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## Bookbinding in the Middle Ages: Presenting Book History in a University Setting

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*Brigham Young University - Provo*

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Honors Thesis

BOOKBINDING IN THE MIDDLE AGES: PRESENTING BOOK HISTORY IN A  
UNIVERSITY SETTING

by

Louisa Eastley

Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment  
of graduation requirements for University Honors

English Department  
Brigham Young University  
March 2023

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Thesis Advisor: Jamie Horrocks, Professor, English  
Reader: Christina Thomas, Conservator, Harold B. Lee Library



# ABSTRACT

## BOOKBINDING IN THE MIDDLE AGES: PRESENTING BOOK HISTORY IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

Louisa Eastley  
English Department  
Bachelor of Arts

Original bindings on historical books can provide important and interesting context to the book's contents, including the class status of the original owner, the aesthetic standards of the time period, and the priorities of the bookbinder. Oftentimes, however, the bindings are ignored or neglected by those interested solely in the book's content.

This thesis project centered around providing visitors to the Harold B. Lee Library in Provo, Utah, with the opportunity to see books from the Middle Ages on exhibit, alongside educational material created to help them understand the significance and relevant characteristics of the books' original bindings. The project's scope was fourfold: I curated and organized two separate exhibits in the Harold B. Lee Library, created a video and models demonstrating binding techniques and materials, taught four undergraduate classes and one graduate class about bookbinding and book history, and built professional connections in the bookbinding community.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project became more expansive and impactful than I ever could have anticipated, largely due to the influence of mentors and academic supporters. I wish to give a special thank you to Jamie Horrocks, for telling me that an exhibit was a valid honors thesis project and for being an enthusiastic supporter and brainstormer through the whole process. A huge thank you as well goes to Christina Thomas, Victoria Birth, and Christopher McAfee for being the best supervisors I could imagine and for opening doors for me into the bookbinding and conservation communities. Thanks also to all the HBLL staff and BYU faculty who supported my exhibits or gave me an opportunity to teach. I'm grateful for all the opportunities I've been given by the university. Finally, thank you to my parents, who have been unfailing champions of my work throughout my Honors experience.



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## Introduction

The poet Emily Dickinson once wrote, “A precious mouldering pleasure ‘tis / To meet an Antique Book / In just the Dress his Century wore / A privilege I think” (16). She claims that having a real book in your hands is a “privilege,” an opportunity to get a better glimpse into the mind of the writer through the “Dress” worn by the book in “his Century.” Both the contents of books and their bindings have meaning and the power to transport the reader away from their present situation and into a new place. For a book historian, books *themselves* tell a story about the priorities, beliefs, resources, and culture of the original creators. Though the information contained in books is frequently studied, the housings—the bindings—are habitually ignored. This is what I wanted to change with my Honors thesis project.

For my thesis, I decided to do a creative project focused on the history of bookbinding, specifically European bookbinding in the Middle Ages (1250-1500 CE). Rather than writing a historical analysis, I wanted to focus my thesis around creating an opportunity for BYU students, campus visitors, and other interested parties to learn something about medieval bookbinding and to get the chance to see and touch artifacts that only conservators typically get to handle. Julia Miller, a book conservator and historian, claims that “We are in danger of losing the thread of history represented by the successive stages in the life of the book, the development and changes in its structure and decoration . . . A different type of loss occurs when a book is in a collection, but its historical significance is unnoticed” (2) This project was an opportunity to rescue some of BYU’s collection items from that forgotten obscurity and to teach people what to look for in future research situations. Ultimately, I wanted to give as many people as possible



exposure to medieval bookbindings. The scope of my project was fourfold: I curated and organized two separate exhibits in the Harold B. Lee Library, created a video and models demonstrating binding techniques and materials, taught four undergraduate classes and one graduate class about bookbinding and book history, and built professional connections in the bookbinding community.

Taking this time to research and share aspects of bookbinding history has been both exciting and rewarding. Like Emily Dickinson, I love the feeling of leather and vellum in my hands. With the artifacts from Special Collections at my disposal, I have been able to look into the minds of readers, binders, and collectors from hundreds of years ago and to feel a love of books bridging our separate experiences. Furthermore, I've been able to share that joy with other students and visitors. Because of the experiences of this thesis project, I feel confident in my decision to pursue bookbinding and conservation professionally after graduation. Indeed, I feel as Dickinson did, that a book's "presence is Enchantment / You beg him not to go / Old Volumes shake their Vellum Heads / and tantalize just so" (17). Now that I've spent time researching antiquated methods, scouring archives, and handling relics, I don't want to do anything else.

### **Preparation for Exhibit #1—Medieval Bookbinding: Methods, Materials, and Oddities**

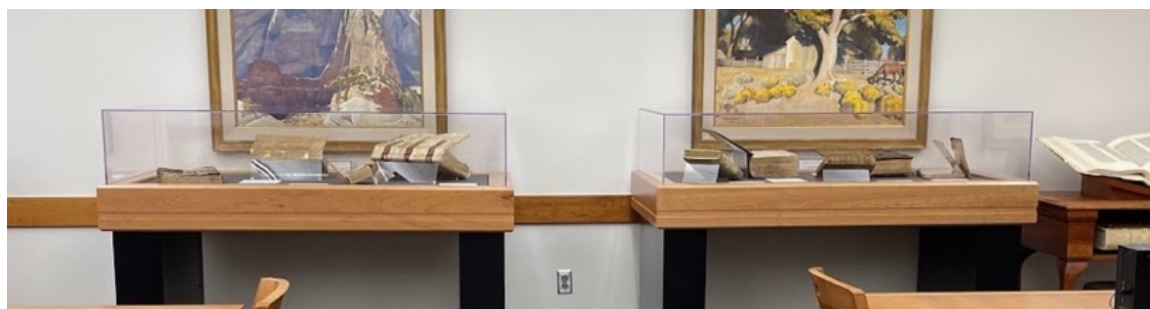
I originally became interested in medieval bindings when I worked on a semester-long English+ internship with BYU conservator Christina Thomas, documenting the historical progression of bookbinding through the books held in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections (BYU has several hundred books from the Late Middle Ages, many in their

original bindings). We wanted to create a timeline of historical methods and materials used by European bookbinders for students in BYU's Conservation Lab and throughout the university. However, as I researched, I was especially drawn to the gothic-type bindings in our collection. I love their enduring strength, the elegant minimalism of the bindings, and the resourcefulness of the binders. Though I continued my work for the internship, creating descriptions of sewing types, covering materials and decoration preferences of books from the early Coptic codices to the pulp paperbacks of the 1970s, I began spending the majority of my free time studying books from roughly 1250-1550 CE and researching methods and styles of binding, both modern techniques and their historical antecedents.

