

The “stickiness” of a Manuscript - what we can learn from the pages of a manuscript



Imagery/Illumination:

Chapters start with a crude geometric page header throughout the manuscript. Every chapter has a different design. Notice the **red text** termed *Rubrication* that was used for the name of God, for the names of saints or the Holy Family. Notice the crude drawing in the image below, created by the same hand that created the chapter heading *illumination*. The faint pencil writing below would have been added later, maybe even by a student. Travelling priests would often use these Bible/prayer books to teach young students to read and learn the word of God.

The image is most likely incomplete and may have at some stage been further illustrated to represent the person about whom the text is describing.



Ruling of lines:

The pin pricks down the side of each page were just one method used to align the text. If you look closely you can also see lines scribed into the

parchment surface both to align the lines on which the text was written as well as for borders to create text justification. Finer vellum manuscripts sometimes used faint lead or pencil marks instead of the incised lines as some vellum pages were too thin to cope with the inscribed lines without damaging the page. In many cases the page would be scored on one side only as the lines would show through on both sides and allow the text to hence be aligned accordingly.

The Colophon:

Since the dawn of writing scribes have used the colophon to tell us who wrote or owned the written piece and various additional pieces of information, such as in the case shown here on the right, such as land ownership and various other titbits of information. The colophon was always written at the end of the work, and in the case of Ethiopian manuscripts was written in a different hand as seen here. These colophons gave us much added information about the culture in which the text existed such as land ownership, the prevalence of women in the society and historic names.



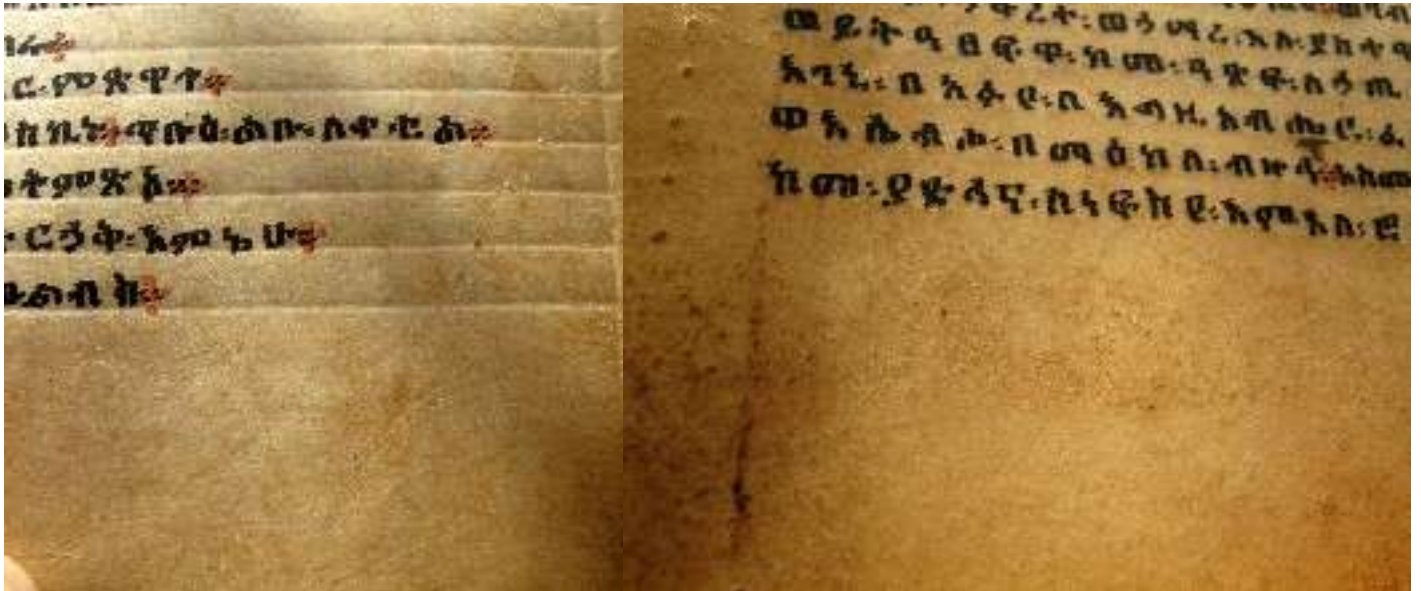


Page repairs:

Parchment and vellum was a very expensive commodity in ancient times, just as it is today. Even today you can pay \$90 for one page of handcrafted parchment. In processing parchment it was inevitable that defects would appear in the surface of the page. Small holes on the animal hide could quickly become large ones as seen in the repair to the pages above. This page is repaired with a fine ribbon of parchment sown in a running stitch along the join, whereas the tear in the centre image, thread such as that used in binding the pages was used. Some holes were not repaired and the scribe would simply write around the hole. However if the document was meant to be used in the church or was to belong to a wealthy owner then only perfect parchment would be used at a considerably higher cost. If omissions were found after the manuscript had been bound into a Codex extra pages would be inserted as seen here on the right. If a few words were incorrect they would be simply scratched out and a new word inserted above, the mistake often highlighted in red as seen below. In some cases when a whole manuscript was no longer of any use, the whole parchment would be scratched clean and reused to make a whole new document. This would be called a *Palimpsest* and many ancient documents can be seen beneath a later document by viewing it under ultraviolet light.



Many copies of the Bible that have been thought lost have been found buried beneath the texts of such palimpsests, with some scholarly institutions such as the Hill museum and manuscript library in the USA actively seeking these out. Older manuscripts could also be found buried within the bindings of later books, used as binding stiffeners.



Writing surfaces:

The writing surface could be of paper, which usually has two smooth surfaces or of skin such as parchment or vellum that had a velvety nap more prominent on one side. In the images above the velvety nap can be seen more prominently on the right on the hair side while the paler inner skin side appears smoother in comparison. Sometimes the outer surface would also show very tiny holes where the hairs once were and was usually of a deeper colour than the inside skin surface.

Bindings:

Early bindings were usually left exposed with covers of wood or leather applied to the front and back of the document. In the case of this Ge'ez Bible, the original covers were of fired clay which eventually broke and were replaced with wooden covers, which too broke. The quires (a group of folded sheets) were bound together with a form of stitching called *Coptic Binding* that allowed the document to be opened fully and laid flat. Ethiopia is one of the few counties left that until recently used this form of binding that has been used for over 1800 years. The early church would have bound its first groups of letters/Gospels in this format.



Smaller groupings such as single Gospels would have been bound as seen here on the left in a simple leather cover with one or two quires only. Some of the early texts were bound in leather with ties around the top and sides to protect the pages during travel.

