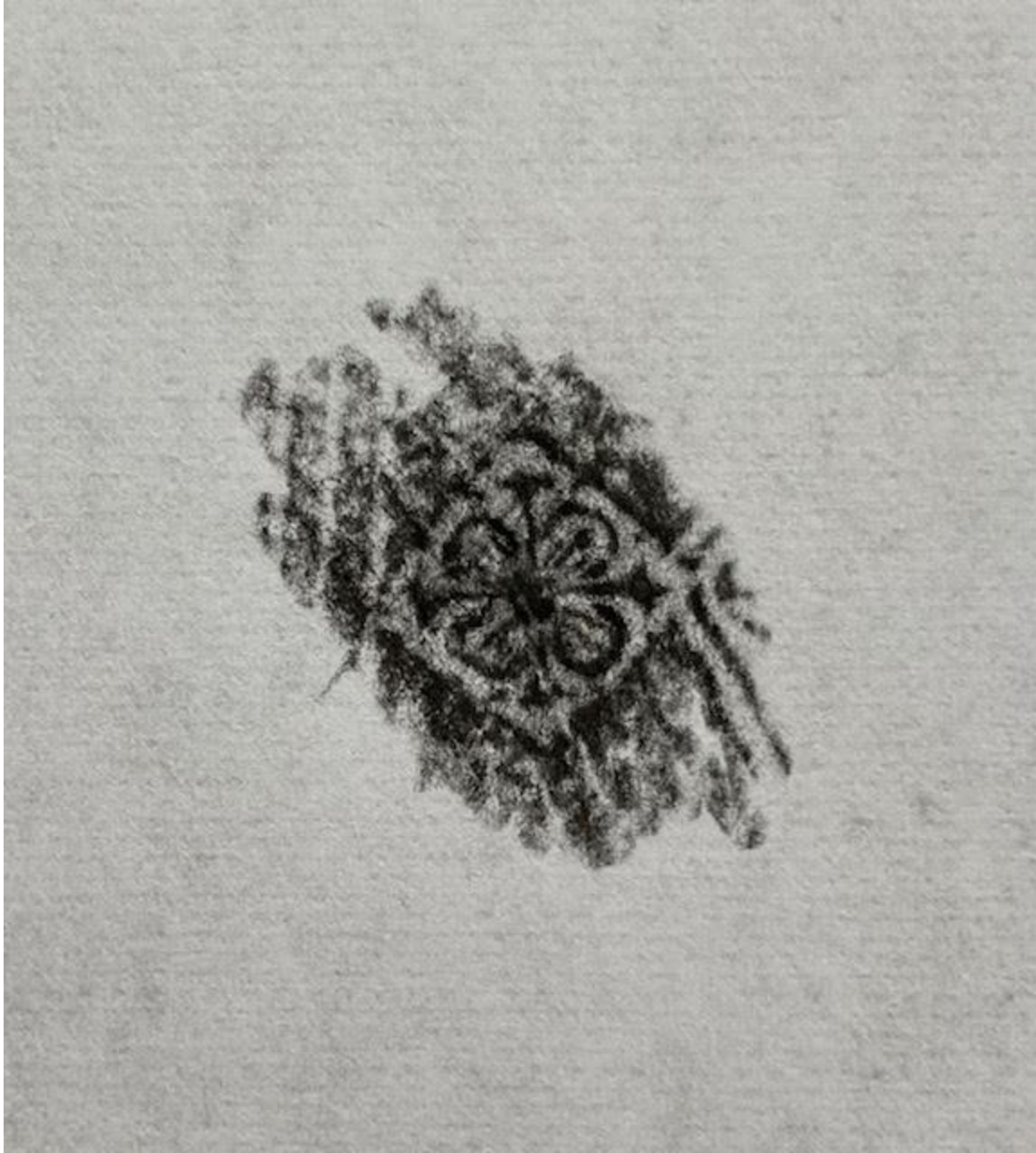


Figure 1a. Rubbing of stamp design from Portland State's codex binding. Measures 1.4 centimeters across at its widest point. The EBDB motif classification is "blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves," motif number m001931.