As my research became more specific, I decided that I wanted to make the unique resources BYU has available to viewers in the form of an exhibit. This was the germ of my thesis project, and it became a kind of trial-run for the larger project I would undertake the following semester. In coordination with Christina Thomas, Maggie Kopp (curator of Rare Book Collections), and library security, I had the opportunity to explore the Special Collection vaults, choosing books that demonstrated significant aspects of bookbinding methods in the Middle Ages, many of which had lain hidden away since their acquisition by the HBLL. I closely examined hundreds of books, comparing their attributes to those discussed in scholarship about various aspects of bookbinding. Oftentimes, I had to use the aesthetics of different periods to determine whether the book's binding was original or if it had been rebound by a later owner. After choosing books that represented the specific period I was researching, I took detailed photos of each object to include in an online library catalogue and made notes about each book's

characteristics. (The pictures for exhibit items are included in Appendix A.) If a book demonstrated unusual attributes, I made special note of that peculiarity.

Working with HBLL curator Trevor Alvord, I received permission to create an exhibit of some of these books, which I entitled “Medieval Bookbinding: Methods, Materials, and Oddities,” in two display cases in the Special Collections Reading Room. This exhibit, which ran from April to September of 2022, contained nine items, curated



*Figure 1. Exhibit cases in Special Collections Reading Room*

from the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, with accompanying written material that I prepared. This was my first experience acting as bibliography researcher, exhibit curator, conservator, educator, and public relations specialist in the Harold B. Lee Library, so its small size was ideal. However, this exhibit had limited capacity for public exploration, and its location wasn't very accessible. In order to visit, a person needed to develop sufficient interest in the signage on the main level of the library (which I was responsible for overseeing) to go down to the lowest floor, lock up their belongings, and explain to a collections security guard that they wanted to access the Special Collections reading room to see the



*Figure 2. Visitors studying the exhibit in the Reading Room*

exhibit. These requirements likely stymied some (if not many) potential visitors. That is when I decided to do something similar for my Honors project—but something larger, more interactive, and located in a place where more visitors could see and learn from it.

### **Preparation for Exhibit #2—Bound and Found: Medieval Treasures from the Vault**

After the training experience provided by my smaller exhibit, I had the confidence and the knowledge to plan a more interactive and expansive exhibit, which comprised the bulk of my creative thesis project. This second exhibit was entitled “Bound and Found: Medieval Treasures from the Vault.” I narrowed the range of historical time that the exhibit would cover, making a sharp cutoff at 1500. This allowed me to focus exclusively on the gothic bookbinding period, which is exemplified by longevity, availability, and a more subdued beauty than is typical in later periods.

After consulting with several HBLL staff members about location, I worked with librarian Christiane Ramsey to reserve the exhibit space in the HBLL’s Gallery on Five, conveniently located across from the Humanities help desk. With this space in mind, I started to brainstorm ways to make gothic bookbinding (an admittedly arcane and niche topic) accessible and interesting to a wide viewership. I decided to lean into a hands-on approach; after all, the material experience of the books is what I enjoy the most. Obviously, we

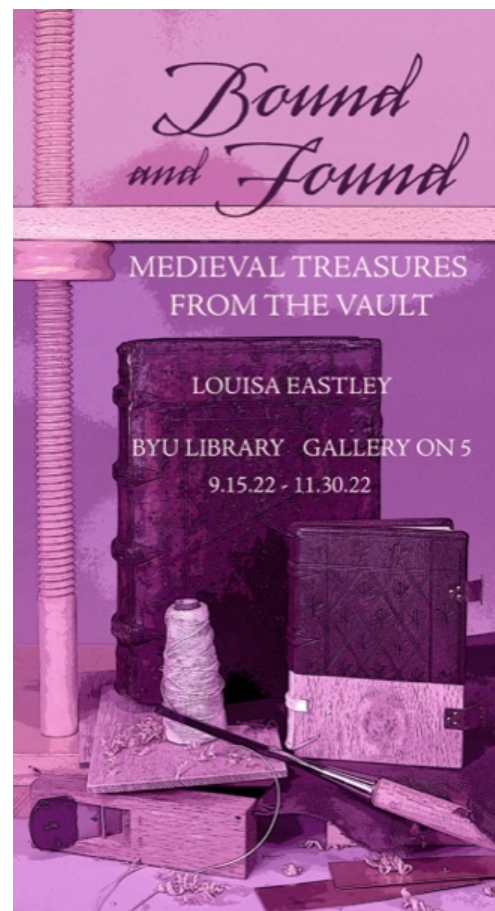


Figure 3. Exhibit poster

could not allow visitors to handle the actual artifacts for security and preservation reasons, but I wanted to create something that could replicate that experience as much as possible. I had already made a couple of replica bindings as class projects: a limp vellum binding for a “History of the Book” class taught by Jacob Rawlins, and a standard gothic model for a “Late Middle Ages History” class taught by Sarah Guerrero (See Appendix B for images). These could be included in the exhibit as touchable resources, but by themselves, they didn’t fully represent all of the bindings I knew I wanted to display. I decided that the more bindings I could add, the more interesting and informative the exhibit would be.

I did not, however, have the knowledge or the expertise to create replicas of the other bindings that would be in my exhibit, so I searched for a way to learn. To my delight, I found that the American Academy of Bookbinding was teaching two week-long summer workshops on medieval binding techniques in Telluride, Colorado. I put together an application to this program, got accepted, and with the generous funding that came from an Experiential Learning grant through the Harold B. Lee Library, a HUM grant from the College of Humanities, and a thesis grant given by the Honors program, I was able to afford the tuition, transportation, and housing to go to Colorado.

I had such an amazing experience at these workshops. They were taught by experienced professional bookbinders I would not have had the opportunity to become acquainted with otherwise. Peter Geraty, who taught the “Parchment Over Boards” binding class, is an associate of the American Institute for Conservation, a long-standing member of the Guild of Book Workers, and a recognized authority in hand-bookbinding. Renate Mesmer, who taught “Historical Sewing Structures,” is the J. Franklin Mowery

Head of Conservation in the Werner Gundersheimer Conservation Laboratory at the Folger Shakespeare Library. I was able to meet and work with them and with other



*Figure 4. "Parchment Over Boards Binding" class with finished projects*

bookbinding enthusiasts and professionals, spending around ten hours a day studying techniques and precedents in bookbinding. Ultimately, these classes allowed me to contribute five more models to my exhibit and helped me gain expertise

and confidence in the methods used. Moreover, being part of these seminars helped me determine that I want to pursue bookbinding and conservation after graduation from BYU and gave me connections that have already been helpful as I have applied for graduate programs in Conservation and Book Arts.

