


4-1-2010

Books and Their Covers: Decorative Bindings, Beautiful Books

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Beck, Karen S., "Books and Their Covers: Decorative Bindings, Beautiful Books" (2010). *Rare Book Room Exhibition Programs*. Paper 1.
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BOOKS AND THEIR COVERS:
DECORATIVE BINDINGS,
BEAUTIFUL BOOKS

A GUIDE TO THE EXHIBIT

THE DANIEL R. COQUILLETTE
RARE BOOK ROOM

Spring 2010

Welcome to an exhibit of beautiful books. Unlike most of our exhibits, this one focuses not on the intellectual content of the books in our collection, but rather on what they look like. One often thinks of law books in utilitarian terms, but this exhibit proves they can be objects of delight and desire as well. Over the centuries their owners must have loved and appreciated them as works of art, just as we do today.



Here is a brief glossary of printing and bookbinding terms that you will encounter in this exhibit.

BOARDS – The stiff front and back covers of a book, usually wrapped in leather, vellum, or cloth.

CALF – Smooth, tanned leather commonly often used as binding material for law books. It is often treated with chemicals to produce a variety of decorative effects, such as **SPECKLED**, **SPOTTED**, **MOTTLED**, and **TREE CALF**; examples are on view and explained more fully elsewhere in the room. Calf is frequently embellished with **BLIND** or **GOLD TOOLING** (see below).

INCUNABULUM / INCUNABLE – A book printed before the year 1501, in the earliest days of the printing press. The term is Latin for “cradle,” referring here to the cradle, or infancy, of printing.

MARbled PAPER – Produced since the sixteenth century, marbled paper is used to decorate book covers and the insides of books as well. Colored dyes are floated on top of a liquid surface, then carefully combed or swirled into decorative patterns. A sheet of blank paper is then laid down on the liquid, where it absorbs the design.

TOOLING – Designs impressed into the leather or vellum binding of a book using a variety of small decorative tools. Bookbinders often decorated their covers with a combination of straight lines and floral or abstract designs. With **BLIND TOOLING**, the design is impressed with no additional color or material added. With **GOLD TOOLING**, the design is impressed with gold leaf.

VELLUM / PARCHMENT – A material used for binding a book, or as a writing surface. It is made from animal skin which has been soaked, depilated, stretched on a frame, and dried under tension. Unlike leather, it is usually not tanned or dyed, but is white or cream in color. **VELLUM** and **PARCHMENT** are generally used interchangeably, but vellum is sometimes considered to be of higher quality. Though resilient, vellum is sensitive to changes in humidity, and may contract or expand a great deal.

WRAPPERS – Interim book covers made of paper, often blue in color. Many printers initially bound their books in wrappers when offering them for sale, and the purchaser would later bind the book to his or her taste and budget.



This exhibit begins in the large dark wooden exhibit case to the right of the room's entrance. It continues clockwise around the room in the eight wall cabinets, and concludes in the small dark wooden exhibit case to the left of the door.

The exhibit was curated by Karen Beck, Curator of Rare Books / Collection Development Librarian. It will be on view through May 2010.

Large Wood Exhibit Case:

VELLUM

While most law books are bound in brown calf leather or humble cloth, a sizeable minority are bound in vellum, particularly early printed books published in France and the Netherlands. This case contains a sampling of our choicest vellum-bound works.

DECORATED VELLUM – BLIND TOOLING

CORPUS IURIS CIVILIS.
Geneva: 1602.

This very large edition of the famous Roman law text features elaborate blind tooling on the vellum-bound front and back covers, remnants of book clasps, and index tabs carefully

pasted onto the pages by a devoted early owner.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

INSTITUTIONES IMPERIALES.

Paris: 1507.

This magnificent French binding features ornate blind tooling on its front and back covers. The bookbinder used a combination of straight lines and numerous floral stamps to create a tour-de-force binding that survives in its original condition, over five hundred years after it was printed.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

DECORATED VELLUM – GOLD TOOLING

HUGO GROTIUS. DE JURE BELLI AC
PACIS LIBRI TRES.

Amsterdam: 1735.

This volume features a magnificent double lion crest on its front and back covers, plus additional decorative lines and ornaments on the covers and spine – all tooled in gold leaf.

Remnants of green silk ties are visible on both covers as well.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

VOCABULARIUS UTRISQUE JURIS.

