

**Syracuse University**

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**From the Selected Works of Peter D Verheyen**

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2009

## The Bone Folder by Ernst Collin

Peter D Verheyen, *Syracuse University*



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

FROM ITS FOUNDING IN 1962, the *Guild of Book Workers Journal* has served as a source of information about the tools, techniques, and people of the book arts. Originally published three times a year and including news about Guild activities among its articles, the *Journal* gradually shifted its focus to emphasize technical, historical, and scholarly articles. In recent years it has brought the proceedings of the annual Standards of Excellence seminars to the entire membership, reaching a much broader audience than the seminars alone could accommodate.

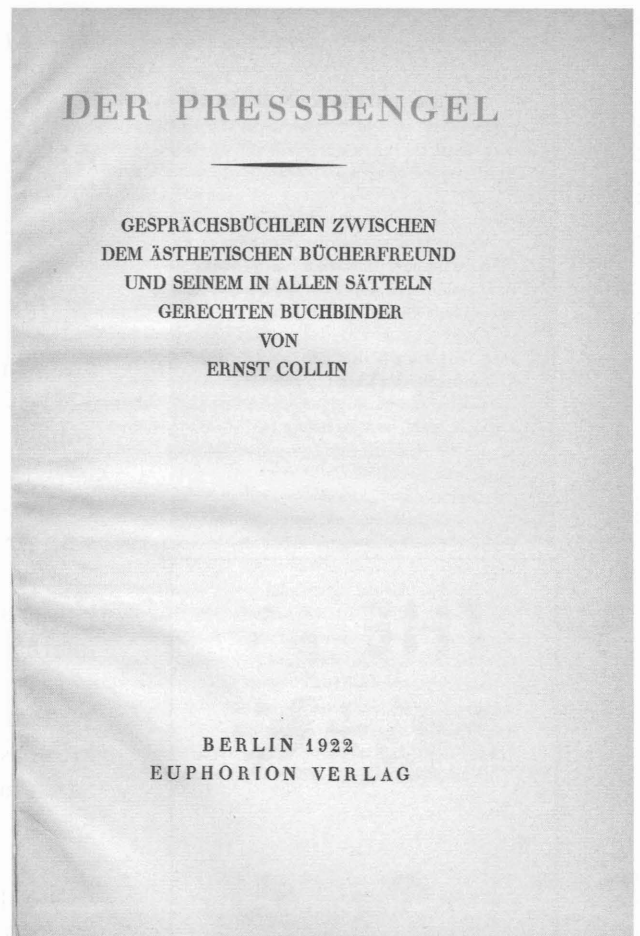
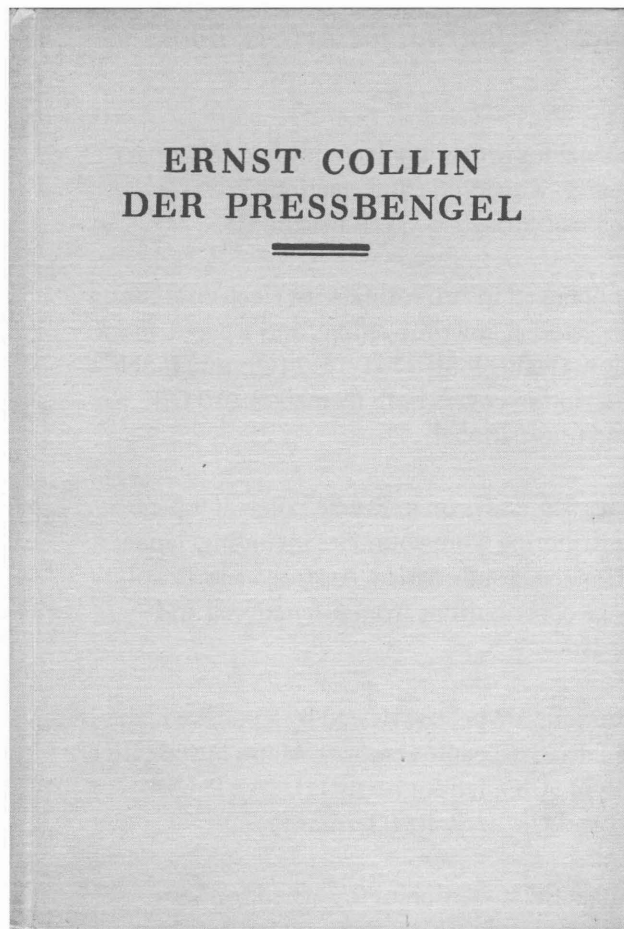
You now hold in your hands a redesigned, full-color, peer-reviewed *Journal* that has once again broadened its scope. The annual *GBWJ* will publish full-length articles and photo galleries addressing all aspects and periods of the book arts and crafts, itself serving as a standard of excellence for our members and other readers, whether we are archivists, binders, book artists, calligraphers, collectors, conservators, curators, designers, historians, librarians, papermakers, printers, restorers, toolmakers, or typographers, and whether we are professionals in our fields or casual amateurs exploring new interests.

When you turn this page, you will find yourself faced with riches: profiles of binders, both contemporary and historic; galleries of images; an introduction to the versatility of two related book forms; a tour of Spain; a guide to ergonomics in the conservation lab, where the authors urge us to treat not only books but ourselves with care; considerations for digitizing early manuscripts and the role of artists' books in museums; and a translation of a 1922 German text in which a fictional binder engages his collector-client in a series of discussions about binding. As you read this particular piece, consider the similarities between the challenges faced by conservators and translators: how visible should the practitioner's hand be? How does one retain the essence of the original while making a piece accessible to a new population of readers? What sort of documentation should be provided for posterity?

It has been my great honor to midwife the new *GBWJ* into existence, but real thanks and credit are owed to those who made it happen: Jim Reid-Cunningham for envisioning new possibilities and ensuring continuity; Paula Jull for her magnificent design; Chad Johnson for his collaboration on the design and his impeccable typography; the entire editorial committee, named on the masthead, whose members not only reviewed manuscripts for this issue but contributed in individual and significant ways to many aspects of content development and editorial policy. I would also like to personally thank my predecessors, Dorothy Africa and Signa (Judy) Houghteling, for their admirable devotion to the *Journal* and for setting the standard that I have been challenged to meet.







Cover and title page of *Der Pressbengel*.

