



## What is a facsimile and how is it produced?

### 1.) The definition and meaning of facsimile

Unofficial translation of a formulation taken from the Vienna-based CODICES MANUSCRIPTI Zeitschrift für Handschriftenkunde (Journal for Manuscript Studies):

*"A facsimile is the technical-mechanical reproduction of a unique, effectively two-dimensional original which eliminates as much manual copying as possible, retains the intrinsic and extrinsic features of the original so far as possible and uses all available technical means to ensure the preservation and accessibility of the original and thereby does justice to scholarly and artistic interests. A facsimile must be able to replace the original as fully as possible for purposes of research and bibliophilia."*

#### **Etymology of the word facsimile:**

Facsimile comes from the Latin "fac simile", meaning "Do it similarly". A unique original (a book or manuscript) is reproduced in a perfect interaction between modern technology and traditional craftsmanship, while retaining all the characteristics of the original in its current state (in terms of format, completeness, colours and any damage or other special features).

#### **The importance and role of facsimile editions:**

The original is reproduced subject to the very highest quality requirements for the facsimile edition and subject to protecting the original during and after the publication of this edition. Above all, the facsimile edition of a unique work serves to protect the work while making it accessible to scholars and bibliophiles.

For most institutions, museums and owners of these manuscripts, the publication of a facsimile edition enables them to safeguard the original properly, as they can then keep the original locked away for its protection - as the facsimile can substitute for the original for most purposes (e.g. research and exhibitions).

Since every edition is accompanied by a scholarly text explaining and classifying the original, the publications have often prompted fresh scholarly exploration of these unique works and led to completely new findings in the field of medieval art and history.



The contribution that these editions have made to the preservation and exploration of European and non-European cultural heritage cannot be valued too highly. Our current knowledge of the art and general history of the Middle Ages would undoubtedly have been poorer if these editions had not been available. This genre of books should therefore be preserved at all costs and valued accordingly. This is mainly due to the fact that the art of the great written cultures of this epoch was handed down and preserved almost exclusively in books, and that the book has been the key medium for writing and art for almost 1,000 years and is therefore an irreplaceable source of essential content.

## **2.) How is a facsimile produced?**

It takes, on average, two to six years to publish a facsimile edition - from selecting the title to producing the first copy. A facsimile publishing house therefore usually publishes no more than two or three titles each year. Each project involves an extremely high financial outlay and a high level of entrepreneurial risk.

### **Selecting a title**

Our first step is to select an original (usually a manuscript) and to consider the feasibility of publishing it in a facsimile edition. This selection requires a profound knowledge of art and general history, as well as years of research and study. This expertise is gained from travel, the formation of a special network, and detailed and continuous study of the specialist literature. Our publisher always works on and determines the selection of titles with the help of a special team of experts.

Once we have selected the title, we contact the owner of the manuscript and negotiations begin; these often last for years. However, before taking this step, we must assess whether we will really be able to make a facsimile of the original we have selected (in view of its condition or other specific problems). After an initial contact, our publisher will usually travel to wherever the original is kept in order to inspect it there and to assess whether it will be possible to make a facsimile of it. This can only be decided in consultation with the owner and the restorer, and our own team - which requires specific expertise and a lot of experience in handling manuscripts and books.



### **Negotiations with the owner**

The phase of negotiating with the owner of the original will begin once we have decided to implement a project. This can take a very long time, as a lot of details concerning rights and the working process will have to be established and agreed upon. Specifically: exclusivity (the publishing house usually has an exclusive right to publish a facsimile edition of this original for 10-20 years), royalties (an agreed percentage of the sale price per copy is paid to the owner), work steps (access to the original for colour matching), insurance, selection of commentary authors, edition size, and handling of the original (the publication of a facsimile edition is usually the occasion for restoring the original and carrying out conservation and protection measures on it, which will be paid for by the publishing house and carried out by a restorer selected by the owner). We will begin actual production as soon as the contract has been signed.

### **Image data acquisition**

Only special devices and data formats can serve as the basis for a facsimile edition and meet the quality standards that we require. We either unbind the manuscripts so that we can record the double pages or record the bound original page by page with a specially developed device (called a book cradle). Protecting the original is always our highest priority during this step in the production, but we have to reconcile this with achieving data capture that meets our current requirements. We have to take out appropriate insurance for all of our work on the original. At this point in the production phase, our entire team of experts (a reproduction expert, a printer and a bookbinder) assembles before the original to capture its individual features. We check the data quality throughout the process and correct it if necessary.

### **Reproduction work**

Our team of experts will now prepare the captured image data for printing. This work requires the highest level of expertise and years of experience in this field. Only a few experts are able to prepare this data in the quality we require (three or four companies worldwide).

We produce the first proofs and compare them with the original on site in parallel with our reproduction work. We can then make our first colour corrections and use them as value specifications for subsequent colour adjustments. Before beginning production, we determine the paper to be used for the entire print run and order it as that will ensure that the paper quality is consistent in each step of the production process. We treat the precious metals (gold leaf, brush gold, and silver), patina and tooling in the original separately and create specific masks for them. We straighten the pages and mount them correctly, so that they hold together for printing and binding and that their measurements are correct.



### **Proof comparisons**

We make proofs of each page on production paper and then compare them with the original. This sometimes involves corrections in the order of as much as 1-2%. We repeat this step until we can approve the quality and the image data can be used for production printing. We require, on average, 3-4 corrections against the original in order to achieve a perfect result.