After I returned to Provo, it was time to get to



*Figure 5. "Historical Sewing Structures" class with finished projects*

work putting everything together because the exhibit was scheduled to open on September 15th. I wanted to be able to include as many Special Collections items as possible, since they are a vastly underutilized resource, and this was an opportunity to get



them out of the vault and let them serve a legitimate educational purpose. I hoped to be able to fit four exhibit cases in the gallery space. Drawing on my experience organizing the first exhibit, I decided that I would be able to include about 20 collection items, depending on their size and the way the books would be displayed (having a book open takes more space than standing it on its end, for example). That number was eventually narrowed to seventeen as I decided which aspects of books to emphasize in my captions and organization. Three books were repeated from my first exhibit; the rest were fresh for the second exhibit. I decided to focus on sewing methods, binding types, and decoration preferences. For each book, I wrote a 75 to 120-word caption (Beverly Serrell, in her book *Exhibit Labels: An Interpretive Approach*, claims that even highly-interested visitors are statistically unlikely to read more than that), drawing the viewer's attention to the most interesting or

unique parts of the book. Christina Thomas, HBLL conservator, and Christopher McAfee, Head Conservator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, gave detailed feedback on drafts of the captions and provided general best-practice guidelines for curators and educators. I wanted to avoid jargon and make the ideas accessible for viewers with a wide range of prior experiences. (For the full text of all captions, see Appendix A.)

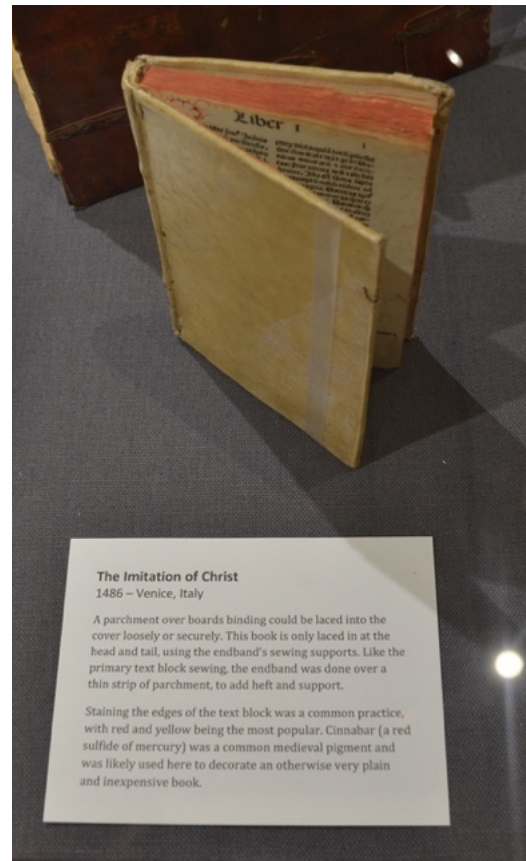


Figure 6. Collection item with caption

Once the research and curatorial segments of the project were complete, I was able to collaborate with library professionals to prepare for the final aspects of the exhibit. I obtained final permission from Maggie Kopp to include the books in the exhibit. I made mounts where necessary for the display items. Doing this personally enabled me to customize each book's display for maximum safety and presentational effectiveness. Eric Howard, the library Exhibits Manager, took my exhibit information and the images I prepared and transformed them into a beautifully eye-catching poster. I arranged with Roger Layton (HBLL Communications Manager) for permission to take photos of the exhibit. These individuals and others were essential to making this exhibit possible, and I am grateful to them for their kindness and help. Having this experience greatly enhanced my understanding of the different layers of library management; before this, I had little idea how an academic library worked or how many people were involved in putting together even a relatively small, temporary exhibit like my own.

Christina Thomas and conservator Victoria Birth helped me wrestle the cases into place and decide the final layout in the Gallery on Five. One case was placed outside the gallery as a type of teaser. It contained three volumes: one extremely large, one bound in an old sheet of music, and one with only



*Figure 7. Exhibit case outside entrance and introductory statement*



the spine covered in leather and the wooden board exposed. These eye-catching artifacts



*Figure 8. Gallery on Five exhibit*

served to get people's attention and encourage them to stop and look at the other materials. Once inside the gallery, three additional cases discussed sewing methods (five books), binding methods (five books), and decoration (four books)

respectively as the viewer walked through the space. Two hanging shelves with my models were staggered on the wall between the cases.

While I was pleased with the presentation of the Special Collections items and the models, I wanted visitors to have something more to help them understand the binding process. It was while participating in the "Historical Sewing Structures" class that I decided to prepare a video element for my HBLL exhibit. As I made each binding, I filmed segments of each step. I later compiled these clips into a comprehensive summary of the binding process and materials. After speeding some things up and editing the clips down, this video was about eight and a half minutes long. This was displayed on a large computer in Gallery on Five, and when I visited, I noticed that many visitors would stand and watch the entirety of the video, sometimes even staying for several loops. I consistently heard that it was their favorite part of the exhibit and really helped them

understand how the bindings were put together. Even seeing the finished product or having it in their hands wasn't as helpful for visualization purposes as the video, but all the elements together removed much of the confusion that seeing the collection items independently might have.

I found the overall effect of the exhibit space to be very conducive to learning. All the cases were lit with overhead lights, and the arrangement welcomed a visitor in. While the captions were available, many visitors were simply mesmerized by the books themselves. I would drop by every few days to clean dust off the cases, and each time I would find new fingerprints on the glass and each model situated differently on the shelves. This evidence of people who had come in and interacted with my exhibit was so rewarding! Though I cannot give a precise number to the visitors, based on reports from classes that attended and the feedback of the Humanities Help Desk staff (who kept an informal count), I would conservatively estimate over a thousand visitors.

### **Presentation: Bringing the Exhibit into Classes**

Once the exhibit was on display, I wanted to take additional opportunities to teach about and to share these objects while they were available to the public. To that end, I reached out to the English and History Departments, offering to teach lectures about bookbinding and book history for professors whose courses aligned with these topics. I eventually visited Book History, Paleography, Medieval Literature, and Shakespeare classes. Additionally, I presented three sessions of the exhibit and additional collection items in the A. Dean Larsen Book Collector's Conference at BYU in October 2022.

