

The Codex and Crafts in Late Antiquity

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Between the second and the sixth centuries AD, the format for written texts changed from the roll to the multigathering or multiquire codex—or the book as we know it today. The aim of the research presented here has been to identify not why this change happened but rather how it did by casting light on the antecedents and possible provenance of the various techniques used to make the multigathering codex and its constituent parts. To answer this question, the research evolved in two parallel directions: comparing the multigathering codex with simpler types of codices that predate it (single gathering and wooden tablet codices) and comparing the multigathering codex to other artefacts of the same historical and cultural context (late antiquity).

We have found that the multigathering codex does combine features borrowed from both the wooden tablet codex and the single gathering codex. Sewing through the fold is probably inherited from the single gathering codex, while sewing multiple gatherings into a single structure appears to have been adapted from the wooden tablet codex. Sewing holes arranged in pairs and sewing these pairs independently is a feature common to all three types of codex. In the multigathering codex, however, the use of paired sewing holes that are sewn independently appears to derive from the wooden tablet codex, in which multiple units (in this case tablets) also make up the book block.

The comparison of techniques used for making the multigathering codex with those used in other crafts of late antiquity, supplemented by documentary and iconographical evidence, serves to place the construction of the multigathering codex within the technological background of late antiquity. The evidence points to a close relation between the techniques employed in making the multigathering codex and those used in a variety of everyday crafts and common objects, such as woven textiles, baskets, mats, socks, shoes, and sandals. Most, if not all, of the components of the multigathering codex, both structural and decorative, can be directly or indirectly related to a wide range of crafts and artefacts: the sewing employed the same technique used to make socks and possibly more elaborate fabrics; the endbands were fashioned with techniques used for the edge finishing of textiles; and the decoration of the covers and the fastening straps borrowed techniques commonly used in shoes, sandals, belts, and other leatherwork.

Most of the research was conducted in Bard Graduate Center in New York, between the years 2015 and 2016 where the author has been a visiting scholar for four months in 2015 and an adjunct professor in 2016. The present paper aims to give an overview of the research which will culminate in an exhibition organized between February and June 2018 in the BGC gallery space in Manhattan with original items borrowed from such major collections as the Morgan Library and Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Arts, The Brooklyn Museum, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, the Yale University Art Gallery, and the American Museum of Natural History. Original artefact will be displayed next to replicas in order to make clear the connection between the codex and different crafts of Late Antiquity and a monograph with the same title will be also

published and distributed by the Chicago University Press, richly illustrated with photographs and technical drawings.