

## Preserving the Evidence

A 16th-Century Book Absent Its Binding

Ronald K. Smeltzer

The recent Caxton Club / Bibliographical Society of America / Newberry Library symposium “Preserving the Evidence,” in part about the question of preservation versus restoration, provided me with a useful context when I considered a recent acquisition. During the past decades of collecting, only seldom have I purchased books not in very good or better condition. I have had a few books conservatively restored in cases where it seemed that little remained of the original state. In general, however, I have preserved books as-is if significant features of the original state exist.

The recent acquisition presented the case of a late 16th-century book without a binding. However the sewn text block appears to be in a contemporary state with a few interesting features, and I concluded that the book should be left as-is. In this note, I describe the book and explain why it remains in the as-purchased, slightly shabby state.

The book is an obscure one on a subject, early scientific instruments, of long-time interest to me: Henry de Suberville’s *L’Henry-Metre, Instrument Royal et Universal...*, Paris: Adrien Perier, 1598. On the title page appear the phrase “boutique de Plantin au Compas” and the

printer’s mark, a hand with a compass, and the motto, “Labore et Constantia,” of Christophe Plantin. Adrien Perier’s connection with the Plantin name came about when in 1596 he married Magdalena Plantin, a daughter of Christophe Plantin<sup>1</sup>. The colophon notes



Fig. 1. Portrait frontispiece of Henri IV from Suberville’s *L’Henry-Metre*.

that the book was printed by Jamet Mettayer, a printer and bookseller<sup>2</sup>.

The book is a modest quarto:  $\tilde{a}^4 \acute{e}^2 A-2G^4 2H^2$ ; gathering S is misimposed. The collation is [12], 225, [19] p. Throughout the first half of the book are 72 woodcut illustrations, many full page or nearly so, showing how a *Henry-metre* is used and diagrams of the relevant geometry for calculations based upon measurements done with the device. The second half of the text is devoted mostly to specific problems, mathematical calculations, and tables of numbers. There are four engraved plates, one being a frontispiece portrait, Fig. 1, by Thomas de Leu<sup>3</sup> of the dedicatee, King Henri IV, perhaps France’s greatest king. Another plate, Fig. 2, illustrates a *Henry-metre*, and two other plates show what seems to be accessory apparatus.

Suberville’s book is fundamentally a text on mensuration with the trigonometric device of Fig. 2. With its circular base, both horizontal and vertical angles could be measured. Hence, it could be used for surveying, measuring heights and distances, and carrying out astronomy

measurements. Selected from among the many woodcuts in the text, Figs. 3 and 4 show a *Henry-metre* in use. One bibliographer described Suberville’s book as “an interesting effort to perpetuate an inventor’s name by a See *HENRY-METRE*, page 3

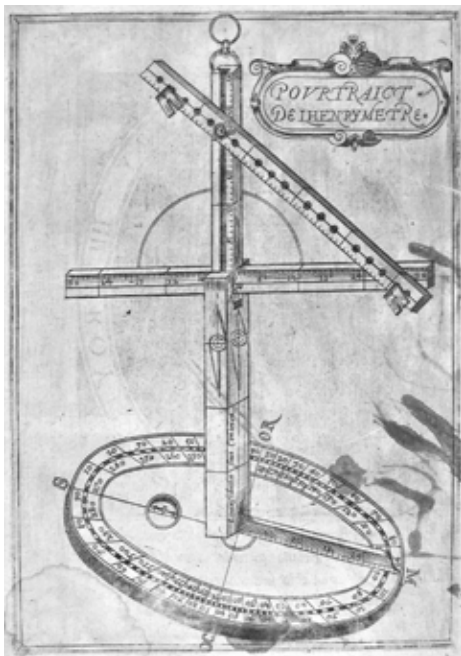


Fig. 2. Suberville's Henry-metre as depicted on an engraved plate.

HENRY-METRE, from page 1

work of no special scholarship describing an instrument of no particular value<sup>7</sup>. There is no later documentation about Suberville's device, suggesting that the bibliographer's assessment is probably correct.

