

Medieval Bookbinding: From Devotional Objects to Modern Idolatry

VIDEO DOCUMENTARY SCRIPT

University of British Columbia

ETEC 540 66A Text Technologies: The Changing Spaces of Reading and Writing

Assignment 2

JoAnna Cassie

July 2018

Bookbinding developed to protect manuscripts from the dirt and oils on the hands of those using them. The goal of any book-binding is preservation, but it also allows for ease of opening for reading, and closure for storage or display on a shelf. “In order to trace the spread of book production in the early Middle Ages we must trace the spread of monasticism.” (Clement, 1997). By the 9c, the monasteries were firmly established as centers of power (Clement, 1997). Each had scriptorium where books were copied and bound. They were often copying the Bible, but also books of psalms commissioned by the upper classes, as well as the classical texts of Homer and Virgil.

Medieval Bookbinding

Technical Process

The common steps to producing medieval books:

1. Quire (or signature in printed) which is four folded sheets folded together
2. Puncture the quire in standard intervals for sewing
3. Ruling (making lines) by stylus, lead plummet or ink
4. If parchment was used as the writing surface, it required further preparation such as pumice for smoothing, chalk for whitening or starchgrain to prevent ink bleeding
5. Rubrication – this is the application of headings which involved decorating, painting and illumination (the fine art of applying gold leaf) of letters and images
6. “The final stage in book production is binding. Manuscripts were sold unbound, so binding took place after the manuscript was purchased. It was initiated by the owner of the book, often far from where it was originally copied or printed. In many instances, especially with printed books, even the Rubrication, decoration, and illumination were likewise initiated after the book was purchased.” (Clement, 1997)

7. Sewing frames held leather thongs in place. The signatures were positioned with the fold against the thongs in the frame. The thread, which was often linen, fastened the signatures to the thongs, produced the ribbing that we see on the spine

IMAGE: Coptic binding.

This one is called a Coptic binding, not bound in leather and the book lays flat when opened. Coptic binding existed from the 2 to 11c.

8. Stitches keeps the quires together. A kettle stitch, loops the thread back over itself for a more secure bind.
9. Headbands are attached to quires at top and bottom to keep to fasten them to the covering.
10. A hardbound book was bound in stout boards in the medieval period, covered in leather. The boards were attached to the textblock (sewn quires) by running the bands through small holes bored in the beveled edge of the boards and then fastening them on the inside”
11. Then using what is called a pastedown on the inside cover hid the thread attachments

Embellishments

In the early days of book binding, “the nature and elaborateness of a binding was directly related to an owner's willingness to pay for it.” (Clement, 1997)

Tooling. In the medieval scriptoria, bound leather manuscripts would have been decorated by using small stamps that were pressed into the leather by means of hand tools. (Scinto, 2015). Blind tooling is a “dark impression is made by pressing dampened leather with a heated brass finishing tool.” (Princeton University Library, 2004). The earliest examples of leather tooling date back to the 5c.

As the craft progressed, larger decorative stamps, called panel stamps, were used. Large rectangular bronze plaques, usually cast, which had pictures in relief, were stamped by a press. Panel stamps became enormously popular in the Netherlands and the Dutch became known for their elaborately decorative panel stamps.

Image of Panel Stamp. This example is brown calf leather, blind-tooled, over wooden boards with two gilded silver clasps. Here we can see examples of the two types tooling: one is the smaller shapes of diamonds and triangles and the other is the panel stamp. It shows two columns of animals in winding foliage, common at the time. The closure clasps are remarkable because they not only mimic the pattern in the panel stamp, they are sawn-out banderoles with the date 1497. The clasp has a hinge which is closed using a little pin that is fastened to the catch by a chain on the other side. The fact that the date appears in both the stamp and the clasps is rare and means the binding was done for a special occasion.

Image of Chemise Binding. In the Middle Ages textile was welcome addition to the materials available to bookbinders. It was especially used for books in royal collections and books for women. This was known as a Chemise binding, and was often quite refined. This one covering wooden boards is made of velvet on the outside, and red silk on the inside with trimmings in red and gold thread with a silver fastening, likely from Spain in the 15c. The manuscript itself seen here is a Book of Hours which will be discussed later. (Optional) By the 19c, textile binding evolved into intricate embroideries of silk embellished with pearls, especially under the influence of Elizabeth I who was fond of these artistic materials.

Image of Treasure Binding. Treasure bindings are luxurious books encrusted with gold, silver, and gemstones such as star sapphires, diamonds, emeralds, pearls, and garnets. The books

reconceiving this exclusive treatment were venerated religious text commissioned by or created in abbeys where often the monks were celebrated artists.

Image of Lindau Gospels. Lindau Gospels, Germany, 9c. Unusually, this work of art was created over several centuries and different regions. The back cover is from the 8c, and was likely made in the region of Salzburg, Austria. The front cover, dates to nearly a hundred years later and was likely produced in what is today eastern France. The manuscript itself was written and illuminated in the monastery of St. Gall, Switzerland. “At some unknown point in time, precious silks from Byzantium and the Middle East were attached to the inside covers of the manuscript, thus adding yet another layer of complexity to this fascinating object.”

Image of Berthold Sacramentary. The Berthold Sacramentary, Germany, 13c. named after Berthold, the abbot who commissioned it. This book includes representations of the abbey's patron saints (Martin and Oswald) and Abbot Berthold himself. On the images inside, the gold leaf is applied mirror-like and even have little curtains sewn in over them to protect the gold leaf.