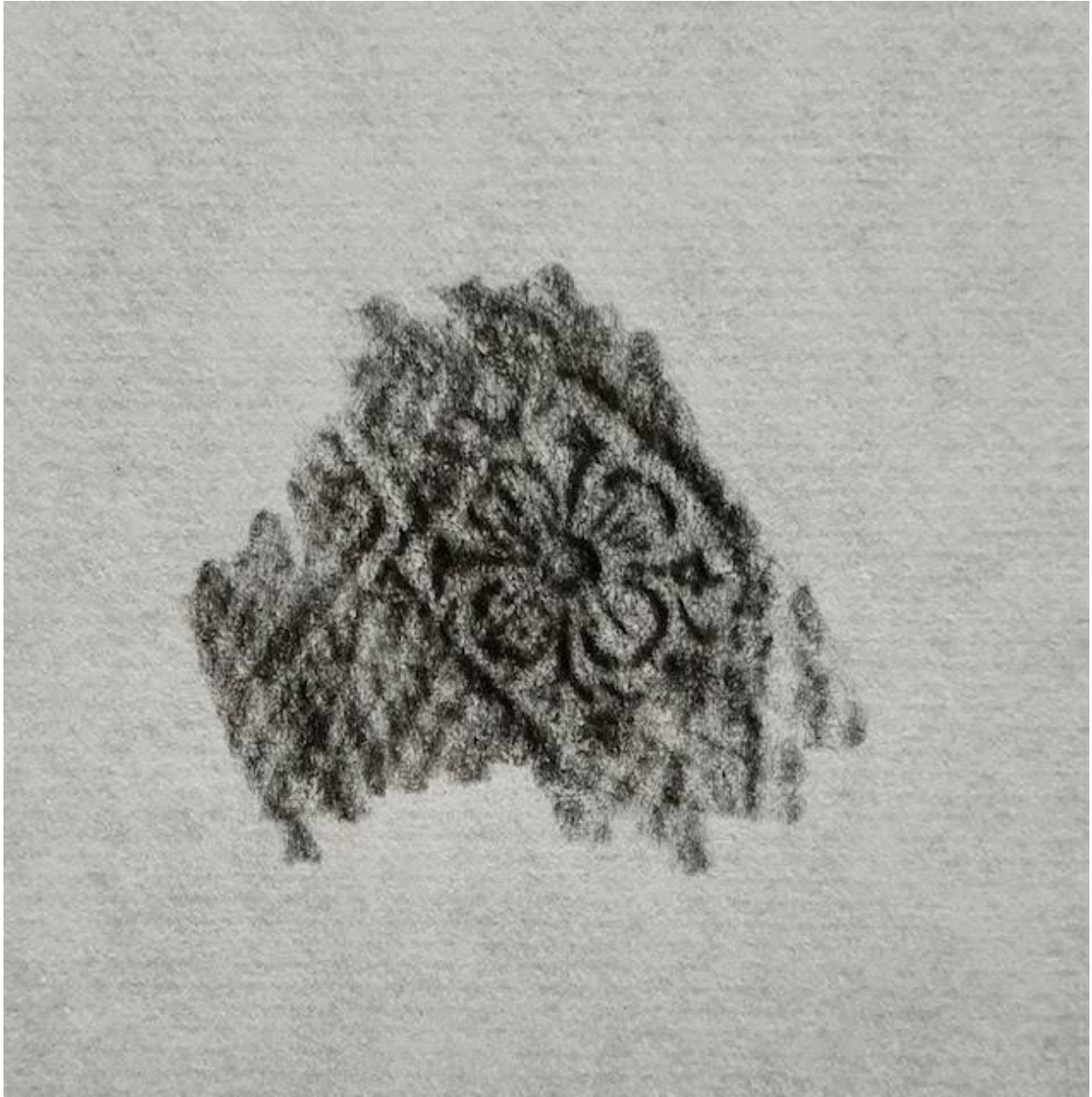


Figure 1b. Another example of motif number m001931 from Portland State's codex binding.



Figure 1c. Example from EBDB, tool number s005361. Associated with the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg.

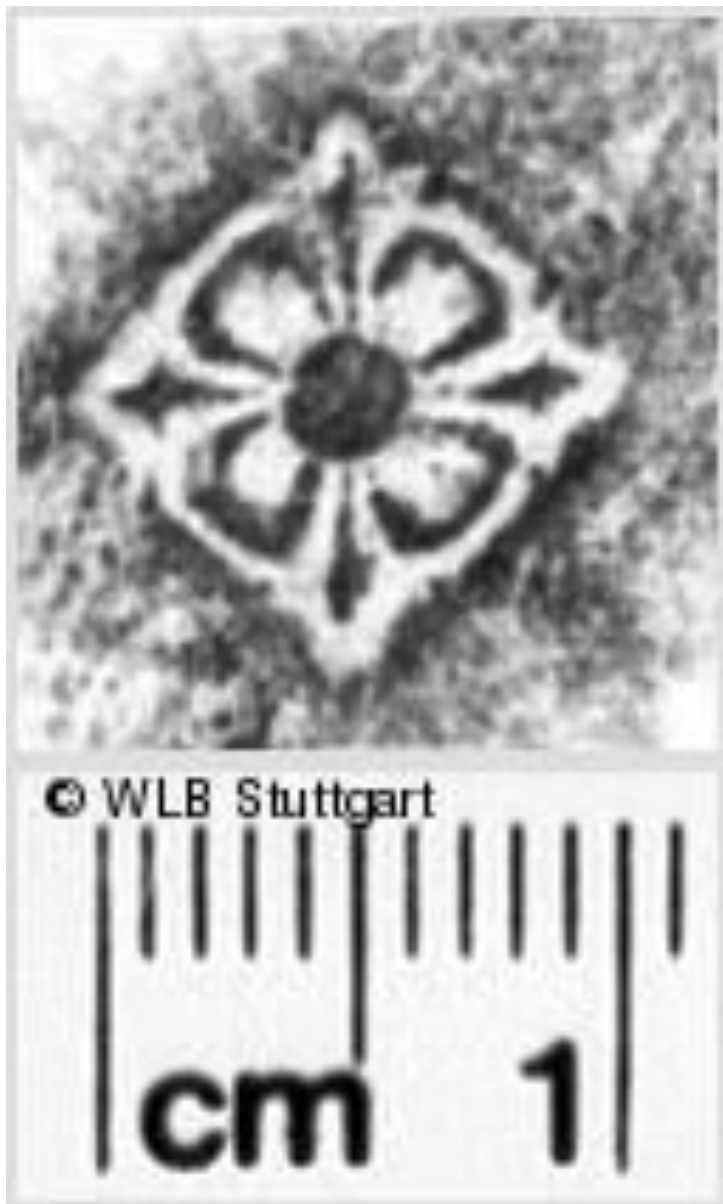


Figure 1d. Similar (but not identical) example of the “blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves” motif. EBDB tool number s009993. This design is smaller than the one on our codex, and the petals do not appear to have score marks. Associated with the workshop of Wolfgang Herolt, Erfurt, Germany, EBDB workshop number w000958.

