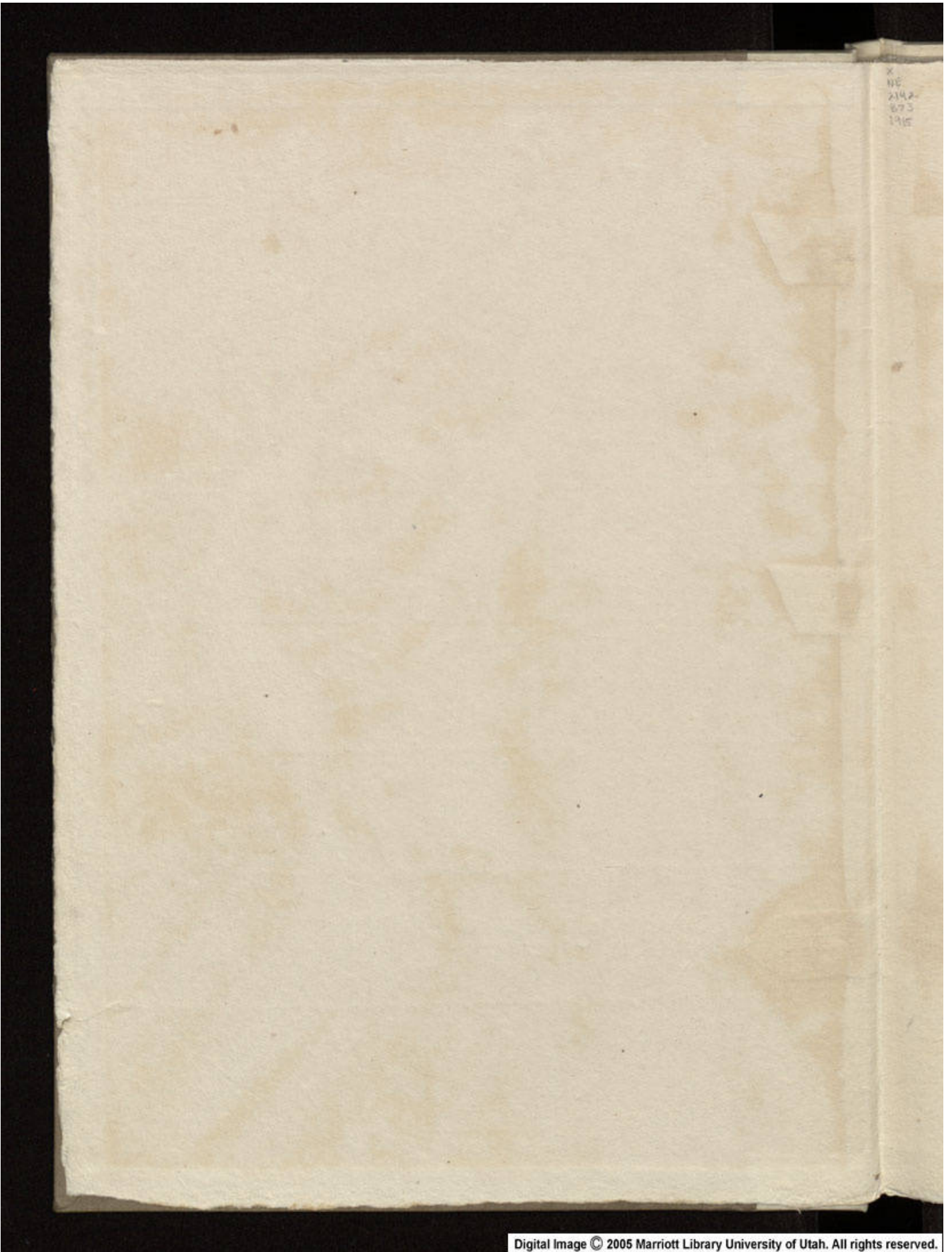


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