In addition to the measuring instrument being named after the king and the presence of the portrait, the book includes a nine-page dedication sycophantic in style and five pages of odes in praise of Henri IV. On the title page, the author describes himself as a Breton, despite then holding, or perhaps having held, the positions of *chanoine* (canon) in the cathedral church of Saint Pierre in Xaintes (Saintes, in southwestern France) and *advocat* in the Cour de Parlement (a judicial body) of Bordeaux. In the text of his book, Suberville states that he lived in Xaintes during the period 1584 to 1590<sup>4,5</sup>, and he further notes that this was a time of civil war<sup>6</sup>. At the end of the long dedication, he lists his place of

residence as Kimpercorentin (Quimper in Brittany; "corentin" refers to the city's first bishop).

As noted earlier, this copy of Suberville's book is without a binding, but is otherwise mostly intact. What appears to be the contemporary sewing of the text block is fully intact, and as visible in Fig. 5, spine cords and remnants of the sewing of the head and tail bands remain. Because of the missing binding, the endpapers are damaged.

Apparently as guards, vellum flaps are present, but not visible in Fig. 5, on both sides of the spine. Very old handwriting, not decipherable by me, is on the inner side of the vellum pieces, as illustrated in Fig. 6. As seen in Fig. 5, archival boards are included with the enclosure to protect the endpapers.

Fig. 6. Writing on the inner surface of a vellum guard.



Fig. 5. Suberville's treatise in its polyester enclosure with hook-and-loop fasteners, showing the intact structure of the spine, including the remains of head and tail bands and cords.

Considering the interesting visible and apparently contemporary structure of this late 16th-century book, it seems appropriate to leave it as-is. As it resides in a private collection and is very seldom handled, the polyester enclosure – much easier to make than a box – seems appropriate.

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NOTES

1. Leon Voet. *The Golden Compasses: The History of the House of Plantin-Moretus*. E-book [http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/voet004goldo1\\_01/](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/voet004goldo1_01/), p. 181. (accessed June See HENRY-METRE, page 5

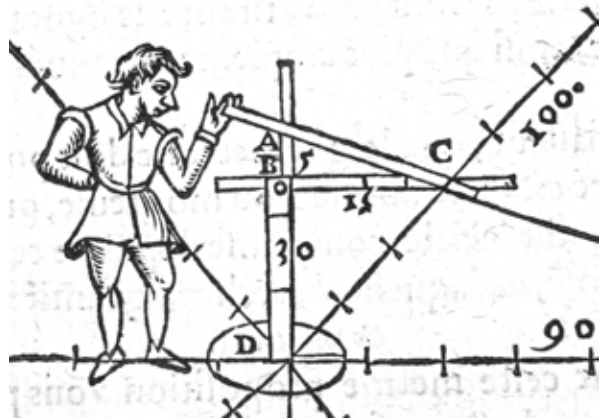
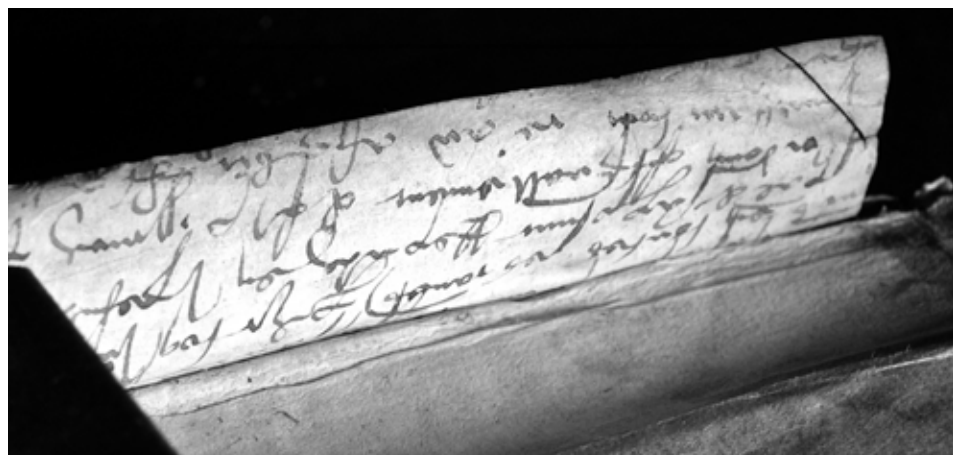


Fig. 3. A Henry-metre in use for measurement of distance, from the woodcut illustration p. 74.



Fig. 4. A Henry-metre in use for measurement of height, from the woodcut illustration p. 80.



lish an oasis in this East Lansing desert: found a good second-hand bookshop to which his friends on the staff of the college, and the better sort of undergraduate, might resort. They would brew strong coffee and serve plain doughnuts and sell very good books, old and new, and have good talk.