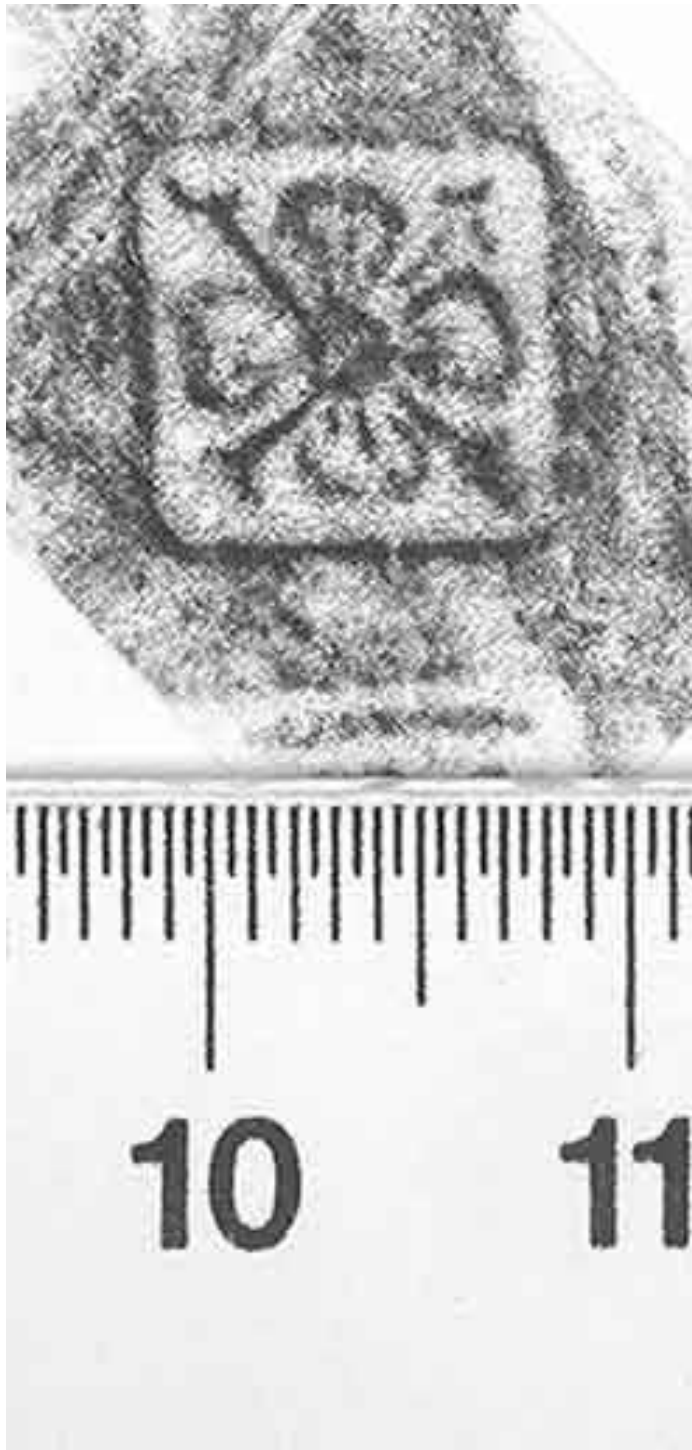


Figure 1e. Another similar but not identical example of the “blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves” motif. EBDB tool number s001872. This design is smaller than the one on our codex, and the corners of the outer rhombus are more rounded. Associated with a workshop in Erfurt, Germany, EBDB workshop number w000804.



Figure 1f. Here, the petals are thinner and not uniformly shaped. Additionally, the interleaves (the diamond shapes in each corner of the rhombus) appear to be wider than those on our codex. EBDB tool number s001811. Associated with a workshop in Erfurt, Germany, EBDB workshop number w000804.

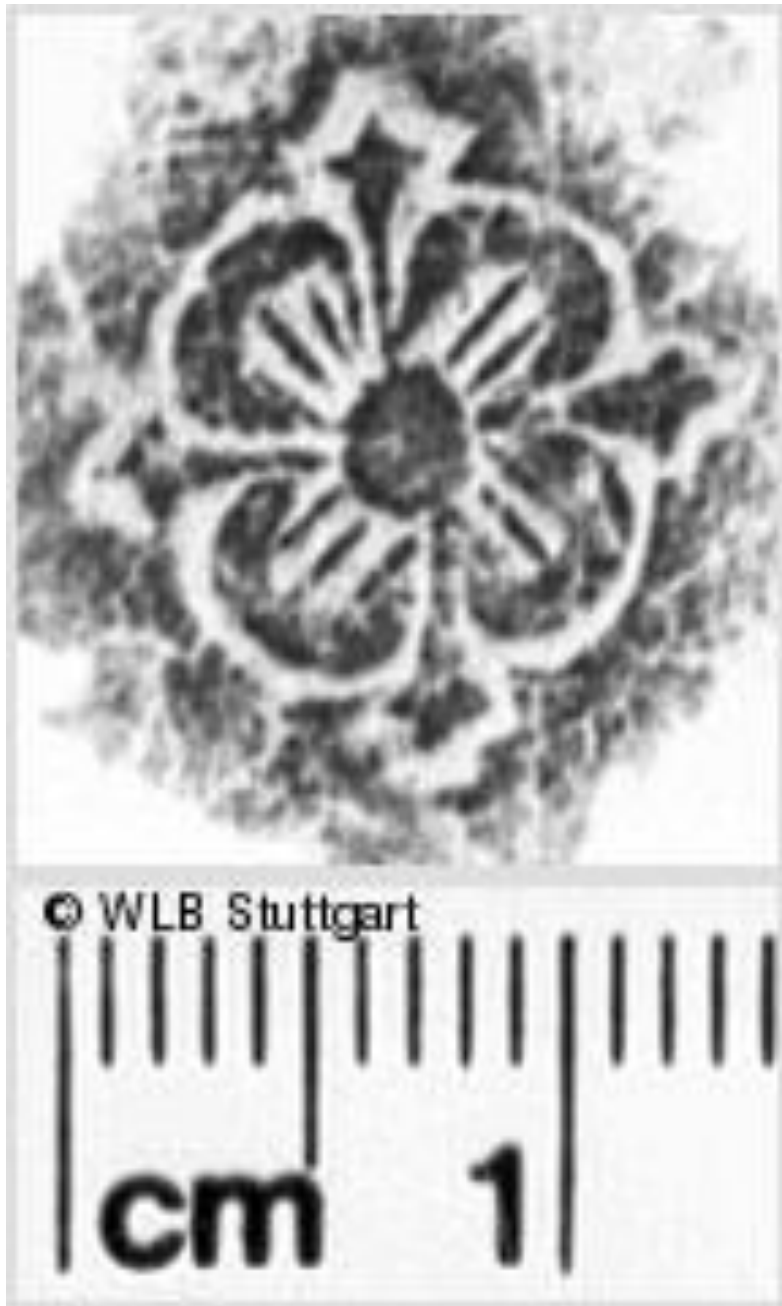


Figure 1g. This design is similar to one on Portland State's codex, but the motif is not contained within a rhombus, so it is not a match. EBDB tool number s009746. Associated with a workshop in Erfurt, Germany, EBDB workshop number w000118.

