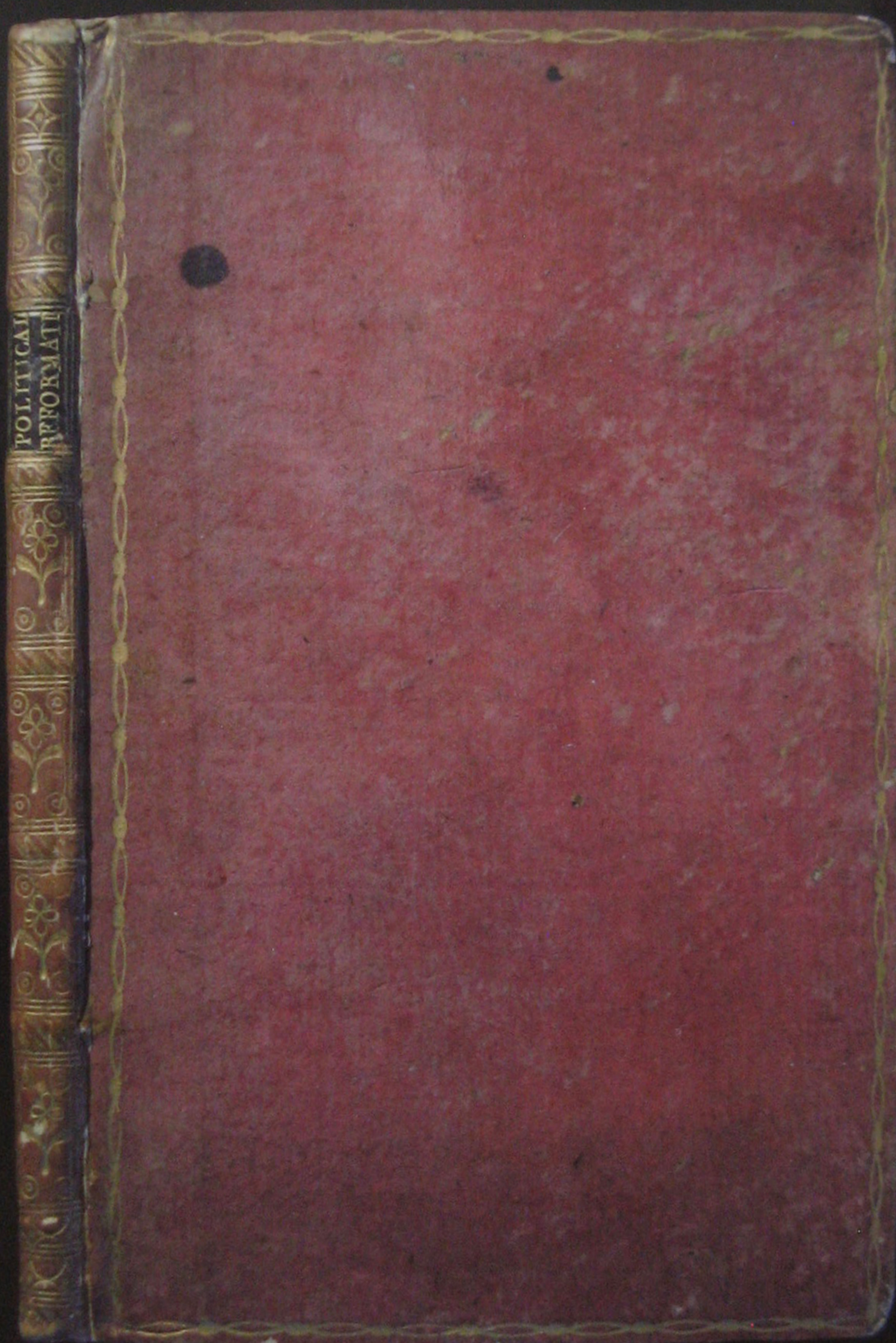


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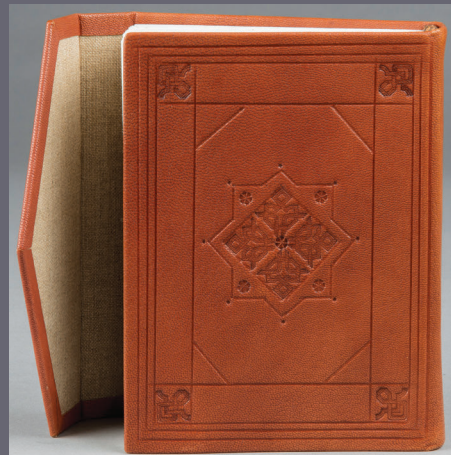
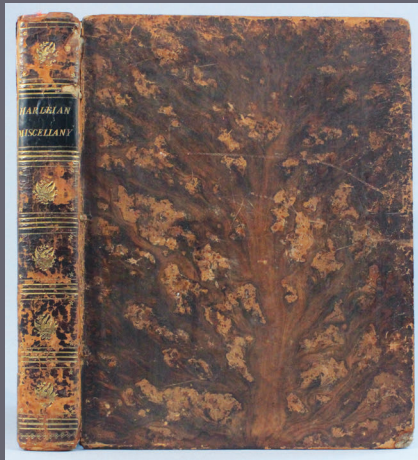
Selected Historical Bindings

Julia Miller



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The Legacy Press

2018

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Photography: John R.F. Allison, Erin Johnson, J. Wayne Jones, Julia Miller, Randal Stegmeyer
Drawings: Pamela Spitzmueller
Video (on DVD): John R.F. Allison

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Designed by Cathleen A. Baker.

Miller, Julia
Meeting by accident : selected historical bindings./
Includes bibliography and index.

ISBN 9781940965079 (cloth/DVD)
eISBN 9781940965710 (2026, vi.0)

For my son, John, who is
aptly and lyrically described
in Denise Levertov's poem, "A Son."

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Meeting by Accident,
We hovered by design¹

A second book, after all.... *Books Will Speak Plain: A Handbook for Identifying and Describing Historical Bindings* was initially published in 2010, and at the time I believed it would be my first, and my last, book. After it was published I did other things for a long time, continuing my research on all sorts of bindings, teaching workshops focused on making models of historical exemplars, and giving lectures on various aspects of historical bindings. Most of the material I taught or lectured about concerned Coptic bindings made during the first millennium of the common era but once in a while I turned to a different subject because I was intrigued by some of the bindings I had encountered in my research on *Books Will Speak Plain*, such as scoreboard bindings.

Cathleen Baker and I came up with the idea for a collected essay series devoted to topics drawn from the history of bookbinding, and *Suave Mechanicals: Essays on the History of Bookbinding* was begun. As I write, The Legacy Press has published four volumes in the series with the fifth and sixth volumes in preparation.

My second book, *Meeting by Accident: Selected Historical Bindings*, has grown out of the experience of writing *Books Will Speak Plain*, and the real joy it has been to serve as the editor for and an occasional contributor to the *Suave Mechanicals* essay series. *Meeting by Accident* is a very different sort of book, and it may be my last book. The books I write about in *Meeting by Accident* all had their beginning fascination for me when I was researching

1. Dickinson, Emily. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. R.W. Franklin, poem 1578. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. These first two lines sum up, for me, the exact experience I have had so often, looking at historical bindings in numerous book collections, finding interesting books mostly by accident and the examination and research (the hovering) that follows. The subtext of the two lines of Dickinson's poem for me is the fact that we do have to meet many historical binding types by accident, since analog and online finding aids do not carry much or any physical binding description for thousands of books in our rare and special collections. This is not oversight or ignorance at all, it is a matter of staff time and affordability. Today more and more collection curators and catalogers are adding such description to finding aids; the spreading use of digital imagery to showcase public and private book collections is giving us another tool for finding some types of bindings. I think the future for identification and description is a bright one, it just takes a lot of time and effort, and engagement by those of us who are interested in the topic. We help when we identify a binding type and begin the discussion of what it is, what is important about it, and what others should know, or find out.

Books Will Speak Plain, but although I wrote briefly about some of the binding types in that book, I have always felt I wanted to return to them, study them further, and write more about them.

I feel strongly that we can spend much more time than we tend to do on every type of historical binding. I think past research and writing has identified and to a degree defined many types of binding, but there is still a lot of research and writing yet to do to identify and describe other types, and piece together more binding history, and answer more of the “why?” questions concerning historical bindings.

The binding types I write about in *Meeting by Accident* appeal to me; they may not interest you, or may not mirror any of the bindings you are responsible for. But I urge you to look around in the collections you own or work with, and consider writing about some heretofore hidden or neglected aspect of historical binding. It is a very enjoyable kind of work; you will encounter fascinating books by accident, and hover over them – by design.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many friends and colleagues to thank for helping me with this book, but the first to thank is the friend who has made my books possible, Cathy Baker, owner and publisher, The Legacy Press. I thank her for her friendship, her vision for The Legacy Press, and for all the books and essays she has published and will continue to publish to further our knowledge about the book arts.

I also deeply appreciate and extend my thanks to Pamela Spitzmueller for agreeing to co-author the chapter on the Nag Hammadi codices; our collaboration on the Nag Hammadi extends back many years and has been more fun than work. A special thanks also to Ashley Cataldo for contributing to the Appendix to Chapter 2 about canvas bindings.

Readers for this book include Barbara Korbel, Martha Little, Olivia Primanis, and Karla Vandersypen; I thank you all from my heart. They have done the very hard task of reading these chapters, helping me rein in my more eccentric or unsupported enthusiasms, helping me shape my thoughts into something coherent. Any exception is the fault of the author.

For many of the excellent images in this book I depended on the skill and patience of photographers J. Wayne Jones, Randal Stegmeyer, and John R.F. Allison, Luminate Studios, who also created the video and eloquent voice-over description of my book room that appears on the DVD. I thank you all for your work, for the images, and for the time and skill involved. Some of the images are my own adequate but not very professional documentary photographs.

