

## Outreach and Collaboration across Institutional Boundaries with the Treatment of the De Brys's Collection of Voyages

### ABSTRACT

The De Bry family published several travel accounts in Frankfurt in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, including a description of voyages to the New World. The De Brys's portrayals of the Native American inhabitants of Virginia and Florida in the 1580s, including the well-known and oft-consulted engraved reproductions of John White's watercolors, were intended for diverse European audiences and illustrate a people who are alternately powerfully elegant and savagely brutal. Staff at Duke University Libraries selected three of the De Brys's printed works for conservation treatment because of their poor condition and high instructional value. Conservation and curatorial staff collaboratively decided that preservation of the original texts and preparation for high instructional use should be the goals for treatment. The treatments consisted of washing and resizing two texts and rebinding all three in blind-tooled, full-calf bindings. Large tissue fills and creative guarding strategies were employed to allow oversized plates to be handled and stored in a way that minimized damage.

The conservation treatments were presented in a talk at a symposium at Duke University in the spring of 2011. The symposium was hosted by Duke's Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and brought together international scholars and their various interpretations of the De Brys's works. The author's involvement in the symposium offered a unique opportunity to connect these researchers to the printed originals and to hear firsthand how the repairs might impact the researchers' experiences and readings of the works. Having this type of transparent and open discourse with the scholarly community can inform future treatment decisions and, more generally, will help to raise public awareness and appreciation for special collections holdings and their preservation. The conservation of the De Brys's works and the timing of the symposium also led to other outreach opportunities on

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campus: the items were highlighted in an exhibit in the library and referenced in a visiting artist's installation.

### THE DE BRYs AND THEIR WORKS

The De Bry publishing house was active from the 1590s to 1630s, and consisted of Theodor de Bry, his sons Johann Theodor and Johann Israel, and various colleagues. The De Bry family trained as jewelers and goldsmiths but learned the technique of copper engraving in Antwerp in the 1570s. These skills gave them an edge in the relatively new realm of copper engraving, which was replacing the older style of woodblock printing as the leading form of book illustration. In the 1590s, the De Bry family brought this technique to the book trade in Germany, where they became established as booksellers, publishers, and illustrators in Frankfurt (Van Groesen 2012).

The De Brys are perhaps best known for publishing two series of travel accounts. Explorations in the Old World were detailed in 13 volumes of *India Orientalis*, printed between 1597 and 1628. Accounts of New World explorations were detailed in *India Occidentalis*, or the *America* series, consisting of 14 larger format volumes printed between 1590 and 1634. Nearly all of the 27 volumes in the two series were issued in German and Latin, and the first volume of the *America* series was also printed in French and English (fig. 1).

Having never visited the Americas, the De Brys based their engravings on illustrations by White and others and portrayed the native people and conquest through a European lens. As publishers, the De Brys made modifications to both the text and illustrations to enhance salability, at times tailoring the written content to the intended audience (Van Groesen 2008).

### CONSERVATION OF THE DE BRY VOLUMES AT DUKE

Duke University's Rubenstein Library holds four volumes produced by the De Brys, three of which are from the *America* series. Though far from a complete and intact collection, Rubenstein's copies—particularly the Virginia volume because of its regional significance and renowned illustrations



Fig. 1. Title page of *America* part 1, 1590. Rubenstein Library C-9 fH282A c.1

of the Roanoke settlement—offer great instructional value to Duke. Neighboring Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill (UNC) owns an impressive hand-colored full set, which offers additional reference collaboration for Duke University.

Between fall 2010 and spring 2011, the Conservation Services Department of Duke University Libraries (DUL) treated the three works from the *America* series: the German-language printing of part 4 and the Latin-language printings concerning Virginia and Florida, parts 1 and 2. Printed in Frankfurt in the 1590s, these materials were selected for treatment because of their poor condition, high instructional value, limited functionality, and potential security risks. All of these items are consistently used by researchers and are pulled frequently for instructional sessions in the library.