Venice: 1606.

Gold tooled abstract ornaments and delicate sheaves of wheat decorate the spine of this elegant little volume.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

JAMES MACKINTOSH. THE LIFE OF SIR
THOMAS MORE.

London: 1844.

Elaborate gold designs cover the entire front and back covers of this beautiful book.



SIMPLE VELLUM BINDINGS

Though these two volumes lack the “wow” factor of the others in this case, it is clear there is beauty in simplicity as well. Without the tooling and gilding to distract us, we are able to appreciate the creamy color and smooth texture of the vellum. These simple and functional bindings have served their owners well for centuries.

ARNOLDUS CORVINUS. DIGESTORUM DE
VERBORUM SIGNIFICATIONE
COMMENTARIUS.
Amsterdam: 1668.
Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

ARNOLDUS VINNIUS. PARTITIONUM
IURIS CIVILIS LIBRI IV.
Rotterdam: 1664.
Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

LIMP VELLUM BINDINGS

Most of the books in this case are bound in the traditional way, with the vellum being stretched over stiff boards to form the book’s covers. But

these two examples are different. The vellum was stretched over a light, flexible material, so the covers have retained a flexible, or limp, feel.

LA VIEUX NATURA BREVIUM.
London: 1584.

This ancient volume has survived beautifully for over four centuries. The hand of the original bookbinder is evident in the leather cords that bound the covers to the spine, and the holes in the covers where leather were once affixed.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

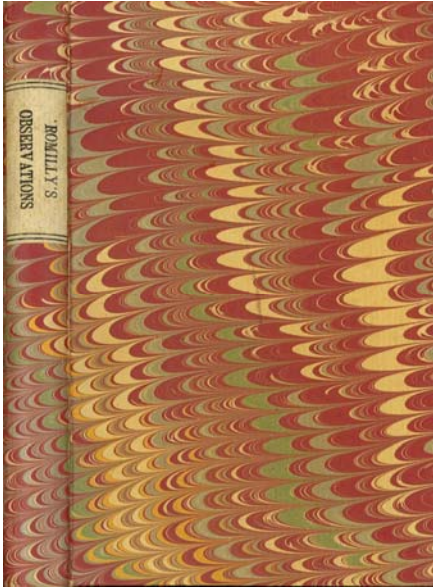
ST. THOMAS MORE. UTOPIA.
Hammersmith: 1893.

Published by William Morris’ famous Kelmscott Press, this beautifully crafted book still has most of its silken ties, which were used to hold the book closed.

***First and Second Wall Cabinets
(labeled Cabinets II and III):***

MARBLED PAPER

Probably no category of bound books receives more attention from our visitors than the books bound in marbled paper. It is easy to see why: books bound in these papers are striking, unique, and eye-catching. Marbled papers were a particular favorite of our beloved friend and benefactor, Kitty Preyer, and we think of her every time we pull one of these beautiful books off the shelves. In these two cases are several of the many examples in our collection.



WILLIAM WALLER HENING. NEW VIRGINIA JUSTICE. Richmond: 1799. *Gift of Kitty Preyer.*

FRANCIS BACON. ESSAYS: MORAL, ECONOMICAL, AND POLITICAL. Boston: 1807. *Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.*

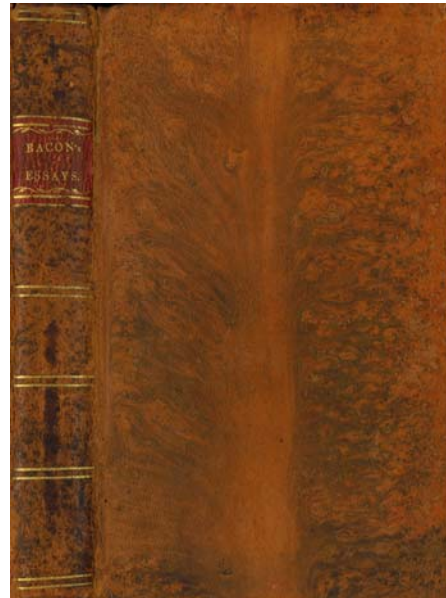
Third Wall Cabinet (labeled Cabinet IV):

LEATHER

Tanned leather (usually calf) has been a very common bookbinding material for centuries. In addition to plain brown leather, book artists treated the leather, usually with ferrous sulfate, to produce a variety of interesting effects. Several examples are on display in this case. Most of these design effects have descriptive and rather self-explanatory names, such as speckled calf, spotted calf, or mottled calf. Most unusual is tree calf, in which the calfskin was treated to create a tree or tree trunk pattern on the book's cover.