# DER PRESSBENGEL THE BONE FOLDER

*A Dialogue Between an Aesthetically Inclined Bibliophile and a Well-Versed-in-All-Aspects-of-the-Craft Bookbinder, by Ernst Collin. Originally published as Der Pressbengel by the Euphorion Verlag, Berlin, 1922. Translation © 2010 by Peter D. Verheyen.*

ERNST COLLIN (1886-1954) WAS a writer whose father, the well known Berlin-based bookbinder Georg Collin (1851-1914), occasionally provided bookbinding lessons to the Prussian King and German Emperor Frederick III. The elder Collin was also very involved in training women to become full-fledged bookbinders.<sup>o</sup> Because of this paternal connection with the trade, Ernst maintained a strong affinity for bookbinding, demonstrated by his publications about and for the bookbinding trade. Among them are *Vom guten Geschmack und von der Kunstbuchbinderei* (1914), a treatise about aesthetics and fine binding included in a monograph about the Spammersche Buchbinderei, Leipzig; *Deutsche Einbandkunst* (1921), the catalog to the Jakob-Krause-Bund's exhibition; and the Bund's newsletter, *Die Heftlade* (1922-24). The Jakob-Krause-Bund, a precursor to Meister der Einbandkunst (MDE, the German association of masters of the art of binding), included some of the most influential German binders of the late 19th and early 20th century, among them Paul Adam, Otto Dorfner, Paul Kersten, and Franz Weiße. Collin also authored *Buchbinderei für den Hausbedarf* ([1915]) and *Paul Kersten* (1925), the latter a biography of one of the most seminal German fine bookbinders, whose *Der Exakte Bucheinband* (1923) helped define German fine binding. *Der Pressbengel* (1922), Collin's best-known work, was first republished in 1984 by the Mandragora Verlag and later translated into Italian as *Dal Religatore d'Arte* (1996). Conceived as a dialogue between a bibliophile and a master bookbinder on all aspects of the bookbinding craft as well as specific techniques, the original German has a charming if somewhat pedantically formal "school primer" tone, in keeping with the time in which it was written. The question-and-answer format has a long history in pedagogical texts, whether for catechisms (see Nicolaus Cusanus' *Christliche Zuchtschul*) or trades, as in Friedrich Friese's *Ceremoniel der Buchbinder* (1712), which introduces the reader to all aspects of the bookbinding trade and its traditions. First published in 1937, Oldrich Menhart's *Evening Conversations of the Booklover Rubricius and the Printer Tympanus* is the letterpress equivalent to Collin's *Pressbengel*, and there is considerable overlap between the two, as might be expected. *Evening Conversations* was later translated



**Peter D. Verheyen received his start in the book arts as a work-study student in the conservation lab at the Johns Hopkins University Library. Following a formal apprenticeship in hand bookbinding, he worked as a binder and conservator, and is currently head of preservation and conservation at Syracuse University Library. His teaching and publishing interests are focused on the German style of binding. His bindings have been exhibited widely throughout the USA and abroad. Peter is the founder of Book\_Arts-L, the Book Arts Web, and is publisher of The Bonefolder at [www.philobiblon.com](http://www.philobiblon.com).**

into German (1958) and then English (1980), the latter by the Crabgrass Press in an edition of 100 copies bound by Fritz Eberhardt.

Throughout the work, Collin himself is very frank in addressing the conflicts between quality and cost, as well as the positive and negative impacts of “machines.” In his introduction to the 1984 reprint of *Der Pressbengel*, Gustav Moessner, author of and contributor to several German bookbinding texts, states that he sees Collin’s work in part as a reaction to the growing industrialization of the bookbinding trade and the loss of the skills and techniques connected with this industrialization. In many respects this trajectory continues today, accelerated by the decrease in formal bookbinding apprenticeship opportunities, the increasing simplification of structures, changing aesthetics, and ultimately changes in the perceived value of books and the general economic climate. Until recently, Germany’s strong guild system required one to complete a formal apprenticeship and become a master binder to order to open one’s own shop and train apprentices. Unfortunately, this system has been in decline over the past decades, and many shops are closing or no longer training apprentices—a completed apprenticeship and “meister” are no longer required to open a business if no apprentices are being trained. Concurrently, a network of centers and alternative programs, such as “master-run” shops offering instruction to amateurs, is not developing in a way that would provide the high quality, rigid training critical to sustaining the craft over the long term. The apprenticeship system declined even earlier in the United Kingdom, another nation with a strong tradition of formal craft training. Elsewhere the trade system was not as formalized to begin with. The United States represents the most diverse environment for the trade, with a blending of the dominant English, French, and German traditions brought over by immigrants, but a formal career path, like that in the European tradition, never developed. Instead, less formal apprenticeships (on-the-job training) became the norm. This did not, however, hinder the development of some very fine American binders.

Samuel Ellenport’s *The Future of Hand-Bookbinding* (1993) provides an excellent if sobering overview of the changes experienced by the hand bookbinding trade in the United States, but leaves out the explosive growth among amateur binders and book artists. The

past thirty years have seen a resurgence of interest in all aspects of the book arts, with centers offering workshops springing up across the United States. Formal programs have been developed, including the North Bennet Street School in Boston (a two-year trade model), the American Academy of Bookbinding in Colorado (a series of workshops), and the

**Collin’s work is in part a reaction to the growing industrialization of the book-binding trade.**

University of Alabama’s MFA in the book arts (an academic degree). These programs are doing much to preserve many traditional skills, but the contemporary book arts craft risks losing others that may be deemed too anachronistic or, like gold tooling, simply unaffordable and therefore not regularly practiced.

This is the first publication of *Der Pressbengel* in English, and while I have attempted to remain faithful to the original text, it should not be considered a scholarly translation. It is intended, like the German original of 1922, to be a general introduction to the bookbinding craft and trade as it existed in Germany when the work appeared. While techniques are described in varying level of detail, it was never intended to be a technical manual. The title change from *Der Pressbengel*, an esoteric tool used to increase the leverage when tightening a German backing press (Klotzpresse), to *The Bone Folder*, an iconic tool that represents bookbinding as no other can, was undertaken both because “Pressbengel” has no “clean” English equivalent and to help make the text more accessible to today’s binders and bibliophiles.<sup>2</sup> In a very few other cases, references to brand names have been made more general where this had no impact on the essence of the text. The result, I hope, is in keeping with the spirit and essence of the original German.

**NOTES**

1. Information from the website of the Verein Berliner Buchbindermeister 1849 e.V. (Association of Master Bookbinders in Berlin). < <http://www.vbbm1849.de> >, Geschichte.

2. This change has also been made in the first paragraph of the Tuesday section of the dialogue and in the last line of the text.

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## DER PRESSBENGEL/THE BONE FOLDER

## MONDAY: A DISCUSSION ABOUT BOOKBINDING

BIBLIOPHILE (looking around the studio of the master bookbinder): Master, what is this wonderful tool that you have here? It looks intriguingly dangerous.

BOOKBINDER: That, my good sir, is a harmless but important tool. We call it a bone folder. I use it to fold paper, make signatures, rub down the linings on the spine, and work leather and any number of other materials that I encounter every day. With it I can take a collection of papers and craft them into a book. It is an extension of my hands and serves as a continual reminder of the value of good craft work, even if the aura of the trade is no longer what it once was.

BIBLIOPHILE: Quite right, Master. As a bibliophile, I know how to value a finely handbound book. I just can't find pleasure in reading an ugly, poorly bound book that falls apart as one is reading it. In contrast a well bound, indestructible book helps bring me to the time and place of the story and gives me the sensations I need when reading. If I were to ask you, Master, could you tell me about your work? Please don't think idle curiosity is my motive or even that I want to steal ideas from you.

I think I will be a better client if I understand your craft and can judge its complexity. My opinion is that a bibliophile who doesn't understand books is following a trivial pursuit. However, someone who isn't interested only in the content of the work but also understands how a book is made—beginning with papermaking and through to titling the finished binding—has embraced book collecting with his heart and soul. So, won't you introduce me to the secrets of your craft in a few short discussions?

BOOKBINDER: I would be willing to do that, but you can't expect me to teach you everything, as that would require an apprenticeship of three to four years, plus as many more years of work and experience in order to become a competent master bookbinder. A master binder doesn't appear out of nowhere. Why don't we do it this way: I'll tell you about some of the most important binding styles first, and tell you only enough about the structure so you can visualize it. We'll talk about the specific details that interest you when you bring me your books to bind.

