Introduction

Thirty years have gone by since volume I of The Henry Davis Gift: Studies in the History of Bookbinding appeared. During this time much work has been done and several books and articles have been published, especially dealing with French and Italian bindings, the main subjects of this volume. New attributions to binders or binders’ shops have been proposed and earlier attributions have been corrected. Although the most frequently used method for attributing decorated leather or parchment bindings to binders’ shops remains the identification of tools and groups of tools used for their decoration, more archival work has been done and the results have changed our concept of how the fine binding trade was organized and – especially in France – how production was divided between forwarders and finishers. Consequently, some of the attributions suggested in that volume have been revised here.

More recent study of the bindings made for the French kings, from Louis XII onwards, has helped to shed light on some of the royal binders and their role. Some nicknames in use in the older literature have been supplanted by real names of identifiable people, or have been changed altogether.

As the literature on French named and nicknamed binders of the first half of the sixteenth century remains confusing, it may be useful to set out here (in condensed form) the current state of knowledge (as at January 2007).

The names in **bold** are those adopted in the present volume of the Catalogue.

The **Atelier Louis XII/François I = [equals] Simon Vostre.**

**Pierre Roffet** (active 1511–33): bookseller and royal binder; his widow: Jeanne Cassot (1533–37) took over with the help of their son André. Meanwhile their son:

**Etienne Roffet** (probably 1533, but at least 1537–49) set up separately. He became royal binder (1539–47) (= ‘binder of the Estienne Bible’); he ceased to be royal binder in 1547 (see below: Gommar Estienne), and died at the end of 1548 or at the beginning of 1549.

The **‘Fleur-de-lis binder’** (who worked among others for Jean Grolier, c. 1538–40), was at work probably by 1536 (= ‘Bayfius binder’).
The ‘Fontainebleau binder’ is now called the ‘Salel binder’. The ‘Entrelac binder’ (= ‘Claude Picques with solid tools’) now equals Jean Picard (c. 1540–7), bookseller and binder. He was the Aldine representative in Paris, responsible to Grolier; he left in 1547. Bindings formerly attributed to Claude Picques with open tools and some of those attributed to Claude Picques with hatched tools have now also been attributed to Picard.

Laffitte & Le Bars attribute bindings made for the French kings (François I and Henri II) after 1545 to the Atelier de Fontainebleau, using solid, hatched and open tools (all formerly attributed by Nixon to Claude Picques). Picard used the solid tools that were also used in this atelier. Gommar Estienne was in charge of the atelier from 1547 and Claude Picques (see below) probably from 1556. The Atelier de Fontainebleau was at work at Fontainebleau from 1545 till 1552; then the ‘relieur du roi’ moved to Paris, where Gommar Estienne was still in charge until c. 1556 (or 1559).

Bindings with (mainly) hatched tools formerly attributed to Claude Picques are now attributed to Gommar Estienne, who became the representative of the Aldine shop from 1548. Already in November 1547 he was called ‘binder to the king’; in 1548 he was called ‘bookseller to the king’. Other documents of 1550 and 1554 called him ‘binder to the king’; he is last mentioned in a document of June 1556. According to Laffitte, ‘Le grand doreur de Henri II’ (= ‘Claude Picques with hatched tools’) now equals two ateliers: the ‘Atelier de Fontainebleau’ (1547–52) and the ‘Atelier du relieur du roi’ (from 1552). But both used the same tools.

Claude Picques, bookseller and binder, 1539; in 1548 he was called ‘doreur’ (finisher); in 1553 he became bookbinder to the queen (in 1557 he was still called ‘bookseller to the queen’). In a document of 1556 he was called ‘binder to the king’, and he was certainly binder to the king in 1559. In 1567 he was called ‘binder and finisher to the king’. He remained royal binder (under Henri II, François II and Charles IX), and was still mentioned as binder to the king in 1574 (Henri III). He was succeeded by Nicolas Ève (called bookseller and binder in 1560), who became royal binder sometime between August 1574 and November 1578 (when Ève was called ‘binder to the king’).

