

The Most Valuable Rare Books

Rare and valuable books don't have to be centuries old—though many of them are. They can be ancient artifacts, first edition books, or the earliest edition of a coveted modern novel, across any genre. Outside of rarity and condition, books considered truly “rare” are those that have helped to mold history or that have impacted our society in a profound way. And even as our society advances and relies less on physical works to document our history, the finite amount of copies available ensures the health of this market for years to come.

Below are four of the most valuable and best-known rare books today:

THE FIRST ATLAS BY CLAUDIUS PTOLEMY (1477)

The First Atlas by Claudius Ptolemy

1477

Price Realized
\$3.9 million

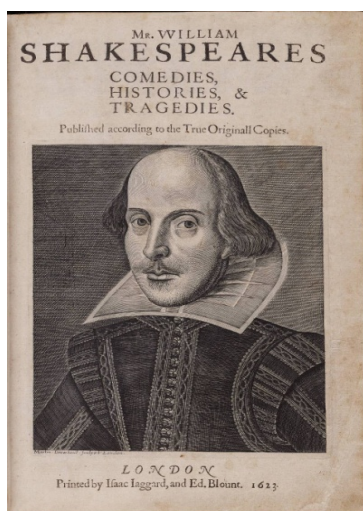
Sale Date
October 2006

Auction House
Sotheby's



In 1477, the first printed edition of Ptolemy's “**Geographia**” with maps was issued in Bologna. Considered one of the world's first printed atlases, this original version of this work was created by Claudius Ptolemy in 150 AD. Only three original copies of the first printed versions remain, with one copy going for \$3.9 million at Sotheby's in 2006.

FIRST FOLIO BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1623)



The title page of the Shakespeare First Folio, 1623

Printed in folio format (four pages of text are printed on each sheet; two on either side) with folio paper size dimensions; 304.8 x 482.6 mm, and containing 36 plays. There are less than 300 copies of the first collection of Shakespeare's works still available today, and they are rare to hit the market. In 2001, one copy sold at the auction house Christie's for \$6.2 million.

THE BIRDS OF AMERICA BY JAMES AUDUBON (1820)

The Birds of America by James Audubon

1820

Price Realized
\$11.5 million

Sale Date
December 2010

Auction House
Sotheby's



This map-sized book is home to drawings of over 400 American birds. And while experts believe that 120 copies still exist today, their rarity has led to one copy selling for \$11.5 million in 2010 at Sotheby's.

THE TALES OF BEEDLE THE BARD (1820)



Autograph Manuscript individually handwritten and extensively illustrated by the author, c.160 pages containing c.5500 words, written in an Italian hand-made notebook. Acid-free deckle-edged cream-coloured leaves (167 by 111mm.), bound in brown morocco (175 by 114mm.) embellished on upper cover by Edinburgh silversmiths Hamilton and Inches. It has five individually hand-chased hallmarked sterling silver ornaments & mounted moonstones, spine in compartments with raised bands, folding clasp, green endpapers, green head and foot bands together with green marker ribbon.

Tales of Beedle the Bard by J.K. Rowling (2008), Public Edition: Seven handmade copies were created in the early 2000s, and given away as gifts. Before printed copies were released in 2008, one original handmade work sold at Sotheby's for \$3.98 million in 2007.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR COLLECTION

Do...



Keep temperatures between **65-70 degrees** Fahrenheit.



Keep humidity levels between **30-50%**.



Protect books from UV rays by storing in **dark rooms**.



Leave space between books stored on shelves.



Dust regularly with a soft and clean cloth or brush.



Handle carefully with **clean or gloved hands**.

Don't...



Dog-ear the pages or **use bookmarks** with chemicals.



Stack more than three books on top of one another.



Pull books off the shelf by grabbing the **top of the spine**.



Group books of **various sizes** together on shelves.



Let the book lay **completely flat** when handling.



Repair books with **household cleaners or tape**.

RARE BOOKS ON PUBLIC VIEW



Cuneiform Accounting Tablets

2100 B.C.

Library of Congress,
United States
of America

This ancient tablet is one of the **earliest known recordings of sales, receipts and other billing items.**

Ambrosian Iliad

500 A.D.

**Biblioteca
Ambrosiana, Milan**

**The only ancient
book with
illustrations depicting
the story of *The Iliad*.**





Blue Qur'an

1020 C.E.

Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar

This golden Islamic calligraphy is **considered the most rare and luxurious manuscript** created.

Magna Carta

1325

Folger Shakespeare Library, England

The **first statute of rights** in England, transcribed in Latin.



FACTORS THAT DETERMINE THE VALUE OF A RARE BOOK



Provenance, or a record of ownership.



Contemporary binding, as books are more valuable in their original form.



Primacy is highly valued, as first books are much more rare than first editions.



Books in **excellent condition** are worth more than those that are actively disintegrating.



Quality of the pages and the binding help to identify a book that's been cared for.



Market demand for the rare book, as highly demanded works drive up value.



Scarcity of copies of the same book or books by the same author.