



The Aldus Story

By Jay Hoster

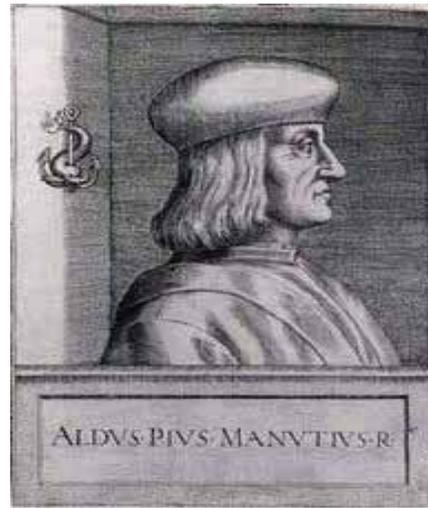
Many of our newer members might be curious about to how our organization – The Aldus Society – got its name. We lay claim that we’re “about all things books,” so how would an anchor and dolphin logo become part of our identity? Thereby hangs a tale (many of them, actually).

During our formative months over the winter of 2000, our visionary founder Geoffrey Smith hoped that we might apply for membership in the Fellowship of American Bibliophilic Societies (FABS) as soon as we were officially organized. And we noticed that many of the FABS member clubs had named their clubs after famous people in the history of books, printing and collecting.

For instance, The Caxton Club in Chicago was named in honor of the first English printer, William Caxton. Our neighboring club in Cleveland, The Rowfant Club, was named for Rowfant, the home of Frederick Locker-Lampson (1821-95), a writer of light verse who was a leading book collector of his time. Canada’s Alcuin Society was named to honor the memory of Alcuin of York, who encouraged the study and preservation of ancient texts, contributed to the development of the lower case alphabet, and helped establish numerous schools and libraries.



ABOVE: The Rylands copy of the Aldine Vergil
RIGHT: Dante’s Commedia, 1502, owned by the Newberry Library in Chicago



Aldus Manutius (1449 - 1515)

logo for his Aldine Press have been happily incorporated into all of our activities since that time.

So who exactly, was Aldus Manutius? Why is he important in the history of printing? Why have publishers incorporated variations of his logo into their own, and why have architects even used his Aldine Press logo as a decorative element in their buildings?

Aldus Manutius was a scholar, grammarian and teacher known in the most important humanist circles of the time before coming to Venice around 1490. In 1493 he established the Aldine Press during a time which came to be known as the Venetian High Renaissance. His publishing legacy includes the distinction of introducing italic type, which was first used in an octavo edition of Virgil which he published in 1501.

Certainly we could simply have assumed a simpler name, something like the “Central Ohio Book Club.” But founding trustee Paul Watkins sagely suggested naming our organization to honor someone who is held in highest esteem in the history of the book world – Aldus Manutius. As a result Aldus’ name and the



The revolutionary impact of Aldus’ editions is readily apparent when the elegant portable octavo of his 1502 edition of Dante, printed in italic type without commentary, is compared to the ponderous incunabula of the previous decades, which were inclined to bury Dante’s text beneath

exegetical commentary. His italic type allowed him to introduce books in a more compact format, now considered a forerunner of today's "pocket books." His smaller italic type took up much less space on the pages which made his books less expensive to produce, inexpensive to purchase, and easy to carry. These books were called *libri portatiles*.



Manutius and his grandson Aldus the Younger, who was also a printer, are credited with introducing a standardized system of punctuation including developing the modern use of the semicolon and the modern appearance of the comma.

Manutius stated many times that his goal was to make available in print the classic texts of the ancient world which were beloved by Renaissance humanists. We are fortunate that he appeared at such an important moment in the history of the book. Aldus is credited with re-introducing original Greek texts to the western world after centuries of unavailability.



Aristotle printed by Aldus Manutius, 1495-98

Choosing Aldus Manutius as our namesake actually resulted in a "double-hit." Not only were we able to honor him by naming our organization after him, we also were able to utilize his printer's mark for our very own logo. This mark is arguably the best-known printer's device in the history of printing.

His device brings together two seemingly disparate elements – the anchor and dolphin – which serve to illustrate the classical adage *festina lente*, a paradox that means "make haste slowly." The tacit meaning is that activities should be performed with a proper balance of intensity and contemplation.