Each lecture was slightly different, as I adjusted my material to suit each course's specific focus. For the Book History class, I began with a detailed discussion of how

bookbinding progressed from the beginning of the codex to the present, with a bit more focus on medieval bindings. Because they had already discussed papyrus and paper making, and had more familiarity with the topic, I was able to go into more depth. We discussed how different binding methods evolved in accord with different uses, resources, and societal ideologies. After the lecture, I taught the students how to make a Coptic stitch, and each student bound a small copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* from printed folios. After my lecture, the class was required to visit my exhibit and write a short reflection.

The Paleography class was more spontaneous. It was a class I was personally taking, and one morning my professor announced (without realizing that I had curated the exhibit) that we would be visiting a new exhibit in the library that was “super cool and pertains to our topic.” After telling him it was my exhibit, he asked me to give the class a guided tour and explain the significance of book history for paleography. Though this was less formal than my other lectures, it was just as fulfilling, as it demonstrated that people appreciated the exhibit even without prompting or direct intervention on my part.

For the Medieval Literature class, I worked with Maggie Kopp to do a longer lecture and library experience. The class began in the lecture space in Special Collections, with the students handling examples of religious texts from medieval



Figure 9. Students handle models in the gallery

Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. I spoke briefly about how the bindings (and the differences in book structure) were responsible for the preservation of these texts, and how each binding demonstrates the piety of the individual binders. After that introductory experience, I led a tour of my exhibit, where I showed the examples of religious texts and spoke more about the monastery system of binding books.

The Shakespeare class I presented in was a graduate course, composed largely of English Teaching students. With that context, I gave a much shorter lecture on the overall history of bookbinding, focusing instead on book binding, printing, and literature



Figure 10. Students learn Coptic binding

distribution in the Early Modern Period. I showed pictures of the stalls in St. Paul's square and talked about the early system of selling books unbound and owners commissioning custom bindings. We talked about pamphlets and the popular circulation of Shakespeare's work. Finally, I taught them the simplified coptic binding on printed folios of *King Lear*. After the presentation, the students claimed that their

enhanced understanding of the print culture in Shakespeare's time could help them make the topic more interesting to their future high school students, and that they were even tempted to take time to allow their students to bind their own copies of Shakespeare to study in class.

Finally, I was given the opportunity to share my work during the A. Dean Larsen Book Collector's Conference (held annually in the library). In each of three sessions, I gave a lecture on book history and then a guided tour of the exhibit. Participants included individuals with no prior experience in book history as well as former curators of Special Collections. While those with no foreknowledge definitely learned more from my presentation, the curators seemed thrilled to see their collections being used and appreciated. Additionally, this experience gave me the chance to network with yet another section of the book world: the collectors and booksellers.

### **Discovering Conservation: My Experiential Learning Journey**

Working on this thesis project has been an experience of discovering available resources and making use of them. BYU has incredible resources, but it sometimes takes extraordinary efforts simply to realize how easy it is to access them. Once I knew what was there and what I could do, BYU employees and staff helped me along every step of the way. Making these resources more widely publicized and utilized could be incredibly beneficial. As it is, BYU has a bounty of artifacts, professionals, research, and facilities that make projects like mine possible and worthwhile. As I've discovered resources and been willing to ask for help, I have found doors opened to me I never imagined possible, and I've felt incredible support and encouragement. University Librarian Rick Anderson included a positive review of my exhibit in one library-wide email, saying it was an example of wonderful student work in the library. Robert Means, English Language and Literature Librarian, described the exhibit as "beautiful and informative." The Honors Program Newsletter published an article about my exhibits and bookbinding experience. Though bookbinding and conservation is not a formal major/minor at BYU, I feel

exceptionally well-prepared to progress to more specific study and integration into the professional community of book workers.

I also see my experience researching, organizing, curating, designing, and teaching as a monument to journey-based learning and taking advantage of opportunities as they arrived. I didn't come to BYU with the intention of studying medieval bookbinding or rare book conservation; I didn't even know it existed as a discipline. My primary goal as a BYU student has always been to find joy in learning and to have as diverse an educational experience as possible, so I looked for classes that sounded interesting and crafted a course of study around them. I initially stumbled onto bookbinding when I took the beginning bookbinding course offered by Judy Sommerfeldt. She included a tour of the HBLL conservation lab in the class, and I was

enamored with this novel  
(to me) career path.

Subsequently, I was hired  
by the HBLL to work in  
Book Repair, which later  
merged with Conservation,  
allowing me to work on  
Special Collections and  
circulating items.



*Figure 11. Conservation students and staff at the HBLL*

Fortunately for me, the lab supervisors are dedicated to mentorship and experiential learning. They trained me on the job and allowed me to pick my own projects. My major, too, encouraged experiential learning. My English+ requirement provided the impetus for

me to explore book history further, and that internship opened many more doors for me. Discovering book history, conservation, curation, and education has helped me find a field of learning that brings me joy. This entire project has been the result of my inspired learning process and has enabled me to make incredible strides (while still an undergraduate) in what I have now determined will be my professional field.

Overall, I couldn't have asked for a more meaningful thesis project, or one that presented me with more tremendous opportunities or more vital growth.



## Appendix A: Pictures of Collection Items and Captions

### Exhibit #1:

#### *The Book of Lorenzo di Bartolo di Piero de Bardi*



1433 – Italy

This is a standard ledger binding using tacketed vellum.

“Tacketing” is a method where small vellum strips were used to secure various parts of the book together, in this case the leather supports and buckles to the vellum, and the sewn text block to the cover. The tackets are twisted upon themselves when wet, creating a tight and hard bond when dried.

The leather wraps on this binding show that this was a permanent binding intended for frequent use, but the owner wanted the contents to be well protected. The metal buckle is an unusual feature, suggesting it would often be carried.



## *Questions on the Four Sentences*



1481 – Venice, Italy

This book was bound such that it could be chained to an Italian model chained library, a lectern with shelves for book storage and chains to keep the books attached. The title was written on the top and bottom to be visible when shelved flat. The label on the spine was added by a later owner, who intended to store it vertically in his library.

It was bound with intense attention to detail, including tiny parchment guards inside every single sewing hole. The endbands were done with strips of red leather (faded now to beige on the outside), braided around a hemp core in the Spanish style.

### **Exhibit #2 version:**

This book demonstrates a tremendous commitment to quality workmanship. It is sewn over paired cords, with each sewing hole reinforced on the inside with a tiny scrap of parchment. Though this method was less bulky and visible than the full-length parchment strips, it was far more time consuming.

