MEI: HOW TO USE

• Preliminary steps:
• 1) Examine the collection: learn as much as possible about the history of the collection so to recognise particular signs and evidence in the books.
• 2) Examine the incunabulum you want to catalogue and start taking notes (on a piece of paper) on all the signs of provenance and try to arrange them consistently and in chronological order.
CREATE A MEI RECORD

• Once you have collected the relevant information on paper, create a record in the following order:

• **FIRST**, work on the ‘Owners of Incunabula’ Database (e.g. Smith, John; Oxford, Balliol College, etc.).

• **SECOND**, create the **MEI record** for the incunabulum.
OWNERS OF INCUNABULA

• Check the presence, and, if necessary, create new records for the owners in the ‘Owners of Incunabula’ Database (e.g. Smith, John or Oxford, Balliol College, etc.) BEFORE creating MEI records for the incunabula.
The Owners of Incunabula database is accessible by clicking on Datasets in the bottom menu. This database is particularly useful because, once you have created a good Owner record, every time you will insert the same provenance in a MEI record it will populate the Provenance Information automatically, saving time and preventing mistakes.
If you wish to **SEARCH** or **EDIT** a record, search for the record in the search tab.

To **CREATE** a record of provenance (person or institution) in the **Owners of Incunabula** database, click on **More** (top menu) and then **Create a new record**.
This is how a new record looks in the Owners of Incunabula Database.
In **Provenance Name**, fill in all the relevant information, following the model below. Make sure the information is correct, since, if it is not, it will be repeated in all the records you will create using this provenance!!!

**Name format:** IMPORTANT! See next slide.
CONTROLLED LANGUAGE:
Personal Name: [Surname, Name]. Example: Correr, Theodorus. If a religious, add the Sigla, ex: Cleuen, Franciscus, OSB
Corporate Name (religious): [City, Order, Dedication, Sigla]. Example: Venice, Benedictines, S. Zacharia, OSB. This is basically the Bod-inc and IPI model, which allows best browsing.
Corporate Name (lay): [City, Name]. Example: Brescia, Biblioteca Queriniana
In **Activity**, fill in all the relevant information. Particularly regarding **Dates**, the same principle applies as with MEI records (if incorrect, the machine cannot read them), so follow carefully the MEI guidelines. Add **MARC Area Code** for the country, and **Place** and **GeonamesID** to allow the system to locate the place on the map. Add **Profession /Type of Insititution** and **Characterisation**. Remember, once you are back in the MEI record, to add the **ROLE**, which has to be added manually every time (since it may chance).

Most Owners will have only **1 Activity**. In rare cases (e.g. a student who then becomes a lawyer, and we have precise dates) it is possible to have more. Generally speaking, however, best to stick to 1 Activity, listing the dates of birth and death (or foundation/end), either precise or approximate.
• Once you have finished inserting all the relevant information in the Owners of Incunabula Database, you are ready to create MEI records.
The Material Evidence in Incunabula (MEI) database is accessible by clicking on Datasets in the bottom menu.

If you wish to SEARCH or EDIT a record, search for the record in the search tab.

To CREATE a new record:
After Login, click on More and then on Create a new record.
This is how a new record looks. The bars **Copy** and ‘**About this record**’ remain unvaried, while ‘**Evidence #**’ can increase for as many blocks of evidence you wish to create. See further on how to create new blocks of evidence. Ignore ‘**About this record**’, you will never have to use it.

**Start from: COPY.**
In **copy** there are a few very important things that need to be completed, and a number of others that are unessential. Of the first three elements, **Database segment** (ignore), **Language** (ignore), **ISTC N° IS ESSENTIAL** (if you do not insert it, you will not be able to retrieve the record!!!).

1) Find your edition on the ISTC website (in another screen!) and copy the ISTC number (eg: ia00067600); 2) Back in MEI, click on **SELECT (yellow tab)** and paste the ISTC number. 3) Click on the edition that appears.
In **Holding Information**, the **Holding Institution** is essential: select (yellow tab) and find your institution. **Collection** (ignore, except in very specific cases). **Shelfmark** is **essential**. **Holding note** (ignore). **Note**: add ‘**Created by *Name Surname***’ e.g. ‘Created by Geri Della Rocca de Candal’.
Also bound with this copy: only relevant if there is another MS/printed edition bound together with the incunabulum you are describing. Should that be the case, please contact me.

Copy history (ignore).
**Physical description**: if the volume is incomplete, this is where you will describe the details (e.g. ‘wanting a1’). Add the leaf height and length, in mm.
Copy features: very important. Choose as many options apply (e.g. Complete, Incomplete, Parts of texts in facsimile, Parts of text in manuscript, etc).

Support material (book) (i.e. printed on?): usually paper (rarely parchment).

Support material (plates): ignore. Watermark and Note on Watermark, Bernstein Database, etc: ignore, unless it is the copy of a particularly rare edition (check ISTC – if less than 20/25 copies worldwide, contact me).
**Electronic Reproduction**: only add if you have a digitised version, complete or partial, of **YOUR** copy. If so, contact me for further details.

**Other Identifier** (ignore). **Other information** (ignore).

**Completeness**: choose ‘**Incomplete**’. Once the description of the copy is concluded, change to ‘**Complete**’.
At this point you have completed the description of **Copy**. To stay on the safe side, **SAVE** the record (**green tab**).

**Remember to save frequently to avoid loss of data!!!**
Once you have saved, you will see the record as it looks. Scroll to the bottom, and click the **first tab** on the left (square with pen) to **EDIT** the record.