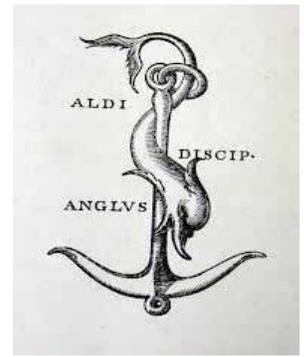
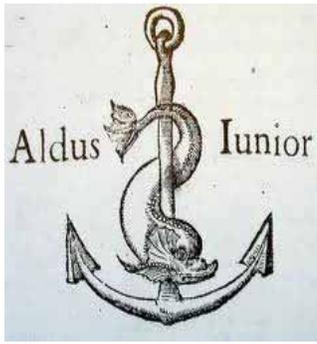
Erasmus praised this adage in his great work, *Adagia*, and used it especially to compliment his printer: "Aldus, making haste slowly, has acquired as much gold as he has reputation, and richly deserves both." Subsequently, Aldus used the corresponding symbol of the dolphin and anchor as his printer's mark.

After Aldus' translation of Euripides was published, Erasmus was so pleased with the results that he took up residence at the Aldine Press. What Erasmus wrote went directly to the compositor and then to the printing press, a practical application of *festina lente*. "The labor was such that there was no time to scratch one's ears," Erasmus later recalled. "Aldus very often declared that he was astonished that I wrote so much *ex tempore* and amid such a tumult of surrounding noise."

Actually, Aldus wasn't the first to use the anchor and dolphin image. The anchor and dolphin device is familiar to collectors of Roman coins. During the reigns of Titus and Domitian a denarius silver coin depicted an anchor



Aldus showed Erasmus a Roman silver coin, given to him by Cardinal Bembo, which bore this symbol on the reverse side. Terry Belanger donated a similar one to the Clark Library at UCLA.



VARIATIONS ON A THEME: The anchor and dolphin image has been used by Aldus Manutius and many others over the years. Above you can see many of these artistic interpretations, including William Pickering's at far right.

with an entwined dolphin. Terry Belanger, founding director of the Rare Book School, donated an anchor-and-dolphin denarius to the Clark Library at UCLA and gave a talk with the intriguing title “Parallel Lines Never Meet: Dolphins and Anchors and Aldus / Book Historians and Numismatists and Roman Coins.”

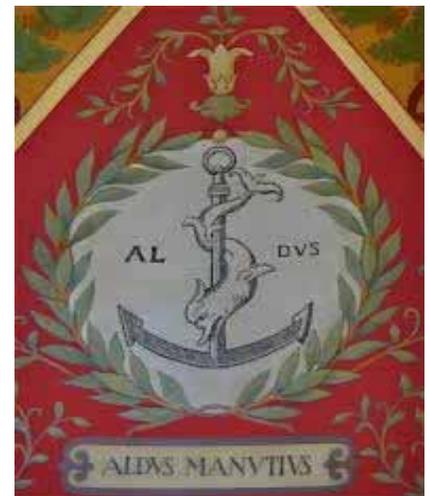
So well-known is the anchor-and-dolphin of Aldus that other publishers have employed it over the centuries. William Pickering, a nineteenth-century British publisher added “Discipulus Aldi” (disciple of Aldus) to the anchor-and-dolphin device (above right). Thomas Bird Mosher, an American fine press printer of the early twentieth used a device with two dolphins entwining the anchor, and the anchor-and-dolphin currently serves as the logo of

Doubleday Publishing with the ring at the top of the anchor in the form of a “D.” (see image at left)



And so well-known is the anchor-and-dolphin of Aldus, it has been used as a complimentary architectural feature in buildings, as well. Many university libraries have used this symbol in their stained glass windows, and the Library of Congress honors Aldus with their colorful mosaic of the anchor and dolphin in the Thomas Jefferson Building. In New York City, the Printing Crafts Building sports the anchor and dolphin logo on their beautiful terra cotta façade.

With such a long and rich history of both Aldus and his printer's device, it is only fitting to remember our organization's namesake, Aldus Manutius.



ABOVE: Mosaic from the Thomas Jefferson Building at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.

LEFT: A portion of the Printing Crafts Building façade in NYC