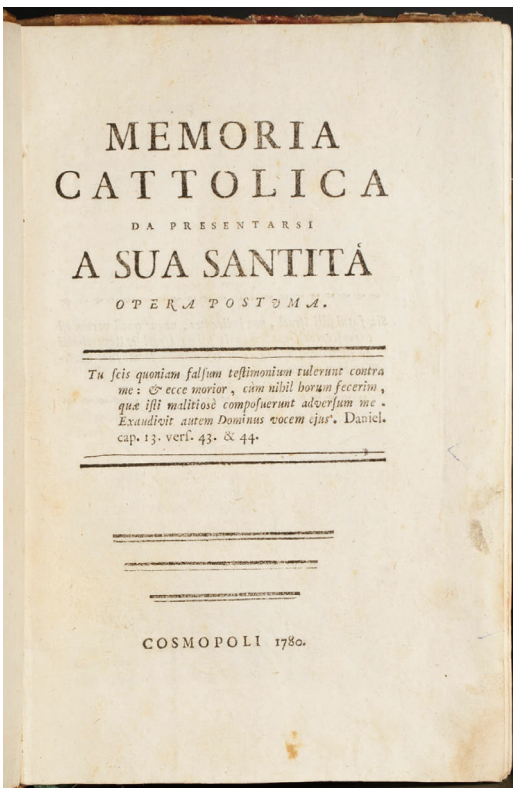
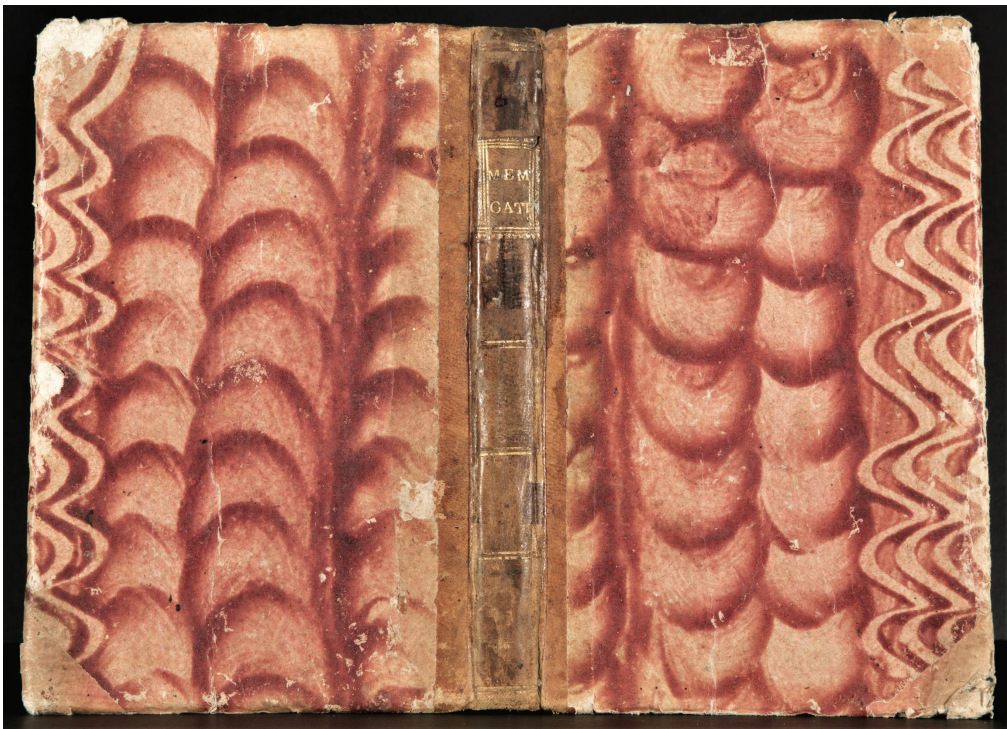
I thank the colleagues who have immensely aided my research by making it possible for me to look at and study many bindings that I would never have known about without their help, and in many cases providing excellent photographs of items in their collections: Pablo Alvarez, Outreach Librarian and Curator, University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Library); Shannon Zachary and Leyla Lau-Lamb, Preservation and Conservation Department, U-M Library; Emiko Hastings and Oksana Linda, Book Division, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan; Olivia Primanis, Conservation, Harry Ransom

Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin; Giselle Simon, Conservation, University of Iowa; Scott Devine, Conservation, Northwestern University; Scott Krafft, Curator, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University; Ashley Cataldo, Assistant Curator of Manuscripts, and Babette Gehrich, Head of Conservation, American Antiquarian Society; Pamela Spitzmueller, conservator emerita, Weissman Conservation Center, Harvard University; Lauren Calcote, conservator, Newberry Library; and Professor Annie Merrill, Davidson College, North Carolina. In addition I thank the reference and reading-room librarians, cataloging staff, and digitization staff at the following institutions for helping me with access to their collections: John Carter Brown Library at Brown University; Library Company of Philadelphia; Library of Congress, Serial and Government Publication Division, Newspaper & Current Periodical Room; Historical Textbook Collection, Gutman Library, Harvard University; Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University; Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; The Rosenbach Foundation, Philadelphia; University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Library) and (Papyrology Collection) and the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan. Special thanks to Abby Stewart and David Winter for allowing me to publish an image taken by J. Wayne Jones of our collaborative book-art piece inspired by Chinese wooden book rolls, *Rice Fields, Li River Valley, China* (2009).

Elsewhere, and Pamela Spitzmueller joins me in this appreciation, we thank Martin Schøyen in Oslo for permission to visit his collection, take photographs, and publish them, and we thank his assistant, Elizabet Sørensen, now retired, for all her help on our visit in 2008, and Jenina Bas in the Schøyen Collection Press Office for her recent help with permissions, images, and information. We thank Dr. Zahi Hawass, Dr. Nadja Tomoum, Dr. Elham el Mongy, and Manuscript Archivist Kamilia Makram for their wonderful help with our research at the Coptic Museum in Cairo in 2007 and 2009. And we thank Dr. Tarek El Awady in Alexandria for arranging to send us images of the cover of Nag Hammadi Codex VI now on deposit at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

I close by thanking my husband, John Allison, for his support of and his interest in my research, and for his own example, showing me every day that working on something you love with intensity and generosity is the best way to enjoy life.

Julia Miller
December 2017



Memoria Cattolica, Cosmopoli, 1780. Above: Quarter leather with paste-paper sides. Left: Title page. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Introduction

Why do books disappear? We wear them to death, we throw them away, they get wet and moldy or musty and we throw them away, we get tired of lugging them around, and we throw them away. “Throwing away” is not always literal...sometimes we recycle them to friends or the local library book sale or the thrift shop. I am speaking of more modern books we have been given or purchased in our own lifetimes, but what about old books? Why have so many of them disappeared?

The book opposite is a symbol of intentional behavior toward certain books: *Memoria Cattolica* is a prohibited title, one of those listed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* of 1948, the final version of the famous index first promulgated in 1559.¹ The *Index* of 1948 was the twentieth and final version and was repealed in 1966. Titles were added or removed over the centuries and enforcement of the prohibition was probably more figurative than literal. Whether or how many of the banned books were destroyed in fact is impossible to tell; this once-prohibited book is simply presented as an example of one of the reasons why historical books have disappeared.^{2, 3}

1. The entry in the *Index* of 1948 for this book is: Borgo, Carlo. *Memoria cattolica da presentarsi a sua Santità; opera postuma*. Cosmopoli [a made-up location], 1780. The date “1780” appears on the title page, and in the body of the *Index* entry, but the date 1781 is in the date column of the *Index*. The title is roughly *Memories of a Catholic Presented to His Holiness; Posthumous Work*. Books are rebound for all sorts of reasons; a major one is wear and tear, so this quite beautiful but worn leather and paste-paper binding has escaped two threats: that of burning (at least figuratively) and that of rebinding.

2. Proscribed texts, particularly proscriptions initiated by religious entities, are ancient and certainly predate the Roman Catholic Church. The Nag Hammadi codices, described in Chapter 5, were believed to have been buried in the latter part of the fourth century, perhaps the result of an Easter letter penned by Archbishop Athanasius in 367 C.E. that condemned the sort of apocryphal writings contained in the codices. There was at the same time a movement to a more hierarchical authority within the church emanating from Alexandria and extending to even remote monastic communities, which may have forced Gnostic monks to leave the monasteries with their books. (See Robinson, James, *The Nag Hammadi Codices*. 2nd ed. Claremont, Calif.: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1977, 1–2.) Subsequent scholarship has challenged this reasoning in regard to the burial of the Nag Hammadi, but the point is that such an assumption was a natural one given the history of proscription and banning of books.

3. If banning books because of content is as old as the book, excision or blacking out text or otherwise obscuring it is just as old. See DVD Fig. 3.17x4 for an example.

There are many other reasons: the book has been a sort of material storage unit through the ages; repositories of incomplete and damaged manuscripts have been known of since antiquity, and fragmented books have served in turn by being used to complete a less damaged or more important copy. Sometimes text material was used to line covers, or spines, or form laminated boards; the ultimate irony occurring when those reused pages were deemed important enough to make someone want to remove them from the book they had become part of. Religious disagreement and warfare have both taken a heavy toll on early manuscripts that became hostages or victims depending on the severity and duration of the argument. More ephemeral manuscript or printed works and books often became grist for recycling to enable countries at war to keep on printing, as happened during the Revolutionary War in America.

We have lost so much in terms of our earliest codices that it is mind-boggling. This is a loss that spans most of the first millennium of the common era and involves the writings of many religions and cultures. Although Egypt as far as we know was the birthplace of the codex, and we tend to view the codices produced there as the prototypes for the codices produced elsewhere in the Near East and eventually Europe, we really do not know how early or how many codices were being produced by other cultural/religious traditions (Samaritan, Jewish, Armenian, Syriac, Islamic, Ethiopian) because if the books existed, they are gone.⁴ Where we still have texts, or fragments of text, the bindings are often missing.

The earliest survivals we have of bound codices are Coptic, and so we take our cue from that tradition, but the number of survivals of bound Coptic codices itself is ludicrously low for what may have been a huge production of manuscripts over some six hundred years (fourth to tenth century) to supply secular and monastic environments dedicated to reading and learning. Knowing of the existence of the great libraries of antiquity, libraries that once held thousands of papyrus book rolls, we can be certain the loss of codices during the first millennium has been great, corresponding to the destruction of those earlier libraries.

As those of us who take an interest in the history of the book and the history of bookbinding consider the very many historical bindings that have received little or no attention in the scholarly writing devoted to these two topics, including the surviving fragments of early bindings stored away in library and museum collections around the world, we must really ask ourselves why this is so. The early binding fragments have often lost all

4. "Gone" in the case of ancient bound codices is not always an absolute. For years, the codicological community have considered the Ethiopic manuscript and binding tradition the most long-lived of the codex cultures, but had to base what we know about the bindings on 13th- and 14th-century survivals for an ancient tradition that was believed to reach back to the 2nd or 3rd century. Recent discoveries of two Ethiopic manuscripts, with bindings, at the Abba Garima Monastery in Ethiopia has turned this history on its head; the books are dated to between the 4th and 6th centuries. My thanks to Gary Frost, Conservator Emeritus, University of Iowa, for drawing my attention to this remarkable development and information on a recent book on the topic: McKenzie, Judith S. and Francis Watson. *The Garima Gospels: Early Illuminated Gospel Books from Ethiopia*. Oxford, U.K.: Manar al-Athar, 2017.

association with the manuscripts they once protected, and were only preserved by luck, or because they offered the possibility of a desirable manuscript fragment concealed in the layers of a cover lining. Collection custodians have thousands of fragments of our cultural past to care for; there is no reason why leather cover fragments should be singled out for care or consideration above the others.

