

Very Brief Timeline of Recreational Origami:

Some important dates in paperfolding history until 1932

By David Mitchell for www.OrigamiMuseum.org

As far as I know the earliest known piece of paper was found during an archaeological dig in Fangmatan in China and dates from between 179 to 14 BCE.

Throughout its history, paper has been, and still is, mostly folded for purely practical purposes but it can also be folded for recreation. We know of two quite separate recreational paperfolding traditions, one in Japan and one in Western Europe (which then spread to Argentina and North America). There may well have been similar traditions in other countries as well, particularly in China and Korea, but the evidence to confirm this is lacking at present.

The Japanese Tradition

1021 - Japan: Completed around this date, the 'Genji Monogatari' (The Tale of Genji), makes frequent references to letters, some of which are characterised as straight folded, knotted, twisted, or wrapped.

1100: The oldest surviving kawahori, a pleated folding fan made of paper, the remains of which were found in the village of Akitsu, was made around this date.

1591/3: The oldest known representation of the Paper Crane appears as a decoration on the sheath of a sword. From this time on the Paper Crane is by far the most frequently illustrated design in the Japanese repertoire.

1680: Publication of a haiku by Iharu Saikaku 'Rosei-ga yume-no cho-wa orisue' (which can be translated as 'The butterflies in a beggar's dream would be folded paper'. The specific design referred to cannot be identified.

1692: Publication of the 'Onna Chohoki' (Women's Treasury) which contains a section devoted to the folding of tsutsumi (formal wrappers for gifts of flowers) also contains the earliest known drawing of Ocho and Mecho butterflies which were used to decorate sake bottles and kettles.

1700 to 1750: Drawings of recreational origami designs begin to appear in woodcut prints in Hinagata Bon (pattern books for kimono) and in ukiyo-e (floating world) illustrated books. The Takarabune (treasure ship) appears in 1704, a version of the Paper Boat in 1713, Komoso in 1717, the Thread Container in 1719, the Star-shaped Box, Tematebako (treasure chest cube) and a version of the Sanbo on Legs in 1734, the Sanbo in 1735 and the Blow-up Frog in 1750.

1797: Publication of the 'Senbazuru Orikata', a book of origami designs, woodcuts and poetry. The designs are created by cutting slits in large squares to divide them into several, or many, smaller, but not completely separate, squares and then folding each of these smaller squares into a paper crane. The cranes remain connected by beak, legs, or wingtip when the design is complete.

1845: Writing of the Kan No Mado, a 63 page hand drawn ms containing diagrams for 48 varied paperfolded designs. Most of the designs are made from bases divided into sections by slits but a few are from uncut squares.

1876: The first Japanese kindergarten was established at the Tokyo Women's Normal School (now Ochanomizu University) by Clara Zitelmann. As a result some European paperfolds became known to the Japanese. A publication issued in 1878 by Tokyo Women's Normal School shows that the Japanese and Western European traditions had quickly become mixed together.

1931: Publication of 'Origami Part One' by Isao Honda which explains many previously unknown Japanese designs but also other designs, including napkin folds, derived from the Western European tradition. Isao Honda continued to publish books of origami designs, mostly in English, until the 1960s.

The Western European Tradition

1440: An illustration of a surprisingly sophisticated cut-and-fold paper or parchment box appears in the magnificent Flemish illustrated manuscript known as the Hours of Catherine of Cleves.

1502: Approximate date of the manuscript *De Viribus Quantitates* by Luca Pacioli, possibly produced in collaboration with Leonardo da Vinci, which gives three methods of sealing a letter without wax, explains how to cook in a frying pan made of folded paper and also gives a method of constructing an accurate right angle, without using compasses, by folding a sheet of paper twice.

1584: The Buddha Papers magic trick is described in 'The discoverie of witchcraft' by Reginald Scot.

1614: First performance of John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi*, the ms for which contains the words 'Our bodies are weaker than those Paper-prisons boys use to keep flies in ...' We do not know what kind of paper prison John Webster had in mind when he wrote those words. It is sometimes taken to be a reference to the Waterbomb but any kind of paper container, such as, for instance, a paper cone twisted shut at its open end, could act as a paper-prison in this way.

1676: The earliest known description of the pure origami entertainment of Troublewit appears in the book 'Sports and Pastimes' by John Clark.

1759: An orientalist print by Jean Baptiste Pillement shows children playing with a Playing Card Cube.

1760: The Playing Card Monk, a cut and fold toy made from a playing card, appears in a French watercolour entitled 'Le Petit de Chevilly et Sa Soeur'.

1769: By this date puzzle purses were being decorated as love letters in Philadelphia (the practice having probably been brought to the USA by German immigrants).

1800: A painting by John Hill shows two carpenters in a workshop wearing Workman's Hats created by folding paper.

1806: The earliest known illustration of the paperfold now known as the Chinese Junk appears in the Dutch picture book "Hanenpoot" which Willem Bilderchijk wrote and illustrated for his young son Julius Willem.

1806: The Cocotte first appears in a painting by Jeanne Elisabeth Chaudet Husson titled 'Marie-Laetitia Murat portant le buste de Napoleon'.

1832: A cartoon in the French satirical magazine 'La Caricature' includes images of two Double Boats and a Boat with Sail.

1850: Around this date Friedrich Froebel included paper folding as an occupation in his Kindergarten syllabus.

1864: The earliest published instructions for making the Paper Dart, are published in 'Every Little Boy's Book'.

1868/9: A drawing of the Paper Crane appears on a membership card for a Parisian drinking club called the 'Societe de Jing-lar'. This is the earliest known appearance of this Japanese design in the West.

1883: The Flapping Bird first appears in Barcelona in a pictorial story drawn by the Catalan illustrator Apeles Mestres.

1887: Diagrams for the Lily (the four-petalled version of the Iris) and the Sanbo on Legs, under the somewhat surprising name of 'Nantucket Sinks', appear in the American children's magazine *St Nicholas*.

1896: While travelling on a train, the Russian writer **Leo** Tolstoy taught the 10 year old F D Polenov (who grew up to become a famous painter) to fold a Flapping Bird. The paper bird folded by Tolstoy on this journey still survives in the Polenov museum in Russia.

1932: The influential Spanish magazine 'Estampa' carried an article about Miguel de Unamuno's paperfolding which included photographs of several of his original designs. Miguel de Unamuno's followers established a Spanish language paperfolding tradition in both Spain and Argentina.