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From the Selected Works of Sidney F. Huttner

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C. Adam. Restauration des Manuscrits et des Livres Anciens

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Adam, C. *Restauration des manuscrits et des livres anciens*. Puteaux, Erec [68, Jean Jaures, F92800 Puteaux], 1984. Octavo, 166 pp., black & white and color illus., publisher's binding, dustjacket. (Abstract and Testimonials, 2). Price: FF320 (= \$50). Reviewed by Léon Gilissen *Scriptorium* 41. 2 (p. 122-123), review translated here from the French by Sidney F. Huttner, The University of Tulsa.

There are certain works which every bookman will always want to have at hand. Written by a bookbinder, this book covers all aspects which support the principal material vehicle of thought: the codex. Even more, this publication guides the reader across the centuries of craftsmen poorly understood by those who, nevertheless, owe to writing and its transmission the largest part of their knowledge. The restoration of books, manuscript or printed, ancient or modern, valuable or inexpensive, can only be an enterprise for skilled hands guided by an attentive spirit, in a word, by an experienced man. This is the case for the author and the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris must be commended for having him in its service. C. Adam's book is the result of his investigations or rather his response to the multiple questions which have been posed to him as librarians and bibliophiles – the one never excluding the other – entrusted to his care very sick witnesses, nearly dead that is to say, and which must be saved at any price. The publication of an artisan, the plan which has been followed is not surprising: he comments on the different phases required by the delicate work of restoration of books. It is therefore normal that we traverse the past which every binding requires: "folding, sewing, placing in wooden or in binder's boards," headbanding," covering," decorations of the latter. After the general remarks which the author makes in the course of this review, he summarizes, in an appendix, the "principal characteristics of the bindings of each period." A glossary, a list of addresses and an annotated bibliography conclude the book for which one cannot praise too much, in a number of regards, the quality of the text and the abundance of illustrations.

The work nevertheless leaves well in the shadow problems that are principally archeological: the author has not considered himself obliged to deal with them in detail, because the question is, as the title indicates, good restoration treatment rather than true historical research. In the present review, we will content ourselves then by drawing up as briefly as possible the questions which we ourselves have posed. "... from the XIIth to the XVth century, thongs are made of rolled leather" (page 36); the question is of the materials from which the bands are cut; up to XVth century, one still encounters and even more frequently than "rolled leather" split thongs (made from thick tawed [skin]) or, to use the customary term, "split bands" which, according to the author, will be found utilized until the XIIIth century only. The "passing though of new cords aided by an awl" (page 43) in order to reattach the boards, without having to recover completely, is a procedure very frequently practiced in the XIXth and XXth century. Experience demonstrates that this method of construction is not satisfactory, but the author tells us that "this is the most solid solution." In "the evolution of wooden boards, binders board and lacing-in in wooden boards or in binders board" (pages 45-53), the procedures in use during the XIIth, XIIIth, XIVth and XVth centuries are peremptorily described here. Or they pose still greater problems which it would have been useful, if not to resolve, at least to allude to. Is repair of broken boards "contreplat*, 3 dovetail restoration" (page 45 and 55) very expedient? The inlaying of 3 dovetails created in wood already very fragile by reason of its age and which, further, will be, in most cases, covered by the

endsheet pasted to the interior of the board, appears to call attention to an almost morbid concern with returning to the original state: the result will be very fragile and the book “restored” will not be able to be handled except with infinite precautions. Conserving the old boards by placing them to the side of a book on which one has put new put new boards appears to be a defensible enough solution, making allowance for the dangers that the written document encounters in the consultation of the text that the binding protects. In spite of the precautions that one takes for “trimming edges, of the head, of the gutter” which the “berçage”^{*} necessitates, it is not without apprehension that one envisages this operation for manuscript books: sewing done carefully restores, sufficiently it seems to me, the evenness of the edges. Must one not better distinguish headband and headcap? The “simple headband braided with thongs of leather, XIV-XVth century” (page 66), apart from the fact that braided headcaps exist from even earlier times, is an awkwardly drawn up presentation, although the illustrations (notably no. 85) appear to be of very high standard. Etc.

But, as one sees, our remarks are of archeological order; they do not dilute the praise above, understanding that the title of the work does not promise that one will find there any thing other than “restoration,” that is to say, particulars which are highly technical.

^{*}Translator’s note: The assistance of Pamela Scales is gratefully acknowledged as are two notes from Jenny Hille: “contreplat” = the inner side of the board (plat); and “berçage” is used for a procedure *not* ordinarily used on manuscripts (and, in fact, not recommended by C. Adam for book restoration. He includes a description of the procedure in an explanation of older methods of edge trimming and finishing.) The book is placed foredge up in a finishing press; then, by ‘rocking’ the block and spine back and forth, the foredge is forced upwards in a convex curve. This is trimmed with a plough and the foredge decorated. When the book is taken out of the press, the foredge fall back into a concave shape.