Hah! Plain doughnuts, indeed! But, as often happens with beginners, they lucked into buying two quality collections of books, including one from a debilitated old mansion, which later inspired one of Kirk's tales of the supernatural, a ghost story if you will, called "What Shadows We Pursue."

The Red Cedar Bookshop sold many of their books via mail order with a mimeographed catalog to out-of-state buyers. But the two observations that followed were very telling.

A consolation for lack of profit in bookselling is the diversity of character among bookshop browsers. Kirk's most curious customer was saddled with the name of Leon Lack, an

appellation commendably suitable, for he was lean and lank and very shabby, the archetype of the hollow-cheeked radical, straight out of the pages of Dostoevski.

It was a bold and pleasant venture, but time-consuming and unprofitable; it lasted for two years. ... In later years Kirk would urge other men to enter the second-hand book trade but never would be so foolish, despite the temptations, as to return to that business himself.

You might enjoy the flip side of Kirk's bookshop enthusiasm in the form of a little-known BBC series from 2000-2004 called *Black Books*. The series comprises 18 half-hour episodes about proprietor Bernard Black who operates a used book shop somewhere in London, and hates to sell books, and hates the people who buy books. I was gifted with a DVD of the first season. I made the mistake of loaning it to a friend. Surely I ought to have recalled the admonition of that late, great columnist from the *Chicago Daily News*, Sydney J. Harris, who defined rare

books are those "returned by friends."  
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- HENRY-METRE, from page 3  
19, 2015).
2. [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamet\\_Mettayer](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jamet_Mettayer) (accessed June 19, 2015).
  3. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_de\\_Leu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_de_Leu) (accessed June 18, 2015).
  4. Suberville, *L'Henry-Metre*, p. 132.
  5. René Kerviler. "L'Art de l'Ingénieur et le Clergé en Bretagne au Commencement du XVIIe Siècle." in *Mélanges Historiques, Littéraires Bibliographiques*. vol. 1, p. 167. Nantes: La Société des Bibliophiles Bretons, 1878.
  6. <http://www.museeprotestant.org/en/notice/the-eight-wars-of-religion-1562-1598/> (accessed June 18, 2015). See the so-called eighth war of religion, 1585 to 1598; Henri IV's Edict of Nantes in 1598 ended this series of 16th-century religious conflicts in France.
  7. David Eugene Smith. *Rara Arithmetica*. Boston and London: Ginn and Company, 1908, p. 409.
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## Caxton 'On the Move' Event Monday, September 28:

### Treasures of the Maclean Collection

Caxton Club members will be treated to a guided tour of the MacLean Collection, which includes rare manuscripts, maps, lavish books, and ceramics. These treasures have originated from all parts of the world, from ancient Tibet to the studios of modern-day book artists. Portions of this collection have appeared at such major museums as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Victoria & Albert, and the Metropolitan in New York.

Because we anticipate that many members will not want to drive to Lake Forest, we have arranged for a bus. It will depart from the Newberry



Part of a wooden cover (held by the McLean Collection) for a *Prajnaparamita sutra* from Tibet, from the 12th or 13th century.

Library promptly at 3:45 pm and return by 8:00 pm.

Bus transport, tour, buffet dinner and wine with our hosts: \$60.00 per person

For those driving to this event (map will be provided): \$35.00 per person

**Reservations required no later than September 21.**

E-mail [jv.everydaydesign@rcn.com](mailto:jv.everydaydesign@rcn.com) or phone 312-266-8825.

## Caxton 'On the Move' Event Tuesday, October 6:

### Caxton On the Move joins Arts on Elston for the Gala Opening of Words/Matter

The evening will feature a panel discussion on "Book Arts – Chicago" with panelists Melissa Jay Craig, Shawn Sheehy, Marnie Galloway and Jennifer Farrell. Enjoy an exhibition of their work with the work of other young Chicago book artists, including some recent Caxton grant recipients. A wonderful chance to meet Chicago book artists and, with them, explore their work.

Location: 3446 N. Albany (corner of Albany and Elston). Street parking available.

Time: 6 - 8 pm.

Reception includes hors d'oeuvres and wine.

Cost: \$20 per person.

Reservations by October 2 to [jv.everydaydesign@rcn.com](mailto:jv.everydaydesign@rcn.com) or 312-266-8825.



Book art (from top) Melissa Jay Craig and Shawn Sheehy.