The edges were stained yellow, a popular medieval decoration. The title was written on the head and tail, so that it would be visible with the book stored flat on a shelf. The endbands were done with strips of red leather (faded now to beige on the outside), braided around a hemp core in the Spanish style.

Based on the quality of craftsmanship, this was a valuable object, originally fitted with a chain to stop potential thieves from removing it from the library.

*Expositions on the Psalms*



1480 – Cologne, Germany

Early monasteries had few enough books that they were stored flat, with bosses (metal knobs) to protect the leather. When in use, they would be placed on a rough lectern or even on the stone ground. This book has the standard five brass bosses on each cover.

Compare the clarity of the tooling (designs on the leather) on this book to that of the one next door. Both are dated to 1480, but the bosses on this book protected the detailed decoration.

Vellum markers were one method of bookmarking significant passages, similar to what we see now on LDS scriptures to mark separate books. Here the scraps of parchment were tied in a knot, then glued around each side of a page.

### *Chopie's Letters*



1546 – Italy

This example of a tacketed binding is more ornamental. Its leather reinforcement strips are tacketed in an elaborate design and the cover is decorated with ink lettering. Most interestingly, it shows another way in which books were altered after binding. It was originally half the thickness, but when all pages were filled, the owner decided to simply open the case and add more sections to the existing block.

It may have even been done by the owner, rather than a professional bookbinder, as the second half is rather sloppily sewn to the same leather thongs. The increased wear on the back tacketts at the crease around the spine has led to much greater disintegration over the years.



*Expositions of the Dominican Gospels, adapted to dialectical method and rhetoric*



1544 – Germany

Vellum was less expensive than leather and easier to work with. It would be used for bindings that were intended to be temporary, cheap, or utilitarian. The pages would be sewn onto leather thongs, then threaded through the vellum covers. The bindings often included ties, clasps, or protective flaps.

This is an example of the very simplest type of binding, with the vellum simply creased in a single layer around the text block.

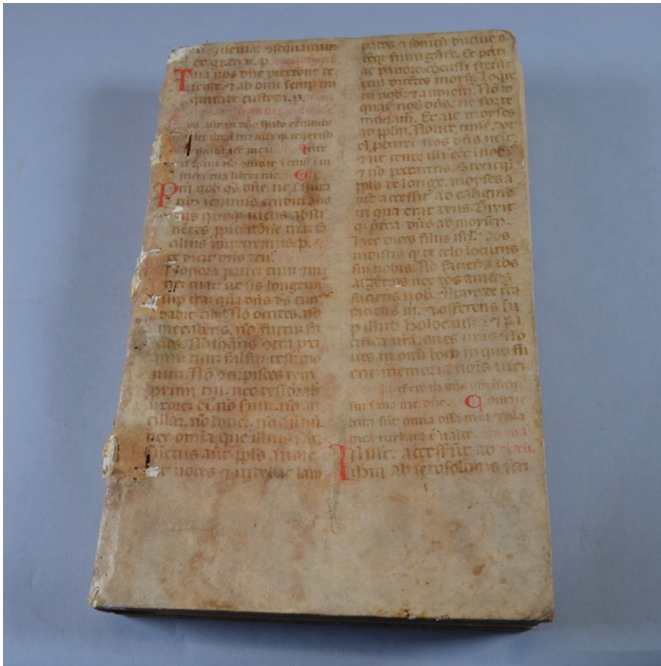
It may have been intended to be temporary until a nicer case could be afforded, but it is also likely to have been kept simple and intended for daily use.

**Exhibit #2 version:**

This is one of the simplest ways to cover a book, with the parchment merely creased in a single layer around the text block. It may have been intended to be temporary until a nicer cover could be afforded, but it is also likely to have been kept simple and intended for daily use.

It was sewn over paired cords, one alum-tawed and one regular leather, which were then roughly tacketed or laced into place through the cover, meaning the twisted strips of parchment were looped underneath the supports and back to the outside of the cover.

## *Fasti*



1492 – Venice, Italy

Because vellum was so valuable and durable, it was often reused. Sheets of vellum previously used as book pages would be kept after the book's usefulness had expired. This book was covered in such a manuscript sheet, complete with small, illuminated letters.

The damaged spine exposes the stitching, showing them to be done in undyed thread over leather thongs. This method involves taking a piece of leather, cutting a slit in the center while leaving the ends whole, and binding around each strip independently, increasing the strength of the whole binding.

*Quadragesimale [Relating to Lent]*



1479 – Reutlingen, Germany

This book has sustained some damage to the endpapers, revealing the internal board attachment method. It was sewn over three split thongs, which were then threaded through wood boards, like so:

The spine edges of the boards were lightly beveled to reduce wear, then guarded with reused parchment. Though one has detached, leaving ink lettering behind, the back endpaper is a full folio from a previous book, with the sewing cuts from the previous binding still visible.

**Exhibit #2 version:**

This book has sustained some damage to the endpapers, revealing how the cover boards were attached to the text block. It was sewn over three split thongs, which were then threaded through wood boards, like so:



The spine edges of the boards were lightly beveled to reduce wear on the sewing supports. Reused parchment was then glued down on the covers to reinforce the joint. The back endpaper is a full folio from a previous book, with the sewing cuts from the previous binding still visible. The other endpaper has detached, leaving ink lettering behind.



*The Book of Sufficiency in the Month of the Prophet Al-Mustafa and the Shabiha of Sadat Al-Khalifa*



1237 – Arabic

This is an example of Islamic type binding, though very little about it is standard. The cover is paper boards covered in red leather, reused from an earlier book. They simply took the cover, cut off the bottom and spine to fit the pages, then connected the two pieces with leather strips and tackets. It would have been held closed around the folded pieces of paper by a piece of metal, bone, or wood hooked inside the back leather loop.

This “binding” was likely originally nothing more than a collection of folded pages, the sewing and spine lining done later for stabilization. However, both the dyed leather and the glued spine demonstrate techniques used by Islamic bookbinders centuries before Westerners.



*Interrogatory or confessional*



1480 – Nuremberg, Germany

This book was bound by the Brothers of the Hermitage of St. Augustine. Here, the board was only half covered by leather to conserve materials. What they didn't do with materials they made up for in craftsmanship. The inside of each folded group of papers is lined with a long strip of parchment, the endbands were sewn in two colors of thread, and the ornamentation is done with nine different stamps.

The decoration has been worn down quite a bit over the years, likely due to frequent handling and rough storage conditions.

## Exhibit #2:

### *Works and Treatises*



1497 – Strasbourg, Germany

Book history is sometimes making observations, then wondering what happened and why. At some point during the last five hundred years, 10-12 sections and the parchment paste-down were removed from the back of this book, leaving the cords, threads, and linings exposed. Perhaps the paper was reused, the contents were banned by the church, or the section was irreparably damaged by bookworms.