The second tab creates a duplicate of the record, and the third tab (bin) deletes the record. Use the latter with caution!!!
After you have clicked on Edit, you will get back to this point. Now you are ready to describe the blocks of provenance. Click on ‘Evidence #1’.
Since the point of MEI is to tag space and time, this info, when available, is essential, so don’t be shy. Write down the **Place** name (e.g. ‘Milan’), then click on the yellow tab ‘select’ – this will open the Geonames window, where you will write ‘Milan’ again, and then select the appropriate option from the list (‘ppl’ option is preferable). Repeat with **Area**: click on yellow tab ‘select’ and insert the country name (‘Italy’) in the window that will have opened. In both cases add notes if necessary (e.g. if you are not 100% sure it is Milan, but you have good reasons to suppose so – explain why).
1) In MEI, time is as important as space (so, again, don’t be shy): in **Time period**, insert either exact dates or approximate dates, but follow carefully the MEI guidelines on how to insert dates (see picture inserted here).

2) Next, click on the yellow tab ‘**Add another Provenance name field**’ (i.e. **DO NOT** start filling the Provenance name section). This will open a window: insert the name you are looking for and select it (provided that it is already in the database). This will create and fill a new **Provenance name** section, under the empty one (which will then be deleted once you save the record). The only part that you always have to complete manually is ‘**Role**’ (e.g. present or former owner, binder, etc.).
ANONYMOUS PROVENANCES

Clearly the majority of provenances are anonymous: we have thus created a number of records for ‘anonymous’ provenances in the Owners of Incunabula database with geographical and chronological boundaries (e.g. Anonymous, Italy [1475-1525]).

Please use of them!
In **Provenance Note**: 1) **Provenance type** is essential: select one or more. If you select ‘**Inscription**’, the text of the inscription should be inserted right below, in the ‘**Note**’ field. For all other options (e.g. ‘binding’, ‘stamp’, etc.) scroll down to the next sections of this block of evidence.

💡 **Difference between inscription and manuscript notes?** An inscription is **ONLY** a note of ownership (e.g. ‘ex libris Marci Tullii’ or ‘This book belongs to Erasmus’). Any other annotation goes under ‘manuscript notes’.

Link to Provenance Image (ignore, unless particularly relevant). **Date of evidence** (ignore, unless particularly relevant).

2) **Method of acquisition**: important, if known.
Describe the **Binding** to the best of your knowledge. **Do not hesitate to ask for help identifying it.** If you **cannot** associate a binding to a particular block of provenance that you have already identified (space and time), then the binding requires a specific evidence block, in which the binding alone is described. Please fill in all, or as many binding descriptors as possible. In **Binding note** you can add a brief textual description (e.g. ‘brown Russian calf, gilt fleuron’), or copy information from an earlier description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Binding</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Binding date</td>
<td>Select an Option</td>
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<tr>
<td>Binding type</td>
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<td>Binding height</td>
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<td>Binding depth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Binding notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board material</td>
<td>Select an Option</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cover material</td>
<td>Select an Option</td>
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<tr>
<td>Binding status</td>
<td>Select an Option</td>
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<tr>
<td>Furniture</td>
<td>Select an Option</td>
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<td>Titling</td>
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<td>Toning</td>
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<td>Edges</td>
<td>Select an Option</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welding on edges</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverboard</td>
<td>Select an Option</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Decoration*
If the book has **Decoration** or **Rubrication**, please describe it here. Again, as with bindings, if you **cannot** associate a decoration or rubrication to a particular block of provenance that you have already identified (space and time), then these sections require individual, specific evidence block, in which the decoration and/or rubrication alone is described.
1) **Manuscript notes**: Tick all the appropriate boxes (e.g. corrections, censorship, etc.) and in **Manuscript notes** you can provide a short textual description of the marginalia (e.g. ‘16th c. Latin marginalia, brown ink, German hand’). MS notes, if not connected to a specific block of provenance (space and time), should be described separately (e.g. if two anonymous sets of marginalia, two individual blocks of evidence describing the manuscript notes only). Please also describe the **Frequency** and **Location in Book** (useful to understand reading practices).

2) **Stamps**: describe, if any (same principle applies regarding provenance: if a stamp is the sole evidence of a prov., describe separately. If not, it goes together with the block of provenance it belongs to, e.g. ‘Bodleian Library’).
Following the same principles described above on how to ascribe evidence to a new block of evidence, or a single one containing multiple evidence, describe the presence of **Historic Shelfmarks**, if any (enquire about the **Shelfmark pattern n°**, if necessary).

If the **price** of the book, in one of its passages of ownership, is known, complete the information here, e.g. 10; GBP; (in **notes**) ‘Price inscribed in pencil on the front pastedown’.
The final step in completing a block of evidence involves stating:

1) The **Certainty** of the evidence. Usually, unless highly dubious, one can consider the described evidence almost invariably certain.

2) The **Source** of the evidence (essential) – i.e. where does the information come from? From the examination of the copy (‘Book in hand’), from a catalogue, a bibliography...etc?
At this point the description of a block of evidence is complete. If you wish to create a new block of evidence, you have two ways:

1) You immediately click on the blue tab ‘Add another empty Evidence Field’.
2) You save the record (green tab), follow slides 19, 20 and 21 again, open the last evidence block created, scroll down to the end of the block, and click on the blue tab ‘Add another empty Evidence Field’.
Either way, once you have clicked on the **blue tab ‘Add another empty Evidence Field’**, the new block of evidence will appear right under the blue tab.