



Some Binding Problems Abroad

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THE INTRODUCTORY VIGNETTE to European bookbinding research is a rather picturesque scene at Athenaeum Club in London. In 1842 Professor Faraday, the famous physicist, investigated the effect of gas light on binding-leather in the library of the Club. This experiment is described in a British report on leather for bookbinding dated 1905,¹ which is still of value, since those days the problems have been studied with growing interest.

The literature on bookbinding up to 1930 is reviewed by M. J. Husung and O. Glauning in F. Milkau's *Handbuch der Bibliothekswissenschaft*, the standard European work on library science.² Some years later a special bibliography of literature on bookbinding in Europe was published in Germany.³ As the new edition of Milkau's *Handbuch* has not yet reached the binding problems, recourse may be had to the shorter German account by Wilhelm Krabbe and W. M. Luther in their manual⁴ which gives references also to modern German periodicals.

There are, however, more binding problems than there are articles on the subject. Some methods have been dealt with in several publications while others have been developed without ever being described in professional literature. The following brief survey does not pretend to sum up all that has been written in Europe on bookbinding.

The old practice of binding every book in calf has long been discontinued because of rising binding costs as well as an increasing knowledge of the physical properties of the materials used. It is essential to judge the importance of a book and its probable future use and accordingly bind good books in good bindings and bad books in "bad," i.e. cheap bindings. This decision cannot be the same in public libraries and in research libraries, nor can it be left to the judgment of inexperienced assistants. Where this distinction is made, more books can be well-bound for the same sum of money—and funds are always

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Some Binding Problems Abroad

short anyway—than where the old system of indiscriminate binding is still practiced. Throughout Europe there are numerous examples of both methods and of various compromise solutions.

These problems will be treated as follows: binding of new books with different techniques and materials; rebinding; cheap binding; pamphlets; book trucks; the care and repair of old bindings; and the question of commercial binderies versus library binderies.

There is a fundamental difference between the binding problems in a public library and those in a large research library. The research library ordinarily acquires one copy only of each title, which is usually unbound, especially when it comes in by copyright or legal deposit. Such copies must be given a binding that will last as long as possible, since funds do not normally allow for replacing worn-out copies to any great extent. The situation is entirely different in public libraries which may buy more than one hundred copies of the same book at the same time and later discard all of them when the demand for the book has ceased.

In many cases public as well as research libraries solve the problem of binding by buying their books in publishers' bindings. Milkau, it is true, strongly condemned this practice, but today the difference in quality between library bindings and publishers' bindings is not so great as formerly. In England where publishers' bindings have always been excellent libraries have generally used them.

On the Continent a special type of commercial binding for the use of public libraries was developed long ago. Some publishers and binding firms bound part of the entire edition of a book in special library bindings which were subsequently sold to public libraries. A standard type of library binding in full rexine or other imitation leather was thus developed in the 1920's, both in Germany and in Scandinavia.

After World War II the library associations of some countries, in competition with the pre-bound publisher's copies, have undertaken the production of standard bindings. Part of the edition of a title is bound as soon as it is published. As long as the stock lasts, public libraries can order such bindings from the offices of the respective associations, which are also authorized to act as dealers, e.g. the Einkaufszentrale für öffentliche Büchereien at Reutlingen, Germany, the Dansk Bibliografisk Kontor in Copenhagen and Biblioteksentralen in Oslo. There are certain drawbacks to this system, however. Copies purchased wholesale for binding are always sewn and must therefore go through the whole routine of preparation for binding (separation of signatures, removal of glue, etc.). In addition, all shipping and

storage costs have to be borne by the library associations concerned.

In Sweden a new system was initiated three years ago and has since developed rapidly. It is based on cooperation between publishers, binderies, and public libraries. The coordinating organization is the Swedish Library Association (*Sveriges Allmänna Biblioteksforening*), and the actual work is done by its purchasing agency, Bibliotekstjänst at Lund. Publishers send proofs of their forthcoming titles to the Lund office which examines them and circulates lists of such titles as are considered suitable for public libraries. The libraries fill in special order forms and return these to Bibliotekstjänst which then orders the requisite number of copies from the distributing agency of the Swedish Booksellers' Association. This organization handles the administrative side of the matter and arranges for the copies ordered to be sent direct from the publishers' printing offices to the contracted binderies in folded and collated but unsewn signatures. When bound the titles are distributed to the local dealers, where they are sold to the public libraries at the same time as the book is published.⁵ Time is saved, and mass production makes the binding cheap, all without any extra administrative cost, dealers' risk, or any binding problem for the smaller libraries.

The quality of the standard library bindings is also controlled. The material is rexine or other waterproof imitation leather in special colors. The lettering begins at standard heights, measured from the top of the book. The signatures are sewn by machine, as are the end-papers. These are folded so as to form signatures of their own and are reinforced along the folds with open-weave cloth, such as crash. This method of making end-papers, used in French bindings since the days of Grolier, has proved better suited to machine sewing than the usual European system of folding double end-papers around the first and last signature of the book. This technique is more suited to hand-binding, but even there the back is weakened considerably.

All over Europe the use of plastic materials for book covers is at present being studied. In Germany the Einkaufszentrale has developed a transparent glue which can be applied to any lamination sheet. In this way it is possible to protect the publishers' printed and often colored paper covers which are glued to the boards.⁶ Thus the appearance of the book is made more attractive at the same time as the covers become washable. In France the entire book covers are sometimes made of a flexible plastic material, an example being the publisher's binding on Mlle. Malclès's *Cours de bibliographie*. The growing mass of pre-bound titles does not eliminate the necessity of

Some Binding Problems Abroad

binding newly acquired unbound volumes which are usually sent to commercial binderies by public libraries as well as by most research libraries.

A well-balanced binding program necessitates the standardization of bindings to a minimum of approved materials in a minimum range of colors. The less storage space and selection time the bookbinder has to spend on library binding materials, the better quality he can afford without raising costs. He may, on the contrary, reduce them. In some libraries one is still weak-hearted enough to bind current periodicals uniformly with the old ones. That practice should be discouraged whenever the traditional type of binding is beyond an acceptable minimum. The main thing is to preserve the books, and a better material is more effective.

In public libraries worn-out copies can and should be discarded. Before that, much sought-after copies can do service some hundred times more if rebound by the unsewn method.⁷ The cardinal problem of that method is the glue. Among the best is the German Lumbeck glue invented by a binder, Lumbeck, some thirty years ago.⁸ This glue has been subject to several tests, and has proved to endure exposure to sunshine during 4½ months, to moisture in a wine cellar during three months, and to severe cold in a refrigerating plant during three months without losing flexibility or growing fragile.⁹ Swedish practice at the Royal Library has proved the glue to be easier to work with than other imitation resinous glues, such as the German Planathol, the Swedish Hernia, and at least equal to such American glues as Liquick Leather. Thus, thanks to the strength and flexibility of the glue, the unsewn book has a better flat opening than any other method affords.

Krabbe and Luther mention another mechanical method, called after the German bookbinder Meiler,¹⁰ a variation of the method called drilling in the United States.¹¹ This method was practiced for some time in a Swedish library, but was soon abandoned since the cords in the inner margin do not permit photographing or filming.

The unsewn Lumbeck binding is being increasingly used, in Sweden mainly for rebinding, in Germany also for the binding of little used periodicals. This is the case at the University Library in Hamburg.¹² The Lumbeck method requires every signature to be cut, thus enabling the glue to reach every page.

Since the application method is unique, it is perhaps the best to describe briefly. The glue is applied twice by hand or machine to the cut spine, which is pressed first to one side, then to the other. Un-

fortunately, this method appeared at the same time as book margins were reduced in size owing to rising paper costs. If a Lumbeck binding has to be rebound, the only way, is to cut again and with the narrow margins that is the weak point.

Another unsewn method, therefore, has been developed in England and Sweden. The method is applicable to books as well as to periodicals. It avoids cutting and preserves the sewn but unbound publishers' copies or the single numbers of a periodical, whether these are sewn, wire-stitched or glued. Any time-consuming ripping and preparation for sewing is unnecessary. The book or the set of numbers forming a volume of a periodical is glued directly on the back, and strong paper or reinforcing cloth is applied, leaving 1½ to 2 inches free on each side. To these joints are glued cut hard boards of imitation leather in the desired colors. The back and one inch of the boards are covered by a thin cloth. The lettering is either typewritten on paper and glued on to the back, or written directly on the spine with an electrical pen on gold leaf or with special ink. There are also small tools for lettering, heated with electricity, among which the German Permacon is very good.

The protection given by such bindings is quite sufficient for a wide range of little-used materials that research libraries are required to preserve. They are extremely cheap, when made within the library, just a job for a supervised apprentice.¹³ If their use should grow unexpectedly, the covers can be torn off without damage and the book or the set of numbers bound in the ordinary way. With this method the earlier cheap bindings, such as cardboard covers, are no longer needed. More important or frequently used titles, however, have to be rebound in the ordinary way.

Pamphlets are not ordinarily bound together in Europe—except in England. Special items are bound separately, often in full paper, covering both back and boards. The most common way is to keep them vertically between hard boards, tied together with a pair of linen bands.¹⁴ The advantage is the elasticity of the covers, which holds the material fast, irrespective of how much or how little there may be between the boards. The disadvantage is the eternal tying and untying of the bands. A recent report from South America¹⁵ has indicated the superiority of bands and boards over vertical cases, where the material often sinks to the bottom and suffers damage. The solution proposed in Lima is boards with only one band to hold them together, but with that method it is impossible to keep pamphlets of different sizes between the same boards, since the smaller ones will inevitably fall out.

Some Binding Problems Abroad

Consequently, one would have to keep a large stock of hand-made boards of various sizes.

The problem is of no small importance as the number of pamphlets in European research libraries often amounts to millions. The best solution seems to be a new German method by which the pamphlets are numbered and kept lying horizontally in boxes big enough to receive different sizes without any risk of damage. The top flap and the lid can be opened for easy access. The author has seen such a box from the Landesbibliothek at Stuttgart, and has heard that they are used in several other libraries.¹⁶

To the care of books belongs the transport problem. The old library trucks with horizontal shelves, often overloaded, result in books continually falling off with much accompanying damage. In Germany¹⁷ and Sweden trucks have been constructed with sloping shelves. A specimen truck was designed at the Royal Library, Stockholm in 1954. They carry less material but it cannot fall off. The prevention of damage to books is worth the cost of extra trucks.

So far, this discussion has concerned the binding and rebinding of modern books. The care of old bindings calls for special attention, the more so as fine old bindings have become treasures which cost far more than most incunabula. In the course of the study of old bindings,¹⁸ principles for the care and repair of them have been worked out, especially at four great institutions in Europe: the binderies at the British Museum in London and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Istituto di Pathologia del Libro in Rome, and the bindery at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich. The head of the London institution, H. J. Plenderleith has written a most useful booklet on leather for libraries.¹⁹ The Rome Institute has published a *Bollettino* since 1939. The founder of this bulletin, the late Padre Alfonso Gallo, took time to gather his immense knowledge of the enemies of books and book repairs into a outstanding treatise²⁰ which should be translated into English. In 1938 a commercial bookbinder in Berlin, Max Schweidler, brought out a book based on his long experience as a skillful repairer of old books, and this useful publication appeared in a revised and enlarged edition in 1949.²¹ A running discussion of these problems is also to be found in periodicals such as *Archives*, *A.B.C.D.*, *Archivum*, and *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*.

The methods followed in this repair work may be summed up as follows: In its unrepaired state a damaged old binding may give useful information on early binding methods. It may therefore be best to keep it as it is, well protected in a flannel-covered box, only cleaning

the leather. If an old binding has to be rebound, it should be treated as an archaeological object. As the binding is taken apart, all evidence of the original binding methods should be carefully recorded, if necessary, the headbands, sewing and joints should be copied on a model. The rebinding then should be made exactly by the same methods as were used the first time. In some places librarians are careful to use the same sort of leather, even if this is sheep or calf. As such leather is tanned now by different and inferior methods to those employed in former times, this is going too far. Morocco or Oasis goat leather is the only material that should be used in libraries.

For the preservation and cleaning of leather, there are several methods. Well-known is the solution used at the British Museum, especially developed to suit the moist climate on the British Isles. Very similar to that is the British commercial product, Pliantine from Messrs. Artur Rick & Partners, Ltd., Pontypridd, Glam. In the Bibliothèque Nationale another method is used.²² First the binding is cleansed by the application in very light touches of a British saddle soap from Messrs. Bricknell, Turner & Sons, Ltd. The effect is quite remarkable. The dirt is removed also from the gold finish, which is not affected but shines with clear brightness. The next day the leather is polished with a mild varnish (Ceronis from Messrs. Lefranc, Paris). In the Royal Library, Stockholm, the varnish is mixed with neat'sfoot oil, and the effect is remarkable. A pre-Grolier calf binding which was just in the yellow state of transition into dust received a brilliant yet durable surface.

Lamination of manuscripts according to the Barrow method or others is practiced and studied all over Europe.²³ As the method will be treated elsewhere in this number, it is not necessary to deal with it here.

The repair institutions mentioned above belong to the libraries. Book repairing requires skilled craftsmen which are seldom found in commercial binderies. If a library can afford such a bindery of its own, it will pay—beyond discussion. Whether it would also pay to do ordinary bindings in library binderies depends on several circumstances. In England the law does not allow books to be taken from the British Museum, and consequently a bindery in the house is necessary. In Germany the problem has been much discussed since World War II. The Germans seem to think that it would pay for a big library to operate its own bindery, provided that only the most modern machines are used and the workmen are efficiently supervised.²⁴ In Scandinavia, where the libraries are owned by the state or the local gov-

Some Binding Problems Abroad

ernments, the standard wages make library binderies uneconomical. A good workman does not earn more money than a lazy one, and the wages paid by government institutions are too low to attract competent workmen. In those countries, therefore, it is better to concentrate on repair binderies, which are also able to bind manuscripts and newspapers and to produce cheap bindings. It is wiser to let ordinary bindings be made by commercial binderies.

With standard specifications for library bindings, on the model of those given in the American Library Association *Library Binding Manual*,²⁵ the work of shipping the books to binderies is very much facilitated. A simple list, arranged and typewritten by a clerical assistant, will do. Thus much of the old complicated routine has become obsolete.

The main thing in organizing a library binding staff is to keep a trained librarian to decide what type of binding should be used for various types of books, and who could control the quality of the work and study materials and methods. No modern library can afford to neglect binding problems as in the past.

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STEN G. LINDBERG

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