Attribution to named French binders is made more difficult by the fact that in France forwarding and finishing were two separate professions, so that structural features cannot be used to attribute bindings with certain finishing tools to specific ateliers. Moreover, it is likely that the ‘relieur du roi’ organized the binding of the royal books, and probably specified the designs to be used in their decoration, but that he did not himself stand at the bench, using instead the best forwarders and finishers at work in Paris at the time. Alternatively, Laffitte & Le Bars suggest that the royal librarian specified the binding designs, but that the finishing tools
belonged to the Atelier de Fontainebleau and the Atelier du relieur du roi, and were used by a succession of royal binders. The same tools are also found on bindings for other collectors, and either the royal binder worked also for other collectors (in slack periods) or the latter also patronized the same finishing atelier in Paris. (See also below under Jean Picard: French bindings no. 23, Gommar Estienne: French bindings no. 64, and Claude Picques: French bindings no. 69).

The work of Italian binders who produced fine bindings during the late fifteenth, the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries has also been studied much more widely and here, too, archival study and a more general historical approach have made a noticeable contribution to our knowledge both of binders’ shops and of their patrons. New literature has helped me to confirm or to change attributions made in volume I of The Henry Davis Gift, and especially to bring some order to the vast majority of the Italian bindings in this Gift that had remained uncatalogued in detail.

The title of this volume of the Catalogue is somewhat misleading. ‘Southern Europe’, consisting of France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland, forms indeed the main part of this volume, with 222 entries for France, 157 for Italy, 15 for the Iberian Peninsula and 14 for Switzerland. But there are also three bindings from Eastern Europe, eight from the Near and Middle East, and two from the New World, one from Mexico, the other from New York. Moreover, two bindings overlooked when volume II was compiled have been added here. This last section, headed ‘Miscellaneous bindings’, has gained from some comparatively recent publications dealing with Oriental bindings.

How useful much of the research published during the past thirty years has been to me in the compilation of this volume is clear from the references, literature and comparative material given in each entry. The list of ‘Books and articles referred to with abbreviated titles’ (pp. 13–25) is not a complete bibliography. It lists only those works that are of direct relevance to the bindings described, and that have been given abbreviated titles in the entries. Books and articles that have been mentioned only once or are relevant only to one particular binding have been given their full title, etc. in the entry itself.

A few uncertainties remain: within the French section there is a binding (no. 53) with strong Italianate characteristics, as well as one (no. 88) that may well have been made in Switzerland; within the Swiss section there is a binding (no. 234) that might have been made in northern Italy, while a binding in the Italian section (no. 331) may have been produced in Switzerland; the tooling of no. 372 (also in the Italian section) is somewhat suggestive of Spain: all literally borderline cases.

Like volume II, The Henry Davis Gift: A Catalogue of North-European bindings, volume III of the Catalogue has been arranged according to country and within each country chronologically.
However, the work of a particular binder or binder's shop, and, to a lesser degree, that done for a particular owner, has been kept together; related binders or binderies have also, where possible, been listed sequentially, thereby overriding a strict date order.

As 25 years have passed since volume II was published, it is hardly surprising that my views about binding description and what it ought to contain have changed. I now regret that in volume II structural features were omitted and descriptions were kept to a bare minimum. Having meanwhile taught several generations of students, I have come to realize that better verbal descriptions, side by side with illustrations, are indeed helpful, and my own research over the past 25 years has brought it home to me how inseparable structure and decoration are when trying to date and locate bookbindings. Consequently, the descriptions of the decorative aspects given in this volume are more extensive than those in volume II (including those of board edges and turn-ins), but, more importantly, several structural elements, such as sewing techniques, endbands and endleaves, have been described – albeit, for practical reasons, still too briefly. Edge treatments and fastenings, mentioned in volume II, are of course included.

When volumes I and II were written, the Henry Davis books had not yet been given a British Library press mark. Since then each volume has been given a number (as opposed to Henry Davis's habit of numbering by title). These numbers are quoted in the entries of this volume, but the old Davis accession numbers are given in parentheses, so that bindings referred to in volume I can still be found. Future researchers are encouraged to use the 'Davis' numbers and not the P or M numbers.

Having given some indication of binding structures in this volume, it may be worth while drawing attention to some comparable and different binders' practices as evident from the fine bindings made in Italy and France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but not without emphasizing that such practices have been observed in a collection of fine and decorated bindings, splendid objects, made at and for the top end of the market, and that they can not therefore be taken as characteristic of the total binding production in those countries. Structural changes and especially those aimed at simplification are more readily observed in trade bindings and in the run-of-the-mill products meant for a wider clientele.

