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## Episode 4 - Does Size Matter?

Heather Wacha  
*University of Iowa*

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## Episode 4 - Does Size Matter?\*

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*Devotional 2. The University of Iowa, Special Collections, xMMs.De2*

One of the smallest folios held in The University of Iowa Special Collections has been known as Devotional 2 (xMMs.Dev2). But what exactly is a Devotional you might ask? In Episode 4, we find ourselves asking the same question.

We are also wondering if the manuscript leaf's 'devotional' content has anything to do with its small size. Indeed, this episode forces us to ask the question...

**Does size really matter?**

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\* Originally published in Omeka:  
<http://thestudio.uiowa.edu/historycorps/exhibits/show/books/episode4>

Watch the video here and read more about the manuscript below!



CLUE ONE - THE TEXT



*"De constitutione et integritate baptismi," xMMs.De2, verso.*

Our manuscript leaf was likely made around 1300, and likely of Italian origin. It contains two important clues to help us figure out what this text is. First there are

rubricated chapter titles. These titles say "*De Sacramentorum iteratione*" and "*De constitutione et integritate baptismi*". When you enter the chapter titles into a google search, you may come up with some interesting results. In my attempts to identify this text, I had to enter quite a few combinations of other Latin words found in the leaf until I finally had a hit that matched the words exactly. When I followed the link, I was able to see the entire text in Latin and it fit what we had on our leaf! When I checked the rubricated titles, although slight variations existed in the wording and spelling, these too matched the titles found on the website. In the end, I was able to identify this leaf as a text from Bonaventure's *Breviloquium*, Part VI.



*Saint Francis.*

*Background:* Bonaventure, later Saint Bonaventure, was born Giovanni di Fidanza. He is best known for being a thirteenth-century scholar and theologian (1221-1274). Bonaventure entered the Franciscan order in 1243 and studied theology at the University of Paris, where he lectured on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, the standard textbook for theological training at the time. Bonaventure wrote prolifically, both on his philosophy and on the practicalities of being a Christian.

Most scholars agree that Bonaventure completed his *Breviloquium* in 1257, at a moment in his life when he was transitioning away from the academic world at the Sorbonne and taking on more pastoral responsibilities as the general minister of the Franciscan order. Once general minister, Bonaventure became acutely aware of a lack of proper training for the order's friars. As a result, he wrote his *Breviloquium*, which presents a concise summary of what Bonaventure saw as true in religion. He hoped his work would instruct Franciscan friars in their own devotional practice as well as their preaching and thus create a more consistent teaching throughout the order.

*More Background:* The Franciscan Order was founded by Francis of Assisi, later Saint Francis, in the early thirteenth-century. The founder was dedicated to imitating Christ and practicing apostolic poverty. He gave up all possessions and began to preach repentance. Soon many followers gathered around him and Francis found himself as the natural leader of these men and women, but did not particularly enjoy the burden of

administering the day-to-day activities of an order. Resigning these duties, he decided instead to write a rule for the order in 1221, and this was confirmed by Pope Honorius III in 1223. As mendicants, the Franciscan friars needed to travel from place to place in order to preach and receive sustenance and lodging in return. Unlike some of the earlier orders from the twelfth century, for example the Cistercians and Premonstratensians who often enclosed themselves in monasteries, the Franciscans did not turn away from the temporal world, but embraced it. They were itinerant preachers who lived off the charity of others until they were required to settle down into a more fixed abode.

With a new understanding that this manuscript was likely meant for a Franciscan friar, the highly abbreviated text begins to make sense. Entire Bible verses have been abbreviated down to the first letter of each word, indicating that the person who was reading this leaf had to have been well acquainted with their biblical passages to recognize the letter sequences and then remember the verse.

Since Bonaventure's *Breviloquium* was a type of instructional manual for Franciscan friars, we come one step closer to understanding why it may be so small. If this was supposed to be a text meant for all friars, then many copies were likely made. Costs could be cut and production time decreased if the parchment was small, the writing was small, and each page had as many words as possible on it.



*Magnifying glass with Devotional 2*

## CLUE TWO - IT'S MINISCULE



*iPhone comparison to leaf*

Our leaf is about the size of an iPhone 4. The folio measures 116 mm x 82 mm. An iPhone 4 measures 120 mm x 70 mm. If we compare this episode's leaf to the gradual from Episode 3, which was 635 mm by 425 mm, we can see that it is about sixteen times smaller than the gradual.



Moreover, the extent of the writing on the page is even smaller: 90 mm x 60 mm. Both recto and verso have two columns of forty lines each. That means every inch (or 5 centimeters) holds twelve lines of writing. Unbelievable!

How on earth did thirteenth century scribes write such small letters? Well in the video we can see Heather Bain attempting such a feat! Below is a description of quill cutting and ink-making that helps us understand that the size of this manuscript was not indiscriminate. It was intentional, involving a lot of skill and precision.

*A comparison of one of our largest leaves with one of our smallest, xMMs.Gr2 (from Episode 3) and xMMs.De2.*

*Background: How to write super small script.* Heather Bain from The University of the Iowa's Center for the Book led us through a tutorial about quill cutting.

1) First you have to get a goose feather.



2) Then you scrape away the feathers and fluff from the end. Then you take your knife and make a scoop cut.



3) After the scoop cut, you need to trim the sides of the quill. This is the part that was tricky! With all my trying, I could not get the quill small enough to match the script size in our leaf. Heather came close, but her quill was still larger than the size necessary for our leaf. Nevertheless, we continued in our pursuits.



