

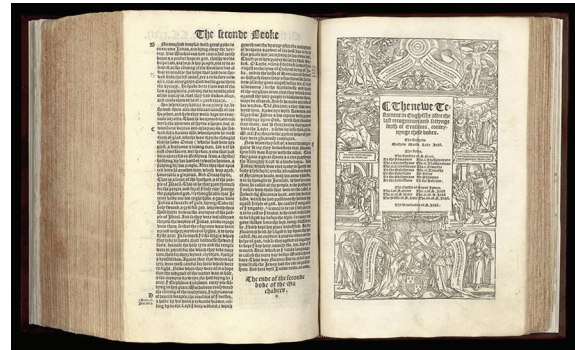
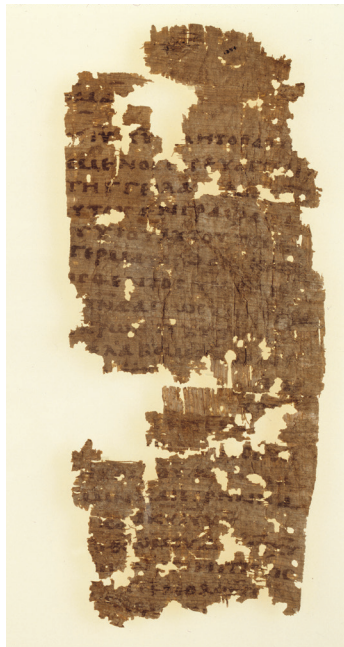
## BRIDWELL'S SPECIAL COLLECTIONS—

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On a sunny summer afternoon in 2016, I escorted a patron into the Special Collections Reading Room to see a **fragment of Paul's Epistle to the Romans**. This fragment of ancient Greek text, written by hand on papyrus, was encapsulated in glass and lying on a gray foam support. It dated from the 6th century A.D. and had been found in central Egypt, in a location south of Cairo near the ancient city of Oxyrhynchus, where el Bahnasa is found today. The papyrus was encapsulated for its protection when it was removed from the climate that had preserved it for so long. Our visitor, a participant in the Perkins Course of Study program, alternately bent over to peer closely at the document and stood back to take it in from a distance. He said that he didn't read ancient Greek – it simply meant a lot to him to see it in person, to be in the presence of an early fragment of Scripture that had come down to us through the centuries. The look of awe and admiration on his face indicated the depth of his feeling. I was not unfamiliar with the effect that historic books and manuscripts can have on people. I started my own career with rare materials 17 years earlier, and I have worked with a lot of researchers since then. Nevertheless, I had just started working at Bridwell that week, the visitor was my first patron, and this ancient fragment of Scripture was the first item I pulled from Bridwell's vault. It was a great way to start my new life in Dallas, and this manuscript fragment remains one of my favorite items in Bridwell Library's remarkable collections.

The collections held by Bridwell Library are indeed remarkable, built around the generous donations of two core Bible collections: the Elizabeth Perkins Prothro Collection and the Thomas J. Harrison Collection. The Harrison Collection focuses on the origins of the English Bible, and includes such landmarks as the **Great Bible** (1540), the **Geneva Bible** (1560), the **Bishop's Bible** (1568) and the first



clockwise from the left: **MS Papyrus: Paul's Epistle to the Romans; the Great Bible; detail from the Geneva Bible; the Bishops Bible**



edition of the **King James Bible** (1611). Mr. Harrison was also interested in the history of the Bible in the United States, as well as the translation of the Bible into world vernacular languages. His donation included important early American volumes, including **printings in Cherokee, Choctaw, Chippewa and other Native American languages**. Mrs. Prothro collected a broad and deep representation of

the history of the Bible throughout Europe in both manuscript and print. The Prothro Collection contains such renowned publications as the **Complutensian Polyglot** (a beautiful and very rare multilingual Bible printed in Spain between 1514 and 1517), **Martin Luther's German translation of the Old Testament** (1523-24) and the first printed Spanish translation of the Bible (1569), referred to as the "**Bear Bible**" after a woodcut illustration of a bear on the title page. The breadth of the Prothro Collection is further supplemented by such treasures as John Wesley's proof copy of his **Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament** (1755), with Wesley's own handwritten notes, and a copy of the **Nuremberg Chronicle** (1493), a heavily illustrated history of the world from Creation to the 15th century. Some overlap between the collections



# Special Indeed

means that in the case of select titles Bridwell Library is blessed with more than one copy. I would not call these “duplicate” however, as each volume reveals its own unique history through ownership marks, marginal notes and variations in binding. Through such physical evidence, the books in Special Collections may be studied as historical objects, as well as for their textual content.

Another foundational gift is that of Dr. Alvin Valentine Lane, who began donating his impressive collection of ancient near-eastern artifacts, including the *manuscript fragment of Paul*, to SMU in 1917. Over the years the

1. Na weegād'igün oochit' Sāsoo Goole fan wēdabēksijū, Dabid nēgūla ookwīsūl, Ablaham' nēgūla ookwīsūl Dabidūlū.  
2. Ablaham' wēgwešis'ūnūl Esakūl'; Esak' wēgwešis'ūnūl Sakobūl'; Sakob' wēgwešis'ūnūl Soodahūl' ak wijegūdooitēdtkū chenūmoogwū.  
3. Sooda wēgwešis'ūnēgū' Pālāsūl' ak Salāhūl', ak Tamal ookwījooōsūb'ūnūl. Ak Palās' wēgwešis'ūnūl Eslomūl'; ak Eslom' wēgwešis'ūnūl Alāmūl'.

