

# Walters Ex Libris

[manuscripts.thewalters.org](https://manuscripts.thewalters.org)


## Immortalizing ancient manuscripts in the interactive, open-source, digital space.

### Services

- \* **Leveraging Data**
- \* **Web Design**

Scholars and curiosity-seekers alike have an all-new, interactive way to experience The Walters' collection of over 300 ancient manuscripts.

### THE BEGINNING

Our part of this project was to design & develop an interface for their digitized manuscript data, making it possible for users to search and browse these beautiful piece of history. At the start, we didn't know precisely what this would look like, but we did know we needed to build an interface that made the unique manuscript data at once engaging, searchable and even serendipitous. The Walters Art Museum, located in

Baltimore, has a considerable collection of ancient manuscripts dating from the 8th to the 20th century. By digitizing the manuscripts under a Creative Commons 3.0 license, they're breaking new ground and offering an extraordinary level of detail about each work to researchers and curiosity-seekers alike, completely royalty-free.

With that in mind, we started our design exploration at the source: the data.

### EARLY EXPLORATIONS

When we really started digging through the data, questions we didn't yet know how to answer emerged. Why are some manuscripts' pages out of order? What are these bookmarks and flyleaves that are throwing off the page sequencing? And what about these single-page scrolls, which have no covers at all?

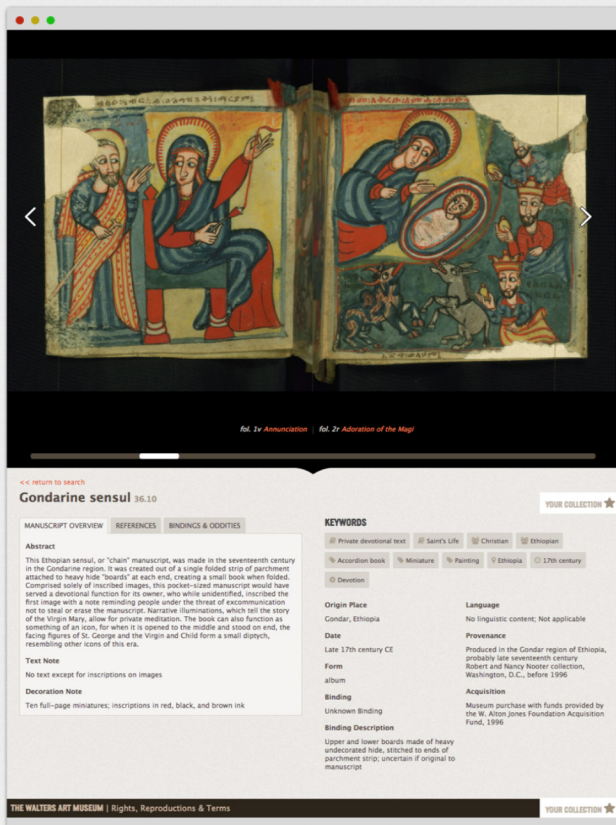
It became clear that these manuscripts were so much more than just books. What other nuances were we missing? We sought understanding of the data by creating a series of increasingly interactive prototypes, including a chapter explorer.



### A PAGE-TURNING EXPERIENCE

Most manuscripts take the form of a book, so we found a page-turning interface to be the ideal way to present the manuscript data. However, unlike a physical book, our interface presents the user with

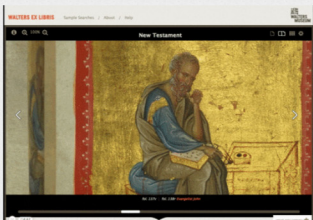
opportunities to jump straight to specific illuminated pages, to "flip" through a preview of each spread with the scrollbar, and to even see the manuscripts' folios in a grid or vertical scroller.



### SEARCH STRATEGY

Once we had a complete grasp of the data and how users would interact with a single manuscript, we developed a strategy for how they would search & browse all 300+. We quickly realized that a search box

where users could enter their own keywords would most often lead to 0 results, so we established a custom strategy to fit the data. To learn more about how we did this, read [Sam's blog post](#) on the project.



We developed three different access-points:

- Filtering by established keywords
- Filtering by user-created keywords
- Sample searches

We proposed Sample Searches as a way to teach users about the unique search system, as well as give non-researchers an overview of what they might discover.

