A Brief History of Decorative Binding.

By Bernard Quaritch.

We take the following copious extracts from the Introduction to Mr. Bernard Quaritch’s “Facsimiles of Choice Examples of Historical and Artistic Bookbindings.” After tracing the origin of book-decoration from its earliest sources, the writer says:—

“The oldest known examples in Western Europe of decorative binding in leather, have been ascertained by Mr. Weale to belong to England in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The ornamentation was effected by means of metal stamps cut with rude designs, in which the rose was a favourite figure; and impressed forcibly in blind tooling—a fers froids, the French call it. In France and the Low Countries the progress of the same method was probably contemporaneous; for, towards the close of the fifteenth century, we find in all those countries examples of similar kind, the Netherlandish being the finest and most ornamental of the three. In Germany its use was later, and continued much longer—a relic of the Gothic times long after the Renaissance had triumphed completely throughout the rest of Europe. At a rough estimate, we may say that the secular career of Gothic bookbinding—leather stamped with blind-tooling—in Western Europe, began in the twelfth century, and ended with the reigns of Henry VIII., Francis I., and the Emperor Charles I.

“A different style of decoration upon book-covers existed contemporaneously in the Eastern empire and the Levant generally. Although derived unquestionably from Byzantine sources, its adoption and adaptation in Syria and Egypt stamped it as Oriental, and we may call this style Saracenic, as distinguished from the Gothic. Its features were of purely geometrical character, with knots and interlacements, usually effected in blind-tooling. A single or double rectangular border, formed of continuous rope-twist, and a circular central ornament filled up with convolutions of similar plaits, were the chief elements of the pattern. At the end of the fourteenth century this mode of decorative binding—usually applied to brown or dark red leather—had been introduced into Venice and Naples as a natural result of their intimate relations with the East. From Venice it passed into other Italian cities, and we frequently hear books spoken of as ‘in the original Medicean binding,’ simply because they were Venetian or Florentine specimens of Saracenic type. The use of gold instead of blind-tooling was not unknown in the Levant; but it was not adopted in Venice till the beginning of the last quarter of the fifteenth century. . . . . Its ornamental value was, however, soon recognised, and from 1490 onwards the use of gold has been general. In the workshop of Aldus, at Venice, in addition to the style of ornamental borders on the sides of books, and an occasional indulgence in Persian decoration derived from Egyptian models—probably by Levantine hands—we find that his plainer bindings were gilt with simple fillets forming rectangular figures, precisely like the work of ordinary modern binders. The leather he used was a smooth morocco, usually olive in tint.

“The classical taste prevalent in Italy in the early part of the sixteenth century led to the creation of what we have called cameo-bindings. They are distinguished by the impression, as centre-pieces on the sides of books, of designs in relief within circular
frames, representing subjects found on antique gems or medals. . . . The bindings, usually
described as executed for Demetrio Canevari, belong to the same class. Most of the
specimens of the latter kind were produced in Venice between 1540 and 1560, and cannot,
therefore, have been made for Demetrio Canevari, who was born in 1559; but he may have
inherited them.

"About 1520, a new and beautiful method of decorating books came into fashion in
Venice; which is usually called Grolieresque or Maiolesque. Its influence was so power-
ful that the old Gothic mode of Western Europe was speedily extinguished in the efforts of
bookbinders to imitate the Italian work. Its principal characteristic was the application of
pigments as well as gold to elaborate geometrical patterns formed by parallels, interlace-
ments, and convolutions of the highest decorative merit. The suddenness of its appearance,
in consummate perfection, without any traces of preliminary development, has led to the
belief that its origin must be referred to a single atelier or a single artist. There is a manu-
script of the Epistles of Cassiodorus, executed for Leo X. between 1513 and 1515, which,
although Florentine in the character of its illumination, must have been written and bound
in Rome. On the sides we find the Pope's arms painted on the leather as a central orna-
ment, with outer fillets of simple silver lines, which are shaped as a lozenge within a square.
The use of various pigments on leather was, therefore, earlier at Rome than at Venice;
but the geometrical interlacements which were introduced at a somewhat later date in
Roman work are merely imitations of the Venetian designs. The books bound at Venice
for Grolier, and bearing his name, are the finest as well as the oldest examples of the style
in question, and were all probably sent out from Aldus's workshop between 1518 and 1530.
From 1530 to 1565—the date of Grolier's death—other volumes were bound for him in
France, at first in a style similar to that of his Venetian books, but less rigidly geometrical,
and, in course of time, more simply composed and more elegant, with single flowing lines
of gold substituted for the painted compartments of the Italian patterns. In fact, there are
three styles predominant successively in his books during the course of his forty or forty-
five years of book-collecting. . . . Such an unbroken succession of achievements in
ornamental bookbinding, with results so clearly distinct and yet so much akin, produced in
three centres so far apart as Venice, Lyons, and Paris, by the hands of craftsmen differing
from each other in training, custom, and nationality, is sufficient to prove that the collector
not the binder, was the real designer of the work of decoration. We may even extend the
argument still further, and conclude that Grolier was the creator of the school of binding
of his name, and that it was he who suggested or furnished designs for ornamental book-
binding to Aldus Manutius."