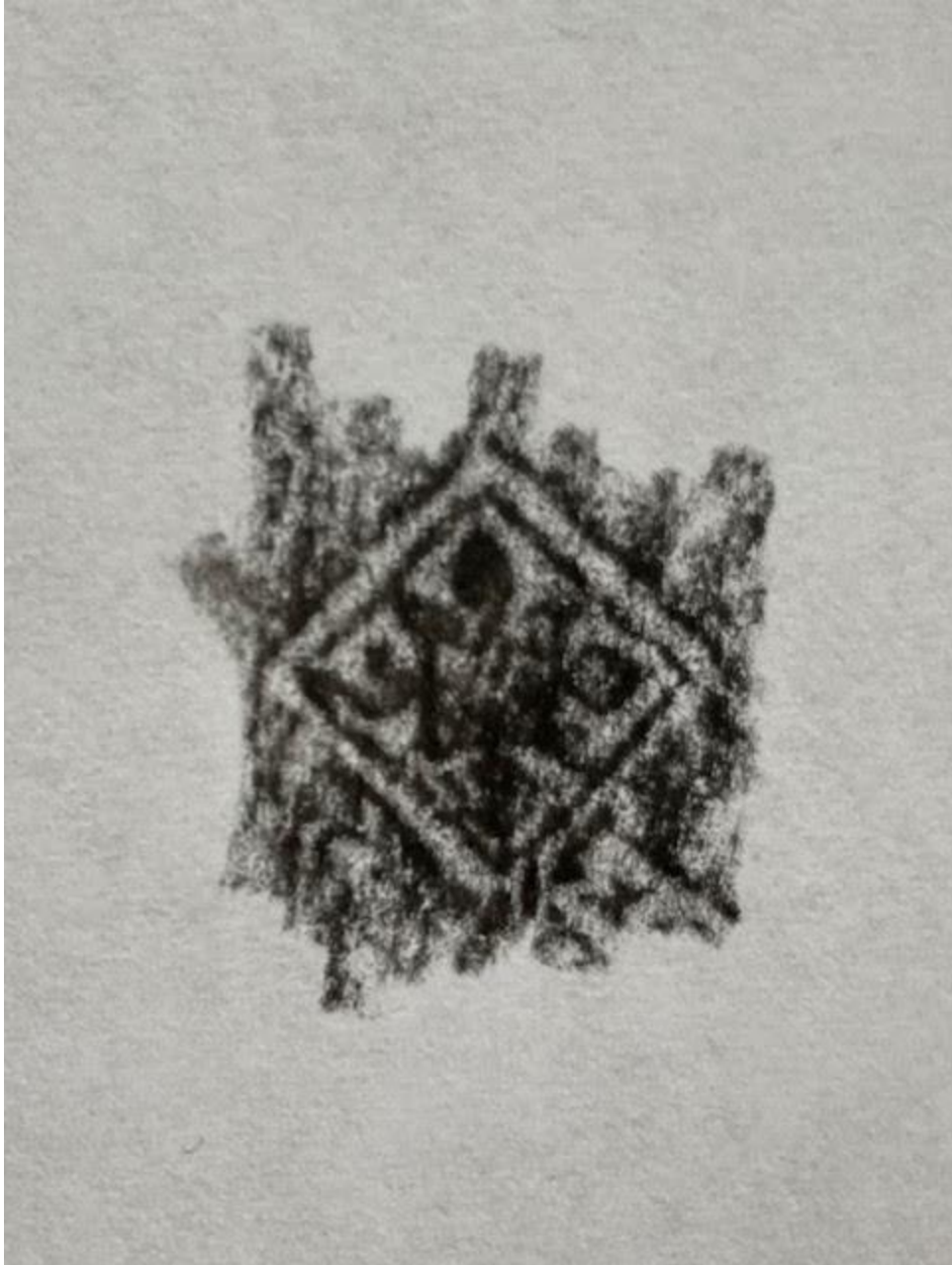


Figure 2a. Rubbing of stamp design from Portland State's codex binding. Measures 1.7 centimeters across at its widest point. The EBDDB motif classification is "blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves," motif number m001931.



Figure 2b. Another example of motif number m001931 from Portland State's codex binding.



Figure 2c. Example from EBDB, tool number s005363. Associated with the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg.

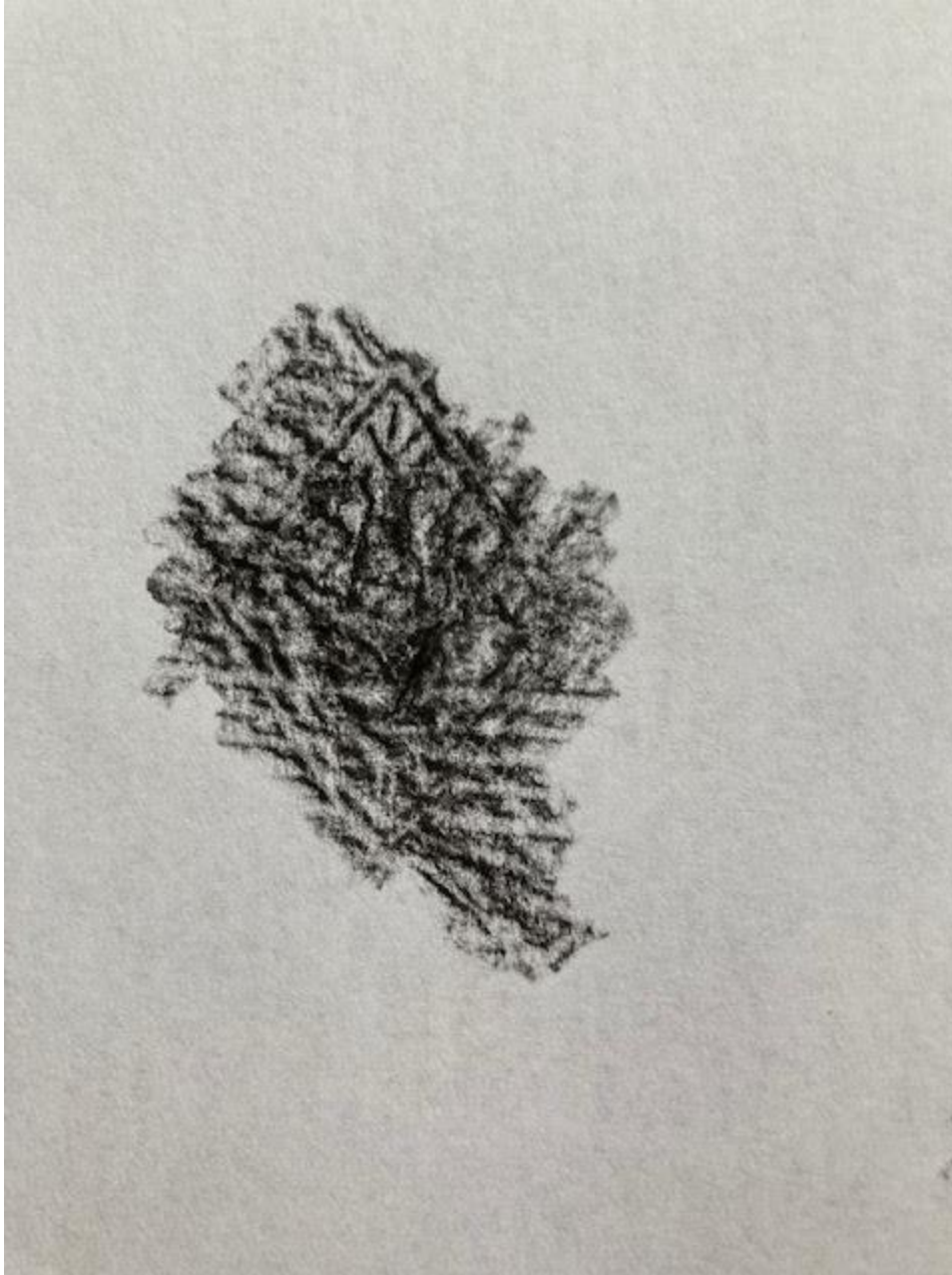


Figure 3a. Rubbing of stamp design from Portland State's codex binding. Measures 2.8 centimeters across at its widest point. The EBDB motif classification is "pomegranate without outer leaves," motif number m002082.