The damage reveals some other interesting features. There are three sewing stations over double cords, but the top and bottom are sewn over single cords. Leather transverse linings were adhered on the underside of the boards.

### *Rationale of Divine Duties*

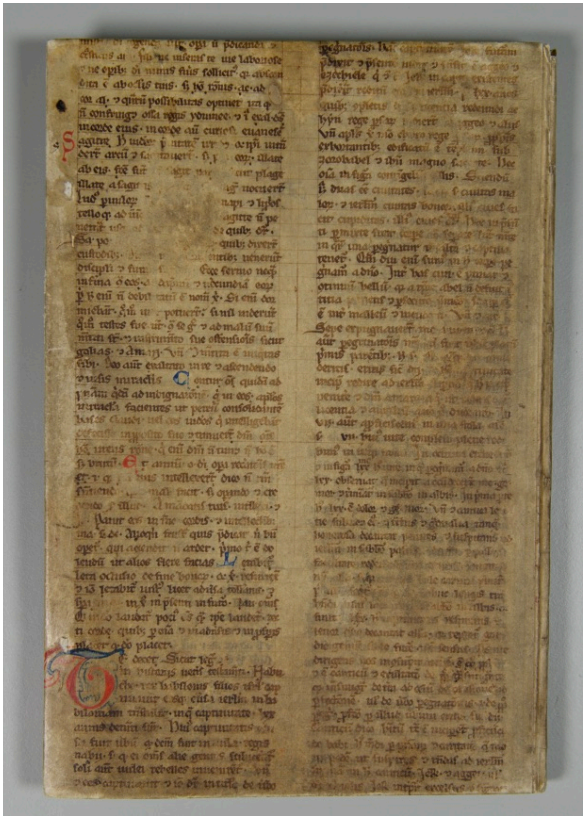


1493 – Strasbourg, Germany

If any binding exemplifies the Gothic bookbinding tradition, it is this one. For a century following the invention of the printing press, books like this were the standard way to contain the quickly created text. BYU's collection alone holds two books nearly identical to this in size, covering, decoration, and sewing. Each is printed folio size (roughly 8"x 12"), then sewn over paired cords, covered with brown calf, and finished with blind tooling and brass clasps.

While the level of internal decoration (colored paintings, gold illumination, etc.) and external tooling differed, the consistency of method and style demonstrate the bookbinder's inability to match the rapid rate of innovation in the printing industry. Standards of excellence began to vary widely as they struggled to keep up with the new demand for bound volumes.

## Of Christian Doctrine, Book 4 (Saint Augustine)



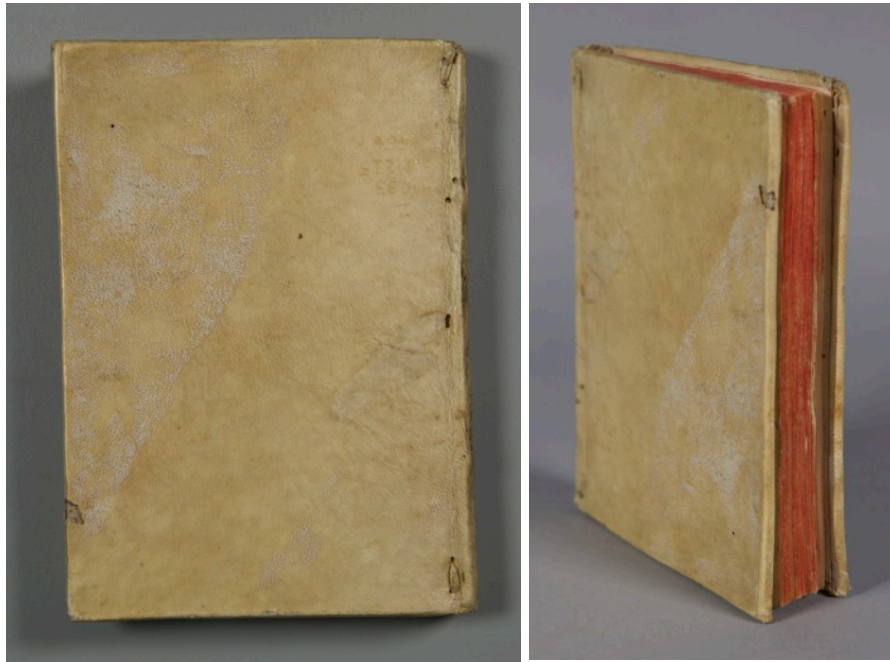
1467 – Strasbourg, Germany

Because parchment was so valuable and durable, it was often reused for spine linings, paste-downs, or covers. Two separate book pages cover this book, one curving around the spine and the second neatly glued atop its edge. Tiny pinpricks are visible where the two pages meet, suggesting that the binder originally tried to sew them together before simply gluing them down.

Parchment tends to warp and shrink with changes in humidity. Alum tawed ties were originally used to hold the book shut, helping to counteract the splay of the parchment covers.



*The Imitation of Christ*



1486 – Venice, Italy

A parchment over boards binding could be laced into the cover loosely or securely. This book is only laced in at the head and tail, using the endband's sewing supports. Like the primary text block sewing, the endband was done over a thin strip of parchment, to add heft and support.

Staining the edges of the text block was a common practice, with red and yellow being the most popular. Cinnabar (a red sulfide of mercury) was a common medieval pigment and was likely used here to decorate an otherwise very plain and inexpensive book.

*Sphere of the World*

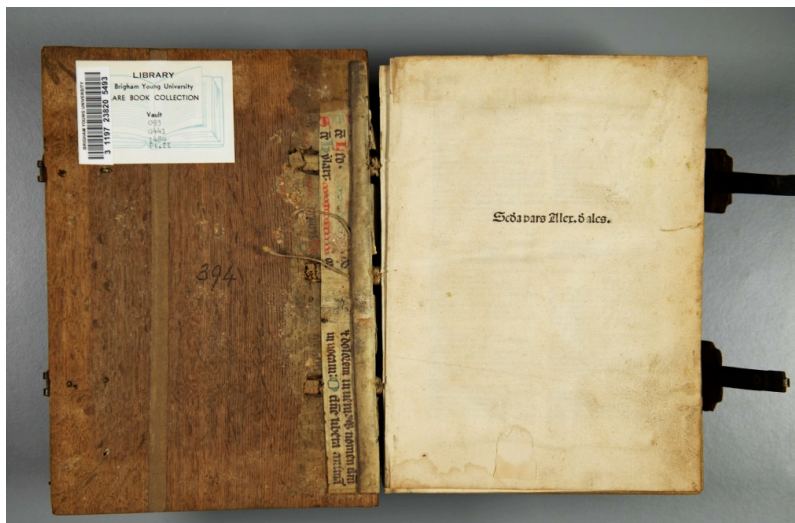


1485 – Venice, Italy

Though this limp vellum binding may look fancy, in reality it is one of the very cheapest medieval varieties. This cover was made from a folded sheet of music reused from another work. It was fast and easy, with no wood boards to carve, no leather to pare, no clasps to mold. It is sewn over red leather supports, which were then laced through the vellum cover.