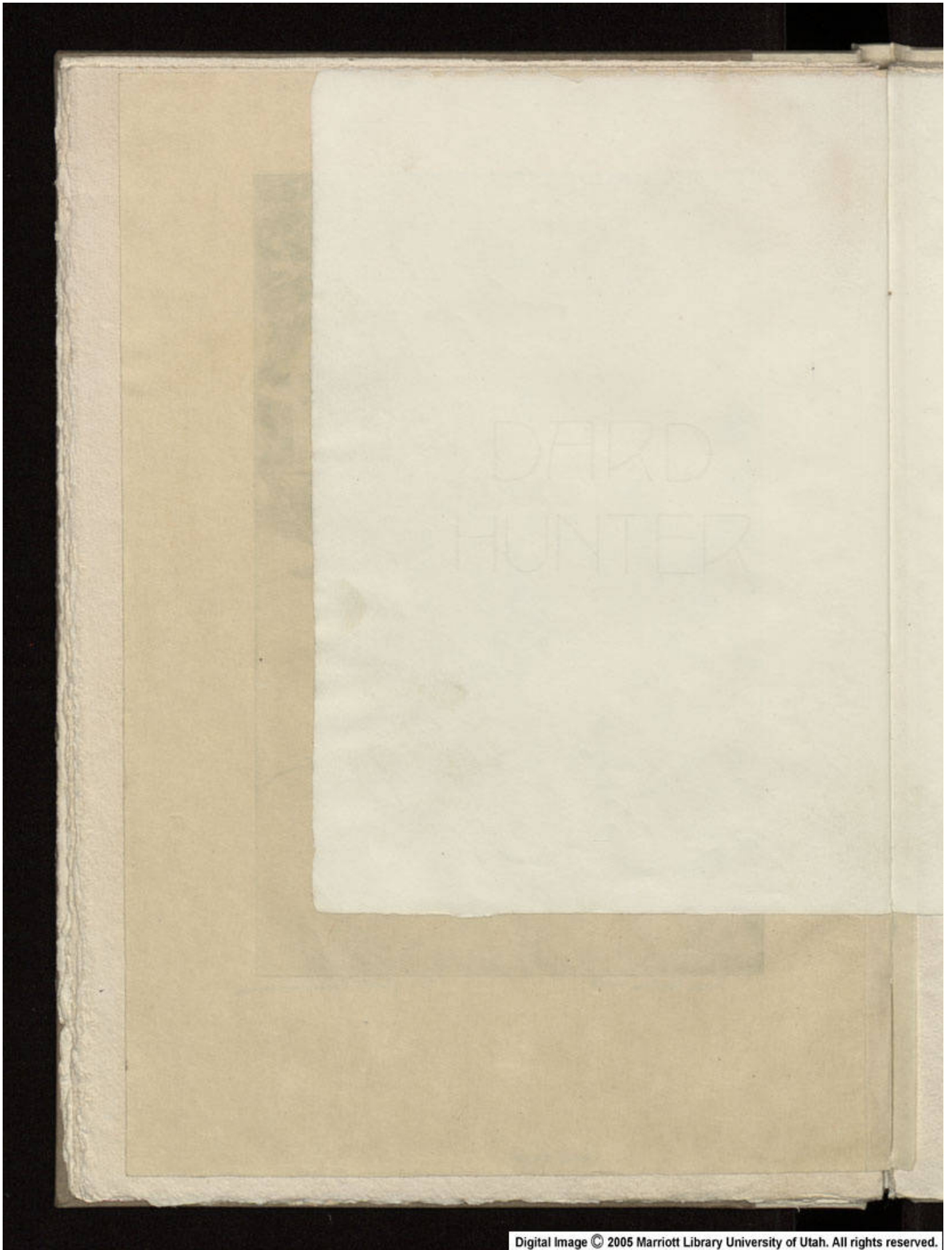
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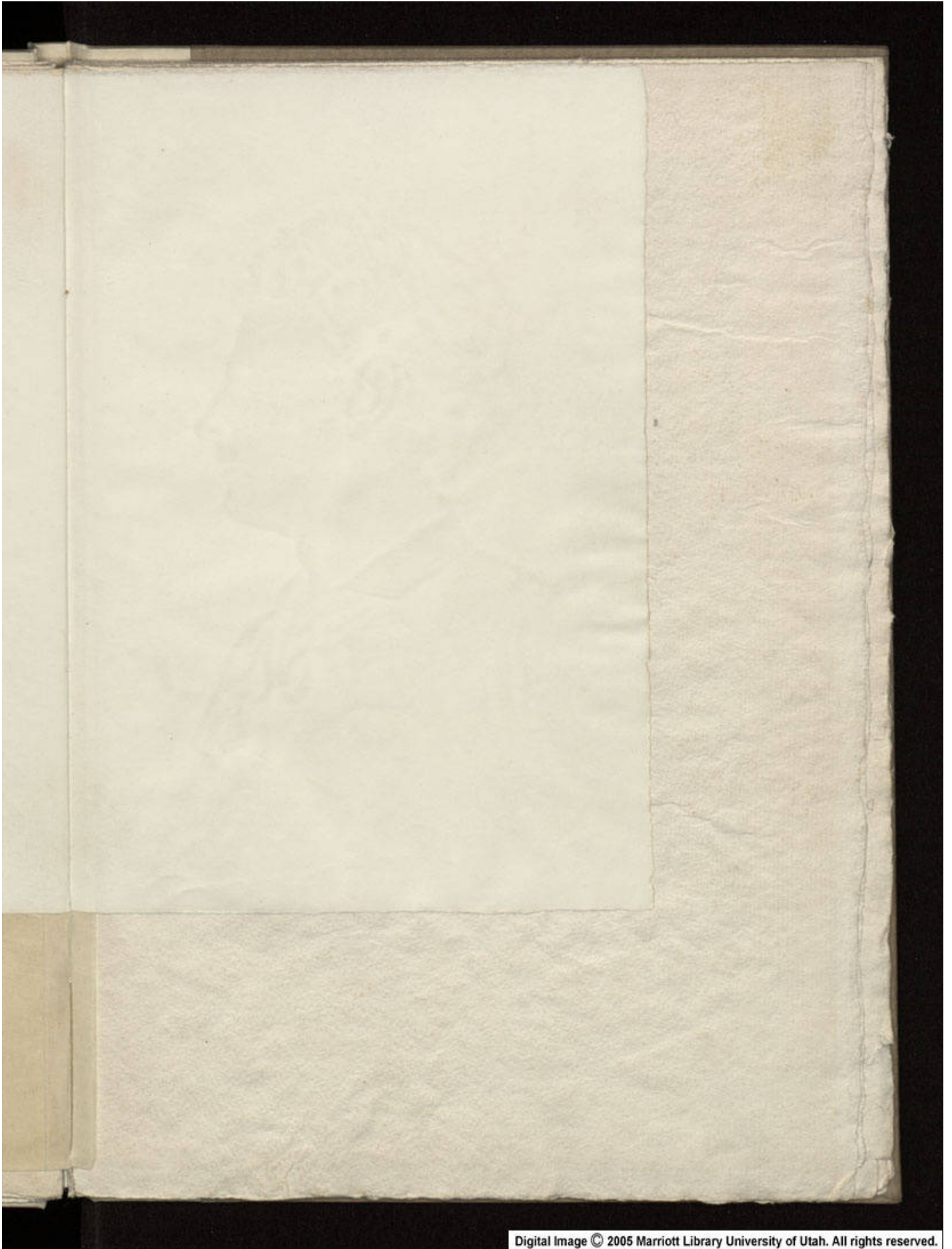
Dard Hunter sketch

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William A. Levy

THE
ETCHING OF FIGURES

by
William Aspenwall Bradley

With an Original Etching
by
William Auerbach Levy



Dard Hunter
Marlborough-on-Hudson
MCMXV

FOREWORD

The Chicago Society of Etchers presents to its associate members, in a series of publications issued annually, a brief but authoritative survey of the various fields of etching.

Cities, bridges, landscapes and now figures form the subject of the four monographs accompanied by original signed etchings by active members of the Society. These are selected by jury from plates made for and purchased by the Society, two hundred and fifty copies printed and plate destroyed.

The etching accompanying this book is by William Auerbach Levy and is entitled, Torah, a Hebrew word meaning the study of all religious law and duty, and represents a Hebrew scholar poring over his book.

This publication is the entire work of Dard Hunter, Marlborough-on-Hudson. The paper was made by him especially for this book, each sheet separately in a hand-mould. The steel punches for the type were cut by him, the matrices struck and the type cast in a hand-mould. The printing was done on a hand-press. These methods are practically the same as those used by printers at the time of Albrecht Dürer.

In an exhaustive study of paper-making and typography, Mr. Hunter has never seen mention of a book produced in which paper, type and printing were the

work of one man as they are in the present volume. Printing as an art reached its highest development between the years 1470 and 1590. Most modern book printing produced by the revivalists tries to imitate this old work by using the most modern methods. Mr. Hunter's idea, during many years of research and experiment, which has culminated in the production of this book, has been to work as the sixteenth century printers did, using, so far as possible, the same tools, materials and methods. By this means, it is hoped, the same general characteristics that are so very pleasing in many of the early volumes, will, at least in a measure, be found in this book.

THE ✕ ETCHING ✕ OF ✕ FIGURES

If etching is not today regarded primarily as one of the figure arts, this is perhaps due less to any inherent disability on its part, than to the important impulsion given to the revival of etching in the early nineteenth century by the double romantic passion for sentimental landscape and for medieval architecture. Jacque, father of modern French etching—and all modern etching that accepts the linear tradition restored by him is essentially French—is its least romantic practitioner. He is, indeed, bucolic, pastoral; but his pastoralism is of that homely Dutch sort in which, as Mr. Laurence Binyon rightly says, the interest is shifted from man to his animal charges, from the shepherd to the sheep.

Daubigny, Appian, Corot, Rousseau were all practically pure landscapists. Lalanne makes sparing use of figures, whether town or country supply his subject matter. Meryon affects devils, gargoyles, and sinister, circling birds, rather than human beings. But he introduces these into at least two of his *Eaux-fortes sur Paris*—*La Morgue* and *La Ministère de la Marine*—with brilliant success, which, on the whole, is more than can be said for either Haden or Whistler, though one was a disciple of Rembrandt, the other of Canaletto who, like those other masters of architectural etching, Hollar and Piranesi, was accustomed to peo-

ple his plates to the considerable enhancement of their picturesque effect.

There are, of course, exceptions to this general rule of nineteenth century etching, which places human interest relatively low in the scale of aesthetic values. Among these the most notable are Millet and Legros. The former's noble and significant peasant figures rank easily among the highest achievements of the art in any period, while many of Legros' figure compositions are also very fine, especially that macabre, Rembrandt-like plate, *La Mort du Vagabond*, which suggests—perhaps was suggested by—Baudelaire's bizarre, powerful poem, *La Charogne*:

Rappelez-vous l'objet que nous vîmes, mon âme,
Ce beau matin d'été si doux:
Au détour d'un sentier une charogne infâme
Sur un lit semé de cailloux.

Millet left no immediate school; Legros, however, who taught so long in England, has had numerous imitators, mainly in that country; and in general, without mentioning living men, one may note, along with a patent exhaustion of the conventional landscape and architectural motives, which tend more and more to mere monotonous repetition (an ebbing of the initial romantic impulse), a marked revival of interest in the etching of figures.

Certainly, viewed from the historical standpoint, nothing could be more logical or legitimate. For the

first signed etching—Urs Graf's, *Woman Bathing Her Feet* (1513)—was a figure study, as were also the six subjects which Dürer etched on iron shortly after, and which show a firm grasp of the medium, except in the case of *The Man of Sorrows*, where the handling has too much the character of a pen-drawing. One of these half-dozen etchings, however (*The Cannon*), is a landscape—as well as a figure—composition, and as such has a special significance in the history of the art. For, neither in Northern Europe, with its ideals of imitative rendering realized by the school of Goltzius, nor in Italy, where Parmeggiano and the Caracci carried on a decadent tradition of the academic grand manner, could etching compete with line-engraving; and it was not until the rise of a true landscape school among Dutch and Flemish artists early in the following century, that the art of the needle really found for itself a recognized place in the sun.

Yet at the very moment when this art was about to be reborn in a new world of beauty and significance, there appeared in France, or rather, Lorraine—still an independent Duchy—an etcher whose peculiar glory is precisely his vigorous and effective rendering of the human figure in action. This artist is Jacques Callot who, in elaborate compositions on an often microscopic scale, handles city or country crowds, peasants or soldiers, with consummate skill, giving to each individual his characteristic pose or gesture, full of animation and vitality, yet at the same time leading the exciting little narrative or drama quite naturally

along the main structural lines of the composition. There is no need any longer to direct attention to Callot's two celebrated series which depict so unforgettably *Les Misères de la Guerre* as he himself had seen them in his oft ravished Lorraine. Less known, however, are the delightful little illustrations for the parable of *L'Enfant Prodigue*, one of which, showing the prodigal as a swineherd, challenges comparison in advance with the subsequent masterpieces of Dutch genre and landscape etching. As elsewhere in Callot's work, the only serious stylistic defect is that the method here employed is not that of pure etching, since it regularly involves the use of the burin to reinforce and complete the work of the acid.

Callot carried the art of etching with him to Italy, where he is said to have instructed his compatriot, Claude Gelée. The latter's handling of the figures in his plate, *Campo Vaccino*, certainly seems to show traces of Callot's influence. In general, however, Claude derives far less from that artist, for whom the landscape serves mainly as a mere background against which the figures stand out sharp and distinct, than from the German painter and etcher, Adam Elsheimer, who also worked at Rome, and who, among many novelties wherewith he seduced his generation, sought to unite both natural and human elements in a single subtle and imaginative synthesis.

Claude was the first great modern landscape artist and his followers tended to reduce the figures to so much mere staffage. Among these followers were

such Italianate Dutchmen as Jan Both, Nicolaes Berchem, and Karel Dujardin, whose idealized types of the Campagna are in striking contrast with the realistic interpretations of native life by those other Dutch masters who, staying at home, followed the lead of the pioneer in this field, the Flemish painter, Pieter (Peasant) Breughel.

Chief among these, of course, was Rembrandt, greatest of all figure-etchers in the range of his observation, in the depth of his penetration, in the power and variety of his expression. Some of his earliest plates were coarsely executed but highly characteristic studies of beggars, in which it is thought he may have been influenced by Callot who also etched a series, *Les Gueux*. He excelled in such genre pieces as *The Blind Fiddler* and *The Rat Killer*. And even in his great religious compositions he was accustomed to draw exclusively upon the life of the streets about him. This is one trait, among many, that makes Rembrandt seem so modern to us today, and that makes so many modern artists take him as a master.

On the side of tense dramatic interest sustained through a vast sweep of character, and of profound human sympathy most nobly and tenderly interpreted, these scriptural plates by which, with certain of his portraits—the *Jan Six*, *Jan Lutma*, *Old Haaring*, and others—Rembrandt is best known, probably culminate in the celebrated *Hundred Guilder Print of Christ Healing the Sick*. From a technical standpoint, however, there are others far more interesting.

Such are those later plates, like the Christ Appearing to His Disciples, of 1650, and the Christ Between His Parents, Returning from the Temple, of 1654, in which he adopts a much broader and bolder manner of treatment. Ceasing to shade his plate with series of closely hatched lines in order to secure that tone which is always the principal personage in his pictorial dramas (this is now left entirely to the printing) he seeks henceforth simply to express the essential character, the spiritual significance, of the scene, as briefly yet powerfully as possible.

No other artist, in western art at any rate, has ever carried expression through pure line as far as Rembrandt in this last period. He himself, absorbed in the world of his own thought, eager only to utter his own ideas, careless of appearances, carries it to the point where he sacrifices everything to it—beauty, form, surface, modelling, texture—where his very figures grow grotesque, inhuman, (as in the Entombment of 1654) and his art, freed from every sensuous element, tends finally to take on a character of pure intellectual abstraction.

Very far from the abstract or intellectual, is another seventeenth century Dutch etcher who must be noted in this brief survey. Yet it is just because he stands on so much lower a level in every way than Rembrandt—because, while having, comparatively, so little to say, he says it, on the whole, so simply and directly—that Adrien van Ostade is a far better general exemplar of figure-etching. It is the fashion to

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look down on Ostade today, to decry his talent as a mixture of the coarse and the commonplace. But no one ambitious to etch the figure can afford to overlook the work of an artist whose influence was clearly felt by a far greater artist, Millet, and who, at his best—in plates like the *Anglers on a Bridge* and the *Fiddler* and the *Boy with a Hurdy-Gurdy*—is himself a master of the economy of means and of simple, expressive draughtsmanship.

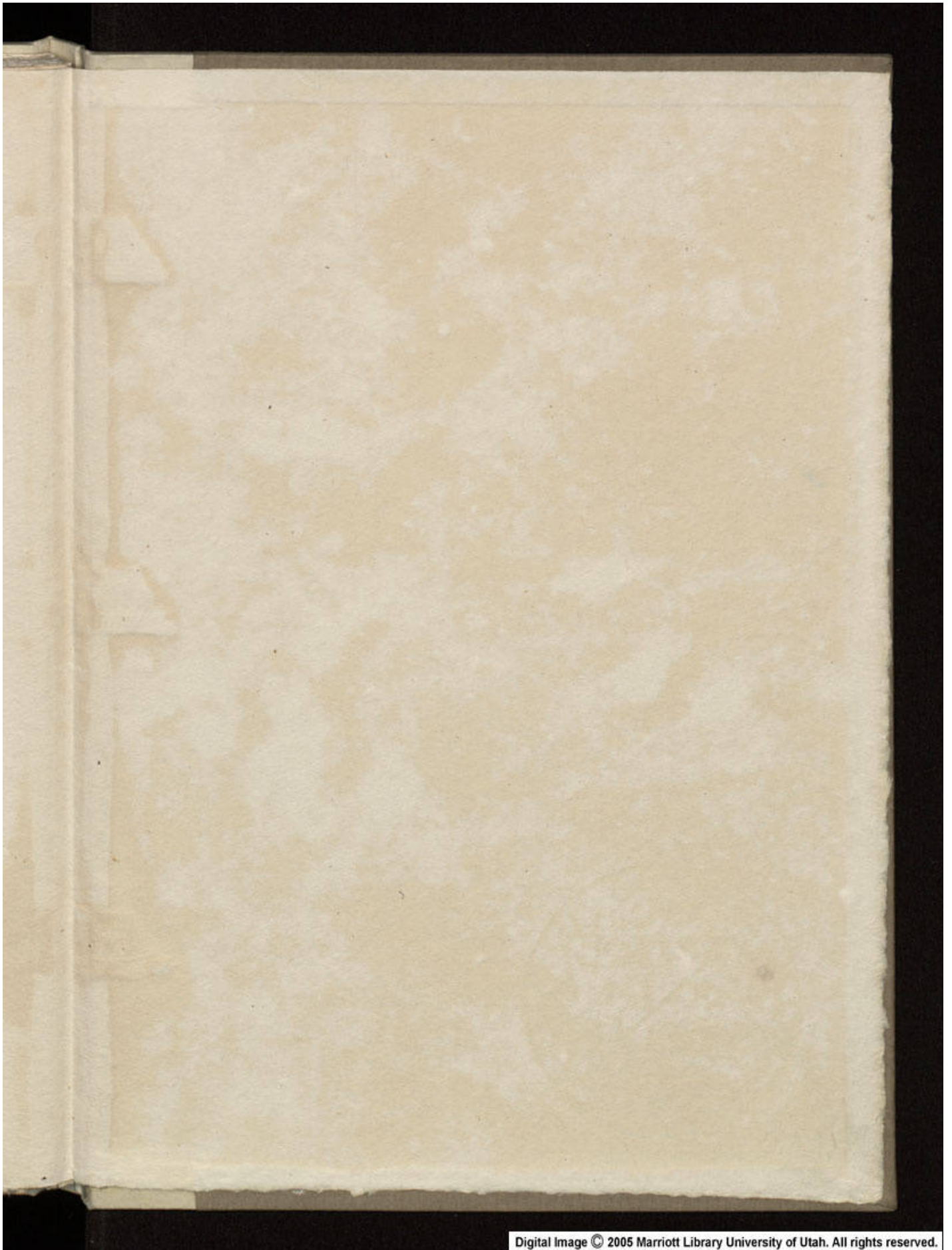
After Ostade comes Bega. Critics have noted the curious prophetic resemblance of his decorative patterns and artificial lighting effects to Goya, whose violence, extravagance, and cruelty may, on the other hand, have had a remote source in that earlier etcher of Goya's own race, though long resident in Italy—Lo Spagnoletto, Ribera.

Manet tried to imitate on copper Goya's marvellous flat modelling of the figure. But though the technical means (a combination of aquatint with the etched line) is clear, the secret eluded him, and his interesting failure, *Fleur Exotique*, affords, if it be needed, one further instance of the purely personal character of the forever elusive, yet forever fascinating, art of etching, for which art, as for all arts, the human figure will always constitute the main object or means of expression.