BIBLIOPHILE: That sounds fair. So, Master, why

don't you start?

BOOKBINDER: All right, let's start with the paper case binding, whose covering is made of paper, either plain or decorated. We'll talk about it again later because it is the most beautiful of the simple bindings, and you will certainly have me make many of them for you.

Next is the quarter cloth binding, in which the spine and the corners of the book's cover are in colored book cloth. Book cloth is woven from cotton, and we can get it in many attractive textures and colors. The parts of the book not in cloth are covered with plain or decorated paper. These are simple bindings, and I want to emphasize that this style is not as much for the bibliophile as for heavily used items in public libraries.

And now we come to the first of the finer bindings, the quarter leather binding. What on the quarter cloth binding would be fabric is now covered in leather. It is a finer binding because leather is the most noble of covering materials. Also, the structure as a whole is much more involved.

BIBLIOPHILE: I understand completely. If leather is the most beautiful and best material, then the binder is obligated to adjust all aspects of the books to the demands of that noble material. Noblesse oblige!

BOOKBINDER: Exactly, and finally we have the best binding structure, the full leather binding. As the name suggests, the whole book is covered in leather. These are the main binding styles. We also have the quarter and full vellum bindings. You could cover books in silk or velvet as well, but that is not something that you as a bibliophile would want.

As you can imagine, the binding of a book is broken down into a sequence of many individual steps that build upon each other. When we are at the conclusion, you will recognize that from the moment a binder takes a text block in his hand until the title is stamped on the spine—how should I say this—all these things occur in a logical sequence. Ultimately, if you miss just one stitch while sewing, it will all come apart.

Particular attention must be paid when preparing to sew. I don't want to bore you with the details, but I will say that we must first disbind books that have

been sewn by machine. This includes breaking the book down to the individual signatures, removing the old thread (or, heaven forbid, those awful staples), and then scraping off the glue left on the outsides of the folds. Next, we need to put the signatures in a press in order to compact the text block. Before we do that, though, we may need to refold the signatures and collate them to make sure everything is there and where it should be. If there are plates, they will usually need to be trimmed to size and tipped back in or hinged in with a thin strip of paper or jaconette.

After the signatures have been in the press—like this one, which gets opened and closed using this iron bar—for a good long time, then we will make the endpapers. Endpapers are what we call the folios that come before and after the last signatures of the

**Disbinding includes removing the old thread (or, heaven forbid, those awful staples).**

text block, made of a white- or cream-colored paper that is matched in color and texture to the paper of the text block. There are many styles of endpapers, one of which I will describe for you. We'll start with a double folio of paper as tall as the text block and slightly wider. Applying paste in a very narrow bead to the back

of the fold, we attach a five-centimeter-wide strip of paper that will serve as a reinforcing strip. When the paste is dry, we fold the strip around the back of the signature, just as pharmacists once used to attach the labels to medicine bottles. We place the endpapers on both sides of the text block so the strip of paper faces to the outside and put the book in a finishing press in order to determine how to divide the spine for sewing.

We sew over twine that we call cord. The old bookbinders used to place these cords on the outside of the spine, so they were raised and visible under the leather. Today we rarely sew on raised cords. The cords are recessed so as not to be visible, and if in the case of a quarter or full leather binding we want raised cords, we will make false ones later out of strips of card.

BIBLIOPHILE: Master, if I may comment, aren't these false raised bands deceptive and a betrayal of good craft? They are certainly fake.

BOOKBINDER: We can debate the pros and cons of this argument for a long time. That said, in the end people just aren't willing to pay for the level of the



craft that I love. If you know this kind of simplification need not be at the expense of sound structure, then I see no reason why one should abstain from the attractive appearance of raised cords on principle just because they aren't real. However, if the client wants real raised cords and is willing to pay, I am more than happy to oblige. But let us move on.

First, I need to divide the spine into fields to determine where the cords go. Usually we sew on five cords, and the fake raised cords are placed directly on top of these. With smaller or simpler books we'll reduce the number of cords to three or four. In addition to the cords we also have the kettle stitches, which are set back slightly from the head and tail of the spine—that is what we call the top and bottom of the text block. The sewing thread connects the signatures at the kettle stitch with a link stitch that looks like the links of a chain. Next, we saw into the folds of the signatures so that we can recess the cords.

BIBLIOPHILE: What? Saw into the text block? You're cutting into paper with a saw? Isn't that barbaric? Paper isn't wood! You're not a carpenter! Master, my bibliophilic conscience can't abide that.

BOOKBINDER: Well, it's like this. I don't have a problem just lightly cutting into the spine of the book, especially if one doesn't deepen the cut with a rasp as some do. One can also avoid sawing into the spine if one untwists the cords and flattens them so that they don't show when the leather is on the spine. If you wish, I'd be happy to sew your book on frayed-out cords if we aren't sewing on real raised cords, but it will cost more.

BIBLIOPHILE: I will gladly pay if it keeps the saw away from my books.

BOOKBINDER: We sew the book on a sewing frame, a tool that is almost as old as bookbinding itself. Here, take a look at my sewing frame—the board upon which the signatures are laid during sewing. At the front are threaded wooden dowels that go through a cross bar, which is slit for the hooks that will hold the cords taut during sewing. Below that, in the board, are nails to which the cord is attached. Sewing is a very important step. You start with the last signature (the back endpaper) and insert the threaded needle through the fold at the kettle stitch, come out and over the first cord, then back into the signature, then out and over the next cord, until you get to the other kettle stitch. Then the next signature is placed on top

and we repeat the process, always remembering to connect the signatures. After we are done, we cut the cords so they extend several centimeters beyond the spine on both sides. Then we fray out the ends of the cords, fan them out, and adhere them to the waste sheet. Next, we tip the endpaper signature to the adjacent text signature with a thin bead of paste. Finally, we glue up the spine and round it with a hammer.

BIBLIOPHILE: Do we have to round the book? I feel that a half-round spine detracts from the overall appearance of the book. A square back just fits better with the right angles of the boards. I want only square backs on my books.

**We sew the book on a sewing frame, a tool that is almost as old as bookbinding itself.**

BOOKBINDER: Then you won't enjoy your book in the long term. I know from experience that with use a square-backed book will have a tendency to develop a concave

spine, causing the individual signatures to jut out. That looks very ugly. Can we compromise? I will only slightly round your book so the signatures don't jut out, but it also won't end up with a half-round spine. I can promise you that a lightly rounded spine will not look ugly.

BIBLIOPHILE: Agreed. I am glad we can combine the expertise of a professional with the ideals of a bibliophile in a sort of marriage of convenience.

BOOKBINDER: Next, we back the book, one of the most important steps in giving the text block structural integrity. I'll need to explain this step to you in more detail. First, we replace the book in the backing press, but this time between two boards, with the rounded spine extending beyond the edges by a few millimeters, a distance determined by the binding style and the thickness of the cover boards. Then we tighten the press very securely and begin to work the spine with a backing hammer, so that the signatures begin to fold towards the boards. We call this the shoulder, and the covering board will sit flush with the edge of it. Before hammering on the spine, we use paste to soften the glue we applied earlier, so the signatures will move more easily into their final shape. After backing, we paste up the spine again and smooth everything out before allowing the book to dry in the press overnight. The next day we take it out

to trim, add a colored or gilt edge, and cut the cover boards to size.

