Jane Greenfield. ABC of Bookbinding

Sidney F. Huttner

Reviewed by Sidney F. Huttner, *The University of Tulsa*.

Sub-titling her book "A Unique Glossary with over 700 Illustrations for Collectors and Librarians," Greenfield has created a work self-consciously parallel to Carter’s *ABC for Book Collectors* and related to but different from Etherington and Roberts’s *Bookbinding and the Conservation of Books*. The text lacks Carter’s wit and Etherington and Roberts’s frequent depth, but nearly every one of the brief definitions in the "Glossary of Bookbinding Terms" is accompanied by an informative line drawing, and the other sections of the book abound with them as well. Not to disparage the work in any way, it might be reasonably be viewed as a collection of captioned drawings.

The book has three principal sections. A "Glossary of Bookbinding Terms" is a straight-forward A to Z of about 1,000 terms, each defined in a sentence or two and, as mentioned, illustrated. A "Glossary of Bookbinding’s Structural Evolution" "explores the evolution of binding structure from the earliest known Coptic examples through the Middle Ages to the latest techniques of the twentieth century" (p. 77). The text is again succinct: distinguishing features of each selected structure are set forth in bulleted array and placed opposite and amongst informative drawings. This section is arranged by century, says Ms. Greenfield, "because it is easier to think in centuries than in periods beginning and ending with specific years."

A "Glossary of Binders, Designers, and Styles of Decoration" is a relatively short (29 pages) A to Z of binder’s names and named styles. Each entry is embellished with at most one drawing, and since the entries typically do not point unambiguously to distinguishing features, the drawings here often tend to be a bit difficult to "read." They are sufficiently detailed that the expert’s eye is drawn to the significant detail, but the less expert may find themselves befuddled. Representing with a single drawing prolific binders (Katherine Adams (1862-1952), Rose Adler (1890-1959), and Robert Aitken (1735-1802), to take just the first three named) gives at best the barest sense of the range of these artist’s work. It certainly raises the question of whether the chosen design is "representative" of the binder’s "style," a question that is addressed in part by a four page list headed "Sources of Drawings" which relates particular illustrations to published photographs on which they have been based.

The glossaries are Followed by a 12 page "Index of Binder’s Identification," that is, an indication of where and how certain binders (or binding firms) signed their bindings; a 129 item bibliography; and an "Index of Alternate Terms", (e.g, "acid migration" has been preferred to "acid transfer", "Paschal Lamb" to "agnus dei").

Not everyone will find this book equally accessible -- it is often true that a picture conveys the information of a thousand words, but it is also true that we must bring considerable knowledge to bear in "seeing" correctly the information the picture contains. Short on connective, cautionary, complicating tissue, this book requires other books, and replaces none. The author-illustrator, however, has worked hard to select words and make images which reinforce each other, and thus the book packs an immense amount of useful information in small compass. *ABC of Bookbinding* earns a rightful place on the reference shelf.

NOTE: The final paragraph of this review was mangled in typesetting and a correction was printed in #120. The correction is made here. This review, abbreviated by deleting critical comments to make it straightforwardly descriptive, was also run in *Rare Books & Manuscript Librarianship* 13:1 (1998), p.77-78.