TREE CALF

FRANCIS BACON. ESSAYS: MORAL, ECONOMICAL, AND POLITICAL. London: 1807. *Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.*



MOTTLED CALF

HENRY WHEATON. HISTORY OF THE LAW OF NATIONS IN EUROPE AND AMERICA. New York: 1845. *Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.*

JAMES WILSON. WORKS. Philadelphia: 1804.

MOTTLED AND SPECKLED CALF

JOSHUA MONTEFIORE. A COMMERCIAL DICTIONARY. Philadelphia: 1804.

SPOTTED CALF

WILLIAM DUGDALE. ORIGINES
JURIDICIALES.
London: 1680.

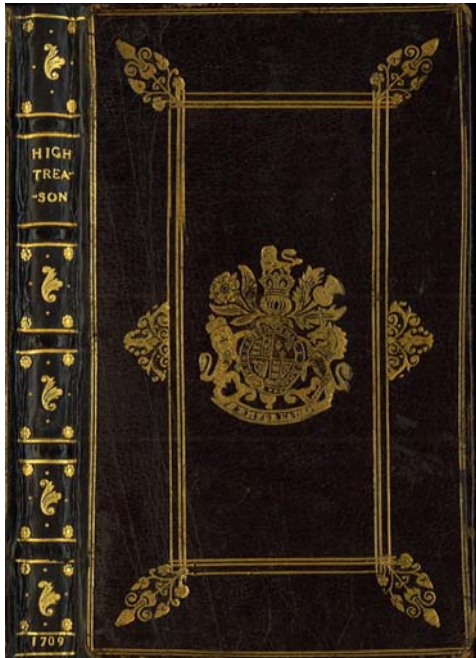
SPECKLED CALF

RECUEIL DES LOIS CONSTITUTIVES DES
COLONIES ANGLOISES.
Philadelphia: 1778.
Gift of Kitty Preyer.

Cabinet V:

DECORATED LEATHER

The bindings in this cabinet are especially lovely. They bring together many of the techniques and materials explored elsewhere in this exhibit, including treated or colored leather, blind or gold tooling, and ornamental clasps.



CHARLES GIRAUD. NOVUM
ENCHIRIDION JURIS ROMANI.
Paris: 1873.

Though created centuries later, this book's binding resembles the BRITTON volume. It features similar strong lines and simple graphical ornaments.
Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

A COLLECTION OF THE SEVERAL
STATUTES, AND PARTS OF STATUTES,
NOW IN FORCE, RELATING TO HIGH
TREASON.

London: 1709.

This beautiful little volume features ornate gold lines, floral ornaments, and crests. The gold stands out brilliantly against the black calfskin binding.

Gift of Frank Williams Oliver.

BRITTON.

London: 1530.

This elegant binding features strong geometric lines, restrained ornaments, and a working leather book clasp.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The three bindings on this shelf feature many artistic binding techniques, including lines, ornaments, blind and gold tooling, and leather treated to produce different colors and effects.

RICHARD ZOUCH. ELEMENTA
JURISPRUDENTIAE.

Amsterdam: 1652.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

FRANCIS BACON. LETTERS.

London: 1702.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

CATALOGUE OF THE BOOKS IN THE
LIBRARY OF THE COLLEGE OF
ADVOCATES IN DOCTORS' COMMONS.
London: 1818.
Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

Cabinet VI (across the room):

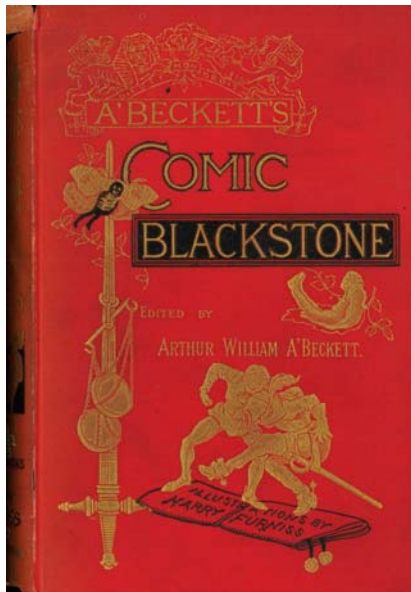
THE SPINE'S THE THING

Sometimes the most beautiful part of a book is its spine, as in the examples in this cabinet. Enjoy!

Cabinet VII:

CLOTH

In nineteenth-century England and America, book artists began to create books bound in highly decorated cloth. While we have many cloth-bound books, most are humble and utilitarian – typical law books. However, a few of them feature attractive designs, often blind or gold tooled, as seen on these two shelves.



Top Shelf:

THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE SEVERAL
STATES OF THE UNION AND UNITED
STATES.

New York: 1853.

This unglamorous volume deserves a second look. Its spine is elaborately decorated in gold, but don't stop there. If you look closer, you can see the cover is blind stamped with a detailed illustration of the Constitutional Convention.

ARTHUR WILLIAM A'BECKETT. THE
COMIC BLACKSTONE.

London: 1887.

SALTER S. CLARK. A TEXT-BOOK ON
COMMERCIAL LAW.

New York: 1892.

VALERIAN PAGET, ED. MORE'S
MILLENNIUM: BEING THE UTOPIA OF SIR
THOMAS MORE.

London: 1909.

Bottom Shelf:

PERCY A. BRIDGHAM. ONE THOUSAND
LEGAL QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE
"PEOPLE'S LAWYER" OF THE BOSTON
DAILY GLOBE.

Boston: 1891.

SAMUEL S. COX. THREE DECADES OF
FEDERAL LEGISLATION.

Providence: 1885.

Cabinet VIII:

BOARDS AND WRAPPERS

The books in this cabinet are notable for their lack of decoration. In fact, they are still bound in the same blue paper wrappers or rough, undecorated boards in which they were swaddled when they were hot off the presses. Most of the time, printers sold books in this condition, and their purchasers would have the books custom bound according to their taste and budget.

These books never got that far. Perhaps their owners lacked the means or the desire to bind them, or perhaps they sat on a printer's shelf for decades before being consigned to a bookseller. In any event, we are lucky they have survived to this day, because they give us insight into the printing and publishing practices of times past.

PRINTER'S WRAPPERS

WILLIAM NOY. A TREATISE OF THE PRINCIPALL GROUNDS AND MAXIMES OF THE LAWES OF THIS KINGDOME. London: 1641.

The printer bound this very old volume in thin blue paper. Such paper was cheap and easy to manufacture, making it a common choice for interim wrappers.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

PRINTER'S BOARDS

GEORGE M. STROUD. A SKETCH OF THE LAWS RELATING TO SLAVERY IN THE SEVERAL STATES. Philadelphia: 1827.

This humble volume is bound in simple brown boards, typical of

interim bindings used by booksellers. The bare spine is visible, revealing the book's binding structure.

HENRY DAGGE. CONSIDERATIONS ON CRIMINAL LAW.

London: 1772.

This volume is bound in interim printer's boards colored an unusual brilliant blue. Perhaps the owner was so taken with the color that he or she never felt the need to have the book bound.

Gift of Kitty Preyer.



HENRICI DE BRACTON. DE LEGIBUS ET CONSUEUDINIBUS ANGLIAE.

London: 1640.

This two-volume work is one of the most unusual in our entire collection. It is bound in rough printer's boards, and the spine is exposed, revealing the book's binding structure. But that is only the beginning. Evidently the person who bought this book directed the printer to bind blank sheets between every printed page. Although this doubled the size of the book, it provided ample space for notetaking, which the owner clearly valued.

Cabinet IX:

A CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

The book bindings in this cabinet defy categorization – and that is why we love them. All are unusual, and reveal the artistry and ingenuity of bookbinders and book owners from long ago.

SHADES OF THE OLD WEST

CONDUCTOR GENERALIS: OR, THE OFFICE, DUTY AND AUTHORITY OF JUSTICES OF THE PEACE.
New York: 1788.

At some point in its history, an owner reattached the front and back covers of this well-worn book using coarse thread in a whipstitch pattern. The book dealer who sold it to our friend Kitty Preyer colorfully described this humble yet functional home repair job as a “frontier binding.”
Gift of Kitty Preyer.



GILES JACOB. A LAW GRAMMAR.
Savoy: 1754.

We could not resist pointing out to Kitty Preyer that this book is a companion to the “frontier binding” described above. You can clearly see how the leather was attached to the front and back boards by looking at the pattern of knots and laces that crisscross the inside covers. With the structure so clearly visible, it reminded us of a tepee, and we all agreed that we had a “tepee binding” on our hands.
Gift of Kitty Preyer.

ETHIOPIAN BINDING

ILLUMINATED ETHIOPIAN MANUSCRIPT BIBLE.
ca. 1500.

This beautiful bible, handwritten in black and red ink on sheets of parchment, is an example of an Ethiopian binding structure. This type of binding structure has existed unchanged from at least the thirteenth century. These bindings are characterized by wooden boards covered in blind tooled goatskin, and thick parchment pages cut flush with the edges of the covers.
Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT LINING PAPER

CORPUS JURIS CIVILIS.
Paris: 1559.

The inside front and back covers of this magnificent large volume are lined with pieces of a discarded manuscript. Early musical notation and fragments of text are handwritten on these sheets, which also feature brilliantly colored large capital letters and ornamental drawings. Isn't it

amazing that something so rare and beautiful was once used as scrap paper?

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

Small Wooden Exhibit Case:

BIG BOOKS, LITTLE BOOKS

The exhibit closes with examples of some of the largest and smallest books in our collection – including two examples of the same work, Justinian’s INSTITUTES. With books as with other objects of desire, the best things often come in the very largest and the very smallest packages.

In the Center:

EMPEROR JUSTINIAN. CODICIS.
Nuremberg, 1475.

The large CODEX of Justinian was published in 1475, making it the earliest printed work in our collection (although we do have older manuscripts). Books printed before 1501 are called *incunabula*, because they are “from the cradle” of printing. This magnificent volume was rebound at some point in its history, but fragments of the original blind tooled leather binding were preserved, and can be seen on the front and back covers.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

EMPEROR JUSTINIAN. INSTITUTIONES.
Amsterdam, 1654.

Sitting atop the big book is a little vellum-bound volume of Justinian’s INSTITUTES. It was printed in 1654 by the house of Elzevir, a famous Dutch family of printers. The Elzevirs were

noted for producing beautiful small-sized books, although they printed larger books as well. Even today, book collectors go mad for Elzevirs, and avidly collect these little gems of the printer’s art. We have several in our collection; a few are scattered in this case.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

Left Side, Top to Bottom:

HUGO GROTIUS. DE MARI LIBERO ET P.
MERULA DE MARIBUS.

Leiden, 1633.

This volume, another Elzevir, is the smallest in our collection.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

JOHN DODDRIDGE. THE SEVERAL
OPINIONS OF SUNDRY LEARNED
ANTIQUARIES.

London: 1658.

This small book has been rebound in calf and marbled paper.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

Right Side, Left to Right:

MAGNA CARTA IN F : WHERUNTO IS
ADDED MORE STATUTES THAN EUER WAS
IMPRYNTE IN ANY ONE BOKE BEFORE
THIS TYME, WITH AN ALMANACKE AND A
CALENDER TO KNOW THE MOOTES:
NECESSARYE FOR ALL YONG STUDIERS OF
THE LAWE.

London: 1539.

This unusually shaped volume is one of our favorites. Its title is charmingly descriptive, and reveals the publisher’s pride in his work. The book ends with the colophon: “Here endeth Magna Carta with divers other Statutes. Imprynted at Lond in Flete-Strete by me Robert Redman dwellynge at the sygne of the George nexte to Saynt Dunstones Church.” Redman was

one of several well-known English printers who specialized in law books; others include Richard Tottel and Elizabeth Nutt.

With its distinctive long and narrow shape, this book was designed to be easily portable. A lawyer or judge could slip this book into his sleeve as he rode the circuit from court to court. This copy features neat lines of blind tooling, and an ornamental design on its spine.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

GEORGE RUGGLE. IGNORAMUS.

London: 1668.

This book is neatly and simply bound in brown calf with vertical bars of blind tooling.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

THOMAS SMITH. DE REPUBLICA

ANGLORUM LIBRI TRES.

Leiden, 1641.

This attractive little Elzevir is bound in vellum and features gold and blind tooling on its boards and spine.

Gift of Daniel R. Coquillette.