Books of Hours

In the Middle Ages, Latin was the only language that had a written form. Ordinary people were not taught Latin, even though it was the language of the Bible. Before Gutenberg's printing press in 1436, every bible was written by hand, and it was unheard-of for anyone besides the Catholic Church to own an actual copy (Sippo, nd). In the Catholic mass, the holy words of the Divine Office were whispered in Latin by priests with their backs turned to the congregation.

With access to God so controlled, people longed for something of their own that would parallel the use and function of those sacred texts and prayers. What was know as the “Books of Hours bestowed direct, democratic, and potentially uninterrupted access to God, the Virgin Mary, and

the saints.” (de Hamel, C., 2012). In other words, it promised answers to the great questions of existence.

Image of a Book of Hours Structure. The Book of Hours was a book of prayers to be said at home, marking the hours of the day. The core text comprised of the Hours of the Virgin, the doctrine of the time which gave rise to the cult of the Virgin. The idea was that that petitions to Mary were relayed to her son and what son can deny his mother? Everybody had them, from kings and queens to housewives, merchants and children. The main prayers are called the Hours of the Virgin, but the book also includes other sections such as Hours of the Cross, Hours of the Holy Spirit, Penitential Psalms said to resist temptation, and the Office of the Dead, for last rites. The content varies enormously because the books were personalized to their owners. Most literate (read: upper class) people would have had some working knowledge of Latin, in which the Book of Hours was written until 1400. Its psalms and prayers were repeated and memorized by everyone daily and did not change, and so the average literate person would have eventually understood more than we probably think.

The significance of the Book of Hours to the populace of the Middle Ages cannot be overstated. The books were commissioned as way to personalize them. These bound Books of Hours became sources of pride for families and was often the only art anyone owned. On the pages of the Book of Hours, around the outside of the text are illustrations known as miniatures, which were beautiful, artful decorations done by the craftsman of the bindery. Illuminators were expert craftsmen in the application of gold leaf to letters, words, and pictures, providing a kind of holy highlight. This is where more personalization came in as although the miniatures often represented what was being discussed in the text, they also included images of the books’ owner,

or family, or momentous occasions. One notable example contains over 80 self-portrait images of the book's owner, the first selfies!

Smartphone Worship

Speaking of which, are the modern-day Books of Hours our cell phones? The Bible, Torah and Quran can be references from them. There are apps that can calculate what times of the day to pray. But moving from a religious to secular theme there are even more similarities: in them we keep in the all the things we do with the hours of our days. The miniatures are our photos of momentous (and not so momentous events), illumination becomes highlighted hypertext, and self-portrait our selfies. The binding, or cell phone covers, which in function serve to protect the contents, in design can be very personalized in plain or priceless ways. Of course, instead, of God, what the phone connects us to is the great vessel of information, the internet. Within this constant connection there is still that kernel of tantalizing potential for something synergistically greater, and in that space, there might just possibly be the answers we seek.

References

- Clement, R. W. (1997). Medieval and Renaissance Book Production - Manuscript and Printed Books. ORB Online Encyclopedia. Retrieved from <http://the-orb.arlima.net/encyclop/culture/books/medbook1.html>
- de Hamel, C. (2012). An Intimate Art: 12 Books of Hours for 2012 – Introduction to Catalogue 17, Les Enluminures Exhibition May 2 to May 25, 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.medievalbooksofhours.com/learn#advanced>
- Princeton University Library. (2004). Hand Bookbinding: Blind Tooling. Retrieved from http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/hb/cases/blindtooling/index.html
- Scinto, Janet E. (2015). The Panel Stamp in Early and Modern Bindings. Library Quarterly. Vol. 85 Issue 1, p106-111. Retrieved from UBC Library, Library & Information Science Source (LISS) Index. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=15&sid=1cba57d4-7e02-4d24-bb6a-f3d7b5b630c7%40sessionmgr4010>
- Sippo, A. (n.d.). Did the Catholic Church forbid Bible reading? Retrieved from http://catholicbridge.com/catholic/did_the_catholic_church_forbid_bible_reading.php

Images *(in order of appearance)*

- Coptic Binding. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coptic_flat.jpg
- Panel Stamp. Koninklijke Bibliotheek National Library of the Netherlands. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://www.kb.nl/en/themes/book-art-and-illustrated-books/book-bindings/panel-stamp>
- Chemise Binding. Koninklijke Bibliotheek National Library of the Netherlands. (n.d.). Retrieved

from: <https://www.kb.nl/en/themes/book-art-and-illustrated-books/book-bindings/chemise-binding>

Treasure Binding. Retrieved from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Livre_d%27Heures_de_Fran%C3%A7ois_Ier_\(Louvre\)_3_reliure.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Livre_d%27Heures_de_Fran%C3%A7ois_Ier_(Louvre)_3_reliure.jpg)

Lindau Gospels. The Morgan Library and Museum. (2017). Magnificent Gems: Medieval

Treasure Bindings. Retrieved from: <https://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/magnificent-gems>

Berthold Sacramentary. The Morgan Library and Museum. (2017). Magnificent Gems:

Medieval Treasure Bindings. Retrieved from: <https://www.themorgan.org/exhibitions/magnificent-gems>

Structure of a Book of Hours. Les Enluminures. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<http://www.medievalbooksofhours.com/inventory>

All other images obtained under Creative Commons license.

Videos

Demerritt, J., Riley, D. (1995). 19th Century Bookbinding at the San Francisco Public Library.

Retrieved from; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xr7cp6n3WnI>

Hong Kong Craftsmanship Siuyuett HD. (2014). I'm A Book Binding Artist. Retrieved from:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUTbW_QBJfc

Music

Gregorian Chant: Full Page Illuminations from the Butler Hours Illuminated Manuscript.

(2013). Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsEZW1IBru4>