This is a scientific work, not a religious one, which could be one reason it was given a less elaborate binding. It was likely intended for a layperson, not a monastery or wealthy nobleman.

*A summary of the universal theology: part II*



1489 – Pavia, Italy

Though originally covered with leather, this book is now baring its secrets to the world. The sewing is over double hemp cords, which were then laced into the boards. While this sewing does entirely cover the cords, it is not packed, just done with a very thick thread. Thread in the Middle Ages was thicker, but much softer, than modern thread, enabling it to be flattened in the signatures to reduce bulk. Some holes were pre-punched, but the kettle stitch wanders a bit at the tail, suggesting that the binder simply used the needle to punch as they went along.

The spine linings are also revealed. Irregular strips of parchment were glued, either with wheat paste or with animal glue, between the sewing stations for additional stability.



*Light of the Soul*



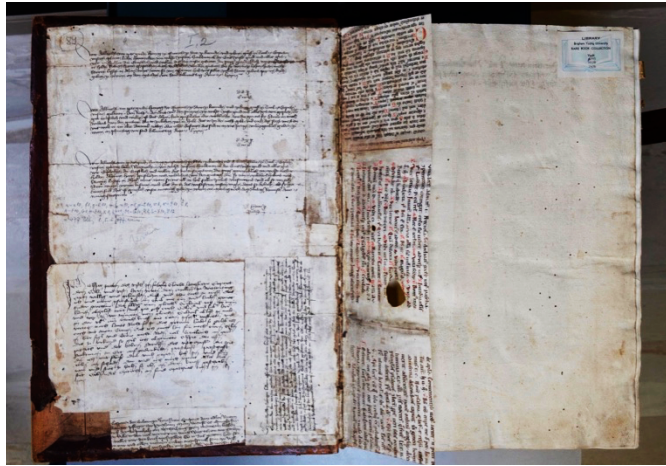
1479 – Reutlingen, Germany

This book demonstrates a very interesting endband formation. A hemp cord was sewn onto the head and tail of the book during the same process that the rest of the text block was sewn. After covering the boards, strips of leather were braided around that core to create a beautiful and strong endband.

In the centuries following their creations, many of these books have been altered to suit the preferences of new ideals of decoration. While in the Middle Ages, little thought was given to uniformity, but later, many medieval books were later painted to conform to the new standards of beauty. Often it was very poorly done, an odd move for a person who was, presumably, very wealthy. Here we see the paint dripping down the back of the book, marring the leather and tooling.



### *A Moral Mirror*



1476 – Strasbourg, Germany

There was a huge range in medieval books, from very basic to extraordinarily lavish. Some, like this example, were only intended for podium use. The huge size of the book caused the binder to innovate a bit, piecing together this paper and parchment paste-down, carving boards more than half an inch thick, gluing multiple boards together, and building clasps hefty enough to hold it closed.

There are five sewing stations to accommodate the height of the book, beautiful herringbone endbands, and internal illumination. It was bound as a gift to a monastery chapel, a representation of the binder's devotion and dedication. The idiosyncrasies of the binding only highlight the differing standards of beauty in the Medieval period.

## *Evening Worship Music*

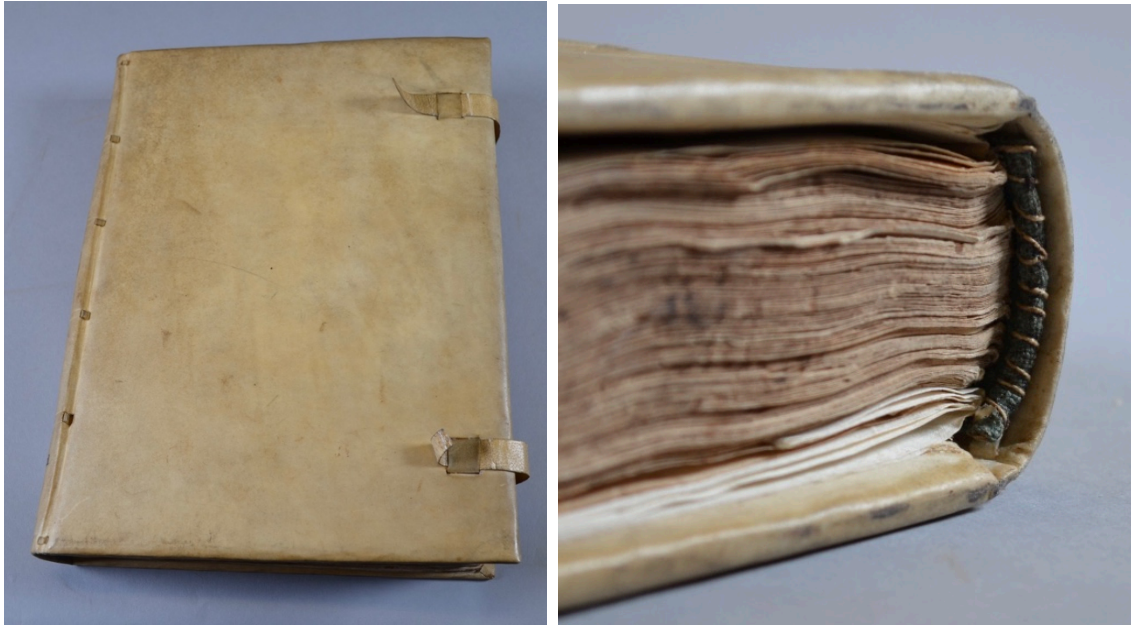


Approx. 15th century – Strasbourg, Germany

Though paper was made in Europe as early as the 12th century, parchment books were still a common option in the late Middle Ages (1350-1500 CE). Parchment was durable, provided a smooth surface for writing, and could be reused if necessary.