4) After we had attempted to narrow the nib of our quill, we need to make a slit in the end to draw up the ink and to finish with a perpendicular cut along the bottom.



There! Quill made!



We also used iron gall ink as we practiced our writing, the traditional medieval ink. For a recipe on how to make your own iron gall ink, visit my [blog site!](#)



*The world's oldest pair of surviving glasses from 15th-century Japan.*

*Background: How to read super small script. It so happens that evidence survives of glasses as early as the thirteenth century. For more information, visit Erik Kwakkel's blog site at [Medieval Glasses 1](#) and [Medieval Glasses 2](#).*



*An imprint of a pair of glasses on a manuscript leaf. Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 1003.*

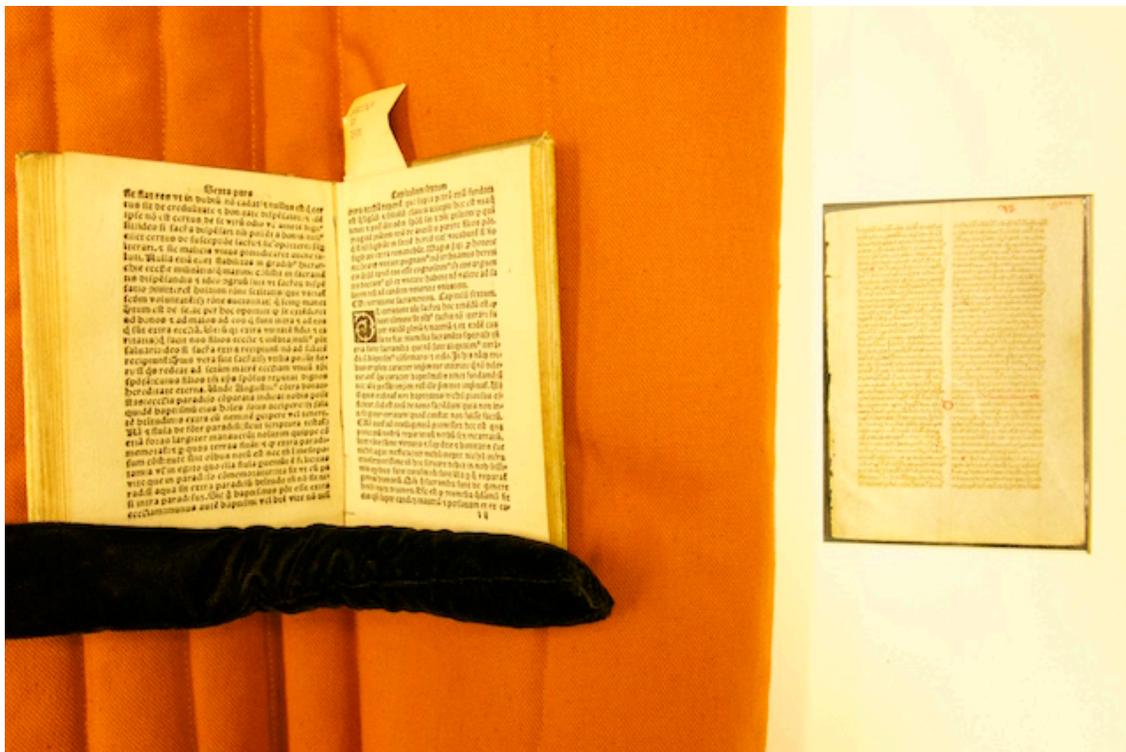
Even today we need a magnifying glass to read this text. It almost seems essential that some kind of instrument must have been used to read such small writing in the thirteenth-century.



Monks traveling with small books.

The experience of trying to write something so very small and then trying to read it certainly helps to understand that this leaf was purposefully designed and formatted for a small surface area. It was not a random piece of parchment from a pile of left-overs. The scribe knew that he or she needed to make the text as condensed as possible, likely so that many leaves could be bound and carried with a friar on his travels. The use of abbreviations helped to condense the text and a friar, educated for preaching, would have been able to decipher them.

CLUE 3 - PAGE 3000? CAN YOU BE SERIOUS?



Our leaf alongside a printed leaf circa 1500, open to the page with the same content!  
De 2 in comparison with xcoll yBX1749 B6 1500, a printed copy of the Breviloquium circa 1500.

We soon found out after looking at an early sixteenth-century printed copy of the *Breviloquium* and a twentieth-century edition, that the work itself could not have consisted of 3000 pages. It was likely called the *Breviloquium* (Latin for brevity or conciseness) for a reason.



*Devotional 2 Page number. The University of Iowa Libraries, Special Collections, xMMs.De2*

However, if we consider our leaf of the *Breviloquium* as part of a larger work, perhaps the *Opera Omnia* of Bonaventure, or a compendium of Franciscan writings, then it may be easier to consider the larger manuscript(s) as a multivolume work that continued with sequential page numbers. Indeed we have another leaf from Bonaventure's sermons in The University of Iowa Special Collections labelled 330. Although it is unlikely that these two folios were part of the same work, it helps to understand that these very small leaves were from very large manuscripts. Moreover, if these works were meant to accompany friars in their travels, then the lighter the load, the better.

So is this page number really 3000? It looks to be that way. But if you have any ideas or can clue us in, please feel free to write us and let us know. Or if you know of any leaves

resembling our own and would like to compare them to ours, feel free to contact us @hgwacha, heather-wacha@uiowa.edu, or @UISpecColl.

## CONCLUSION

There is only one here, and you may not like it. But size matters... at least when it comes to making books that hold a large amount of text for travelling friars!

## Bibliography

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