Figure 3b. Another example of motif number m002082 from Portland State's codex binding.



Figure 3c. Another example of motif number m002082 from Portland State's codex binding.

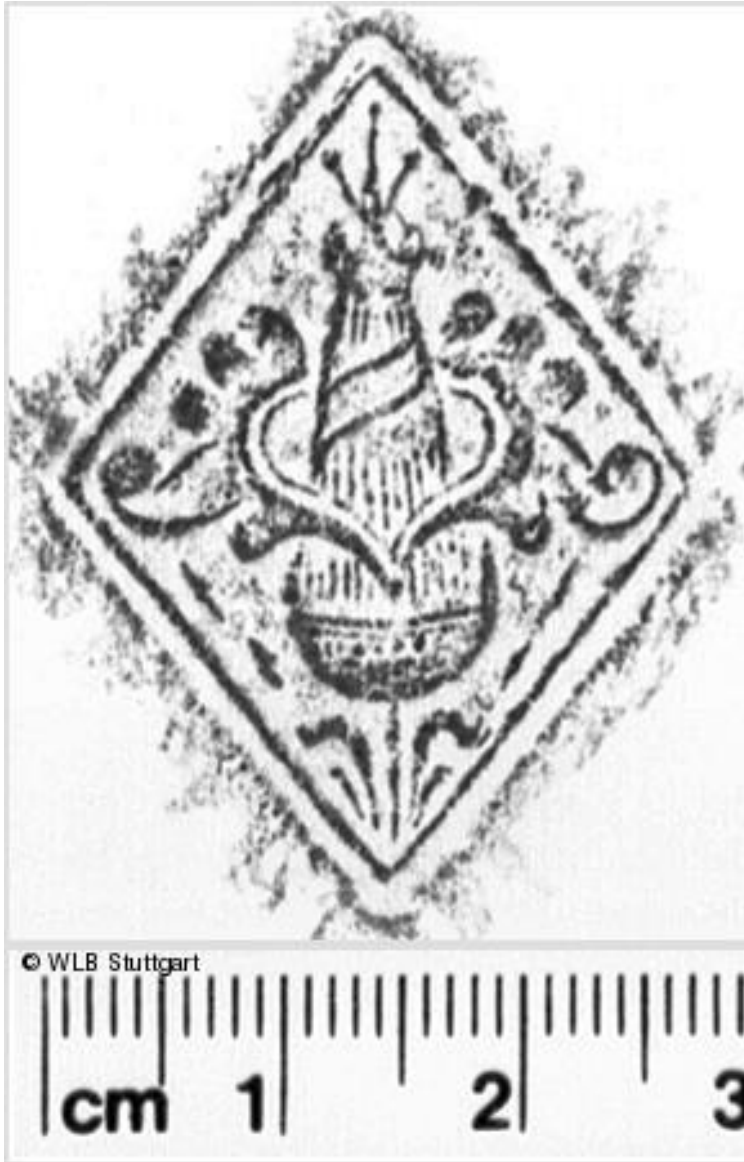


Figure 3d. Example from EBDB, tool number s005357. Associated with the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg.



Figure 3e. Similar example of “pomegranate without outer leaves” motif, EBDB tool number s006956. Associated with a monastery workshop in Nuremberg, Germany, EBDB workshop number w000085.



Figure 3f. Similar example of “pomegranate without outer leaves” motif, EBDB tool number s006308. Associated with a monastery workshop in Nuremberg, Germany, EBDB workshop number w000081.

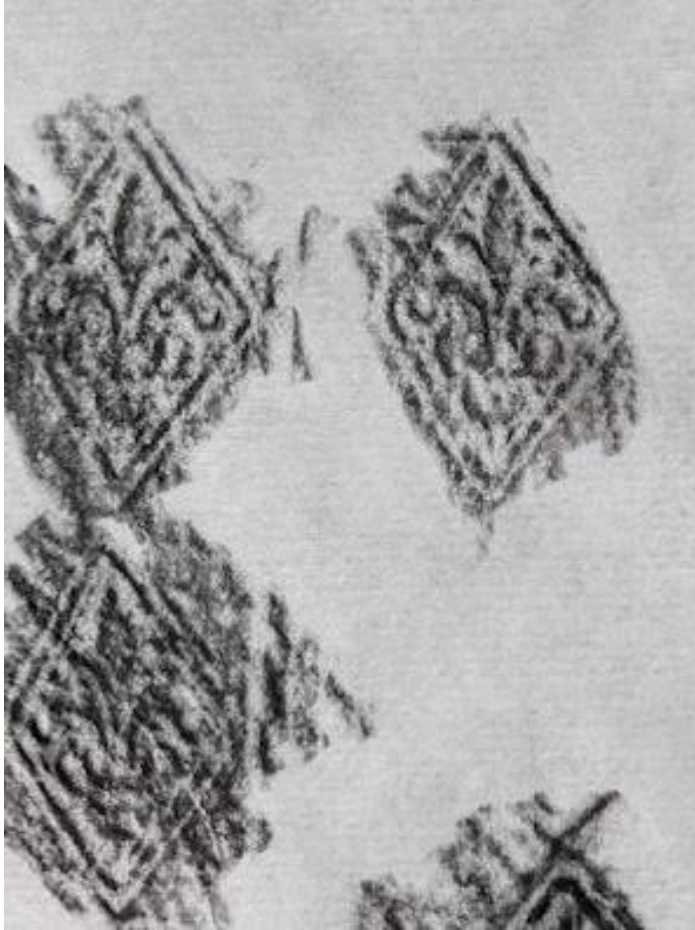


Figure 4a. Rubbing of stamp design from Portland State's codex binding. Measures 2.8 centimeters across at its widest point. The EBDB motif classification is "pomegranate without outer leaves," motif number m002082.



Figure 4b. Another example of motif number m002082 from Portland State's codex binding.



Figure 4c. Example from EBDB, tool number s005358. Associated with the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg.