#### *Treatment of India Occidentalis, Part 4*

The first item to be treated was *Das vierdte Buch von der Neuwen Welt* (1594). This German-language printing of part 4 retells Girolamo Benzoni's description of Spanish settlement in Peru from *Historia del Mondo Nuovo* (Benzoni 1572).

The text came to the library in what appeared to be its original paper binding. The paste paper–covered, Bradel-style binding likely once contained other parts of the series, but at some point they were removed and separated from part 4. The sewing was likely cut at that point as well, leaving a pile of loose, folded leaves inside a damaged and ill-fitting binding.

In addition, there were handling and condition issues at the front and back of the text. At the front, a map of the Gulf Coast included a large loss with a weak, torn edge, creases and misfolds, and previous repairs. The last few pages of the text were also tipped to one another along the spine edge in a way that obscured the visibility of the plates. The final plate had losses along the perimeter and appeared to have been excised from its leaf. It was then lined with one of the free flyleaves from the paper binding, a heavyweight blue paper, with what appeared to be hide glue. The remainder of the lightweight, laid text paper was in fairly good condition.

Treatment-proposal and review meetings at DUL are often a group affair involving multiple conservators and curators, and at times lengthy discussions, particularly for complicated treatments or items. The process is intentionally collaborative, with multiple viewpoints expressed and a consensus reached. Through these conversations, DUL staff decided upon treatment goals for this item: first, the leaves would be secured in a sewn binding so they could not be stolen, inadvertently misplaced, or shuffled. The text also required protection in a new hard-board binding with a flexible opening, which would be durable and well-suited to the printed work.

To meet these goals, the treatment would require selective surface cleaning of the text; separating the glued pages at the front and back; removing residual adhesive with local application of a methyl cellulose poultice; washing the damaged map and the last few leaves to remove glue and attachments, flatten misplaced folds on the map, and prepare for lining and fills; guarding, mending, and filling losses to the text; and finally, resewing the printed work and rebinding it in a full-calf binding.

The curators noted that the map of the Gulf Coast was originally a foldout plate, now missing its whole right half (fig. 2). They felt that it would be useful to indicate to researchers how much was missing by filling to the original dimensions of the plate. The possibility of filling the loss with a printed surrogate was considered but ultimately rejected out of concern for preserving the authenticity of the map. The map and last leaf were washed in deionized water baths alkalized with a saturated calcium hydroxide solution. After the attachments had been washed and separated, losses were filled with acrylic-toned Hanji 1401 tissue applied with Aytex-P wheat starch paste. Both the map and the last leaf were humidified and then lined with tengujo tissue and wheat starch paste. On both leaves, the fills and linings extended to form stubs so that the loose leaves could be sewn into the new binding.



LEFT TO RIGHT

Fig. 2. Map of Gulf Coast before treatment, *America* part 4, 1594. Rubenstein Library Arents qB915A c.1

Fig. 3. Map after washing, fills, and lining

During the process of treating the map, an interesting thing happened. A small fragment of the map that was tucked into the gutter appeared to belong along the torn edge, but on closer inspection did not line up with any part of the remaining map. Luckily, Wilson Library at UNC owns a version of the map, and a digital photograph of their complete map was produced and printed out to scale. The incomplete map from Duke's copy was superimposed over the reproduction on a light table, and it was interesting to find that the small fragment actually belonged near the center of the right-hand portion of the leaf. Conservation and curatorial staff felt it best to adhere the fragment in its rightful place, and the reproduction was used to adhere the fragment precisely where it was originally located (fig. 3).

Selected sections of the text were guarded and mended with acrylic-toned Hanji 1101 tissue. Hooked double-folio end leaves were formed from Ruscombe Rougearte 65 g/m<sup>2</sup> paper, and the text block was sewn on linen tapes to create a durable and flexible sewing structure that allowed for flat opening. The spine was lined with Hanji 1101 tissue and paste, and then with aerocotton and a mixture of PVAC and methyl cellulose. New endbands were hand-sewn over a hemp cord core with an aerocotton support and were adhered to the spine with the PVAC–methyl cellulose mixture. Split boards were formed from a laminate of four-ply cotton-rag mat board, and attached by adhering the overhanging cloth lining and linen tapes with PVAC. The boards were shaped and then covered with Hewitt Book calf. The leather on the spine was not adhered to the text block spine, forming a flexible, hollow-back binding.

