

**Leaves and Fragments from Fifteenth-Century Printed Books**  
at  
**Princeton University Library**

In addition to its collection of approximately 800 *incunabula* (books printed with moveable type in Europe before 1501), Princeton University Library is home to more than 350 individual fifteenth-century printed leaves and fragments. More than 50 of these are fragments that have been discovered inside early bookbindings. Having fallen out of use centuries ago as parts of readable books, they eventually served bookbinders as recycled waste material suitable for covers, pastedowns, endleaves, liners, and various forms of stuffing. They are the last surviving witnesses to lost books. The majority of the other leaves in the collection were taken from defective books to be preserved as typographical specimens, prized by collectors and useful for teaching the history of books, printing, and woodcut illustration. In most cases compatriot leaves from the same dismantled books can be found in other libraries.

Princeton's collection of fifteenth-century leaves and fragments encompasses the earliest history of European printing, beginning in the 1450s and continuing to the year 1500. The geographical regions represented include Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, and England. Presses that were active in some 30 cities are represented, comprising the work of more than 100 different printers. Languages represented in this collection include Latin, Greek, German, Italian, French, Dutch, and English. Of special interest are the 100+ leaves that feature woodcut illustrations, several of which bear original hand-coloring.

More than 20 of the binding waste fragments come from editions that are not otherwise represented in North American libraries, and several of these are considered unique survivors world wide. The majority of the intact leaves, however, are surprisingly common in academic libraries, having been distributed in modern "leaf books" or as sets in such publications as Konrad Haebler's *German Incunabula* (Munich, 1928) and W. L. Schreiber's *Woodcuts from Books of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century shown in Original Specimens* (Munich, 1929). More than a dozen of the illustrated leaves come from Hartmann Schedel's ubiquitous *Nuremberg Chronicle* (Latin and German editions, 1493). As a whole, the collection offers an excellent survey of fifteenth-century typography.

The four boxes of "Leaves and Fragments from Fifteenth-Century Books at the Princeton University Library" include more than 350 items ranging in date from 1460 to 1500, were assembled by Princeton's Rare Book Division from various sources, including some leaves from the printing collection of Elmer Adler. The four boxes do not include items from the Scheide Library, fragments still preserved within early bookbindings, or specimens found in various "leaf books." They are housed in mylar/board folders, sorted in Author-Title order according to the numbers assigned in Frederick Goff's *Incunabula in American Libraries: A Third Census of Fifteenth-Century Books Recorded in North American Collections* (1964), with items not found in Goff's census sorted last.

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