Since the print culture began in the fifteenth century millions of books have been produced and many of them have survived for hundreds of years to the present, each century adding more millions. This too has been a matter of luck, of quantity of production, of rarity, of association, of individual appeal. We keep books for many reasons, primarily because their content is important to us, but also for their company, and sometimes for their beauty or a feature that makes them interesting or valued beyond content. We discard them when the opposite is true: their content is no longer relevant and their company is a burden in some way.

I think research into the history of the book and bookbinding makes our historical bindings relevant again, and makes them better company. Studying and understanding, identifying and describing, gives us more information to consider when we must make decisions about our historical books. Accumulating this information most affects our great institutional collections, and to an extent, private collections, because the custodians of those collections have often tried to pay attention to issues of rarity and importance beyond content. There is certainly a growing and very welcome and broader interest today about the whole book (text and binding), its materials and structures, and the ways time and use marks books, all books. Custodians and scholars have both arrived at the point where they realize materiality and marking are equally important, and sometimes just as important as content, for understanding the impact of books on culture, and culture on books. We are seeing a lot of important research being done on every type of historical binding practice, and it is clearly becoming easier for scholars to find each other, to find the books they are interested in studying, and to publish and share information. I feel more assured today than I did six years ago regarding the preservation of historical bindings, in all their interesting, eccentric, and informative variety.

With that positive assurance in mind, I offer the following chapters in this book. All of this work grew out of the initial research I did years ago for *Books Will Speak Plain: A Handbook for Identifying and Describing Historical Bindings*. At the time that book was published it was my hope that other and younger scholars would pick up some of the topics I touched on, and do more work on them. This did happen in several cases but not all, and as the years have passed, I have found myself turning over the topics in my mind and continuing to gather information about them, and this book, *Meeting by Accident: Selected Historical Bindings*, is the result.

CHAPTER 1. BEYOND TREE CALF: BINDINGS DECORATED BY STAINING

This chapter undertakes to illustrate and comment on some of the many techniques used to stain historical leather bindings in distinctive ways. The aim is to present some broad categories of decorative staining and illustrate them through images of historical exemplars.

The primary goal is to assist those describing leather bindings decorated with staining by providing a basis for comparison with similar examples in their collections. Another goal is to simply increase awareness of these interesting and often very beautiful bindings and to open a discussion on what would be an adequate terminology to classify and describe them in a collection setting.

CHAPTER 2. NOT ALTOGETHER UNPLEASING: THE EXPERIMENT WITH CANVAS BINDINGS

Canvas-type cloth used for bindings appeared in England in the early 1760s; the use of the close-weave cloth was an experiment to offer a sturdy and attractive covering material in place of the standard full leather or quarter-leather trade binding on relatively inexpensive texts. I included a short section on canvas bindings in the second edition of *Books Will Speak Plain*, illustrated with photographs of seven canvas binding examples; here I would like to expand that sampling with additional images and descriptions. The use of canvas for binding was an important historical precursor to the explosion of cloth used for bindings that began early in the nineteenth century in England and America and continues unabated today.

CHAPTER 3. WRAPPED WITH CARE: OVERCOVERS

Overcovers (secondary covers) have been added to bindings throughout the history of the codex to enhance or protect an original cover, or stabilize a damaged cover. Once associated only with medieval bindings, it is clear the use of overcovers continued beyond the medieval era. There is evidence on our shelves that the use of overcovers was a continuous and widespread practice, but they have not been valued as highly as the earlier medieval exemplars. The use of overcovers probably reached its peak in the eighteenth century and into the early-nineteenth century, perhaps because book materials and book structure were both diminishing, the first in quality and the second in the complexity and even presence of structural fail-safe systems. These eighteenth and nineteenth century overcovers are often seen as ugly, damaging because of their material, and unnecessary to preserve as part of the of the history of the original volume. An owner's choice to protect a valued text with a secondary cover, crudely made or not, is an important statement to posterity on the cultural value of that book to that owner. As we study historical books, how they were made, what they were made of, and importantly, how they were used (and how *much* they were used), it is perhaps the worn overcover protecting a damaged primary binding on a lexicon printed in 1738 that tells us an important part of the story.

CHAPTER 4. GOOD ENOUGH FOR GALILEO: BOOKS MADE FOR SCHOLARS

Scholar bindings are books (bindings) made for a specific group of buyers, scholars. The manuscripts and printed works aimed at scholars often present idiosyncratic evidence that indicate their destiny. The printing of pocket editions by Aldus, aimed at scholars at the beginning of the sixteenth century was followed by similar efforts from the Plantins, the Elzeviers and others, and has continued over hundreds of years. The bindings on the

early pocket books made for scholars were often plain and even standardized (vellum laced-case construction), perhaps representing the first appearance of a content-specific historical binding type. Such bindings are often the target of rebinding by collectors who are more interested in dressing up what has become a rare imprint than in preserving original binding states. The chapter addresses a variety of binding types and ventures onto dangerous suppositional ground, with the purpose of asking the reader to look at some historical bindings as representing layered ideas and expressions of what a scholarly book can be or is.

CHAPTER 5. A GIFT FROM THE DESERT: A REPORT ON THE NAG HAMMADI CODICES co-authored with Pamela Spitzmueller

The Nag Hammadi codices are among the most well-documented and described group of manuscripts ever written; their content is so rare the texts were guaranteed preservation once the scholarly world learned of their existence after their discovery in 1945. The bindings of these codices could have had another story, but they too have been preserved, and almost as well documented as the texts. This was *not* true of many ancient bindings that are lost to us forever now, and it could happen once again that the Nag Hammadi would be endangered and destroyed by external and internal political division and warfare, a fact that has played out all too vividly in different world heritage sites around the world in recent times, not just long ago. There is also the more benign issue of out-of-sight, out-of-mind: the story of the Nag Hammadi was written in the 1970s, and it is good to remind present-day scholars of the importance of this group of codices to the history of the book. Pamela Spitzmueller and I have made the leather bindings of the Nag Hammadi a subject of study for a number of years, and we present our comments here. The meeting-by-accident has been fully in operation throughout our research on the codices, and we were able to carry through by luck, pleasant accident, and the kindness of strangers.

CHAPTER 6. A MODEL APPROACH

This chapter is a collection of images and descriptions of many of the models I have made of historical book exemplars to aid me in my teaching, lectures, and research. These models are the result of my “hovering by design” as I slowly learned enough about an early codex to give it shape at my bench. In many cases I worked directly from a surviving historical example and in others I have worked from research notes, essays, drawings, and photographs made by previous scholars. The value of building a collection of historical book models is well known to every curator or academic who teaches history of the book seminars, and every scholar who is engaged in research on the topic, and every conservator examining a historical binding prior to deciding on whether to repair or not, and how. Models of historical exemplars help us understand the early beginnings of and the changes in book and codex materials, structures, and decoration over the centuries and around the world. Model collections can reduce handling of surviving examples, and they can preserve an understanding of what once existed and now is almost entirely lost to us.

CONCLUDING NOTES ABOUT THIS BOOK

When I began writing *Meeting by Accident*, I relied, as I did with *Books Will Speak Plain*, on books in my own historical binding collection to illustrate the different topics, supplemented by photographs of books from rare collections in this country and abroad. I am very pleased to write that, as we finalize the design of this book, my collection has now passed from my hands into the excellent care of the University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Library). The collection now bears the name The Julia Miller Collection of Historical Bookbindings (JMCHB), and the captions for the books now carry their new location information at the University. I include this information so that the ownership and location of the individual bindings is clear. Since I am a collector at heart, I am engaged in building another small collection, and images of books from that group are denoted “Private Collection.”

The motivating force for me in writing about historical bindings is to aid preservation professionals and conservation practitioners when they consult with collection custodians on acquisition, retention, and treatment decisions concerning historical books and their bindings and binding fragments. These professionals are all responsible for helping to preserve the historical record as represented by the books humans have written, printed, and bound over the millennia, and they cannot accomplish that goal when they do not have any information, or incomplete information, or biased information, about the history of how the written record was created, kept together, decorated, protected, and repaired. The identification of the outlying examples of that history is also important; I do not believe in “dead ends” in the history of bookbinding; I consider them experiments and as such, interesting. It is equally important to make more information available to collectors and to sellers in the historical book marketplace; many decisions are made by this group that can mean the disappearance of interesting and unique bindings because they are not recognized for their importance. It is up to you, the reader, to decide if any of these goals are accomplished by this book. As author, I have enjoyed the research and the writing very much, learning along the way.



Fig. 1.1. *A Selection from the Harleian Miscellany of Tracts*.... London: Printed for C. and G. Kearsley.... 1793. Folio; calf binding decorated with stain in classic tree-calf or tree-marble style. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Chapter 1

Beyond Tree Calf: Bindings Decorated by Staining

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate and comment on some of the many techniques used to stain historical leather bindings in distinctive ways.¹ The varying chemicals and chemical combinations used to create the media used in staining leather and the methods of application are not covered in any depth; they are both subject to guesswork in many cases.² Recipes for creating stains and the use of different color media doubtless varied from binder to binder; these books were decorated in a period when master binders kept their techniques and their recipes secret.³ Methods of application probably varied from binder to binder.

1. The “stain” or “staining” referred to in this chapter is not a substance but the *result* of the application of a chemical or chemicals to leather, usually beginning with water, and followed by other chemicals. I use the word “stain” as both a noun and a verb but in every case I mean the result of a chemical reaction on leather. I suggest the use of color media or describe a “color” of a stain, such as black, without defining how the color was achieved (dyes, pigments, spirits) because it is impossible to know the composition of historical media without chemical analysis of the colorant employed. The staining can vary wildly in terms of the amount and depth of staining into the leather, and the colors achieved on any given leather binding.

2. An e-book by Richard Norman titled *An Exploration of Calf Marbling* is in preparation at the time of this writing. This book will go into some depth on chemical analysis of marbled-calf covers, and the different styles of calf marbling, and will contain valuable information on some of the English binderies that produced such bindings. Norman’s book is cited in Part I of an essay by Malina Belcheva, “Complexity & Simplicity in the Conservation of *The Lady of the Lake*,” about her expert rebacking of a marbled calf binding in the *Guild of Book Workers Newsletter*, no. 229 (December 2016): 8–9 and cover illustration. Belcheva describes how she matched the original staining of the cover she was restoring in Part II of her essay, contained in no. 230 of the *Newsletter*, published in February 2017, 16–17. More information about the Norman book can be found at the Eden Workshops website <www.edenworkshops.com/calf_marbling.html>, accessed 14 December 2016.

3. An early source for recipes can be found in *The Whole Art of Bookbinding, Containing Valuable Recipes for Sprinkling, Marbling, Colouring, &c.* Oswestry, U.K.: printed and sold, for the author, by N. Minshall, 1811. The author of this book is anonymous, although some sources believe Oswestry binder Henry Parry is that author; he wrote a book titled *The Art of Bookbinding* in 1817. There is a first American edition of the third English edition of *The Whole Art* that was published, with additions, by Peter Cottom in Richmond, Virginia, in 1824. Both the English and American editions are extremely rare, and none are illustrated.