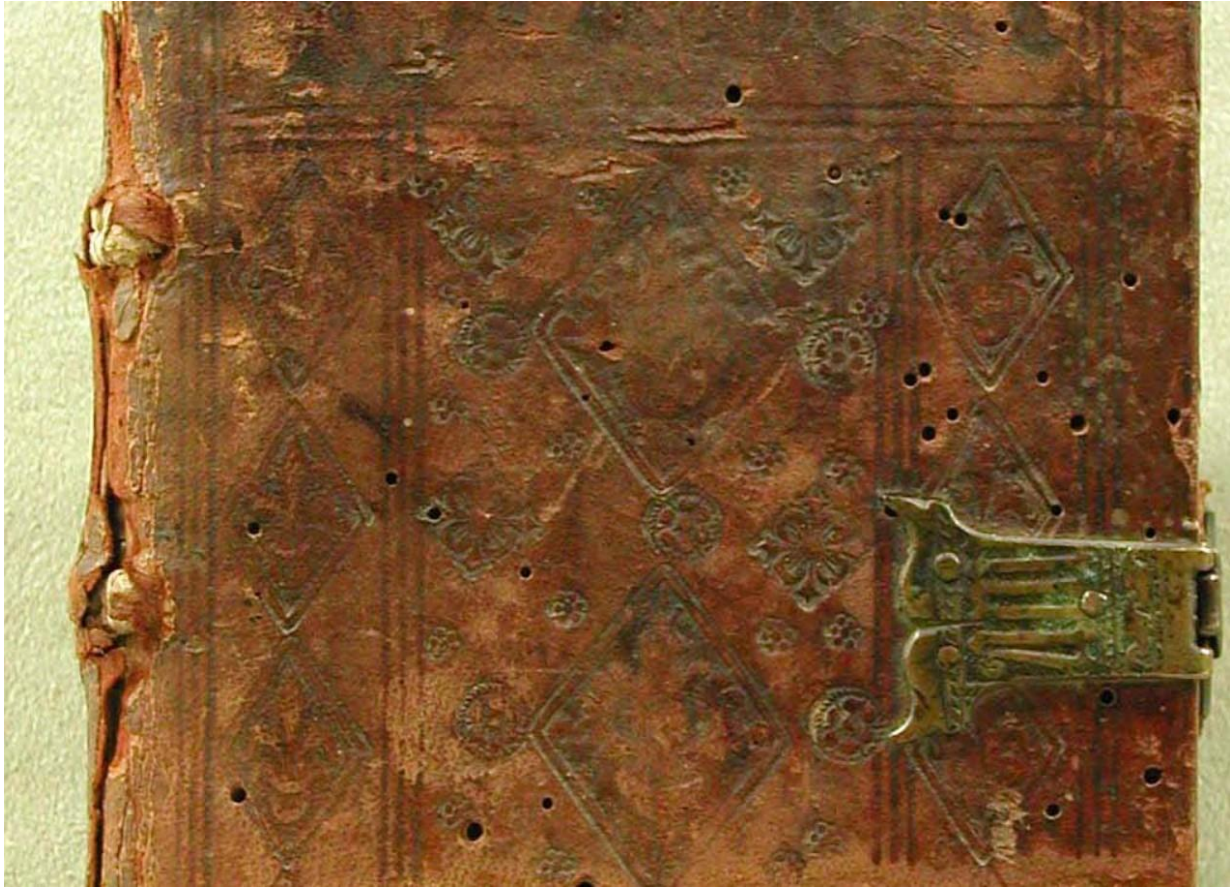


Figure 5. Front cover of *Sermones quadragesimales* by Robertus Caracciolus, printed in Strasbourg by Johann Prüss in 1490 and bound by Nicolaus von Havelberg's workshop. Image from the Scott Husby Database, https://husby.princeton.edu/show_book_by_id.php?book_id=173212.

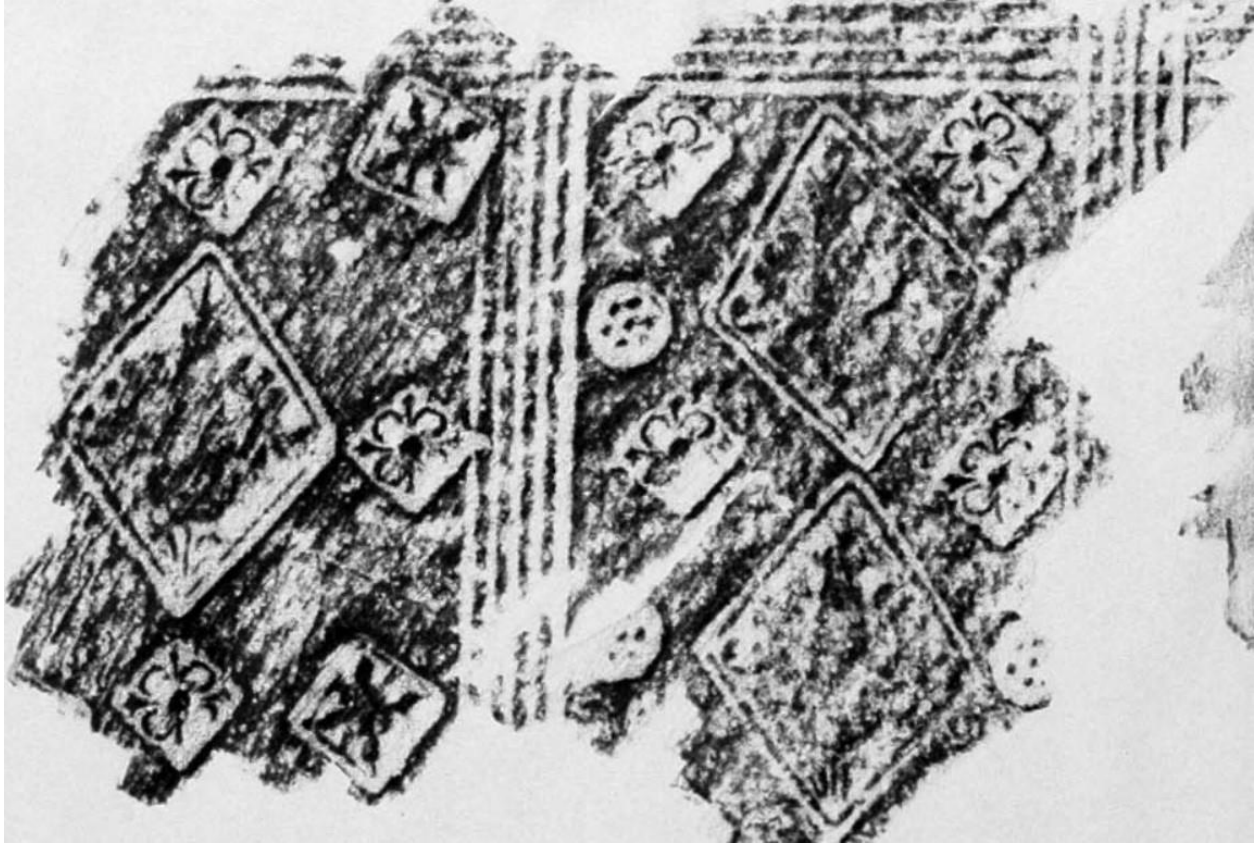


Figure 6. Front cover of *Mariale* by Bernardinus de Busti, printed in Strassburg in 1498 and bound by Nicolaus von Havelberg's workshop. Image from the Scott Husby Database, https://husby.princeton.edu/show_book_by_id.php?book_id=178608.