In this phase of production, we require the same lighting conditions - a calibrated neutral light that is either available at all locations or that we bring along if necessary - at our reproduction facilities, during our proof comparisons at the relevant institutions, and during the print run in our print shop. This is the only way to ensure consistent colour quality.

### **The print run**

After colour approval, we print the entire run using offset printing and in compliance with special predefined quality controls. It is worth mentioning that our set-up times and continuous controls differ significantly from the printing processes that would be used for conventional books. We print gold and silver inks separately.

### **Gold application**

After we have printed the edition, we send the printed sheets to the workshop so that gold leaf can be applied in our own patented process; one that we have modelled on a process used in medieval scriptoria. We use foil or real gold (at least 22 carat).

### **Patina application and tooling**

After this step, we send the printed sheets back to the print shop to have patina shades (traces of ageing and colour applied to the metals) and tooling (fine relief patterns on the metals) applied.

### **Cutting and punching**

In the next step, we cut or punch the pages as in the original. We also reproduce any damage (e.g. any worm damage, missing parts, etc.) that has occurred to the original.



### **Bookbinding**

The cut double pages go to the bookbindery and we work them, almost entirely by hand, into a facsimile.

We have to fold the double pages, assemble them individually into quires and stitch them. We make the binding at the same time: leather with gold or blind embossing, with metal applications, clasps, metal or wooden bindings, imitation ivory (synthetic resin), precious stone elements, specially woven fabrics, embroidered velvet bindings, etc.

Each binding is reproduced to look like the original or, if the original binding has not survived, a different model will be selected to suit the contents of the manuscript. Each binding is therefore unique. Very few workshops in the world are able to carry out all these specific processes (3D scans, fabric weaving, electroplating, carpentry, precious metal processing, synthetic resin processing, modelling, furriery, etc.). All materials are carefully selected and produced in-house: we never use stock goods.

There are only a few hand bookbinders in the world who are still able to produce such books (three or four worldwide). The tooling costs for each title are immense and the high proportion of manual labour means that production is only possible in small quantities and over long periods of time.

The finished book block is given gold or coloured edging, and possibly also tooling, and is then mounted in the binding.

### **A case to protect and present the book**

A matching case is specially designed for each title in order to protect the high-quality facsimile edition. It matches the work and is made of high-quality materials, while simultaneously serving to protect and present the book.

### **Scientific commentary for each edition**

Each facsimile edition is explained by an author or team of authors who have been selected in consultation between ourselves and the owner of the original. Selecting these authors requires a good professional network and a great deal of expertise in order to appoint the right expert on a specific subject, title, period or art historical aspect. The accompanying text is included with the facsimile in a premium edition.



### **100 Images of Wisdom Christine de Pizan - Epître d'Othea**

Facsimile edition of manuscript MS 74 G 27 from the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague, published in 2009 in an edition of 990 copies. 200 pages on special paper that matches the thickness, feel and touch of the original's parchment. The work was printed in Italy and then shipped to the bookbindery in Germany.

All production steps were as described in the text above. Specific features of the product:

Printed in four colours and an own printing process with silver and gold. Followed by application of gold foil on all printed sheets. Coloured edging on the book blocks. The binding is made of goatskin with gold embossing (real gold). As the original binding had not survived, we designed it specially to suit the edition.

We designed and produced a case with a silver-plated decorative element (a motif from an illustration in the manuscript). Commentary volume: a scholar transcribed and translated the entire text of the manuscript just for our edition. This is the first and, so far, only publication of this important text by Christine de Pizan as a complete facsimile edition. It therefore represents a significant contribution to the research and publication of this text, which was so well-known and important in the Middle Ages.

### **The illuminated Bible of Mercy**

This extraordinary edition was created as a unique concept and with unprecedented quality and completeness. A special edition for the Jubilee Year of Mercy in the Vatican: we created the illuminated Bible of Mercy in a lengthy process and with intensive cooperation of a team of experts to find pictures of medieval manuscripts for various Bible editions from the holdings of more than 40 institutions, museums and libraries around the world.

This work requires not only profound expertise in book illumination, but also specific knowledge about and a great understanding of the entire biblical text. 350 miniatures, which were selected to suit the content of the relevant passages, illustrate the 1,024 pages of the biblical text. Each book of the Bible is marked by a special colour guide system: individual marginal borders have been assigned to each book to serve as orientation aids for the reader.



The Katholisches Bibelwerk made the text available for this edition in return for a licence fee. The various owners charged for rights to print the pictures. We convinced the Pope of the quality of the content and the special nature of the project, and he even agreed to write a foreword especially for the edition. We carried the project out in close cooperation with the Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, and the head of the BAV's manuscript department gave us great support for the publication and also wrote a foreword.

We personally presented the first copy to the Pope at an audience. We are donating part of the proceeds from the sales to a children's hospital in Africa that the Pope has chosen.

The book block has gold edging all around and additional tooling on the book edges, a technique that only a few companies in the world have mastered. A graphic artist designed the edition's cover.

We made the binding from fine full-grain cowhide with gold embossing and applied a cross and gold-plated clasps to the front cover. We modelled the gilded cross on the famous Crux Vaticana and set it with a real ruby. It can even be removed from the front cover and hung up, a first in the publishing world. We developed this unique mechanism in a complex and labour-intensive process in collaboration with several experts in Germany.

We carried out all of the production steps in Germany. Simbach am Inn, January 2021 Charlotte Kramer

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