The aim is to categorize some broad types of decorative staining and illustrate them through images of historical exemplars, in order that those describing leather bindings decorated in a similar fashion will have a basis of comparison and a resource for identifying and describing some pattern types. The tentative categorization of different decorative effects offered here is intended to increase awareness of these interesting and often very beautiful bindings and to open a discussion on what would be an adequate basic terminology to describe them.

Sometimes we have misused existing terminology when we apply it to decorative staining; for instance, the term “tree calf” is used broadly, indiscriminately, and often incorrectly. If it achieves nothing else, this chapter strives to illustrate what is, what may be, and what is not, tree marbling. Fig. 1.1 and DVD image. We need to choose a basic terminology to cover different styles of staining that will at the very least assist those researchers interested in examining different types of stain-derived decoration to *find* the bindings they wish to study.

Some of the bindings illustrated and described here fall into the modestly decorated, trade-binding category. Some of the same staining techniques were also used on extra bindings, combined with other decorative techniques, such as simple or elaborate blind and gold tooling, leather onlay, gilt, gauffered, marbled, sprinkled, colored, or patterned-paste edges, and decorated endpapers. This was often done to great artistic effect, and some examples of such bindings are also illustrated here and can be found by following links and call numbers provided for illustrations of interesting stained bindings in printed and digital resources.⁴

The description of historical bindings inevitably leads the describer onto various patches of thin ice, and no patch of ice is thinner than that of describing the many methods of decorating leather bindings. When we speak about tooling, whether blind or gold or both, we at least have a terminology for many styles of ornament, although not for all the types of tooled decoration, by any means; the possible combinations of tools and variations of pattern are infinite. An example is the corner tool commonly referred to as a *fleuron*, whether the shape or detailing is flower-like or not. Many, many corner tools were cut and used in the

4. For an example: the use of staining as part of elaborate decoration can be seen on many of the bindings executed by James Scott and William Scott, bookbinders of Edinburgh. For a few examples of stain used as part of gilt extra binding designs by the Scotts, see Loudon, J.H. *James Scott and William Scott, Bookbinders*. London: Scolar Press, 1980, 58, Pl. JS 18; 242, Pl. JS 94; 346, Pl. WS 8; 348, Pl. WS 9. A calf binding in the Folger Shakespeare Library, and available on the Folger Bindings Image Collection, LUNA, website, <www.luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/Bindings>, shelf number STC 3278 Copy 2, is a very fine example of stenciling and staining used on a gilt extra binding ca. 1789, probably executed in Edinburgh, on a 1531 imprint by Wynkyn de Worde. The book is described and illustrated in Bearman, Frederick, Nati H. Krivatsy, and J. Franklin Mowery. *Fine and Historic Bookbindings from the Folger Shakespeare Library*. Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1992, 186–187. A fine American example of staining used on a gilt extra binding can be seen in Plate 16 in *Early American Bookbindings from the Collection of Michael Papantonio*. New York: Pierpont Morgan Library et al., 1972. The description of the Plate on p. 7 ascribes the binding to binders J. and A. M’Lean, Franklin’s Head shop, 1788.

panel-binding period (roughly speaking from 1600 to 1800) in the British Isles, various parts of Europe, and colonial and post-colonial America. To this day no historian has attempted a census and descriptive catalog of these tools because there are just too many. A few of the corner tools are associated with an individual binder, but generally speaking it is rare to know the name and associated work of any historical binder, and it is especially difficult to make the claim that the use of a particular tool or design element is certain evidence that a particular binder bound and decorated the book.⁵ When we do make such tentative connections we have to bear in mind that chances are that the binder's contemporaries also knew their tooling work, and if a binder's tooling style proved popular among purchasers, fellow binders probably copied their tools and their designs.⁶ Figs. 1.2a–c.

Binders are practical craftsmen and often followed trends in the decoration of leather bindings, usually determined by the buyer's desire regarding cost vs. appearance. The binders might have the skills and tools to produce modestly to elaborately decorated bindings with blind and gold tooling. The bulk of their work might, however, be plain bindings because that is what their customers felt able to pay for. But there was another type of decoration that could be added to a light- or medium-colored leather using stains, dyes, and other media.

5. Although in Francis Skinner, active from 1728–1788 in Newport, Rhode Island, we have an early American binder who is an exception to that rule. Willman and Carol M. Spawn established, in their amazing article on Skinner, that in his 50-year career Skinner owned and used ten corner stamps, a two-line and three-line fillet, and seven fancy rolls. He tended to work in blind and tended to tool variations of two- and three-frame panel designs, adding staining to one or more of the panel frames. Fig. 1.2b. He was regarded as a provincial binder because his approach to binding structure and decorative designs did not vary over his long career, but on the other hand, he did “sign” each and all of his bindings with his constant use of the same small group of tools, same panel design, and same level of execution. He also occasionally signed his work directly either in ink or through the use of a large binder's ticket. Spawn, Willman and Carol M. Spawn. “Francis Skinner, Bookbinder of Newport. An Eighteenth-Century Craftsman Identified by His Tools.” In *Winterthur Portfolio II*, 47–61. Winterthur, Del.: Henry Francis Dupont Winterthur Museum, 1965. Willman Spawn sought two identifiable tool impressions on a leather binding before attributing a binding to a binder; this was most easily done through the use of fancy tools, but could also apply to standard plain tools, especially if wear patterns or nicks in the metal of the tool “signed” the binding as well.

6. There are also numerous binders who prove the rule that we must sometimes question their “signature” via a favorite tool, or tooled design, including American binders John Ratcliff, Henry Bilson Legge, and John Roulstone; English binders Garrett Godfrey, Samuel Mearne, Robert Steel, and Roger Payne; and French binders Nicholas and Clovis Eve, Antoine Michel Padeloup, Nicholas Derôme, and Rene and Paul Dubuisson. Many other binders gained a name and saw their work copied; a more “modern” example is the theft of tool shapes and even tooling designs from the work of T.J. Cobden-Sanderson. The “hedgehog” tool illustrated in Fig. 1.2a has been associated with the work of both Samuel Mearne (1624–1683) and Robert Steel (d. 1711), and the tool shape was doubtless appropriated by other binders of their era. I hope someone will someday collect as many “hedgehog” or “chrysanthemum” tool impressions as they can locate...then we will have a good idea about how many variations were possible. The same study would be intriguing and useful for many idiosyncratic tool shapes.



Fig. 1.2a. English blind panel binding with chrysanthemum or “hedgehog” corner fleurons. “In the Savoy,” 1710. Very light sprinkling to outer frame and inner panel. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

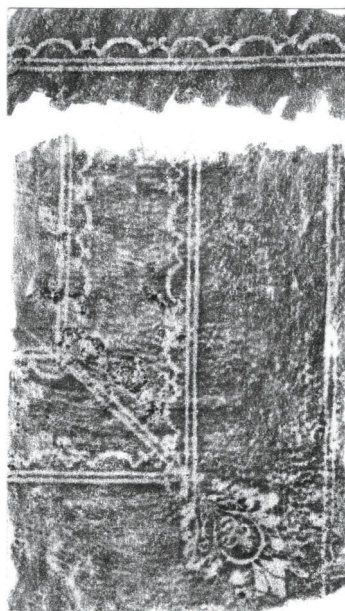


Fig. 1.2b. A blind panel binding by Francis Skinner with sprinkled staining of the outer frame and near-solid staining of the center panel. Newport, R.I., 1729. Fig. 1.2c. Rubbing of an area on the cover of the Skinner binding; the corner-piece tool and the decorative roll are two of the tools Skinner used on his bindings for fifty years. Private Collection.

Fig. 1.3. Turn-ins on a 1697 Amsterdam imprint, striped with stain; a nice touch in finishing the solid coloring of the outside; covers and spine of this book appear solidly stained. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).



Decorative staining of leather covers came into its own in the eighteenth century as more books were produced for more people, and low-cost decoration in addition to or instead of tooling became a useful alternative and selling point for binders and booksellers.⁷

Discussing decorative staining, I do not refer to the initial solid dyeing of the piece of tanned leather used on a book cover; that standard operation would often be done off the book. Solid coloring of the leather also could be done once the book was covered, sometimes having its own decorative element. A binder, if adding deeper color to a leather cover, would usually include the board edges, and might also darken the turn-ins, or leave the lighter turned-in leather alone, or “finish” it with quick swipes of stain, creating high-contrast stripes. Fig. 1.3. Any and all of these operations would have been done before the board pastedowns were put down.

7. Please note that I often use the word “cover” or “covers” when describing decoration; traditional binders would use the words “board” or “boards,” as in “the boards are tooled with a cable roll.” It can be confusing to use board(s) in this context because what is being decorated is the covering material, not the underlying board material. I ask my binder colleagues for indulgence here.



Fig. 1.4. Quarter-leather binding; binder only stained as much of the spine piece as would show once the paper sides were attached, plus a little extra to be on the safe side. Keene, N.H., 1827. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Although we know that one type of decorative staining, sprinkling, and perhaps another, marbling, was sometimes done to a full skin of leather before the skin was cut for a cover, many bindings, and most of those illustrated in this chapter, had decorative staining applied to the leather covering piece *after* covering.

Binders did not waste dye or stain, whether applying it solidly or decoratively, on portions of leather that would be covered by some other material, as in the case of a quarter- or half-bound book's spine strip or cornerpieces. Spine strips were often only partially stained on the flanges. Plain- or decorated-paper sides, now missing in the photograph of the book illustrated in Fig. 1.4, would have overlapped the unstained areas of the spine strip, concealing those areas. A half binding with a partially stained leather spine piece and leather cornerpieces would have paper sides that would overlap and hide the unstained portions of leather, and the board pastedowns would also overlap and hide any partially stained portions of the turn-ins; see Figs. 1.12a–b.

It is evident that some and probably most binders did not bother staining turn-ins as part of the decorative use of stain, but when they did, as in Fig. 1.5 showing the turned-in corner of the full leather cover on an 1817 imprint from Bala, Wales, we see again that

Fig. 1.5. Corner turn-in showing that while the binder did apply solid stain to the turn-ins of this cover, he stopped short of staining the entire turn-in, saving himself some stain and preventing a stain-soaked board area. Bala, Wales, 1817. See Fig. 1.74, the cover. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).



the binder stained only part of the turned-in leather; the board pastedown would cover the unstained area.