The text block is mostly finished now, and the next step will be to attach the covers and then cover it in nice paper or leather. Those steps I'll explain to you when you bring me your books, because the next steps are dependent on the desired binding style.

BIBLIOPHILE: Many, many thanks, Master. I want to continue as your attentive apprentice. Until tomorrow.

## TUESDAY: A DISCUSSION ABOUT DECORATED PAPERS AND LEATHER

BIBLIOPHILE: Good morning, Master! I dreamed about your bone folder all night. I saw it as a young apprentice sitting on a stack of books and laughing at me because I imagined myself already a real book-binder. I had actually hoped to bring by some of my books today, but thought it might be better if we first agreed on how you will decide on what techniques and materials you would use. How do you think we should proceed, Master?

BOOKBINDER: A recurring theme will be the decorated papers that we use to cover paper case bindings, as a covering and endpaper for quarter cloth and quarter leather bindings, and for endpapers in full cloth and full leather bindings. There are many papers that I'm sure you'll consider, even fall in love with. I can't tell you about all of them because decorated papers are appearing very quickly, and there are dozens of workshops that create them. There are even factories being established to produce them, and artists of both genders are creating fantastically colorful designs to wrap around books.

Our traditional decorated papers, primarily the marbled ones, have become unfashionable. As you are a friend of contemporary bookbinding, you will say rightfully so. However, I think you will still be interested if I tell you how marbled papers are made. To marble, one needs a rectangular tray made out of zinc. Into this we pour the size, a material that must have a slimy consistency. The best size is made from carrageen, or Irish moss, as it is also called. Carrageen is a pale yellow or grayish algae that comes from the coasts of Ireland. The marbling colors are sprinkled onto the size with a kind of straw broom, and must contain a bit of ox gall to help them spread on the size. One can also use a mixture of soap and spirits.

There are many different kinds of marbling

styles—to binders, marbling isn't a replication of marble but rather any number of fantastic colors and patterns. I will limit myself to describing the combed patterns. After sprinkling the colors onto the size, we first draw a stylus through the colors with a wavelike motion. Then we pull a comb made of cardboard or wood strips, into which needles are placed at regular intervals, through the size with the colors floating on top. Some combs even have two rows of needles, one of which slides and is moved back and forth as it is pulled through the colors. These motions produce the combed pattern. Next, we very carefully lay a sheet of paper on the size, and when it is lifted off, the pattern is no longer on the size but rather on the sheet. We marble book edges in a similar way, except that we clamp the book between boards that are flush with the book edge and carefully place that on the size. If we do so, the book edges and endpapers will have the same colors and pattern.

The contemporary marbled papers aren't as formal as the old patterns. Instead, we put the emphasis on a

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tasteful and creative combination of colors with more random patterns. In some cases, rather than placing the paper on the size, we moisten the paper and spray several colors on it, allowing them to flow into each other. We can also spray on the colors and then crumple the paper to create unusual veined patterns.

BIBLIOPHILE: I've seen those papers and always felt they resembled clouds in the sky. I can look at them for hours and imagine that the colors and patterns move and change.

BOOKBINDER: There are also sprinkled papers, where different colors are applied to paper that is hanging or at an angle. This way, the colors run down and bleed into each other.

Today, papers that are based on batik techniques are also very fashionable. I'm told that we learned this from the Javanese. When making batik papers, the pattern is applied in wax either by hand or machine. The wax masks off the areas that are not to receive color, thereby helping to create the design. The paper is then crumpled up before the color is applied, which causes the wax to crack and allows color to seep under

the wax. As a result of this process, the batik papers exhibit a fine veininess throughout that also causes the design to float into the background.

But everything old is new. One of our oldest decorated papers is the paste paper, created by applying a mixture of paste and color, generally ground pigments, onto the paper. Once the colors are on the paper, it is very easy to create patterns and other effects. One can use one's fingers to create ribbons by wiping away the color, pieces of cork to create round marks, or a piece of wood or the like to create circles and lines. New decorative techniques include using carved rollers or linoleum blocks, brushes, or other implements. There are no limits to what can be used. There are even Expressionist papers. Those are really wild (laughing ironically); perhaps because of that you will choose them to cover your paper case bindings.

BIBLIOPHILE (laughing): So, you've figured me out. Why don't you give me samples of all the papers we've discussed so I can select books to go with them at home. I find that these decorated papers express so much atmosphere and emotion that one can always find a book to wrap in them. I'll take my time with the samples at home because my passion for the book also includes the binding, and one of my favorite pastimes is thinking of the ways my favorite books can be bound. I won't be stingy, either, and as my budget allows I will give you books to bind in your beloved leather. First though, reveal the mysteries of leather to me.

BOOKBINDER: The naming of the different leathers is a mystery and, honestly, not always a pleasant one, because the leather tanneries have created a great deal of confusion in the naming of their skins. This is especially true if the name of particular leathers are used to indicate their geographic origin even if they no longer come from there. Ironically, many avoid using the name of the animal to identify the skin. What we know as saffian and morocco, the most useful of the skins, are nothing more than goatskins. Both come from Africa. Saffian takes its name from the town of Saffi in Morocco, and the name of the morocco skin also indicates its origin. Saffian is very finely grained leather, whereas morocco is very coarsely grained. Another beautiful coarse-grained goatskin is cape-saffian. However, these three skins aren't tanned in Africa but rather shipped as preserved raw skins to Europe for tanning. In the past, beautiful morocco leather could only be created in England or France,

but a number of years ago we Germans also developed that ability. The French have even had us make some of their morocco, and perhaps we bought it back as genuine French leather. A more basic leather for binding is an East Indian saffian. What is known as "bastard leather" is not recommended for binding, and is the skin of cross-bred East-Indian goats and sheep, often with an embossed grain. I also urge you to avoid sheepskin, especially the thin, split skins. A binding in those is even less durable than one out of paper.

BIBLIOPHILE: You just spoke of confusion in the naming of leathers. I have an example, too. Recently, a bookseller showed me a book bound in chagrin leather. The poor man had no idea that chagrin referred to

the graining and had nothing to do with the species.

**Decorated  
papers express  
so much  
atmosphere  
and emotion  
that one can  
always find a  
book to wrap in  
them.**

BOOKBINDER: Yes, those leather names are a real mess. An écrasé leather isn't just any crush-grained and polished leather, but crush-grained morocco leather. Much better is what they do in England and France—rather than pressing and polishing whole skins by machine, they burnish the skins with a polished steel iron

on the finished book. Another very beautiful leather is pigskin, identifiable by the fine holes from where the hair was. The creamy color develops a patina over time that gives the binding an antique appearance, especially when it has been blind tooled. I'll tell you more about that later. We also use a lot of white alum-tawed pigskin.

Calfskin is naturally smooth and is also often used on bindings even if it is very delicate. Cowhide is very tough and therefore used mostly for very large volumes that get heavy use. Then there are various rough or suedelike skins made from calf, cow, or sheep. The very expensive and coarse-grained sealskin has not proven itself to be durable. If one wants, there are also the skins of lizards, frogs, monkeys, snakes, fish, and other animals that can be used on bindings. And you have also heard that human skins have been used on books.

BIBLIOPHILE: What does tanned human skin look like?

BOOKBINDER: It is similar to tanned pigskin, with



a grayish tone. As far as vellum is concerned, today we generally use the skins of sheep or calf rather than pig. Just as sheep leather is weaker than calf leather, so too are their vellums. Vellums are also much more expensive.

BIBLIOPHILE: What kind of skin does one use to get those beautiful yellowish, mottled vellums that have that antique look?

BOOKBINDER: It could be sheep or calf vellum. As you know, vellum is made from untanned skins that are dehaired and scraped clean while stretched on a frame. During this part of the process, the natural colorings of the skin remain. To get white vellum, the skin is further scraped with pumice and then chalk powder is rubbed in. Leather and vellum are prized not just for their durability, but also because on them the gold-tooled décor really shines. We'll need to talk about that another time.

BIBLIOPHILE: Let's leave it there for today! Tomorrow I shall bring you some books to bind.

## WEDNESDAY: A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE PAPER CASE BINDING

BIBLIOPHILE (carrying books in both arms): Master, here are some of my books. I'm especially attached to the one with poems by one of our best. It is an unusual, tempestuous tome that at the same time is filled with melancholy. Using the decorated paper samples you gave me, I selected one that has wonderful colors playing in the background while the main pattern is strangely exciting.

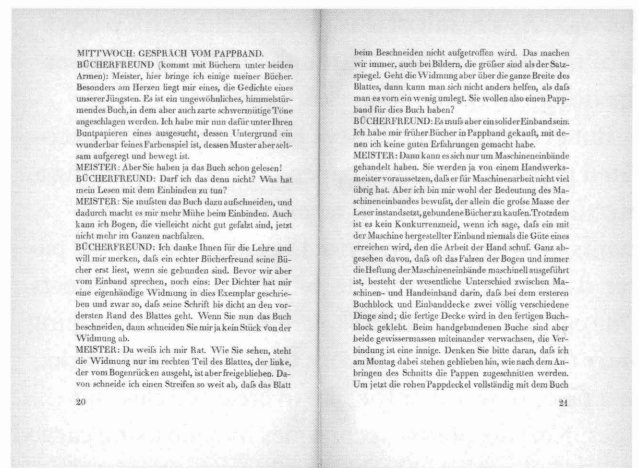
BOOKBINDER: But you read the book already!

BIBLIOPHILE: What? I'm not supposed to read it? What does my reading the book have to do with binding it?

BOOKBINDER: Since the book was originally untrimmed, you had to cut the folds in order to be able to read it. That makes it harder to bind the book, because I can't refold the signatures properly if they are misaligned.

BIBLIOPHILE: Thank you for explaining that, and from now on I will remember that a true bibliophile only reads his books after they are bound. Before we talk about the binding, I just want to mention that the poet wrote a dedication to me in the book and went to the edge of the page. If you need to trim the book, please don't cut into the dedication.

BOOKBINDER: We have a trick for that. As you can



see, the dedication is only on the right side of the page. The left margin still has plenty of room. What I will do is trim a hair off the left margin and reattach the leaf. As that page will now be slightly shorter on the right margin, it will not be cut when we trim the signature. We do this often, even with plates that are larger than the printed area. On the other hand, if the dedication went across the whole page, our options would be more limited—perhaps we would fold that page as if it were a plate. So, you'd like a paper case binding for this one?

BIBLIOPHILE: Yes, but the binding needs to be sound. I have bought bindings in paper-covered cases in the past that left me disappointed.

BOOKBINDER: Those were in all likelihood books that were bound by machine. It won't surprise you that as a Master in hand bookbinding, I don't have a high opinion of the machine-made bindings. That said, I also know those machines make books available to the mass of readers. It's not sour grapes if I say that a machine-made book will never achieve the quality of a good handbound one. Aside from the fact that the books are folded and sewn by machines, the more significant difference is in how the covers are created and attached to the text block. With a handbound book the cover is crafted on the text block whereas in a machine-made book they are made separately and only joined at the end.

Remember how on Monday when you first dropped in, I stopped working as I was about to cut the boards to size? Well, in order to attach the boards and provide reinforcement at the hinges, we use a technique known as the Bradel binding [*gebrochener Rücken*]. First, we take a strip of thin card the height of the boards and a few centimeters wider on either side of

the spine to serve as tabs. To create the tabs, we measure the spine and then transfer that measurement to the center of the strip. Next, we make those two folds and check to see that the strip fits closely to the spine. Then we lightly pare the two long edges of the tabs so they will be less visible under the endsheet when the book is complete. When that is done, we glue out the tabs, fit the piece tightly to the spine, and rub it down onto the waste sheet on which we fanned the frayed-out cords earlier. Then it goes in the press for a quick nip to make sure everything is stuck down well. Only at this point do we attach the boards to the book. We do so by gluing them to the tabs, but set back from the shoulder so the book will open up easily. In this way we create a strong connection between the text block and the cover, and finally we cover it with the paper.

BIBLIOPHILE: I'm looking at this paper case binding and can't help but notice these narrow white vellum strips—see, I'm paying attention. I really like them and imagine they add more interest to some of the more monotone bindings.

BOOKBINDER: We call those “vellum headcaps.” The headcap helps reinforce the otherwise paper-covered book at its most vulnerable spot. We can also add invisible vellum tips on the corners.

BIBLIOPHILE: I will let you know when I want vellum headcaps on my books. Vellum tips I want in any case, but I'll tell you whether they should be visible or invisible. So, now let's talk about what we want to do with the edges of the text block.

BOOKBINDER: They should of course match the dominant color of the decorated paper.

BIBLIOPHILE: I'll agree this time, but it is my opinion that one should not try to match colors too slavishly. You can also create contrasts to capture the mood of the text. I have a friend with a paper case binding covered in a paper with reddish and yellowish tones. The edges, endpapers, and label are black. It's a tome by Strindberg, and the binding was supposed to capture the melancholy nature of the poet. He also has an old edition of Schiller that he had bound in dark blue, with the edges and label in a shade of yellow. The endpaper is grayish and matches the text. Now, I'm also of the opinion that the edge and endpaper colors should be the same. That way they look like a harmonious second wrapper around the book. But one should also be flexible, and I would like to have simple endpapers that match the text paper

because these are simple bindings. Do you have any plain papers?

BOOKBINDER: Certainly. I always keep several varieties in stock. They come in cream and whitish colors with a variety of textures, from smooth to textured, to match the book regardless of whether the book uses machine-made or handmade paper. These varieties meet almost all needs. If by chance I can't match a paper with them, I'll tone the paper myself—coffee works really well.

BIBLIOPHILE: Master, I see that you have many tricks up your sleeve and I can entrust my books to you. Another thing, please don't put the label too far from the head. I think if the label is too low it divides the spine into odd panels and detracts from the elegance of the spine. On thicker books, a higher label can have a slimming effect. Oh, and please don't use too large a typeface; preferably match the face to the type used for the text—Gothic with Gothic and Roman with Roman. And finally, add my initials at the tail of the spine!

#### THURSDAY: A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE QUARTER LEATHER BINDING

BIBLIOPHILE: Master, today I'd like you to bind this copy of *Bachmann*. As it's a reference book, I don't think the paper case binding will be durable enough. But since cloth bindings don't appeal to me and the full leather binding is too expensive, I was thinking of a quarter leather binding, the one you call the *Halbfanzband*. Who or what is this “half of a franz”?

BOOKBINDER: The same reasoning that led you to look for an alternative to full leather is what led King Francis I of France to commission bindings in which only the spine was covered in leather. Other people believe that the name refers to the binding style originally being French.

