

Limp parchment bindings exist in European collections from Carolingian times. They have received little attention because they lack decoration states Szirmai.¹ Smidt on the other hand castigated his predecessors . . . “for regard (ing) the exposed sewing on the back as decoration and not recognizing its functional aspects.”²

In the 1369 inventory of the Avignon Pontifical Library 2 % of the books are described as “sine postibus” or parchment bound. In German Inventories, Erfurt University 8.8 % are limp bindings. The Amplonian collection donated to Erfurt a decade later 22% were limp bound. According to a catalog of 1461 the Dominican convent library in Nuremberg had 9 % limp bound books, but the nuns own books were 44 % limp bindings. Borso d’Este of Ferrar had a 1467 inventory with 8 % “sine tabutir” and Charles V and Charles VI of France had 9.4% “couverte de parchemin”.³

By the 16th century the frequency of limp bindings increased. The Amsterdam priest Jacob Buyk 1545 - 99 had 22 % of his library in limp bindings. The Ramey collection in France exceeded 50 %. With the exception of Christ, (who first described ten of the earliest Carolingian, undecorated limp bindings from Fulda and Basle, in German).⁴ Szirmai is the first to describe a classification of 120 limp bindings from the Low countries library books. He states that while the bindings remained in use beyond 1600, their later evolution is not considered.

I Limp Covers with Primary Tacketing

Tacketing is one of the most ancient methods of attaching leaves of a quire to covering material. See the Nag Hammadi Codex and Byzantine and Western tradition as temporary joining and 10 C Fulda limp bindings as Basle. A small single volume of a few quires, circulating or waiting to be bound in a larger volume. It has a white leather support at the head, parchment at the tail.⁵

The Zutphen manuscript accounts of the infirmary 1536 - 50 and the royal Household accounts of 1306, London are also bound in this manner.⁶

II Limp Covers with Primary Sewing

Here books from Carolingian times have a parchment or leather cover sewn with the book block. Link stitch sewing corresponds to the number of quires .

¹ J.A. Szirmai, the Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding, Ashgate, Brookfield, USA 1999, P 285.

² Szirmai p 285

³ Szirmai p 285

⁴ Szirmai p 286

⁵ Szirmai p 287

⁶ Szirmai p 289

2 a A thin manuscript of 6 quires with the lower cover extending to a rectangular flap with 3 ties of thin cord around buttons on the upper cover (now lost).⁷

2 b Soft white leather (goat or sheep), half are lined with linen or silk and have a pink leather edging with fine whip stitch. The cover overhangs the book block at head and tail. One is a goat skin envelope with a pink sheepskin edging, long enough to be a chemise. Another is a soft brown leather cover that is blind tooled. Most have front edge flaps that are triangular, secured with ties, cords, or button and loop fastenings.

They are sewn with link stitch, or long stitch with thick thread (1.1 mm) have a cloth lining, parchment back support and leather covers.

12th century parchment manuscripts are found in France, Germany and Italy.

III Primary Sewing Through Rigid Back Plates

Horn, wood, thick leather, with modest decoration are used to support the limp covers. Szirmai examined 140 bindings from 1375 - 1500 from Austria, Germany, Poland, Bohemia, Switzerland and Italy. They were literary manuscripts on paper and occasionally parchment. The covers were coarse parchment, (some lined with paper) or limp leather. The lower cover extends to rectangular front edge flap with 1 - 2 cords which tie to flat buttons of horn, leather or metal on the back.

56 % of the back plates were leather

37 % horn

7 % wood

The leather was sometimes decorated with punch outs.

Of 140 bindings 40 % were sewn with link stitch on multiple stations, with the chains visible on the back plates. Some chains were purely decorative.

IV Book block Attachment By Secondary Tacketing

While covers can be attached by primary tacketing, sewn quires can be attached to the covers with secondary tacketing. Szirmai examined 30 Netherlands 16th century paper books, 8 manuscripts and 22 printed books. They had plain parchment covers and 2 - 8 horizontal or vertical tackets.

In 14 the covers were flush with the book block. 10 extended slightly at head and tail. * have square front edge flaps, 3 with metal fastenings. Chamois leather ties were more common.

⁷ Szirmai p 291

These kind of books do not seem durable Szirmai remarks.⁸

V Ledger Bindings

Several kinds of ledger bindings are variants of Secondary Tacketing, with leather, blind and gold tooled covers. they were used from the early 15th through the 19th centuries.

VI Lacing in the Sewing Support

This is similar to the Gothic board structure on a parchment cover, where the slips may be glued or sewn to the cover.⁹

Summary

Limp Parchment Bindings endured the 1966 flood at the Florence biblioteca Nazionale, and has been proposed as a conservation binding. The flexible cover (reinforced with pasteboard from 1550) led to the leather covered Renaissance bindings, the prototype of the case binding.

They exemplify simplicity, sound construction and durability which makes them an ideal conservation book style.¹⁰

Bibliography

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Smith, Keith A, 1999, Non-Adhesive Binding - Books Without Paste or Glue, Keith Smith Books

⁸ Szirmai p 306

⁹ Szirmai p 311

¹⁰ Clarkson p 1