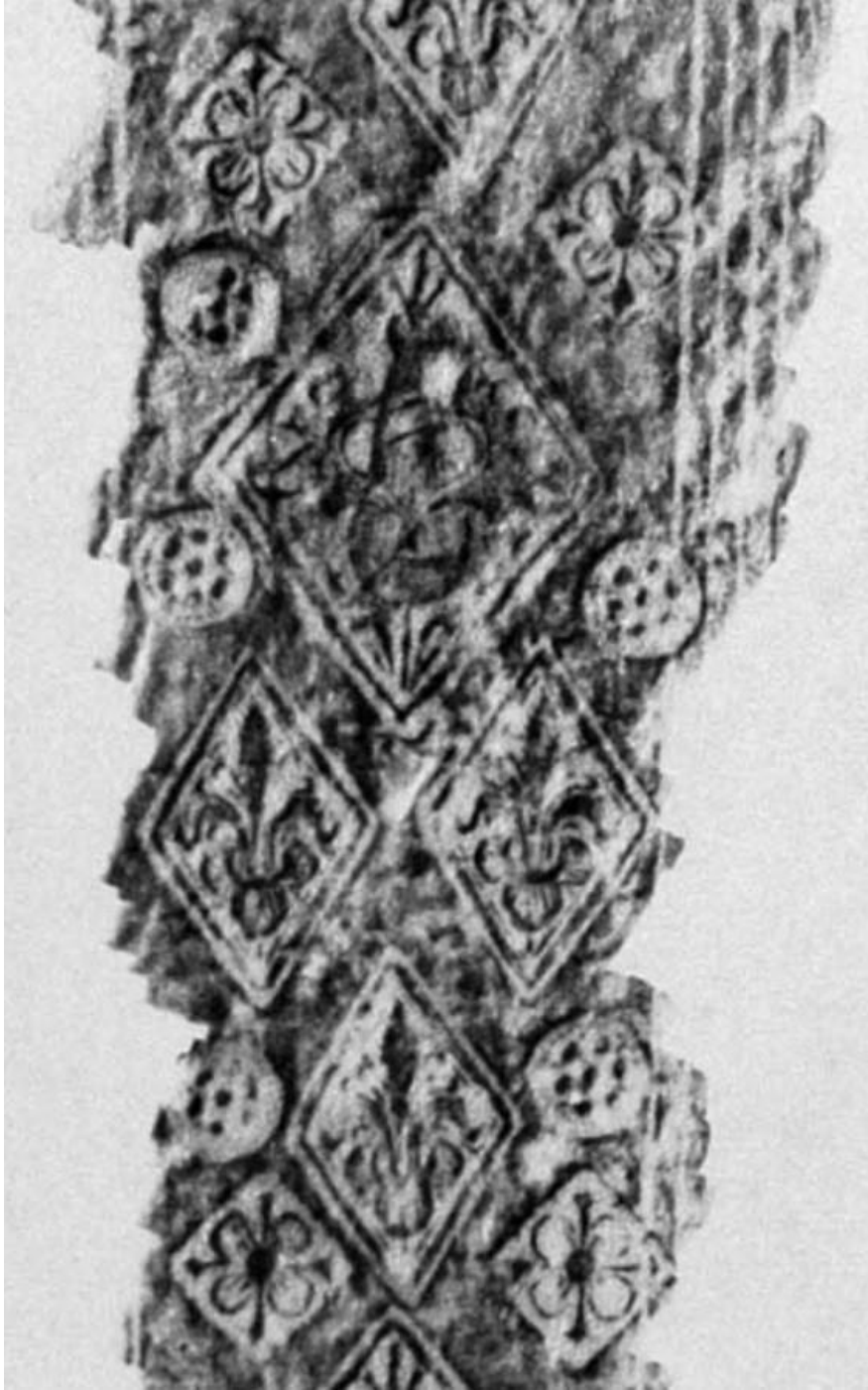


Figure 7. Front cover of *Bucolica* by Virgil, printed in Leipzig in 1499 and bound by Nicolaus von Havelberg's workshop. Image from the Scott Husby Database, https://husby.princeton.edu/show_book_by_id.php?book_id=191345.



Figure 8. Rubbings taken from bindings made by the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg. These three designs appear to match those on Portland State's codex. From the estate of Adolf Rhein, University of Erfurt, https://www.db-thueringen.de/receive/dbt_mods_00020487.