BIBLIOPHILE: In this style, the connection between the cover and the text block is more structural, isn't it?

BOOKBINDER: Yes, you're right in thinking that it is worked differently. The cords that we had cut back to a few centimeters are frayed, fanned out, and pasted down on top of the board. Then a strip of wastepaper is put down on top of that, and the whole book is put in the press between tins and wooden boards. Next, the spine of the book receives two layers of strong paper, and the book is placed back in the press overnight to dry.

BIBLIOPHILE: May I ask a question? While that double layer of paper on the spine may make the spine stronger, doesn't it also make it more rigid, so the book doesn't open as well? I've often noticed that handbound books don't open well, something I can't have happen with my books.

BOOKBINDER: It is a very common superstition that when opened a book must lie flat and stay open. If that is what you insist upon, I cannot guarantee the durability of your book, because the sewing and other elements would need to be so loose that the book wouldn't stay together. The only books that really open flat are very large ones with heavy paper, like springback ledger books. You're a bibliophile and love your books as if they were your children, don't you? You would want the best for your children, why not for your books? Don't you agree that it is better to have a nice tight binding in your hands even if you might have to hold it open a little? And just as you wouldn't use force against your children, you wouldn't want to force your book open by breaking the spine, would you?

BIBLIOPHILE: Master, your logic is impeccable and I will keep what you said in mind. Let me ask you another question. A librarian acquaintance of mine once said that the French do a much better job with their quarter leather bindings than the Germans.

BOOKBINDER: That is absurd. What is most likely behind that statement is the difference between the French and the German styles in how the boards are attached. Remember how I described pasting the frayed-out cords on the board to attach it? What the French do is lace the cords through the boards to secure them. Here, let's see what Paul Kerstens wrote in his *Exaktem Bucheinband*: "It is commonly believed that a book in which the boards are attached in the French manner is more durable than one in which the German method is used. This is false. The boards are attached to the text block via the cords, and in all cases the failure was at the hinge and after many years of use, not because the boards were not laced on..."<sup>1</sup>

BIBLIOPHILE: Again, I can't argue with knowledge and experience of a true craftsman like you.

BOOKBINDER: Let's move along, shall we. Next, we cut the spine piece that goes between the text block and the leather from a piece of card. Onto this we glue our false raised bands, should those be desired.

Then comes the very important yet messy task of paring the leather along the turn-ins so they conform to the shape of the boards and don't have ugly lumps. After that comes the even harder task of covering the book in the leather, a process I must describe in more detail, especially as it relates to the raised cords. For those it is necessary to use what we call band nippers to ensure that the leather sits tight to the raised cords and is even. Then there is also the headcap, which is created by the turn-in of the leather at the head and tail. A well formed headcap is the mark of a true bookbinder. Finally, we put on the leather corners that we pared along with the other leather.

BIBLIOPHILE: Please don't put leather corners on any of my books. I know they are traditional with this binding style, but I think they destroy the aesthetic of the book because the elegant rectangular panel of decorated paper becomes one with six awkward sides. Not having the corners allows the decorated paper to be shown to its full effect.

BOOKBINDER: As you wish. However, to protect the corners I will then use the invisible vellum corners we discussed earlier with the paper case binding. What kind of paper do you want for the endpapers and sides?

BIBLIOPHILE: Because this a reference book, why don't we use the same sturdy handmade paper for the endpapers and the sides? I'm sure you can choose something appropriate that is either darker or lighter than the leather. How about a nice brown goatskin? Please use the same color for the edges as well. Oh, before I forget—the margins of this book are very tight, so please don't trim too tightly, as that will look unattractive. However, untrimmed it won't look that attractive either. Help me out of this dilemma.

BOOKBINDER: That's easy. I'll give your book rough-cut edges, also known as *tranche ébarbée*.<sup>2</sup>

BIBLIOPHILE: Yes, those. I'm surprised I didn't remember them.

BOOKBINDER: When we rough cut the edges we don't do it all at once in a guillotine, but rather trim each signature individually in the boardshear—just enough to even up the edges. This creates an even edge, but not a smooth one. Of course, one can't put a

**You would want  
the best for  
your children,  
why not for  
your books?**

colored or gilt edge on if the signatures are trimmed this way. A French bookbinder once said that the secret to rough cutting the edges of a book lies in evening them without compromising the proportions. Rough cutting is extra work, though, because before the signatures can be trimmed on the board shear they must be slit open to determine where the best place is to trim without cutting off too much.

BIBLIOPHILE: I think I will want this *tranche ébar-bée* for most of my valuable bindings.

BOOKBINDER: I would like to suggest that on books where there is more margin along the top edge you have it colored or gilt. Even with simple bindings that are only trimmed on all three sides, we often decorate the top edge because doing so helps protect the text block from getting dirty from dust.

BIBLIOPHILE: What else do we need to discuss? Yes, I just wanted to say that for this quarter leather binding I don't want any fancy tooling. The gold on the title is enough.

BOOKBINDER: Perhaps some gold lines to either side of the raised cords?

BIBLIOPHILE: I'd rather not. I really like the raised cords as they are and don't think it's necessary to emphasize them further. When I have you bind some larger books this way I may have you add lines at the head and tail of the spine.

BOOKBINDER: Would you like to have a gold line on the cover leather where the paper overlaps it?

BIBLIOPHILE: That would need to be decided on a case-by-case basis. If there is a nice contrast between the leather and the paper then I don't think it's necessary. Otherwise, I'm not opposed to it.

BOOKBINDER: How should I do it with other books I bind for you in the future? Do you always want to use the same papers for the covering or the sides?

BIBLIOPHILE: I thought about that a great deal at home, and I don't think I want all my books to look the same. I like to see variety in my bindings as long as the differences aren't too dramatic. For instance, I like the combination of a nice monochrome endpaper with a colorful paper on the sides. So, I think we're in agreement on what I would like for my quarter leather bindings.

Here are a few more copies of *Eckermanns Gespräche* that I would like to have bound in quarter vellum (without visible vellum corners, of course). For the sides, please use a nice green book cloth. I

can imagine they would look very good together. By the way, I will ask you to bind a different edition of the book in an identical binding at a later date. Will I need to bring this set with me then?

BOOKBINDER: No, that won't be necessary, as I make a template for every better-quality binding I make, on which I note the size, materials, colors, including samples of the materials. This makes it very easy to duplicate a binding.

BIBLIOPHILE: That is very sensible. Good-bye and until tomorrow! (As the bibliophile is on his way out, the Master begins to work, causing the former to quickly turn around and ask:) What in heaven's name are you doing there, Master? You're working on the edge of a book with a tool that looks like something a cabinetmaker would use! Doesn't that damage the book?

BOOKBINDER: On the contrary, it is supposed to help the edge. I have the book clamped very tightly in the lying press and am working the edge with this scraper to get it perfectly smooth so I can put on a beautiful gilt edge. I'm actually removing almost nothing from the edge of the book.

BIBLIOPHILE: Is a gilt edge difficult to do?

**An art in itself  
is the handling  
of the gold leaf.** BOOKBINDER: And how!  
The edge must be prepared  
extremely carefully, scraped,  
and finally pastewashed so a  
mirror-like surface is achieved.