We turn from the general use of dyeing or staining to color leather back to the subject of this chapter: the decorative use of media, sometimes combined with tooling or other decorative techniques. Broadly, that use of media is best described as the controlled application of stain, dyes, or other coloring agents to a leather cover after forwarding, but before any finishing tooling, using the media to achieve a variety of decorative patterns. Adding color media to leather covers is as old as the codex itself and the practice has been prevalent throughout the history of the hand-bound book. Decoration on early bindings was almost always reserved for the books of the wealthy or wealthy institutions, but along the way the covers of books belonging to less wealthy owners were also decorated, usually with simpler techniques. This fact should not make them less interesting to scholars. Sometimes decoration employing folk-art motifs was added to a book by an individual owner using different types of mediums (paint, stain). Binders (or booksellers) also offered various levels of decoration, and a purchaser could specify what they wanted and could afford.

Most leather bindings made from the early days of the codex until the present were, if decorated at all, decorated with marking in some form. The most common marking was blind tooling and later, gold tooling, but the use of painting and staining, and numerous other ways of decorating leather also occurred very early. Before the advent of hot tooling, blind tooling was done cold on dampened leather, and the blind marks might then be painted in with gold paint; we also have ancient examples of fully gilded leather. Black and colored paints and colorful dyes were used on leather from antiquity. Decorative staining is old too;

it was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, sometimes painted solid on spines so that spine tooling in gold would “pop.” Stain was used in the seventeenth century to sprinkle bindings “all over” as well as to solid-stain portions of a cover. But it was in the eighteenth century that decorative staining really came into its own.

Stain is generally achieved by the combination of the chemicals *potassium carbonate* (salts of tartar; darkens the leather) and *copperas* (green hydrated ferrous sulfate; acts on the potassium carbonate to further darken the leather).⁸ Decoration that employed copperas and potassium carbonate in conjunction with flowing water on leather covers was used in the latter part of the eighteenth century and is believed to be a Dutch and German technique. Documentation of the first use of the technique in England to create the famous “tree” effect (tree calf, tree marble) is believed to have occurred around 1775.^{9, 10} See Figs. 1.1 and 1.7.

Colored dyes were also used in combination to “stain” leather covers in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, usually in narrow to wide bands of flowing or painted stain, often running horizontally or diagonally on the covers, and sometimes just sprinkled in large drops that created a dense, mottled effect. The decoration would have been done *after* the book was bound, and although sometimes the spine was decorated or stained solid as in the seventeenth century, more often the spine was decorated with simple to elaborate tooling (blind or gold or a combination) and only the boards were stained. The turn-ins were almost never decorated with staining, unless with solid or striped stain, as described previously, done before board pastedowns were put down.

If identifying the tooling of a leather cover by a specific binder is difficult and rarely certain, identifying the practitioners responsible for decorative staining of bindings is virtually impossible. Binders advertised their ability to do staining decoration, but whether they had the real skill and a good stain recipe to do a credible job and create an attractive pattern without damaging the leather with a poor mix of chemicals was another question.¹¹

8. Douglas Cockerell calls this “green vitriol.” *Bookbinding and the Care of Books. A Handbook for Amateurs, Bookbinders & Librarians*. New York: D. Appleton, 1902, 279. Matt T. Roberts and Don Etherington include it as an alternative in their definition of *ferrous sulfate* in *Bookbinding and the Conservation of Books: A Dictionary of Descriptive Terminology*. Washington: Library of Congress, 1982, 99.

9. Roberts and Etherington, *Bookbinding*, 268. *Tree calf* (*tree marble*) and the process for creating tree decoration is described. Information is drawn from Douglas Cockerell, Henry Coutts, Bernard Middleton, and John Pleger and the technique is illustrated by a very fine tree calf binding in Plate V.

10. Buckley, Terry. “Leather Staining, Dyeing and Decorating.” Class handout. Guild of Book Workers (GBW), Pasadena, Calif., 1996. See also Riley, Dominic. “Tree Calf and Other Techniques.” Class handout. Paper and Book Intensive (PBI), Deer Isle, Maine, May 1999. Riley learned the technique from Buckley; in his own class handout, Riley includes an excellent list of tree-calf-related terms as well as other terms for other styles of marbling, drawing on Roberts and Etherington for his list.

11. Cockerell, *Bookbinding*, 26, 279. Douglas Cockerell did not mince words in his two references to the practice of sprinkling and marbling leather. He was writing about forwarding and finishing practices that damaged leather and on p. 26 ends a paragraph with “and the sides sprinkled or marbled,

Those who did have high skills were sought after and were hired to do the stain decoration for other, less able, binders, much as some binders would turn to another skilled in edge gilding or marbling. It is possible that certain types of distinctive staining can serve as a kind of “signature” that could identify the practitioner, but to date no comparative study of the many varieties and examples of stained bindings has been done, nor any attempt to group exemplars by region, let alone practitioner. This is another area of research where the availability of online digital imagery of historical bindings could help us at least compare and categorize types of stain decoration, and may help us identify practitioners or cities or regions where a specific type of pattern was favored and employed on surviving exemplars.

The practices of staining or coloring-in leather during repair treatments (rebacking, rebinding) are rarely used by book conservators these days. Conservators tend to shy away from steps they feel overlap into the area of cosmetic treatment. Most binders do not attempt practices, such as staining, for the very good reason that they never learned the techniques; book artists who want to alter leather are probably not aware of historical stain decoration and have a wide range of modern media to experiment with in many ways if they do wish to alter leather. There is little call for the old practice of staining, and when there is demand to repair or replicate an earlier style involving staining, there are modern media that can be employed by restorers to reduce damage to the leather surface (see fn. 2). Some restoration binders do a wonderful job recreating stained and sprinkled panel bindings, and the technique for sprinkled panel bindings (often called a Cambridge panel) is taught occasionally in workshops, but in fact historical staining and coloring methods largely go untaught and unpracticed.¹²

thus further damaging the leather.” On p. 279, he quotes, approvingly, the Special Committee on leather for bookbinding established by the Society of Arts: “The sprinkling of leather, either for the production of ‘sprinkled’ calf or ‘tree’ calf, with ferrous sulphate (green vitriol) must be most strongly condemned, as the iron combines with and destroys the tan in the leather, and free sulphuric acid is liberated, which is still more destructive. Iron acetate or lactate is somewhat less objectionable, but probably the same effects may be obtained with aniline colours without risk to the leather.” No doubt a worthy caution, but two hundred years too late; we have many surviving examples of the use of staining for decoration in good condition, and many examples in poor condition from pitting and other forms of aggressive leather deterioration.

12. In addition to Terry Buckley and Dominic Riley, another practitioner and teacher of leather staining techniques is book conservator Jeff Peachey, who teaches leather stain decoration as part of his highly regarded workshop on 18th-century French vernacular binding. Visit the following website for a description of a class he taught in 2009, illustrated with pictures of student work from the workshop: <<http://jeffpeachey.com/workshops-with-peachey/>>; accessed 11 January 2016. The French types of stain decoration represented on the well-executed student models range from sprinkled to repeat pattern mottling. Master binder and renowned book conservator Don Etherington has taught the binding and decoration of Cambridge panel bindings in recent years, employing several decorative staining techniques, especially sprinkling. Personally, I think it would be a good idea for book conservators to learn these techniques to better understand the examples that

TERMINOLOGY: EXACT AND THE NOT-SO-EXACT

Decorative staining of leather bindings is often referred to as “marbling” because many of the stained covers somewhat resemble the patterns of proper (real stone) marble and historical marbled papers used for bindings.¹³ There are a few descriptive terms in common use, such as *sprinkled binding*, *marbled binding*, *tree marble/marbling*, *tree calf*, and occasionally *tree sheep*. A wide variety of staining patterns qualify as “marbled,” but there are also examples of distinctive patterning referred to as marbling which could be better described. There is also a wide tendency to call every stained binding aside from sprinkled bindings a “tree calf binding.” “Tree calf” has become the default description for stained bindings that do not in the least resemble a tree, and for many that are also *not* bound in calf. The default use of the terms “tree calf” or “tree marbling” for any type of stain marbling is still prevalent in our bibliographic description, as well as our bookselling and book collecting, communities.¹⁴ Figs. 1.6–1.8 and DVD images.

come to their benches for repair, and to then assist curators and other custodians to identify such decorative practices used on collection items.

13. See Fig. 1.44 for an example of what appears to be marbled vellum.

14. Pearson, David. *English Bookbinding Styles 1450–1800*. London: British Library; New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press, 2005. Pearson has an image of a calf binding, Fig. 3.109, which is a good example of tree calf, but his Fig. 3.110, which he identifies as “tree calf, with a more abstract design” might be better described as just “marbled.” Color Plate 16.2 is a good example of a marbled calf binding. The decoration Pearson illustrates in Fig. 3.110 is nearly identical to the decoration of the lower board in Fig. 1.6, which I would describe as “marbled calf.” Stuart Bennett, who has written the other most recent and also excellent handbook describing English bindings, likewise applies the term “tree calf” to stained calf bindings that should probably be described as “marbled.” Bennett, Stuart. *Trade Bookbinding in the British Isles 1660–1800*. New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press and London: British Library, 2004. Bennett’s Figs. 2.34 and 4.49 are on the mark, but his Figs. 2.38, 3.9, 4.52, and 4.61 which he calls tree calf are not, but they are good examples of “marbled” decoration. There are doubtless many failed tree calf bindings that can be described as such if you can discern the failed tree shape, but when the decoration is simply an overall marble, I think the distinction between tree calf or tree sheep (or tree marble) and marbled calf or sheep should be upheld in describing the decoration. I consider the upper board of the book illustrated in Fig. 1.6 an attempt at tree marbling that failed; perhaps the binder just threw in the towel at that point, which would explain the wildly different pattern on the lower board. A book, such as Fig. 1.6, does challenge the flexibility of exact description, but it also allows us to point out the differences between a free-form marble effect and an attempt at a tree-like pattern. I’ve run on about this in the case of the Bennett and Pearson books because they serve as standard references for catalogers everywhere, and since they are not more exact about what is and what is not tree calf (or tree sheep), they doubtless unintentionally help perpetuate the widely and incorrectly applied use of the term. And by the way, I can be just as guilty of this as anyone.



Fig. 1.6. Marbled calf, asymmetrical staining pattern from one board to the other. London, 1774. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

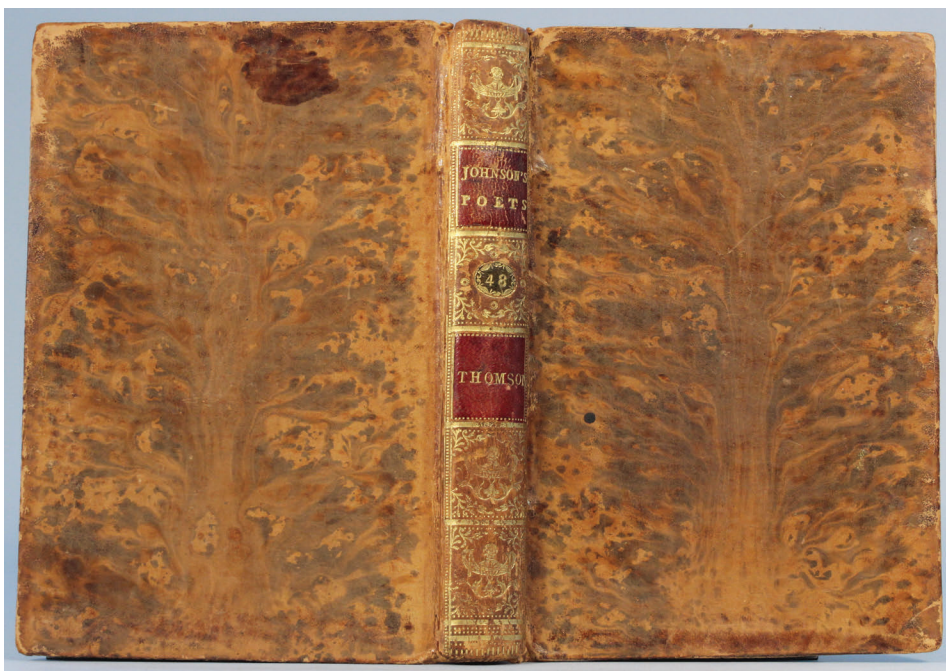


Fig. 1.7. Tree calf, symmetrical staining pattern on both boards. London, 1779. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).



Fig. 1.8. Marbled sheep, reasonably symmetrical in appearance. New York, 1839. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

The American Library Association (ALA), Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) furnishes bibliographers with a descriptive terminology in the RBMS publication *Binding Terms: A Thesaurus for Use in Rare Book and Special Collections Cataloging* (published in print and in an online version) for leather bindings decorated with stain.¹⁵ The *Thesaurus* is

15. *Binding Terms: A Thesaurus for Use in Rare Book and Special Collections Cataloging*. Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries and Washington: Cataloguing Distribution Service, Library of Congress, 1988; and <http://rbms.info/vocabularies/binding/alphabetical_list.htm>; accessed 3 May 2017. The binding thesaurus lists *marbled calf bindings* with the narrow term *tree calf bindings* and the related term *stained calf bindings*; *tree sheep bindings* is also included. The term *marbled sheepskin bindings* was added fairly recently. Other forms of staining are represented by the terms *sprinkled calf bindings* and *mottled calf bindings*. Poor old neglected sheepskin! Every type of decoration, whether blind or gold tooling, and all forms of staining, were used just as much on sheepskin as on calf, and given that sheep was a less expensive leather, there are probably far more stained sheepskin than calf bindings in existence. It is my belief that either the skin distinction should be dropped and only the term “leather” in conjunction with the technique (staining, tree marbling, mottling, etc.) used in descriptions, or all the staining technique terms should be

a work in progress and is periodically updated with new terms. The binding thesaurus is not illustrated and probably most catalogers are correctly hesitant to assign terms in descriptive fields if they are uncertain whether they apply to the book in hand.¹⁶ The cataloger may take the time to search for a similarly decorated binding that is illustrated and described, but it can be searching for a needle in a haystack. One reason we are still struggling to describe so many types of bindings and styles of binding decoration is that the binding-history community has been mostly concerned with describing gold-tooled bindings. Sprinkled bindings were considered a less expensive decorative alternative to blind or gold tooling, and the assignment of “cheaper” to a decorative style (or binding structure) has often resulted in something of a blind spot for those researching and publishing on the history of decorated bindings.¹⁷ It is puzzling to this author that some of the decorative styles besides tooling that have been important to the history of bookbinding – especially the different techniques of staining leather – have had so little attention, particularly those, like staining, that have given us some visually stunning results.¹⁸

available for use modified by “calf,” “sheep,” or “leather”: stained sheep, tree sheep, mottled sheep, repeat-pattern sheep, sprinkled sheep, etc. Many catalogers, along with all the rest of us, often have difficulty distinguishing sheep from goat; it is much easier to distinguish calf from sheep, but many times I have seen smooth, burnished sheepskin described as calf. The bindings thesaurus refers to this dilemma in parentheses under the *tree sheep bindings* listing: “In case of doubt use Tree calf bindings.” Just for comparison with the RBMS binding thesaurus, Roberts and Etherington have listings for both *mottled calf* (dabs and flecks of stain) and *mottled sheep* (colors applied in an irregular pattern), and *sprinkled calf* but not *sprinkled sheep*. To illustrate how difficult it is to pin down terms, their definition of *marbled leather* describes only the addition of marbling colors to leather by sprinkling or throwing with no mention of stain, but they also list *marbled calf* and describe this technique as the addition of acid to produce a marble effect, taking this definition from John Pleger. Granted it can be confusing, but calling every leather binding decorated with flowing stain *tree calf* is worse.

16. Another terminology of staining styles does exist, listed in a tree-calf workshop handout taught by skilled binder and teacher Dominic Riley. It would be useful to see this terminology published online accompanied by illustrations of each decorative style. Riley also teaches panel-staining technique in his workshop on Cambridge panel bindings; see fn. 7.

17. There are no hard and fast rules about the use of decoration on any historical binding, and what it indicates in terms of the cost of the binding; there are many elements of any binding (material quality, printing quality, structural quality) that can reduce or increase total cost. Gold or blind tooling in the 17th and 18th centuries were often combined with some type of decorative staining. Although it is true that staining was a faster (and thus cheaper) decorative technique than blind and gold tooling, it does not follow that all bindings with *only* stain decoration are always “cheap” or “cheaper” than other decorated bindings.

18. A useful term missing from the RBMS binding thesaurus and other glossaries are *repeat-pattern mottling* (or *repeat-pattern staining*). The term *repeat-pattern staining* or *repeat-pattern mottling* is not used by anyone except me at this point, but I think it is a good way of describing this distinctive and often very attractive use of stain; see Figs. 1.75 to 1.85. The term *Spanish marble* is also missing

This discussion of the terms used to describe leather bindings decorated with stain and who uses what term and how is a perfect example of the chaos inherent in the description of a particular aspect of binding decoration. It is neither surprising nor unusual in the history of binding description, and it may well be impossible to untangle in this case. Ideally terminology should be succinct yet flexible and recognized as the best term available by all concerned. But this is an ideal and it is going to be very difficult to realize. What we *can* do is examine terms that tend to be catch-all, such as tree calf, and do a little triage to help those looking for true tree-calf examples to find them, and those interested in some other distinctive forms of stain decoration to find those. It will still be a muddle; we cannot go back and rewrite scholarly references, but we can put forward some good terms and good images of bindings to illustrate those terms and aid future catalogers and scholars.¹⁹

Mirjam Foot has set forth some good information about describing leather bindings decorated with stain by Irish binders in her essay “A Magnificent and Bewildering Variety: Irish Bookbinding in the Eighteenth Century.”²⁰ She discusses the flourishing of many arts in Ireland, and the influences of binding practices in England, France, and Scotland on Irish binding of the period. Her essay’s value to this chapter is that she illustrates several bindings decorated with stain. One is a Dublin binding by Parliamentary Binder A, bound ca. 1737, which she describes as black-stained brown calf, onlaid in white calf, tooled in gold.²¹ What she does not mention in the text or caption is that the black staining is done in a repeat-pattern style that is very eye-catching and nearly obliterates the effect of the superb tooling (the pattern is eye-catching but not beautiful because it is not particularly well-done, blotchy, and uneven).²² The second binding she describes and illustrates is another Dublin binding by William McKenzie, ca. 1783.²³ She describes the binding as “brown marbled calf, tooled

from the binding thesaurus. The latter has been used by scholars (Hannett, Loring, Nicholson, Woolnough) to describe the use of horizontal stripes of different colors of stain on bindings (see the definition of the term in Roberts and Etherington, *Bookbinding*, 244).

19. The Ligatus Research Centre, University of the Arts London, has published the *Language of Bindings Thesaurus* (LoB) online at: <www.ligatus.org.uk/lob/>; accessed December 2016. The thesaurus is comprehensive and aids many scholars and book custodians; readers are recommended to search some terms to familiarize themselves with the Ligatus approach and the system of hierarchies the shapers of the site have developed.

20. Foot, Mirjam M., ed. “A Magnificent and Bewildering Variety: Irish Bookbinding in the Eighteenth Century.” In *Eloquent Witnesses: Bookbindings and Their History*. London: Bibliographical Society, British Library, Oak Knoll Books, 2004, 206–236.

21. Foot, “Magnificent,” 221.

22. Foot’s image is in black and white. Maurice Craig illustrated the same book in color in 1976 in his booklet, *Irish Bookbindings* but also ignores the repetitive pattern of the mottled stain decoration in the caption. Craig, Maurice. *Irish Bookbindings*. Dublin: Eason & Son, 1976, Plate 2. He does refer obliquely to the stain decoration in his narrative description on the following unnumbered page: “encased in a contemporary binding in catspaw calf.” See also fns. 28, 31, and 34 on cat’s-paw decoration.

23. Foot, “Magnificent,” 226.

in gold.” The decoration is the kind of flow/sprinkle staining that many of our colleagues might have loosely described as tree calf, not marbled calf. The third binding is another book bound by McKenzie, ca. 1784.²⁴ She describes the binding as “brown marbled calf,” and here again colleagues might have used the term *tree calf* instead with more justification because a “trunk” is quite visible extending from the lower right corner of the upper cover, spreading into limbs and a crown, all on a diagonal. If intended as a tree marble, it is unusual indeed. It is useful to point out that all three of these bindings are extra bindings and combine decorative staining with a lot of gold, and in one case, tooled onlay.

In her *Bookbinders at Work* in Chapter 3. “Decoration,” Foot gives us historical background and definitions that are very helpful in sorting out the confusing use of terms such as marbling of leather.²⁵ The chapter certainly makes it clear that staining and painting meant different things to different binders in different countries. Like other scholars, Foot sometimes ignores the presence of a significant part of a decorated binding. For example, in Plate 10 she illustrates a binding by Elkanah Settle (1703) and describes it in the caption as gold-tooled brown sheepskin, neglecting to mention the extremely large mottled pattern in red and black added to the leather before it was tooled, as she had done with the earlier description of an example in *Eloquent Witnesses*. Not mentioning such a visible decoration has been common in binding descriptions for a very long time, and it does not detract at all from the value of Foot’s research. Her chapter on decoration, and the detail she includes on the historical and geographical sources of certain types of decoration, is a resource for everyone involved in the description of historical bindings.

But just in case your head is not spinning yet, I consulted my unabridged second edition of *Webster’s International Dictionary*, and for *mottled calf* the definition is “marbled calf.” With that in mind I would like to propose a hierarchy with “sprinkled bindings,” “marbled bindings,” and “mottled bindings” as core terms, followed by sub-categories to create a simplified terminology for basic description.

A Simplified Terminology for Leather Bindings Decorated with Stain

- I. Sprinkled bindings: the flecking of leather covers with spots of staining from fine to large spots.²⁶ Probably the oldest of the techniques of staining.
 - All-over sprinkling
 - Sprinkled panel bindings (sometimes combined with solid staining)
 - Sprinkled stencil bindings

24. Foot, “Magnificent,” 228.

25. Foot, Mirjam M. *Bookbinders at Work. Their Roles and Methods*. New Castle, Del.: British Library and Oak Knoll Press: 2006, 65–105.

26. Another chance to consult the Ligatus *Language of Bindings Thesaurus*: listed under “Sprinkling” are definitions of sparse, medium, and dense sprinkling; they are defined by the percentage of the surface of the object (book cover) being decorated at 25% for sparse, 25–75% for medium, and 75% or more for dense.

2. Marbled bindings (the use of stain or colors to create patterns on leather covers).
 - Tree marble (tree calf, tree sheep, tree leather): water flow and chemicals combining to create stain and form a discernible tree trunk and crown; bending or curving of boards necessary.²⁷
 - Marble: water flow and stain form an abstract pattern; bending or curving of boards is not necessary.
 - Run marble: streaks or stripes of stain or colors.
3. Mottled bindings: spotted or flecked areas of stain or colors, sometimes very large, sometimes overlapping, delivered with a sprinkling brush, sponge, or some other object/tool.
 - Mottled: flecks, spots, or irregular patches of staining colors.
 - Repeat-pattern mottling: using a sponge or brush or other implement to “print” a repeating pattern to fill the cover; the staining stays on the surface; there is no embossing; size of a pattern segment can range from small to very large; sometimes the “printed” shapes overlap.²⁸

27. According to the definition in Roberts and Etherington, *Bookbinding*, 268, the technique was usually performed on a book already covered but before the board pastedowns were put down; this allowed the boards to warp slightly into the curved (concave) shape that facilitated the process. The spine was protected against the chemicals; the leather covers were given a paste wash and the book hung between two rods, at a slight tilt. A small amount of water was added to the center of each board and allowed to run vertically, forming the trunk of the tree. More water was sprinkled on the cover, the tilt causing it to run to join the tree trunk, at which point copperas (green hydrated ferrous sulfate, or green vitriol) is sprinkled on the cover followed by potassium carbonate (salts of tartar); the two combine to create the pattern in shades of gray from light to very dark (if dark enough, our eyes will read as dark brown or black). The whole process must be done while the water is running on the cover or the pattern will simply be sprinkling. Each addition of chemical from water and starch (paste) to water and copperas and the potassium carbonate acts to stain the leather. The great mastery of the tree-calf technique lies in achieving a controlled and expressive tree pattern.

28. According to the Eden Workshops website's excerpt of Chapter 3 of Richard Norman's book on calf marbling (in preparation at the time of this writing) mentioned in fn. 1, Norman defines “cat's paw calf” marbling and illustrates the technique with a binding that I would describe as repeat-pattern mottling. I was taught that a cat's-paw binding is a panel binding with cat's-paw staining added to one of the panel frames, usually the middle one in a three-frame panel design, as illustrated in Fig. 1.17. An interesting difference of definition, and one to pursue. The definition in Roberts and Etherington, *Bookbinding*, 49, is general: “An acid-stain pattern on a calfskin binding, somewhat resembling the paw marks of a cat.” Jane Greenfield refers to “catspaw calf” in her definition of Spanish calf: “Calfskin with an acid-stained pattern of blotches in various colors. Catspaw calf is similar.” Greenfield, Jane. *ABC of Bookbinding*. New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Books, 2002, 65. A quick search at the British Library's Database of Bookbindings website yielded no listings for cat's paw, cat's paw calf, catspaw calf, cat's paw marble, or cat's paw marbling; <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/bookbindings/>>; accessed 3 May 2017. However, and

4. Pseudo-marbled bindings

- Tree marbled – plate printed
- Tree marbled paper(s)
- Abstract marbled paper(s)

AN ILLUSTRATED CATALOG OF LEATHER BINDINGS DECORATED WITH STAINING

Sprinkled leather bindings: all over sprinkling, often combined with blind tooling

Sprinkling a leather binding is usually done after the book is bound but before it is tooled. There is a very instructive illustration, Fig. 36 in *Bookbinders at Work*, showing a binder sprinkling multiple book covers “hung” between two rods at different angles.²⁹ The binder is using a large brush with long bristles, knocking it against another tool to generate and help control the direction of the sprinkles. Sprinkling is not as easy as this illustration makes it look, try it and you will see that delivering uniform spots of color to a relatively small surface takes quite a bit of practice. There are many examples of sparsely sprinkled bindings that appear to have been decorated with more haste than skill. But sprinkling was a useful and comparatively inexpensive type of decoration in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it was widely used. It is interesting to note that most of the examples illustrated here are sheepskin, except for the sprinkled panel bindings, which are all calf.³⁰

this goes toward support of the term, Maurice Craig so describes a binding on a 1737 imprint in *Irish Bookbindings*, illustrating the book in Plate 2 and describing it as “catpaw calf” on the unnumbered page following the illustration. I would point out that the stain pattern on the book in Craig’s Plate 2 does not look at all like a cat’s-paw mark; whereas the marks on the book in Fig. 1.17 do. It may be a case of misapplying the term to any repeated pattern, much as “tree marble” is often misapplied. It is also likely that a once-widely used term such as “catpaw calf” has died out of use by most present-day binders and scholars, paralleling the decline in use of the actual technique. If so, consider that a term such as “repeat-pattern mottle” (or mottling) could be a replacement that gets the idea across, and perhaps more effectively. See also fns. 22, 31, and 34 for more references to cat’s-paw decoration.

29. Foot, *Bookbinders at Work*, 75. Image is from H. de Haas, *De Boekbinder*, Dordrecht, 1806.

30. Sprinkling was also standard practice in the American colonies: sprinkling in conjunction with simple blind tooling was used on many early American leather bindings on sermons, prayer books, primers, and other standard productions from early American presses. For examples of sprinkling used on early American imprints, see my essay “Not Just Another Beautiful Book: A Typology of American Scaleboard Bindings.” *Suave Mechanicals: Essays on the History of Bookbinding*. Vol. 1. Ed. Julia Miller, 247–315. Ann Arbor, Mich.: The Legacy Press, 2013.



Fig. 1.9. Lightly sprinkled calf. London, 1686. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

The Works of Mr. John Oldham, Together with his Remains. London: Printed for Jo. Hindmarsh, at the Golden Ball in Cornhil. MDCLXXXVI. [1686]. Bound with: *Satyrs upon the Jesuits* (1685); *The Passion of Byblis* (1685), of which pp. 145–148 appear to be cancels; *Poems and Translations* (1684); *Poems and Translations* (1683); *Remains of Mr. John Oldham in Verse and Prose* (1687). The date of the title page of the last section, *Remains*, establishes that the book was bound in 1687 or later. Fig. 1.9 and DVD images. University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Dark-brown calf, sparsely sprinkled with relatively large spots of staining (size of the head of a pin). The cover leather is very damaged, particularly around the edges, but it is clear there was a double-fillet border in blind. A wide decorative roll with a dotted “almond” motif is run along the spine edge of both covers. The spine leather is very damaged with the grain layer entirely gone and no evidence of tooling or titling remains. Sewn on four raised cords, all four laced in; evidence the text edges were densely sprinkled red and that the book once had worked endbands. There are two leaves comprising pp. 145–148 that have expertly executed full-page cancels tipped to the frames left when the original text was cut out.



Fig. 1.10. Densely sprinkled sheepskin, Vol. 2 of a two-volume set. Amsterdam, 1712.
Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Sermons du Pere Bourdalouë.... Amsterdam: Aux dépens de la Compagnie. M DCC XII. [1712]. Fig. 1.10 and DVD images. University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Medium-brown sheepskin, which is densely sprinkled with stain. Spine gilt, double-fillet borders in gold; decorative roll on board edges in gold. Leather lettering pieces titled in gold; volume numbers tooled direct. Sewn on five raised cords, three laced into boards; text-block edges sprinkled red; worked endbands.



Fig. 1.11. Sprinkled sheepskin, lower cover, with its vellum overcover pulled away. London, 1774. Private Collection.

John Entick. *The New Spelling Dictionary*. London: Printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, in the Poultry. 1774. Fig. 1.11. Private Collection.

Golden-brown sheepskin with very sparse sprinkling on the covers and possibly the spine; double-fillet border of very narrow lines; a decorative roll run along the spine edges of both covers, the decoration composed of unusual elements; it may have been made up with individual unit tools and is not a roll at all. A square-format book typical of dictionaries; unlettered; plain endpapers but with many ink inscriptions. Sewn on four shallow raised cords, two laced in; tying-up marks above and below bands, extending over onto boards. The book is protected by an overcover made from a re-purposed vellum book cover from ca. seventeenth century. For more information and images of the overcover, see Figs. 3.21a–c in Chapter 3 of this volume.



Fig. 1.12a. Sprinkled sheepskin half binding combined with sprinkled paper sides. Reutigen, 1777. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Sammlung der poetischen und prosaischen Schriften... Reutigen: bey Johann Georg Fleischhauer. 1777. Fig. 1.12a. University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library). Half sheep with sprinkled-paper sides, the spine apparently stained solid, the flanges sprinkled. The spine is tooled in blind with a diapered ornament, the spine flanges on the covers tooled with multiple vertical blind lines. There is a vellum lettering piece on the spine; it appears to have been painted yellow with black borders, and then titled in gold, now tarnished or faded. Sewn on five shallow raised bands, all laced in. The board pastedowns are single leaves, comb marbled; text edges are decorated with blue paste, patterned; evidence of endbands.



Fig. 1.12b. Sprinkled half binding of leather with paper sides, the sprinkled paper from the front cover removed. London, 1787. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Lewis Chambaud. *A Grammar of the French Tongue. Ninth Edition, Revised*. London: Printed for J. Rivington and Sons. M.DCC.LXXXVII. [1787]. Figs. 1.12b. University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

The removal of the sprinkled paper on the upper cover reveals that in this case, the pieces of leather used for the spine and cornerpieces were sprinkled before they were attached to the boards unlike the spine piece example in Fig. 1.5 and were probably decorated scrap. The boards are pulpboard; the paper sides are a sturdy laid paper that was surface-colored before it was sprinkled; a small fragment of this paper is visible adhered to the leather cornerpiece in the upper right corner. The smooth spine, not shown, is very damaged with loss of grain layer of the leather and damage to the thick gold lines tooled across the spine and on the tooled leather label. Sewn on three recessed cords, all laced in; text edges colored; stuck-on endbands of brown paper painted with blue stripes to resemble ticking. Directions to the binder printed on the fold-out table.



Fig. 1.12c. Sprinkled quarter binding with pulled paste paper sides. Paris, 1792. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

M. de Florian. *Estelle, Roman Pastoral*. A Paris, de L'Imprimerie de Didot L'Ainé. 1792. Fig. 1.12c. University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

The light-brown spine piece appears to be sheepskin and is sprinkled with stain; the smooth spine was then divided with double lines in gold; a paper lettering piece, painted rose, is titled in gold, and a floral ornament is tooled in each spine compartment in gold. Brown paste-paper sides; sewn on two recessed cords, both laced in; edges sprinkled blue; stuck-on endbands made of paper around a core.



Fig. 1.13. Sprinkled sheepskin. London, 1790. Private Collection.

John Clarke. *An Introduction to the Making of Latin.... The Twenty-sixth Edition....* London: Printed by M. Brown for J.F. and C. Rivington.... MDCCXC. [1790]. Fig. 1.13 and DVD image. Private Collection.

Golden-brown sheepskin, lightly sprinkled across spine and both covers with a double-fillet border and a decorative roll run along the spine edges of both covers. This book has a leather overcover that was adhered to the primary cover via the adhesion of a flyleaf as a second board pastedown, but was cut free of the book at some point. Sewn on five shallow raised cords, two laced in. The primary board pastedowns were plain; the first free flyleaves were used as secondary board pastedowns at front and back after the overcover was attached, and an owner bookplate for Jacob Willard is attached inside the upper cover on the secondary board pastedown. The leather overcover of this book is another example of sprinkling, around a heart-shaped stencil; see Fig. 1.30 in the section on sprinkled stencil bindings in this chapter. For additional photographs of this book and its overcover, see Figs. 3.22a–d in Chapter 3 on overcovers.



Fig. 1.14. Both covers of Vol. 1 open. Lyon, 1801. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

M. l'Abbé Girard. *Synonymes François.... Nouvelle Édition*. Lyon: de l'Imprimerie d'Amable Leroy. 1801. Two volumes. Fig. 1.14 and DVD images. University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Medium-brown sheepskin evenly sprinkled with small to large spots of stain; it appears the spine was sprinkled along with the boards. The sprinkling was done after covering because there is no evidence of sprinkling on the turn-ins. The smooth spine is gilt, titled direct in gold, with a black leather lettering piece tooled with the volume number; a decorative roll was used on the board edges in blind. Cream fleck endpapers; text gatherings sewn on at least three recessed cords, the ends laced in; text edges marbled in dark blue with “white” spot pattern (not actually white, but empty spots where a resist was added to the marbling color); stuck-on endbands, the cores wrapped in paper.



Fig. 1.15. Sprinkled leather, probably sheepskin. Lucca, 1813. Private Collection.

Versi di Giovanni Caselli. Lucca: Presso Bertini. MDCCCXIII. [1813]. Fig. 1.15 and DVD images. Private Collection.

The medium-brown leather of this binding is so polished it closely resembles calf, but the evidence the surface has peeled in some places indicates sheepskin, as does coarse hair-follicle evidence in several areas of the cover seen under magnification. The cover appears to be sprinkled only, but there are faint areas where thin stain may have “run.” The sprinkling was done after covering; there is no staining on the turn-ins. The smooth, narrow spine is tooled top to bottom with repeated use of the same bull’s-eye tool, in gold; each group of “eyes” bordered above and below with narrow decorative bands (made by a roll) that divides the spine into seven compartments; unlettered. Sewn on three extremely thin recessed cords that finish inside the covers; text edges sprinkled red/brown; one stuck-on endband survives; plain endpapers. There are areas on the cover leather that have a linen finish; this may be the imprint of pressing blotters or some other linen-weave material that came into contact with the cover under pressure and perhaps while damp.

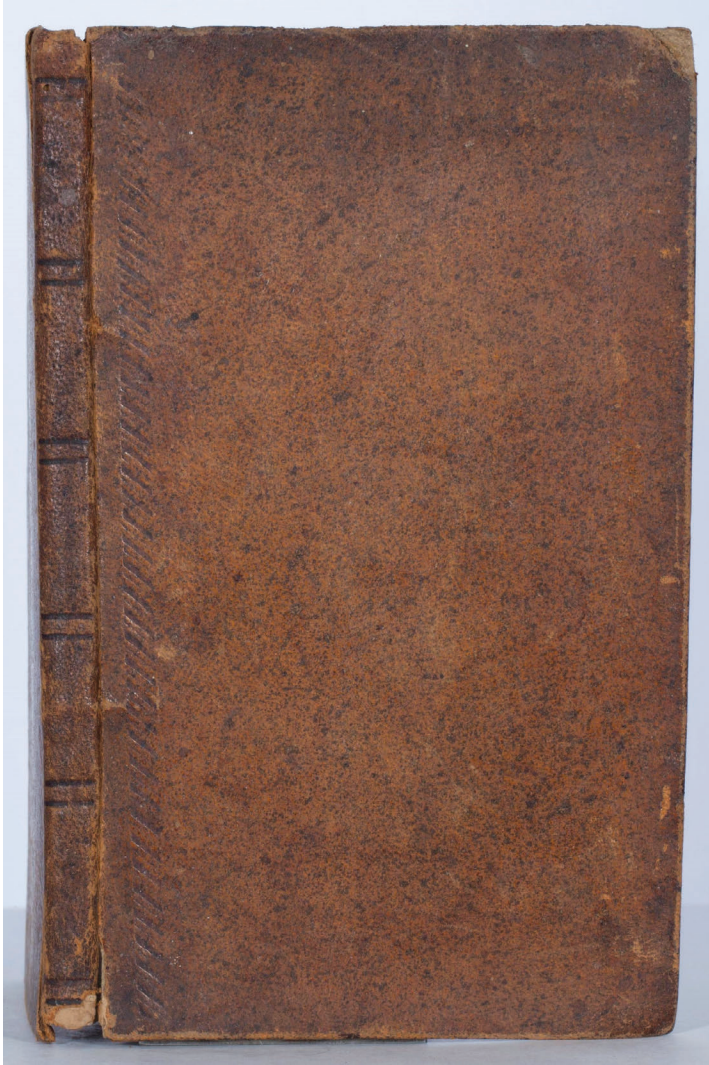


Fig. 1.16. Sprinkled sheepskin. Oxford, 1819. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

The Psalter, or Psalms of David. Oxford: Printed at the Clarendon Press by J. Cooke and S. Collingwood, Printers to the University. 1819. Fig. 1.16. University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

This medium brown sheepskin binding, densely sprinkled with small spots of stain, is a continued use of a common decorative style, similar in decoration to the bindings illustrated in Figs. 1.9 (1686), 1.11 (1774), and 1.13 (1790). The thin book is unlettered; its smooth spine tooled across with blind lines creating five compartments; a slanted-line decorative roll in blind down the spine edge only of both covers. The sprinkling was done after the book was covered. Useful price information is printed on the title page: “Price 7d. in Sheets.”

Sprinkled panel bindings, sometimes combined with solid staining of center panels

Panel bindings generally have two or three panels, achieved by concentric frames defined by borders tooled with single-, double-, or triple-line rolls, or decorative rolls, or a combination of line and decorative rolls. The tooling of panel bindings can be in blind or gold or a combination; plain blind panel bindings predominate in the eighteenth century, some with gold lines or lettering on the spine. Sprinkling or sprinkling combined with solid staining is typical on these bindings; the areas to remain blank were masked out with paper, the sprinkling or staining was done, and the book was tooled.^{31, 32, 33}

31. The blind panel bindings described here are almost all on London imprints, and the assumption, however conjectural, is that they were bound by London binders. These bindings are so common on eighteenth-century English imprints that they are considered standard by curators and collectors alike and as such, not very important as a type to study. Little attention is paid to them, although they can be beautifully if quietly bound and decorated, and they can have their own charming idiosyncrasies (like cat's-paw decoration). Language enters the fray here: if you speak of a "Cambridge panel," you get attention and interest; mention "blind panel binding" or "paneled calf" and the interest wanes. Most of the bindings discussed here qualify to be described as "Cambridge style" if they have a sprinkled outer frame and a sprinkled center panel. See Roberts and Etherington, *Bookbinding*, 45.

32. Foot mentions the use of pasteboard for masking before sprinkling in *Bookbinders at Work*, 87. During a recent telephone conversation with binder Tom Conroy, he mentioned masking with paper, and sent the following quotation taken from a 1990 reprint of George Cowrie's *The Bookbinder's Manual*, first printed in London by Cowrie and Strange in 1828. The quotation is found on p. 80 and is informative far beyond its mention of masking material: "Place the book between the wands, marble the boards with a tree on each centre, and put on each board an oval, made of a thin piece of paper, and bind it to the boards with pieces [weights] of lead. Black the cover on the outer parts of the ovals, and when thoroughly dry, go over the same with strong basil water: then throw on red spots, and when dry, take off the ovals; wash the portion of the cover where the red spots are with a piece of clean spong [*sic*] and water. If the inside of the ovals be coloured with the following liquid, it will have a very pleasing effect: ...Mix together spirits of wine and powdered turmeric, in the proportion of half an ounce of the former to half a table spoon-ful of the latter; put the liquid into a bottle, shake it well, and let it settle before using...Give the ovals two coats of the liquid, with a camel's hair-brush; and when done, cork the bottle up tight, to prevent evaporation."

33. There are blind and gold-tooled panel bindings that have no staining of panels; there are also examples that combine solid staining with unstained areas and have no sprinkled areas.



Fig. 1.17. Sprinkled panel binding with cat's paw decoration. London, 1703. Courtesy University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Robert Barclay. *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity...Quakers.... The Fifth Edition in English*. London: Printed and sold by T. Sowle, in White-Hart-Court in Gracious-Street. 1703. Fig. 1.17 and DVD image. University of Michigan Library (JMCHB, Special Collections Library).

Medium-brown calf, a mitered panel binding, the triple panels bordered with double-fillet lines and a broken-line roll; different sizes of gouges used to create a scalloped line inside the center panels, all in blind. The outer panels densely sprinkled with fine spots of stain, the middle panels decorated with "cat's paw" repeat-pattern staining, and the center panels blank.³⁴ The staining was done after covering but before board pastedowns were attached: the turn-ins are not sprinkled but are solidly stained and are much darker than the leather showing in the middle and center panel. Sewn on five raised cords, three laced in; there are tying-up marks around the raised bands, and a much later red lettering piece was added, tooled in gold. Worked endbands, and bookseller advertisements bound in.

34. Cat's paw patterns are relatively common on 18th-century English panel bindings; the paw mark was probably made with a bit of sponge, or a scrunched-up piece of cloth dipped in stain and applied to the cover; see also fns. 22, 28, and 31. The William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan has two fine and very different cat's paw panel bindings in the collection, C2 1704 Burchett, and C2 1719 Wood.