

## Which Rare Non-Law Book in Your Library's Collection is the Most "Interesting?"

### Rare Law Book Librarians Offer Some Answers.

Most subject-specific book collections hold works that could be considered "out of scope." Rare law book collections seem to conform to this reality, and their non-law pieces often have stories to tell. Sometimes these materials have been selected intentionally because of the context they provide for other, legal, works in the collection (such as histories). They might stealthily accompany gifts of law books – to be uncovered later in the depths of a box – or arrive inserted in the leaves of one of their "legitimate" companions. Such non-law holdings add spice to a collection and pique the interest of patrons. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine that any collection, regardless of its focus, could avoid a dash of *non sequitur*.

We posed the title question above to a group of rare law book librarians. We expanded the question to include not only books, but any printed or manuscript material, and also realia. To our delight, the five librarians who responded (six, counting us, the GW Law Library) each wrote *sua sponte* about a piece from a different "class" of material. Included are an early printed book, a manuscript, a twentieth-century reference book, a newsletter, a piece of realia, and a pamphlet.

Below are the librarians' responses, along with images and links to the bibliographic records for their chosen pieces.

#### From Hannah Miller-Kim, Special Collections Librarian, Georgetown Law Library:

The smallest item in our collection also is one of our most precious treasures. The *Itinerarium Benjaminis* [of Tudela] *Latine Redditum Opera Constant L'Empereur*, or the *Travels of Benjamin of Tudela*, is a Latin text printed in Lyon by Elsevier in 1633. The book was written by Benjamin of Tudela, a twelfth-century Jewish adventurer known for his extended journey of more than ten years throughout much of Constantine's empire. He recorded his observations vividly with an attention to detail unrivaled by other extant contemporary accounts, and historians have looked to Benjamin's travel diary as a valuable primary source ever since. At a time when most books were religious or legal in nature, this type of travel narrative was a rarity. Its small size of 3½ by 2 inches makes it literally a portable pocket edition. To us in Special Collections it is especially striking because of its size, and according to Erin Kidwell, Curator of Legal History Collections, "it is a traveler's log of what was left of Justinian's empire and as such complements the other Justinian materials in our rare book collection."



#### From Karen S. Beck, Manager, Historical & Special Collections, Harvard Law School Library:

