

## Editor's Preface

Nine authors writing on nine topics. This collection of essays, published as the first volume of a series of studies on the history of bookbinding, sets a high standard for interesting and groundbreaking scholarship in the history of the book.

The first essay, by Evyn Kropf, examines the evidence of repair found on a selected number of Islamic manuscripts in the University of Michigan collection. As Evyn wrote in the abstract for her article, "The nature of a repair and its context will often reveal whether it was conducted by a skilled binder with considerable means at his disposal, or under more humble circumstances by an earnest owner in the manner of a folk mend." She traces not only the present state of repair of each volume in her study, but also relates the type of repair and the materials used to the history of the mending tradition attested to in numerous sources on Islamic bookbinding, both ancient and more recent.

Sylvie L. Merian follows with an essay on the occurrence of secondary adornment on Armenian manuscripts, adornment that, in some cases, has added layers of votive objects to already decorated leather bindings. She describes these bindings, deconstructing the materials added in terms of inspiration, material type, shape, and intention. She looks at the possibility that such bindings served an apotropaic purpose for the individuals who commissioned them as gifts to the church or as sacred household objects kept by a family. In her discussion, she ties these bindings to the rich vein of research into the prevalence and power of the "evil eye," and the role votive bindings may have played and still may play as wards against evil.

Most of us have a system for our daily life; it may be a fairly haphazard one, but many of us leave a record of our passage. Historians rely heavily on such records when they exist and know now that the "laundry lists" of past epochs tell us as much about a culture as its literary or scientific remains. Consuela G. (Chela) Metzger has made a study of colonial American account books made prior to 1800 based on examples found in the Winterthur Library. She looks at the binding structures of these books that have long been termed "stationery" bindings, comparing them to account books from the English binding tradition, probably the source of training for most, if not all, colonial American binders. She studies the books' materials and their intended purpose, and includes a discussion of accounting methods used during the period represented by her study, how that history developed, and the impact it had on the format of account books.

The simple act of signing one's newly-made binding in some fashion seems like the kind of final touch most binders would relish, but we know that, historically, most binders did not sign their bindings, and we are still searching for information and examples for those

who did. Robert J. Milevski reviews the history of the signed binding, and then concentrates on adding more information to the corpus on the topic through his thorough discussion of primarily nineteenth-century English and American binders who signed their bindings. He concentrates on ticketed bindings of the period with an excellent description of how the tickets were produced, the varieties in design and shape, and accompanies this information with numerous beautifully detailed images of tickets.

My own topic contributed to this collection is on the subject of American scaleboard bindings, a group of bindings that are numerous in many collections but yet have received virtually no descriptive attention in the literature on the history of hand bookbinding. My interest in the topic grew out of a volunteer project at the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan as I encountered examples of the style, and I have since had the opportunity to examine scaleboard bindings on imprints ranging from 1686 to 1844 in six different collections. My goal with this research was the development of a broad typology to guide other scholars or custodians as they examined scaleboard bindings in their own collections, and that typology is presented in this volume.

In his essay titled "Beating, Rolling, and Pressing: The Compression of Signatures in Bookbinding Prior to Sewing," Jeffrey S. Peachey takes on a topic that once figured very importantly in the process of hand bookbinding, but which has become almost lost to us in the double sense of the decline in the use of the methods involved and the disappearance of most of the historical tools once used by hand binders to beat, roll, or press signatures. This chapter is as much a fine piece of detective work as it is a description of process, and it underscores the value of a focused examination of every part of the historical hand bookbinding tradition.

Martha E. Romero is nearing completion of her PhD at the University of the Arts London, and the essay she contributes to this volume is the result of her thesis research into the history of Mexican printed books in the sixteenth century and the European influence on how the books were bound. She gives us a description of the interplay of cultures in Mexico as they affect book production, the important role of the Catholic Church and the power of the Inquisition in determining the content of books, and the not surprising influence of Spain and Spanish bookbinding tradition on hand binders in Spain's colonial possessions in the Americas. Romero develops her thesis with the aid of clear line drawings and photographs of historical bindings in Mexican rare-book collections.

Any discussion of the book in the nineteenth century must include the terms "experimental" and "ornate." One or both terms can be applied to many of the book styles produced in the course of a century that saw the most extreme changes occur in both the structure and the decoration of the handmade book. Jennifer W. Rosner has focused on one particular style of novelty binding, papier mâché bindings, also known as lacquered bindings or mother-of-pearl bindings, and she has produced a fascinating history of a short-lived, complex structure, often used to cover literary annuals or gift books that probably once graced every middle-class parlor in America and England. She accompanies this history with an appendix on how to make these bindings today based on her own trials with historical techniques, producing her own stunning versions of the historical bindings.

In the final essay in this collection, John Townsend has researched a small number of scaleboard bindings, six in all, on six copies of the 1715 William Bradford imprint of the book popularly known as the *Mohawk Prayer Book*. He has also approached his topic as a detective, sifting through layers of hearsay and history to arrive at interesting and compelling conclusions about this group of bindings. The six bindings turn out to be, for all intents and purposes, both contemporary to 1715 and identical, raising the question of just when we should date the inception of the idea of a limited edition and/or the idea of a publisher's binding. Townsend ends his essay by encouraging us all to set aside what we think we know about the history of bookbinding in order to bring fresh thinking to the evidence we do have. To quote his quotation from Heraclitus: "Most people do not take heed of the things they encounter, nor do they grasp them even when they have learned about them, although they suppose they do."

The essay topics are eclectic, but reading them reveals interesting relationships in terms of micro and macro examination of a topic (scaleboard bindings), interpretation of a binding style roughly related in structure, time, and space (colonial American stationery bindings and colonial Mexican limp-parchment bindings), an overview and expansion on a topic of great interest to binders, curators, and collectors, that of signed bindings. And finally four essays on topics of great specificity, rich in sound exemplified by the essay on beating signatures in preparing a text block for sewing, rich in tradition on the subject of Islamic mending, rich in mystery on the ritual adornment of Armenian bindings, perhaps as charms against evil, and rich in eccentricity on the short-lived production of papier-mâché bindings in the nineteenth century, described so aptly in the essay's subtitle: "shining in black and gorgeous with pearl and gold."

These essays are presented to our colleagues to read, discuss, debate, and perhaps challenge, but most hopefully, they are offered to aid our colleagues in our work of identifying, describing, and preserving historical bindings.

As series editor, I would like to extend my thanks to all of the authors who have participated in this first volume of studies in the history of hand bookbinding published by The Legacy Press. These authors have all taken time out of busy lives, taken time away from their benchwork, teaching, lecturing, and families to contribute to this collection of essays. By doing so they have shared insights gained from years devoted to their work in the area of conservation, librarianship, or curating collections, the type of insight so often lost to our collective memory when thoughtful people do not find the time or opportunity to publish their knowledge in some forum. We can all cite examples of great scholars who have conducted invaluable research in various areas of the history of bookbinding, compiled incredible amounts of information, and yet never published the results of their study; every such instance is a loss to the world of scholarship, and each loss means the delay or even abandonment of important subjects of research in the history of bookbinding.

A published series such as this one can play an important role in addressing the need for a print-format forum to serve as one of the repositories for the exchange of research, the identification of new or neglected areas of research, and the encouragement of scholarly

writing by practitioners in the fields associated with the book arts. Such a series can also inspire scholarly thinking and research on the part of the young people who are to follow us as custodians of that part of our cultural history represented by our great book collections.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Cathleen A. Baker of The Legacy Press on behalf of all the authors participating in this project. Her publishing vision, her devotion to the idea of helping to preserve our historical book collections by personally fostering the publication of important scholarship on the history of the book, and the impact her vision and the scholarly work she is publishing is making, will be measured over the years and will benefit all of us in the bibliophile community.

Julia Miller, editor

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