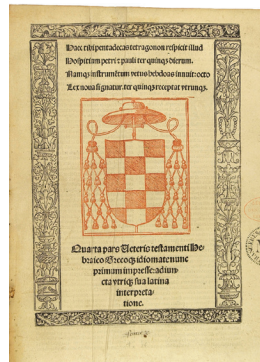
clockwise from the upper left: **Micmac New Testament translations, the Complutensian Polyglot, Martin Luther's German translation of the Old Testament, detail from the Nuremburg Chronicle**



library has added to these gifts so that today Bibles, and Bible-related publications, account for more than 3,000 distinct titles of the approximately 50,000 volumes held within Special Collections. This number comprises complete Bibles, separate publications of the Old or New Testaments, selections of Scripture such as evangeliaries and psalters, as well as commentaries, children's Bibles and picture Bibles. The collections include works in more than 100 different languages.

I began to grasp the breadth of the Bridwell's collections before I even arrived in Dallas. For my on-site interview, the search committee asked me to give a talk describing how I

would respond to a request from a faculty member for a class presentation. The scenario was very specific. It would be for a class on the Old Testament, and the goal was to show how this text was transmitted over the centuries. I have a fairly good background in textual transmission and criticism, having studied Ancient Greek and Latin literature, so I knew that I would want to talk about the process of producing manuscript copies of Scripture, as well as about significant moments in the history of printed copies of the Bible. Not being a biblical scholar, however, I did a lot of research to identify the really

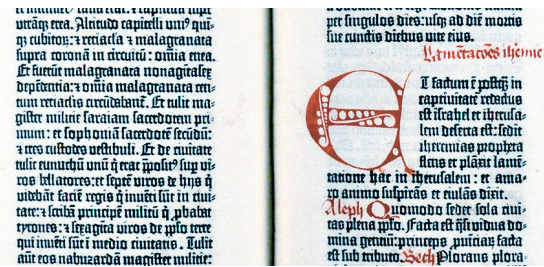


important historical publications of the Bible. From this I compiled an ideal list of what I would show if I had access to anything I wanted. Turning next to the library catalog to see what Bridwell held, I was surprised and delighted to find that nearly everything I wanted was there. The only items that I could not find were some specific manuscripts, which was not a great surprise seeing that these materials were unique and already known to be held in other libraries around the world. Nevertheless, I discovered that in some cases the library had high quality facsimile publications of these works, and so I was able to include them.



I am told that my enthusiasm for Bridwell's collections was evident during my interview presentation. This past fall semester I had the chance to give this specific presentation to a class in the Department of Religious Studies. I saw the same look of enthusiasm

and surprise on the faces of the students as they realized that these materials were here, on their campus, and available for them to examine for themselves. This is the central message of my outreach efforts, through classroom presentations and public exhibitions: that Bridwell Library provides students, faculty and community members with access to some truly amazing treasures and that anyone can make an appointment to work with them personally. You do not even have to be a student or other affiliate of SMU. I like to tell students that since I started at SMU, I have hosted researchers from as far away as Switzerland, England and Japan. I tell them that even years from now they will always be welcome back, but that they should take advantage of this opportunity while they have such great materials in their own backyard.





Many students discover Bridwell Special Collections through classroom presentations. Working with the faculty, I select books and manuscripts specific to what the students are studying in their courses. In recent years, an average of 288 visitors have attended my classroom presentations each semester. We reach a very broad audience, indeed, as requests for presentations of Bridwell's Bibles and other rare books come from a diverse array of disciplines. One class co-offered by Religious Studies and Art History compared manuscript Bibles with Torahs and Korans. Every spring I am visited by a class in the Advertising Department which examines the interaction of text and image, comparing fragments of the Gutenberg Bible (1454-55) with William Morris's Kelmscott Chaucer (1896) and Henri Matisse's Jazz (1947). While most class visits are from SMU courses, I also host groups from other area universities, high schools and even some community groups. For the past three years a class investigating the intersection of technologies and great intellectual movements from the Christian Life Preparatory School has examined items like a 13th-century "Paris" Bible and cuneiform tablets.

While some community members are reached through presentations, outreach beyond the campus is greatly aided by Bridwell Library's exhibitions, developed by curators collaborating with Bridwell's exhibition designer and digital project librarian. Physical exhibitions are accessible to local communities and campus visitors, while digital exhibitions reach audiences worldwide. In the spring 2019 exhibition, I had the privilege of presenting biblical texts drawn from the

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library's holdings of 20th-century books designed and printed by artists and fine press printers. The exhibition featured such items as *Salvador Dali's Biblia Sacra* (1967) and *The Story of Exodus* (1966), with illustrations by Marc Chagall, pictured at left, and provided a wonderful opportunity to explore the rich holdings of more contemporary artistic books in a library that is often known for its early printed books.w

Bridwell's rich collections continue to reveal treasures to me, and my enthusiasm grows every time I see a new class or visitor make their own discoveries. I hope our outreach efforts will lead to many future experiences like that first one I had in 2016, and provide new opportunities for people to have meaningful encounters of their own.

## FACTS ABOUT THE BRIDWELL LIBRARY

- Researchers come from as far away as Switzerland, England and Japan
- Average of 288 students attend classroom presentations each semester
- SMU religious studies, art history and advertising classes regularly visit Special Collections
- Special Collections hosts community groups and classes from area schools
- Bibles, and Bible-related publications, account for more than 3,000 distinct titles of the approximately 50,000 volumes held within Bridwell's Special Collections