This is especially difficult with the concave surface of the fore edge. An art in itself is the handling of the gold leaf. This gold is extremely thin, and each leaf is kept in a booklet between two sheets of tissue. The gold must be lifted carefully from the booklet and then placed on a chalked leather cushion—the chalk degreases the leather so the gold can be removed easily. It is cut with a gilding knife and tiled on the book's edge, which has already received egg glair with a special device. Then the press is tilted to allow the excess glair to flow out from under the gold. Watch out! I'm about to show you how it's done. See, the glair is dripping and the gold is staying in one piece. Now the book needs to remain in the press for several hours, but not so long that the glair is too dry. Next, we begin burnishing the edge. First, we lay on a lightly waxed piece of white paper and begin moving across it carefully with this agate burnisher. Then we remove the paper and continue with the burnisher directly on



the gilt edge to burnish it to an even shine.

BIBLIOPHILE: Is it essential that the edge is polished to a shine?

BOOKBINDER: Not necessarily. If we keep burnishing with the paper over the gilt edge we will create a matte finish to our edge.

BIBLIOPHILE: I think I will prefer the matte edge on my books so I can tell myself that even dull things can be of gold.

### FRIDAY: A DISCUSSION ABOUT THE FULL LEATHER BINDING

BIBLIOPHILE: Master, I am happy! Look what I have here! It's a first edition of Heine's *Book of Songs*. I found it in a bookseller's stall. Do you have any idea how much I paid for it? Two marks and fifty! The seller had no idea what the book was worth. I have to admit that finding the book is as much fun as getting it for such a laughable price. I guess that's how we bibliophiles are. So, as a reward, I will treat myself to a full leather binding [*Franzband*]. But everything needs to stay as it is, with absolutely no trimming, not even rough cutting. I'd also like you to preserve the paper wrappers by binding them in with the book, even the paper spine.

BOOKBINDER: Of course! Here binding in the wrappers is appropriate, especially given the scarcity of the volume, but we also do so in those cases where the wrappers have aesthetic value. However, I think it is excessive to do this with all books, the way the French bibliophiles like to.

BIBLIOPHILE: You're absolutely right! And because it such a valuable book, I want to have it sewn on real raised cords. I'd also like to have sewn endbands like on all fine bindings, not those garish stuck-on ones.

BOOKBINDER: You mean a handsewn endband? Only a small number of bookbinders know the history of those. I imagine it started like this: the old binders sewed the book and at the ends added cords like those they were sewing around. When they wrapped the sewing thread around them to get to the next signature, the handsewn endband got its start.

BIBLIOPHILE: I remember seeing that on more recent bindings, too. In one exhibition I saw bindings like that by Cobden-Sanderson, the well known English book art reformer who came to bookbinding after being a lawyer. He wrote a wonderful ode to the "Book Beautiful." How do we create endbands today?

BOOKBINDER: There are many styles, but I will briefly describe the most common ones. We start with a strip of card or vellum that is as wide as the boards are thick. Around this we wrap a piece of thin fabric, and we glue this to the spine of the book. Next, we wrap around the strip with different colors of silk thread. One color could be that of the leather and the other that of the edge decoration. The sewing itself is more like a wrapping, and requires a great deal of attention to detail to work the two needles so the threads all lie next to each other tightly, without getting twisted, and to ensure that the bead on the front is even.

BIBLIOPHILE: I think handsewn endbands are very attractive. Is this going to be an expensive book?

BOOKBINDER: Well, you do know that the price of leather has risen a great deal. There is also quite a lot of work involved with doing a full leather binding, especially with all the paring at the edges and along the joints, where we need

**Handmade  
paper is a  
noble material  
in its own right.**

to be careful not to make it too thin. When we paste out the leather it gets very soft and is easily damaged, so we need to work carefully and not damage the grain as we put down the leather and complete the turn-ins, making sure the board edges and headcaps are all even and neat. What kinds of endpapers would you like for your volume of Heine? They could be decorated or plain paper. Another option common with full leather bindings such as this would be using silk.

BIBLIOPHILE: No silk, please! For this binding please use a handmade paper in the same yellowed color as the text. Why can't the endpapers of a full leather binding be plain once in a while? Besides, handmade paper is a noble material in its own right. Please also give the endpapers more pages, like those I have seen with other leather volumes.

BOOKBINDER: You mean the English endpaper that is made of two folios stuck inside each other? How should I decorate the binding?

BIBLIOPHILE: Can we talk about it tomorrow? For today I'd also like to ask you to bind this copy of the *Divine Comedy* in full calf vellum. One should always use vellum with an Italian book. Let's leave the vellum untooled, as it is so beautiful, and place a label on the spine in a condensed Roman font.

BOOKBINDER: If I may make a suggestion, I'd like

to give this vellum binding a yapp edge on the fore edge, something that was common on many of the older vellum bindings. This makes the edge wider when seen from the front and helps protect the book's fore edge. If you'd like, I could also sew the book on vellum slips and lace them through at the joint so they are visible.

BIBLIOPHILE: This is going to be a beautiful binding! I can't wait to get it back. When will that be?

BOOKBINDER: Perhaps in four weeks.

BIBLIOPHILE: What, it takes that long to bind a book?

BOOKBINDER: Certainly not, but a binding is not just worked on. It also needs to rest. I mentioned at various times that the book needs to go in a press after certain steps. This is because the boards need to dry out under weight for periods of time, and then, when the book is done, it needs to be kept under light weight to make sure the boards don't warp. If I have to make you wait, it is so the covers of your books lie flat, which as it should be.

BIBLIOPHILE: I don't mean to rush you, I'm just very eager to hold the finished books in my hands. Unwrapping a new binding is like unveiling a new monument.

## SATURDAY: A DISCUSSION ABOUT GOLD TOOLING AND FINISHING

BIBLIOPHILE: Today I'd first like to ask whether I should have an artist work on the design of my binding. However, dear Master, please don't think I'm asking this question because I don't trust you to do a good job. Although you are a master craftsman, shouldn't the binder be responsible for crafting the book and an artist for designing the book's décor?

BOOKBINDER: I'm not the least bit insulted and have worked with artists on many occasions. But you will need to concede that because of the skills required to execute our most challenging form of decoration, gold tooling by hand, a binder's designs are not necessarily inferior even if he has not collaborated with an artist. Here, take a look at the tools I use.

First, the brass roll, into which up to four lines can be engraved: fine ones, heavier ones, or even a combination of those. There are also chains of small circles, dots, and other ornaments that have been engraved onto rolls. Then we have my set of gouges—thirty sections of a circle, each with a larger radius, from two

millimeters to twenty centimeters. In this cabinet I have all my decorative handle tools. In the one next to it are my pallets in increasing lengths, some even with dots, dashes, or other decorations like on the rolls.

BIBLIOPHILE: I see how by using all these tools you can create an infinite number of designs. Without taking away from the skill and sense of design required, it's almost like a game of chess in that there are nearly limitless combinations that can be used to move the pieces. However, one ought to be able to recognize the enormous amount of work required and differentiate between it and tooling created by machines—the two are often indistinguishable. So, please leave some almost imperceptible imperfections, such as where two lines meet at angles, to accentuate the “hand” in your finishing, something most bibliophiles like to see.

BOOKBINDER: Well, even then it might not be possible to avoid using a blocking press to form some larger, more complex designs, for example a coat of arms or some specialized text elements.