#### *Treatment of India Occidentalis, Parts 1 and 2*

Because of their poor condition and unique binding features, the Florida and Virginia volumes required slightly more complex treatment decisions. As with part 4, these works are of high use and high value. The Virginia volume, *Admiranda narratio, fida tamen, de commodis et incolarvm ritibvs Virginiae ...* (1590), is particularly popular: With Theodor De Bry's engravings modeled after John White's watercolors, it is the most widely cited and reproduced work of the three DUL owns. The Florida and Virginia volumes were both formerly owned by Charles C. Jones, a Confederate colonel and historian from Savannah (1831–1893). They were apparently rebound in the 19th century in half bindings with marbled paper sides. The bindings were most likely produced while in Col. Jones's possession, as other items from his collection exhibit the same binding style.

The 19th century bindings presented challenging condition issues. The inner hinges were splitting at the front of both items, and the first few pages of the Florida volume were detached from the rest of the binding. The sewing and page attachments appeared to be intact, but the text opening was restricted, and whipstitching through the first section was visible in the joint. Additionally, it was clear that the 19th century rebindings were not executed with great care. The pages were apparently trimmed at that point, and portions of the plates were cut, including text from the second title of the Florida volume. Many leaves were tipped to one another, in some places with bands of adhesive that measured over 5/8 in. wide. The adhesive attachment restricted visibility of the contents and made the pages vulnerable to damage during handling. Further, double-folio plates in the Virginia volume were attached to the text with stiff paper guards that restricted their opening and limited legibility of the images.

Strangely, throughout both volumes, the illustrated leaves had slightly variable dimensions and the plates did not register in line with one another. Some of these pages extended beyond the text block at the fore edge from 1/8–3/4 inches. These somewhat bizarre features may indicate that these texts were made-up copies, or complete volumes formed by piecing together leaves from different editions. Acid migration from the binding materials, combined with a poor storage environment, appeared to have discolored the text edges and made them brittle. As a result, the edges of the extended plates were chipping from handling.

The two volumes exhibited the unfortunate combination of an inflexible binding structure with tipped and brittle text paper. This could be improved by washing and resewing the texts, which would require removing the 19th century bindings and sewing. The group considered: Is it more meaningful to use and handle these items in the form that Col. Jones used while doing his research? There were many compelling reasons to rebind as well: The binding materials were acidic

and damaging to the text. Recasing or rebacking would likely be fairly invasive treatments of Jones's bindings, and the end results would be limited in their durability and functionality. Ultimately, DUL staff decided that it was in the best interest of the original printed works to rebind.

Many of the treatment objectives for these volumes were the same as those for the German-language volume, with the added goals of stabilizing the texts chemically and protecting the folded and extended plates from further handling damage. In addition to the treatment process used for the German printing, these two texts were also washed, deacidified, and resized. The sections were pre-humidified in a humidity chamber for an hour before immersion in deionized water baths. On average, two to three 20-minute warm-water baths were required to separate tips and reduce residual adhesive on the leaves. Each folio was then resized individually in a 1% gelatin bath and left to dry between blotters and felts.