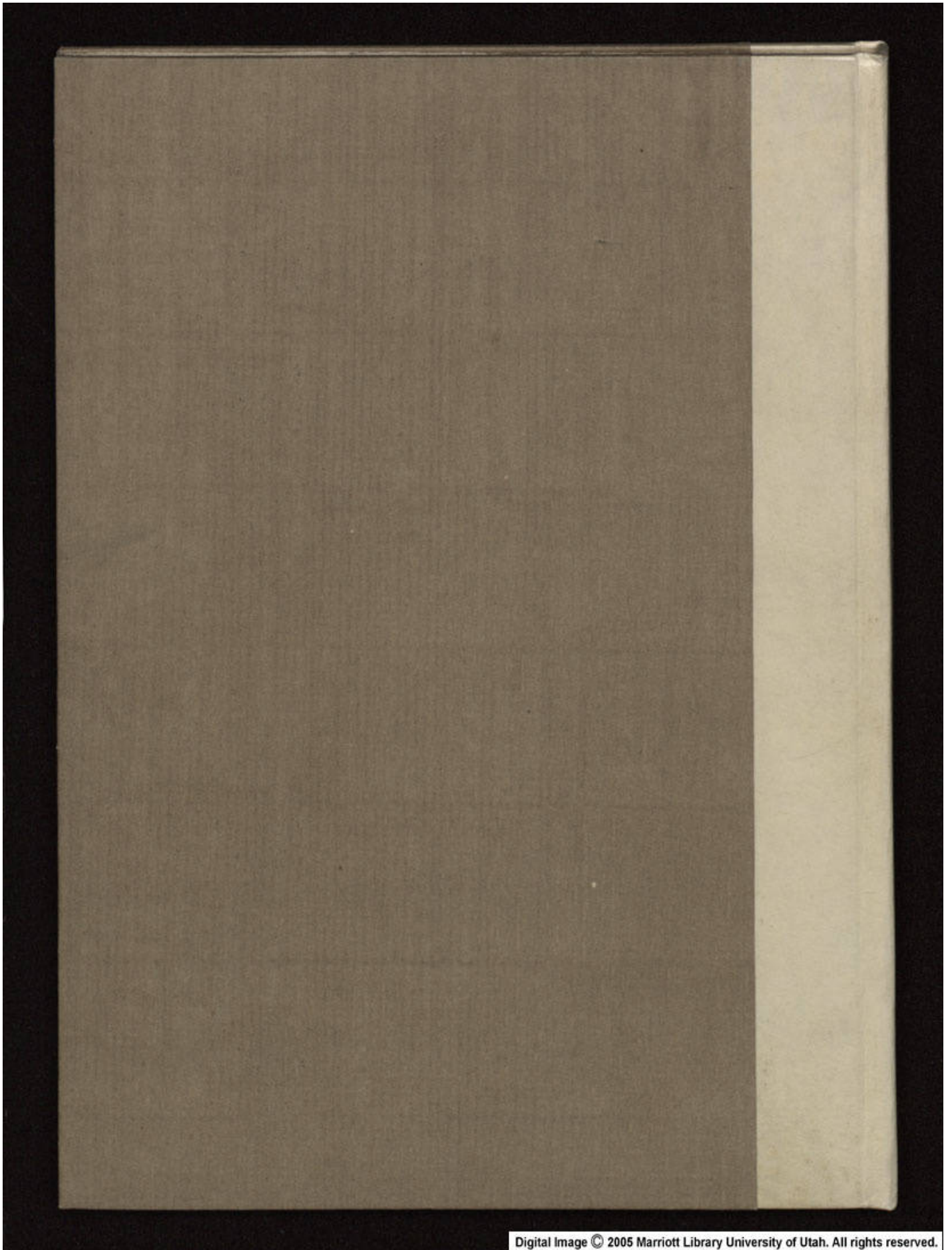
This book, *The Etching of Figures*, was written by William Aspenwall Bradley for The Chicago Society of Etchers. The paper and type were made by Dard Hunter in the manner of the Sixteenth Century and the book printed by him at The Mill, Marlborough-on-Hudson, N. Y. in the United States of America.

Two hundred fifty copies printed.

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