(To be continued.)

Fifteenth Century Breviary.

The engraving on the following page represents the front cover of a Breviary bound in the
fifteenth century. Many of these old covers were exquisitely designed, and also laden with
gold and silver mounts and precious stones. The scroll work in the design given is excellent
in proportion, and full of artistic instinct. Portions of it might well be used as an inlaid
bordering upon modern binding.
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Jean Grolier (born 1479, died 1563) was not a mere book-collector. The book-collector is a benefactor of mankind, and deserves the respect due to benefactors of every kind. Scholars who live after him, and who find that to him, and to him only, they are indebted for the rare opportunity of examining those forgotten weeds of an elder literature which frequently reveal more to the historical student than the finest and best known flowers of the same period, will bless the book-collector. But it is difficult to nurture any high esteem for the amiable being whose creed is *Sic vos non vobis*. Grolier was, by profession, a financier and statesman, by education a scholar, and a book-collector simply because he was a scholar who loved books. Many modern bibliophiles have been book-collectors because they were not scholars, and took, therefore, *omne ignotum pro magnifico*. Grolier’s eminence in learning is shown by no book of his own writing, but by the dedications of many books to him, and the fact that he was one of the members of the Aldine Academy—consisting entirely of men devoted to the revival of classical literature, to the procurement of correct texts, and to the illustration of art and history during those eight happy centuries that divided Xerxes from Julian the Apostate. If Grolier did not—because we cannot tell whether such was the case—so completely relish the works of Villon, Marot, and Ronsard, as we do now, we can no more blame him than we might blame Francis Bacon for his lack of appreciation of the works of Shakespeare.

The primary movement of the age in all European countries was the restoration to colleges and schools of a knowledge of those antique models which had been caricatured in the literary essays of the Middle Ages. It was a reaction powerful enough to blind scholars, as well as divines, to the healthy developments of vernacular literature.

About 1530 Grolier brought his books to France. From that time till 1565 (with a few short exceptions) he lived in Lyons or Paris. His Italian bindings led to the creation of a fashion among the Frenchmen; or, at least, we must suppose that he contrived to inspire some French workmen to emulate the success of their Venetian contemporaries. At first the French bindings done for him and for his friends were wholly similar to those of the Italian craftsmen, and their gorgeousness was more attractive to book-lovers than the simple and sober elegance of the purely French work done afterwards for himself.

Grolier binding was imitated everywhere. In England it flourished but a little while—twenty years bound the extremest stretch of its influence. Introduced in the first year of Edward VI.'s reign, patronised by the young king himself, by Sir William Cecil (afterwards Lord Burleigh), by Thomas Wotton (afterwards Sir Thomas), the father of the famous Sir Henry, and by a few others, it reached the end of its Italianesque career about 1560. The one example after that period—the Bible bound for Matthew Parker in 1569—shows the only attempt we are aware of to introduce the French Grolieresque. It has been suggested that foreign workmen were employed in London to execute these bindings; but the conjecture seems unfounded. The leather alone is not the only criterion which distinguishes Grolieresque
work done in England from that done on the Continent—there is a certain individuality of style which marks the English hand.

In Germany we find an example of Grolieresque hand-work so recent as the early part of the seventeenth century. In Italy, Grolieresque methods rapidly degenerated into extravagant luxuriousness. True Grolieresque binding disappeared about 1570. A bastard French Grolieresque made its appearance in 1568 in the work of the Eves. Towards 1580, the pure geometrical patterns of the first Eve began to show slight signs of further decoration—not, as in the Grolieresque books, blending naturally in the plan of the whole ornamental design, but simply additional, for the purpose of filling up portions of the naked spaces. Small wreaths of leaves and palm branches were thrown in here and there, and occasionally a few little gold dots formed a short curved line springing from some of the corners of the ground pattern and ending nowhere. The wreaths of foliage became so fashionable in time that they were multiplied to such an extent as to conceal the beauty of the geometrical design.

The great scholar and lawyer, Jacques Augustin de Thou, was flourishing as a book-collector in Paris towards the close of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. Books bound for him are recognised at sight from their style and the armorial bearings stamped upon them. The books in his library were, for the most part, decorated with simple gold fillets and nothing more, beyond the central escutcheon, and served as the exact prototypes of the later Bourbon binding, familiar to us on volumes bearing the arms of Louis XIV. and Louis XV. De Thou was the first collector who procured a variety of leathers for the use of his binder. While others preferred the exclusive employment of red morocco, or of olive morocco, or of brown calf, he diversified the character of his large library by causing his books to be arrayed variously in citron, olive, red, or brown. The morocco which we now call Spanish was one of his favourite materials, and, as he was the first to use it, we may assume that he was himself the importer of the skins. There is binding of such Spanish morocco, decorated in simple gold lines with a geometrical pattern, which might be attributed to Clovis Eve in his simpler days, but which is shown by several details to belong to Louis XIII.'s time. This is one of the earliest productions of a binder famous under the name Le Gascon for work of a very different kind. It is not known whether the name is a patronymic or a local designation; and some persons, including the editor of a recently-published volume of specimens of binding in the Bibliothèque Nationale, are inclined to think that Florimont Badier (known from a single signed example of his work) was the Gascon who is acknowledged by everybody as having been the chief artist in pointillé decoration. Marius Michel, however, whose artistic instinct is not lightly to be rejected, holds that the signed volume of Badier is an example of such execrably bad taste that he cannot have been Le Gascon. Of Le Gascon we only know really that some volumes bound about 1640, decorated with masses of gold produced by an infinite variety and repetition of dots arranged in curved lines, are said by contemporaries to have been the work of "Le Gascon." To him, therefore, we attribute all the best achievements in that line, and a few others which are in the Eve style, because in some of the latter the pointillé gilding appears as a subsidiary branch of the ornamentation.

There are other bindings which represent the full perfection of pointillé, and enable us to assure ourselves that Le Gascon was one of the few great binders who created a school of
art. There was no lack of imitators in Paris—witness the Florimont Badier above referred to—and many men tried to follow his example. Few, indeed, were endowed with that patience—the truest element of genius—which enabled him to achieve the brilliant success of his career, and most of his rivals used mechanical means, to some degree, to obtain Le Gasconnesque results. We may suppose that he bound books down to the seventieth year of his age, although there exists no exact data to verify this conjecture. It is nearly ascertainable that he was engaged in binding as early as 1620. Few men in the handicraft enjoyed an active career so protracted as the late Francis Bedford, who was at work on his own account for nearly half a century.

[To be continued.

Notes on the Library of Lichfield Cathedral.

By W. Salt Brassington.

Note I.—Introductory.

The Minster of Lichfield holds a position unique among English cathedrals; it is at once church and a fortress, but it is not a monastic institution. In the seventh century there was a church there, founded by Jarumana, Bishop of Mercia, under King Oswy. In A.D. 669 St. Chad, a pious hermit and missionary, about whom monks in later times related many marvellous legends, succeeded to the see. St. Chad's shrine disappeared long ago, but his well at Stowe still exists. In the eighth century Lichfield became, for a short time, the seat of an archbishop, but Pope Leo restored the archiepiscopal dignity to Canterbury in A.D. 799. In pre-Norman times Earl Leofric and Lady Godiva dwelt at their manor of Bromley, four miles to the north of Lichfield, and became great benefactors to the church, probably bestowing books upon the canons of Lichfield as well as upon the monks of Worcester. In 1128, Roger de Clinton, a member of a powerful Norman family, received the see. Roger was a prince-bishop, equally a soldier and a churchman; he fortified the close, maintained a garrison, and died at Antioch a crusader. Defended by massive stone walls and bastions, a deep moat, and
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We have mentioned two methods of decoration used by Le Gascon—the Eve kind, in which geometrical patterns are worked out in simple gold lines; the pointillé, in which delicate curves of minute gold dots are so disposed as to occupy precisely those portions of the leather surface which would have been left blank in bindings of the former sort, so that the geometrical design was ingeniously formed by the spaces of red leather rising in apparent relief between the masses of glittering pointillé. A third mode was simply the old fashion of double rectangular borders on the sides, but made daintier by the use of petits fers, so that each border was broadened to a deep fringe of gold lace. This last style has had a continuous vogue in all countries, and may be said to have reached its highest excellence in the borders of Boyer, Du Seuil, Padeloup, and Derome.

The binding in Italy in Le Gascon’s time was infinitely handsomer and more creditable than the ridiculously gorgeous attempts of the latter portion of the preceding century; but the progress of debasement in taste was never effectually stemmed. From that time to this, Italian work—and Spanish also—has been at a very low stage, and needs no further mention.

In England, in the second half of the seventeenth century, a great diversity is to be observed; the vast majority of the books were bound in the ugliest and plainest covers which bad taste could imagine; while a few expert workmen produced imitations of Le Gascon. John Evelyn also introduced models, and English work was done in imitation of the square Le Gasconian style which Boyer in Paris was beginning to make his own. This was not, however, all that English binders could accomplish. A thoroughly native style, usually worked out in blue morocco, is connected with the name of Hugh Hutchins, in London, and with contemporary binding-offices in Oxford and Cambridge. It was evidently based upon the second Bourbon style, but so completely individualized as to present no suggestion of a foreign model. The ornamentation in gold was simple and used with restraint, and only a French connoisseur would deny to many of the extant examples the credit of good taste, sobriety, and solidity. In the minor details of the decoration, we find the first appearance of a number of little ornaments which became distinctively English throughout the period between Charles II. and George III. The books which were most expensively bound for the Earl of Sunderland, and for the first Earl of Oxford, are florid examples of that kind; usually less excellent than their prototypes. Another English method, comparatively rare, distinguishes the finest bindings produced here between 1665 and 1710. It is of a highly decorative kind, dependent for its effect upon a rich display of gold, and an elaborate inlaying of pieces of leather different in colour from the blue morocco ground. This mosaic work marks a high cultivation among some of the London binders. Bindings of that sort ceased to appear in England after the death of Queen Anne; but Parisian craftsmen were attracted by the English models, and Padeloup, Monnier, and Derome signalized themselves by dazzling and splendid achievements of similar character between 1720 and 1750.

The Boyer or Boyet family of binders flourished in Paris from 1670 to 1730. As compared with everything which had gone before, the style of binding adopted by them is distinctively their own. Many of the ornamental details were simply selected from the work
SPANISH BINDING IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

[Image: Decorative book binding with intricate patterns and designs.]
of their predecessors; some were quite new, and the mode in which they were applied to the red or blue morocco coverings, manipulated with great skill, was fresh and elegant. It has been followed by the binders of all countries ever since, in spite of a few weak occasional attempts to substitute new methods. In the Boyer books, the backs of the volumes are more elaborately gilt than the sides; the surface of these being left to a large extent blank, without other decoration than the gold fillets and the corner-pieces of dentelle-work. An elegant ornament is the figure of a vase, sometimes placed at the angles on the sides and in the panels on the back; but this had been used by contemporaries and followers of Le Gascon before the first Boyer's time. The usual ornament was a flower on a bit of lace-work which, in combination with the corner-pieces in the panels on the back, left the morocco blank in lozenge shapes. The morocco lining is a characteristic of the better kind of Boyer bindings; it was usually plain with the exception of a dentelle edging of gold.

During the first twenty years of the eighteenth century, Augustin du Seuil, who had evidently been brought up in Boyer's house, became famous as a binder. His work is more ornate than that of his teacher, and shows a renewal of some of the fine and delicate methods of Le Gascon's time. He indulged in broad dentelle borders and preferred olive morocco for the production of his best effects. He likewise affected leather linings more richly decorated than Boyer's. Du Seuil connected himself by marriage with the Padeloup, another great family of binders, whose chief member was Antoine Michel Padeloup. The artist, between 1730 and 1759, produced a number of fine bindings in red and blue morocco which have never been surpassed in symmetry and elegance. His style was usually that of Boyer; but he improved both on Boyer and Du Seuil by adding a number of small ornamental details which have been adopted or copied by all his successors. The first Derome was a binder of considerable merit who cut the margins of his books in a deplorable manner, and who evidently did not mean that they should be opened for reading. As a decorator, he was inferior to Padeloup, but followed similar methods. The two binders usually classed together as one under Derome le jeune imitated Padeloup with great success between 1760 and the Revolution; but although superior to J. A. Derome, they never equalled the other master. The last twenty years of the eighteenth century witnessed the extinction of the Derome school and the utter debasement of French binding.

With Padeloup's Horace may be compared a fine specimen of contemporary English work applied to another copy of the same work. In the latter we see the best kind of English bookbinding which prevailed in the last century, and which is usually identified with the names of Elliott and Chapman. During about thirty years they bound books for the chief collectors of the time of George II., and some worthy successors inherited their skill in decorating volumes which passed into the famous Harleian Library.

It is time to mention a Scottish school of bookbinding which had come into existence towards the end of the seventeenth century, and which disappeared about 1730-40. It made a very remarkable use of petits fers, and produced wonderfully bright and sparkling effects with tiny dots and leaves of gold. The design is usually somewhat stiff and over-elaborate, but the execution always creditable and ingenious.

The renown of Roger Payne is great in England. No one can deny that he loved his art, and produced, with small means, some striking and characteristic examples of book-binding. The favourite material on which he worked was russia-leather, and the methods
of decoration which he employed were almost wholly his own. The grotesque accounts in
his handwriting, which owners of books bound by him are fond of preserving, show how
utterly illiterate was Roger Payne, and how defective must have been his knowledge of
what had been accomplished by the binders of a former time; yet he had taste and skill of
no common order. Besides the kind of work which he preferred, he also produced "pot-
boilers" of an ordinary sort for patrons who did not appreciate his characteristic methods.

When Roger Payne died in 1797, there were several craftsmen in London whose
work was considered so good on the Continent that the Paris binders, Bozérian, Thouvenin,
Simier, and others, revolted from the decay of native art, made strenuous efforts to imitate
and adopt it. Benedict, Walther, Saggemeier, and Kalthoebier, were Germans who had
imported from their own country only its earnestness and solidity, but not its style. They
infused fresh vitality into English methods, and just enough of their native manner to
produce an agreeable cross. Kalthoebier was the most prolific and elegant of them all.
Some of his work is coarse, gaudy, and tasteless, but he introduced motifs of decoration
which had the charm of novelty, and he covered his books with a polished red morocco so
exquisitely rosy in its tint as to fascinate the eye. Hering at the same time copied Roger
Payne, but with modifications derived from the Germanic school. Next came Charles
Lewis, tasteful, elegant, and aristocratic in style, who was the chief English binder between
1802 and 1840; contemporary with him, Clarke, who was the first reproducer in our age of
sixteenth-century models, but whose usual work was the respectable gilt calf of modern
England. Bedford, who had worked with Lewis, continued his traditions, allied himself
with Clarke, and reached the summit of his profession. He was the chief of English
binders between 1850 and 1870, and produced splendidly dull bindings, all very much
alike, except in a few instances when he copied Venetian-Saracenic patterns of the fifteenth
century. He also imitated Veneto-Lyonese work of the end of the sixteenth century,
French work of the present century, and many other styles, all copied with scrupulous fidelity.
There was nothing original about Bedford; he was a mechanical artist of the highest
order. As for the binders of to-day, it would be invidious to make allusions; but it may
be said that there seem to be some prospects of a brighter future.

In France, about 1830, the bookbinding world began to rebel against the Bozérian,
Thuyenian, and Napoleonic fashions; and the tendency was to return to Boyer and Pade-
lopinian methods. It was a wise and judicious revolution, and ought to have been the
genesis of new excellence. Banzonnet, Simier le Jeune, Duru, and Niedrée, led the way;
and in the hands of several men of taste, the utmost perfection and delicacy of execution
have been reached. Trautz and his contemporaries, as well as several binders of to-day,
have covered themselves with glory—in so far as glory can be won by imitation. No trace
of originality can be discovered in the brilliant and beautiful accomplishments of modern
French work. Everything which could be compassed by taste, skill, ingenuity, fulness
of resource, earnest and conscientious painstaking, has been achieved. Only the vivifying
spirit is absent—the one indispensable quality which would console us for the absence
of the most exquisite neatness and regularity. The artist of the sixteenth century worked with
a few simple and imperfect tools, used the rule and compass very sparingly, trusted to his eye
and to his hand, in a sublime confidence that they would carry out his inspirations with
sufficient accuracy and boldness; in this collection of Facsimiles he will be found justified.