Both conservation and curatorial staff were concerned about the folded plates and the damage that could occur from



Fig. 4. Folded plate from the Florida volume before treatment, *America* part 2, 1591. Rubenstein Library C-9 fB915 v.2 c.1



Fig. 5. Plate washed and folded so that a short stub is formed in the inner margin, eliminating the fold through the image





LEFT TO RIGHT

Fig. 6. This double-folio plate was hinged in with a stiff paper guard. *America part 1*

Fig. 7. Double-folio plate after treatment



unfolding and refolding them repeatedly during use (fig. 4). In an effort to limit damage to the plates, a guarding strategy was developed to keep the plates from extending at the fore edge. The majority of the bi-folios were split at the fold, and this made it possible to guard them so that instead of folding through the image, they folded in the margin, with a short, unobtrusive stub in the gutter that does not interfere with the plate visually (fig. 5). The movement and visibility of the double-folio plates in the Virginia volume were greatly improved through washing them, removing their stiff paper guards, and hinging them in with a more flexible Hanji 1401 paper (figs. 6–7).

These volumes were also re sewn on linen tapes, bound into split-board binding structures, and covered in full calf. The simple blind-tooled design of the new bindings was based upon on a contemporary full-calf binding from the Rubenstein Library collection; its text was printed in Heidelberg in 1598. All three De Bry volumes were housed in individual cloth-covered clamshell enclosures along with their previous bindings.

During the course of treatment, these three items were digitized in their entirety. It was a project that curators had considered for some time, and because the items could be more quickly and easily scanned while disbound, the imaging was performed at that stage in the treatment.

#### OUTREACH

Serendipitously, during the course of treating these items, DUL exhibits coordinator and conservator Meg Brown learned about an upcoming symposium commemorating the publication of the latest issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, which is published by Duke University Press. The issue happened to be dedicated to studies of the De Brys's works. The organizers wanted to use images from

the Rubenstein Library's copies for the production of their journal, and they hoped to have the originals on display for their symposium, to be held in Rubenstein's Biddle Rare Book Room. Meg Brown saw an opportunity for outreach. She told the organizers that DUL conservators had been treating these items and suggested that the treatment process might be of interest to the symposium attendees. As a result, this author was invited to share the treatment of the De Bry volumes at the symposium.

The symposium brought together international scholars with research interests ranging from native dress and costume to depictions of cannibalism in the Americas. Although these volumes are often pulled for classes and library "show-and-tell" talks, Rubenstein staff speculated that many of the visiting researchers were likely accustomed to relying on reprints for their research. With this talk, there was an opportunity to connect the audience with the printed originals in a tangible way.

The author's presentation at the symposium minimized technical jargon and focused on the elements of the treatments likely to be most relevant to the audience at hand. An introduction to the field of conservation—including the common aims of treatment and the principles of reversibility, preservation of original material, and documentation—was presented to help orient the symposium attendees. Interactive elements—including videos of washing paper and of a lining removal from the De Bry treatments—were also added to the talk to engage the audience. The process of digitizing the works was described, and their availability online was publicized. Finally, feedback about the repairs was invited, and the audience was asked, "How might these repairs impact your research as well as your research experience?"

Following the presentation, there was a lively conversation about decision-making and the different perspectives and roles of the curators and conservators in treatment-proposal

meetings. There was also a more in-depth discussion about some of the features of Rubenstein's copies. One visitor confirmed that the overhanging plates in the Florida and Virginia volumes most likely originated from other copies, and possibly later editions, which explained why the plates weren't registering with one another.

One intended goal of the talk was to demonstrate how much intellectual work and scholarship are involved in making conservation treatment decisions and how conservation work can influence and inform scholarship more broadly. It was also important to communicate that in this field, as in the DUL conservation laboratory, the aim is for conservation treatment decisions to be transparent, collaborative, and undertaken with public input.

In addition to the collaborations already mentioned between curators and conservators inside and outside the library, a couple of other events on campus took inspiration from the De Bry treatments. In fall 2010, Mary Yordy from the Conservation Services Department developed an exhibit for the DUL preservation exhibit case. The exhibit, *Mixed Blood: Conservation Work and Decision-Making in Support of the Study of Racial History*, featured digitized images from the Virginia volume. Additionally, Stephen Hoffman—a visiting artist in the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies—was inspired by the De Bry works when he toured the conservation laboratory in spring 2011. He decided to use some De Bry imagery in his screen-printed installation, which is still on view in the library.

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