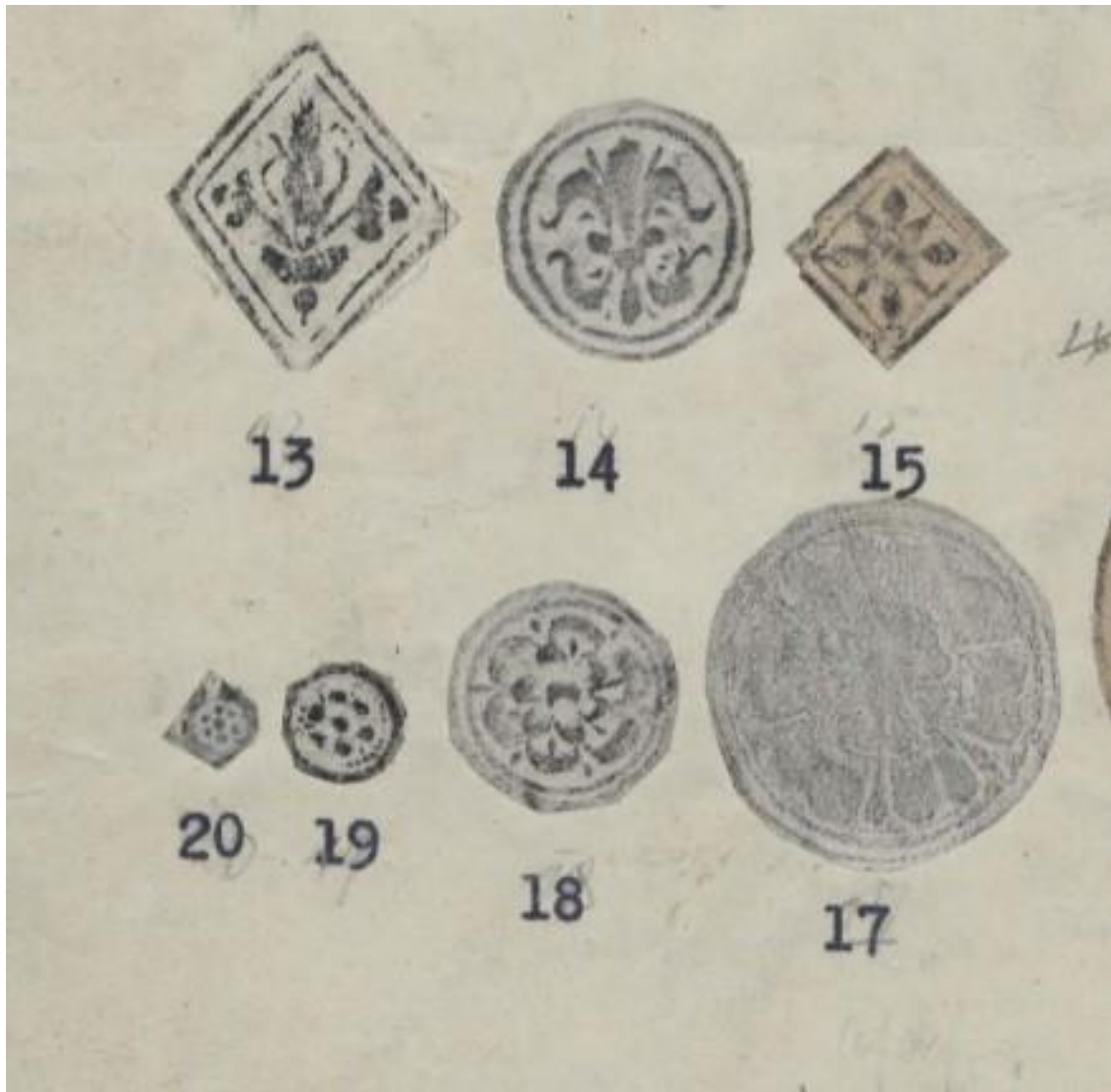


Figure 9. Rubbings taken from bindings made by the workshop of Nicolaus von Havelberg. Design 15 appears to match one of the designs on Portland State's codex. From the estate of Adolf Rhein, University of Erfurt, https://www.db-thueringen.de/receive/dbt_mods_00020487.



Figure 9. Cover of the *Summa universae theologiae* by Alexander de Hales, printed in Nuremberg in 1482. From SHD, Goff number A-383. This cover appears to have a stamp design, the “blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves” motif, used on Portland State’s codex. Where exactly this was bound is unknown, but the SHD record associates it with either EBDB workshop number w000804 or w002590, both of which were in Erfurt.

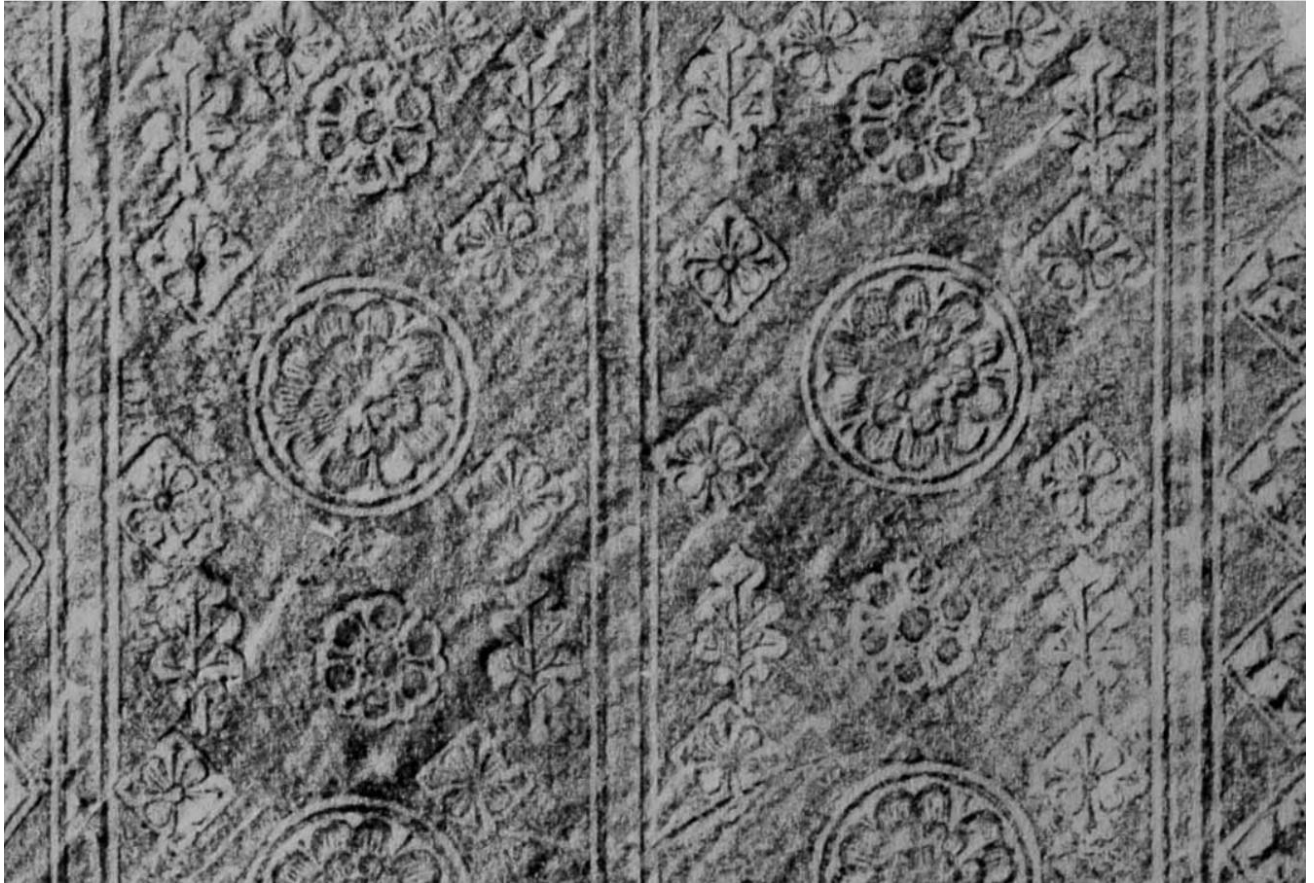


Figure 10. Cover of Bonaventura's *Opuscula*, printed in Strassburg in 1495. From the SHD, Goff number B-928. This cover appears to have a stamp design, the "blossom quatrefoil with additional leaves" motif, similar to one on Portland State's codex. The SHD record associates it with EBDB workshop number w000112 in Erfurt.