From the tenth century onwards, most western bindings were sewn on alum-tawed leather supports, split over the width of the spine and sewn round in a variety of patterns. By the fifteenth century we also find bindings sewn on split tanned leather supports, while cords, made of flax or hemp (as already used in Carolingian bindings) were reintroduced during the fifteenth century. Thinner, single tawed and tanned leather supports came into use during the sixteenth century. Sometimes tanned and tawed supports can be found in combination, and parchment sewing supports were also used.

From the fine French and Italian bindings in the Henry Davis Gift it is clear that split alum-tawed supports were still commonly used in France in the 1550s. Split tanned leather supports
are also found, but far less often, while cords were used more and more, becoming the norm in the early seventeenth century. Nevertheless, alum-tawed supports are still occasionally evident during the 1560s and were exceptionally employed as late as the 1580s. In Italy, too, alum-tawed leather was the most commonly used material for sewing supports, persisting longer than in France. Such supports were still much in evidence in the 1560s, gradually dying out during the 1570s, although turning up occasionally as late as the early 1590s. Tanned leather supports were used as well, especially in the 1570s, 1580s and 1590s, and cords are found from the early 1550s, but only becoming more common towards the end of the sixteenth and during the early seventeenth century. A characteristic of Italian bindings is the use, from c. 1518 onwards, of decorative false bands, thin pieces of cord, stuck onto the backs of the sections between the sewing supports and showing on the spine as smaller and lower bands alternating with the higher and larger bands formed by the structural supports. The French equivalent was the habit, from the 1530s onwards, of emphasizing the kettle stitches as bands.

Sewing supports, usually cords, could be recessed, that is lying in grooves sawn into the backs of the sections, thus creating a smooth spine and giving greater opportunity for achieving a variety of decorative effects, an opportunity by no means always grasped. Recessed supports were introduced into Europe in the sixteenth century and were commonly used in France from the mid-1540s, becoming more and more frequent and lasting well into the 1640s, although raised cords start to take over before 1650. They were much less popular in Italy, where raised bands remained the norm, although recessed cords are on occasion found there from the second decade of the seventeenth century.

Alum-tawed strips were also frequently used for the sewn endbands that are found almost invariably on fine bindings. Endbands can be double or single and were often finished with a bead. Primary sewing in white thread, followed by secondary decorative sewing in coloured silks was common in France until c. 1535, after which sewing with coloured silks only became the norm, with a few exceptions as late as 1540. In Lyon we continue to find primary-sewn endbands in the 1540s and 1550s. Per contra, primary and secondary sewing of endbands remained normal practice in Italy all through the sixteenth century and is still found in the first half of the seventeenth century, when it started to diminish, all but disappearing during the second half of the century. Other materials were also used for endband cores. We find tanned leather and cord cores and, from c. 1640, but more frequently during the eighteenth century in France, cores made of rolled paper. In Italy cord remained the favourite material, although rolled paper cores were used during the nineteenth century. We also find in Italy during the later part of the eighteenth century endbands that were not worked on the book, but were stuck onto the spine. Such endbands were of course used far earlier and were far more common on simpler trade bindings. During the first decades of the sixteenth century, the cores were usually laced into the boards, although by now most have broken at the joints. Even in fine bindings
there are signs of simplification; by the 1540s the ends of the cores were no longer as a rule laced in, although the sewing thread and silk was almost always tied down either in or between the sections, but even that habit wore off and in France in the 1640s we find more and more that the endband sewing was only tied down in the first and last sections.

The treatment of the edges of the boards gradually became a decorative feature. In France the board edges were tooled, first in blind, from c. 1535; this rapidly became standard practice and from the 1540s onwards the edges of the boards were almost invariably tooled in blind or gold. Although we find gold tooling on board edges in Italy from c. 1540, and although blind-tooled board edges are in evidence earlier, the habit of decorating the edges of the boards was much less prevalent here than in France. In Spain, too, we find tooling on board edges and turn-ins from c. 1540 onwards. However, the number of Spanish bindings in the Henry Davis Gift is too small to enable us to come to useful conclusions. Doublures too are rarely found in Italy, while in France they adorned the finest collectors’ pieces from the 1550s onwards.

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*MIRJAM M FOOT*

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