**A binding is  
not just worked  
on. It also  
needs to rest.**

BIBLIOPHILE: No, Master, under no circumstances. In a work whose distinguishing character is determined by the work of the hands, there is no place for machines. If binders

are so quick to switch back and forth between handwork and that of machines, they shouldn't be surprised if their work becomes devalued. The masters of old were able to put large seals or coats of arms on their bindings, too, without resorting to a blocking press.

BOOKBINDER: I know that. The old masters had to exert physical efforts that today appear superhuman. BIBLIOPHILE: Well, since today's tools are smaller than the ones of old—without sacrificing aesthetics—I don't see why you can't put a little more effort into doing it by hand if a larger design or type is needed. When I was in England, I visited the shop of Joseph Zaehnsdorf, the German binder who made his name there, and was able to see how complete titles were tooled in gold using individual letters. The finisher who did this work was amazingly skilled.

BOOKBINDER: Hand lettering, as the English call it, does not exist in Germany. We don't even have any shops that possess the sheer quantities of handle letters in various sizes that are required. What I do is use

brass letters in the stamping press or a hand typeholder with which I tool the title line by line on the spine. I use the same typeholder on the cover of the book when I need larger fonts.

BIBLIOPHILE: See, Master, you can do it without machines. And since you told me about your pallets and gouges, I know that you can also piece these together if the design calls for it.

BOOKBINDER: Of course it can be done, and it is done often, but let me tell you more about the technique of gold tooling by hand. As there are several manuals about this aspect of bookbinding, you will understand if I explain it in general terms and focus on the more important aspects. However, there are many more very important small details that a finisher must know. Let's take a border design with straight lines and a larger ornament that will require the appropriate rolls to complete. The center ornamental design will be created from two or three simpler ornaments that are arranged together. There are also designs that are built up from an arrangement of several dots but repeated hundreds of times. Some very complex designs requiring thousands of impressions were created using only a small handful of tools.

BIBLIOPHILE: I image that similar to the gilt edge, the gold leaf is laid on the leather and then pushed into it using the roll, pallet, or stamp.

BOOKBINDER: Well, it's not that easy. First I need to arrive at the final design using the tools and other ornaments. Then I use those tools to stamp the design on a piece of paper. I then copy the design onto a tissue paper that I will lay on the binding. Next, I impress the design through the paper using the specified tools. When I'm done, I remove the tracing paper with the design and carefully brush glair into the impressions made by the tools. When that is dry, I apply a very light amount of grease, such as Vaseline, with a ball of cotton to help hold the gold in place, and then put down the gold, making sure it sits in the impression so the design can be seen. Now I can do the actual finishing with gold. The tools are heated up and impressed into the leather, setting the gold down and binding it to the leather. This can require a good deal of physical effort, but more important is maintaining the tool at the proper temperature—too hot and it burns the leather; too cool and the gold does not adhere. The humidity of the leather also plays a role, as does the dwell time—the amount of time

the tool is in the leather. If I hold the hot tool over the glaired impression too long, the heat can dry out the glair and the gold won't stick, either. A good eye and very steady hand are critical, as one will need to work accurately, yet fast. Of course, not every impression will be perfect—the gold might tear or have gaps. That means we must be able to go into the same impression multiple times, even with complex tools. This is especially difficult with rolls, where the design has no beginning or end. Titling on the spine is also very difficult. One can also achieve rather attractive designs with blind tooling, meaning tooling without gold, especially on volumes with lighter leather, such as natural pigskin. On these the tooling appears dark brown. But achieving an even brown tone is not easy because the leather needs to be evenly dampened, the

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tool temperature consistent, and uniform pressure needs to be applied so the leather does not get burned.

BIBLIOPHILE: Is that all on the subject of tooling? I did not mean to imply that tooling was easy, and I appreciate the amount of skill, experience, and steely concentration that are required of the craftsman.

BOOKBINDER: And spending all day hunched over tools and next to a hot finishing stove isn't pleasant, either.

BIBLIOPHILE: What I really wanted to get at with my earlier question was to learn more about some of the other decorative techniques, like leather onlays and inlays.

BOOKBINDER: Hand tooling is the basis of those, too. When the gold-tooled binding based on the techniques of the Arab world arrived in fifteenth-century Italy, that's when design in bookbinding really began. Prior to that, it was the silver- and goldsmiths, the ivory carvers and others, who decorated the bindings. Before gold there was also blind stamping and lederschnitt (called cuir-ciselé in French, a technique where leather is cut into and modeled). It was with gold tooling that book decoration became an integral part of the book, and the Renaissance had a great influence. In addition to gold tooling, Arab bindings also exhibited the first use of onlaid and inlaid leather,

the latter being more prevalent. Contemporary binders know and still use both techniques, for which we have to pare the leather tissue-thin. Often we will surround the onlays with gold tooling as well.

BIBLIOPHILE: Master, when I came to you today I asked whether I shouldn't rather have an artist design the décor of my full leather binding. This question has now been settled between us; think about the comparison with the chess game. So you will understand that I will reserve the right to work with an artist on books that need that certain something that cannot be provided by your tools.

BOOKBINDER: We bookbinders are not opponents of creative collaboration.

But let me remind you that bookbinders have always created their own tools, too. Think about the fanfare style that we owe to the French master Nicolas Eve, who lived in the sixteenth century. In

the eighteenth century, French binders took inspiration from lace and gave us the *fers à la dentelle*. Le Gascon, who lived in the seventeenth century, gave us *pointillé*, a luxurious style of finishing consisting of dotted lines and curves on bindings. Even today, leading finishers are creating tools for tooling. We also know that we owe much of our inspiration to famous bibliophiles. I'm certain you know the name of the sixteenth-century French diplomat, Jean Grolier, the most famous of all bibliophiles, who had Italian bookbinders create a style to his own specifications. Even the books of Thomas Maioli, the Hungarian king Matthew Corvinus, and the French kings of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries and their wives and famous mistresses, are easily recognizable to bibliophiles. I will even mention a great German bibliophile—Germany was poor in bibliophiles for a very long time, a situation that has fortunately changed—the Elector, August of Saxony, who lived in the sixteenth century and for whom the most famous German binder, Jakob Krause, created many fine bindings. The Jakob-Krause-Bund, the most well known federation of German design binders, was named after him. I could go on and give you the names of further famous French, English, and German binders.

BIBLIOPHILE: Master, I thank you, and as a proper

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bibliophile will study the history of design binding. However, you have shamed me a bit, as I will not be able to compete with your Groliers and Maiolis. But don't you think it is not just important for the great bibliophiles but also for the book as art and for you as bookbinder that there are "lesser" bibliophiles who find joy and appreciation in even the simplest binding?

BOOKBINDER: I agree completely. The bookbinder needs clients who value his work and think about it. I have learned a great deal from you over these past days.

BIBLIOPHILE: We have both learned from and encouraged one another. I have taken everything you have told me over the course of this week and written it down exactly and intend to publish it as a small booklet for the use and enjoyment of bibliophiles and their bookbinders. And do you know what I want to call our book, the one we created through our dialogue over the last several days?

*THE BONE FOLDER!*

## NOTES

1. Translator's Note: The source, which Collin did not include in his text, is Paul Kersten, *Der Exakte Bucheinband*, Halle (Saale), W. Knapp, 1923, pages 22-23.

2. Translator's note: "trimmed edge." The German term is *ebarbierter schnitt*. See <<http://www.cbbag.ca/Re-sourceListsWeb/TranslationOfTerms.html>>.