It also presented some difficulties for both the scribe and binder. Holes in the parchment were often sewn up, patched, or simply written around. Pages weren't always the same size or thickness, and hair or pores could interfere with the writing process. Parchment is very reactive to moisture, warping at the slightest change in humidity, so boards were held tightly closed with clasps to avoid exposure to changing weather.

*Letters Issued During the Pontificate*



1487 – Milan, Italy

This book was sewn over parchment strips. Though it was common for the endband to be sewn over a similar strip and subsequently laced through the case, this book has a wrapped cloth endband glued to the head and tail. To maintain the symmetry of the book, false supports were laced through the case, though they are entirely unconnected to the text block.

When parchment is exposed to any type of moisture, including glue, the parchment buckles and warps. When adhered to a paste-paper board, the whole unit can dramatically change shape. To use less glue, and thus reduce the warping, this parchment was “drummed,” meaning only glued at the turn-ins instead of across the entire board. The parchment clasps also help stabilize the book.



## Appendix B: Pictures of Binding Models and Captions

### Classic Gothic Binding

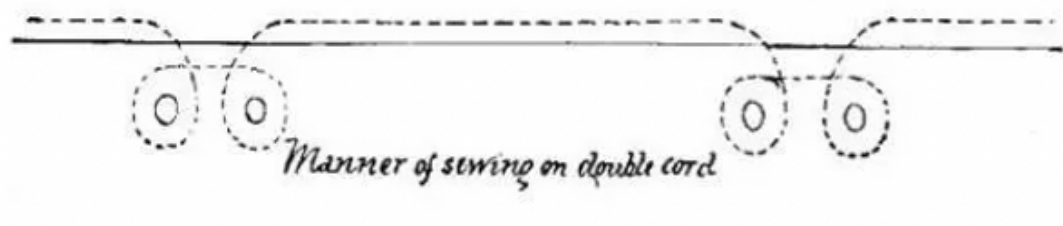


- Packed sewing over split alum-tawed thongs
- Handmade paper
- First and last signatures guarded with scraps of parchment
- Parchment patch linings
- Slightly rounded spine, consolidated with wheat starch paste
- Quarter-sawn oak boards, beveled at spine
- Carved channels for sewing supports
- Dyed goat leather
- Saddle stitch endbands
- Blind tooling with hot tools in diamond pattern
- Brass and leather clasps

### Parchment Over Boards binding



- Sewn over parchment strips
- Modern machine paper
- Cloth slotted lining
- Binders board covers
- Parchment lined with paper for additional resistance to moisture
- Endbands with two colors of silk thread
- Headcap over the endband for aesthetic and protection
- Spine hollow
- Sewing supports split in half and laced through the joint of the parchment



## Limp Vellum Binding

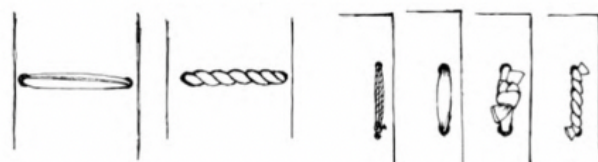


- Packed sewing over split alum-tawed thongs.
- Handmade paper with deckle edge (untrimmed from papermaking)
- Endbands sewn with same thread as text block
- Parchment cover made with soft and supple parchment variation
- Sewing supports and endband supports laced through the parchment cover
- Small yapp (overhanging foreedge) for protection
- Alum-tawed strips are also laced through as ties

## Tacket Binding

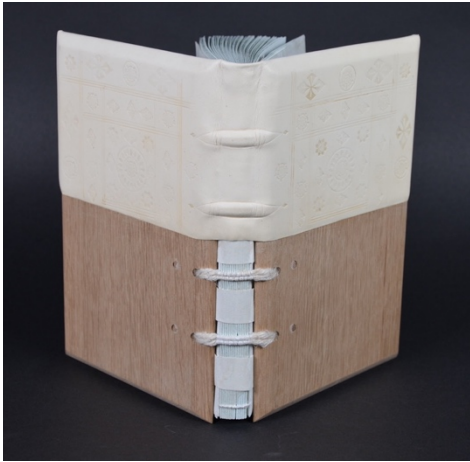


- Modern machine-made paper
- Unpacked sewing over split alum-tawed thongs
- Cover made with mylar (modern archival plastic) for visibility. Historic examples would be made with vellum or parchment
- Each sewing station is tacketing with a different method, though there were many variations
- Case creased to the size of the text block, without a square
- Turn-ins tacketed down
- Protective flap around foreedge



Different types of tackets on the spines of books

### Gothic model: Alum-tawed cover



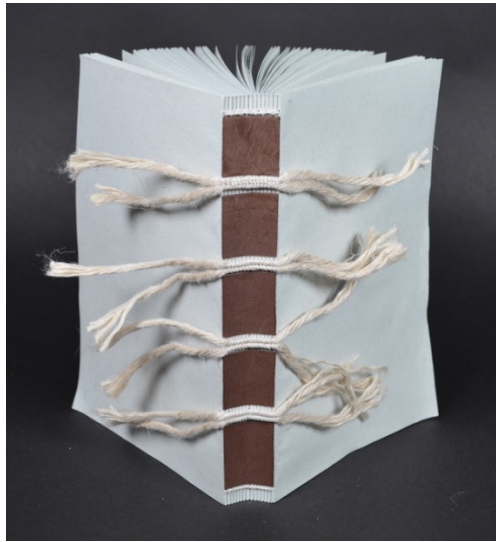
- Sewn over double cords—the bottom station packed, the second unpacked
- Parchment transverse spine linings
- Parchment pastedowns hooked around first and last signatures
- Consolidated with animal glue/gelatin
- Laced into circular holes
- Quarter-sawn oak boards, ¼” thick
- Spine edge of board rounded; the others beveled at a 45-degree angle
- Covered in alum-tawed leather, pared lightly at edges
- Blind tooling with hot tools

### Parchment Tapes Sewing

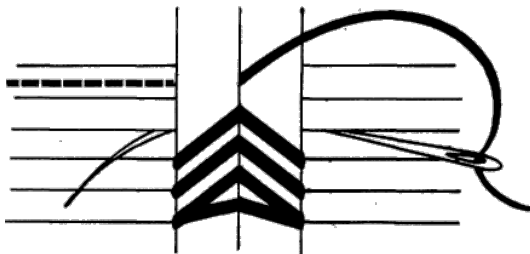


- Sewn over two layers of parchment tapes
- Two-on sewing, meaning that two signatures were attached at each pass of the thread from head to tail. This increased the speed significantly
- Tapes split—only the top half would be laced through the case
- Rounded and backed, i.e., given a small shoulder
- Handmade paper patch spine lining

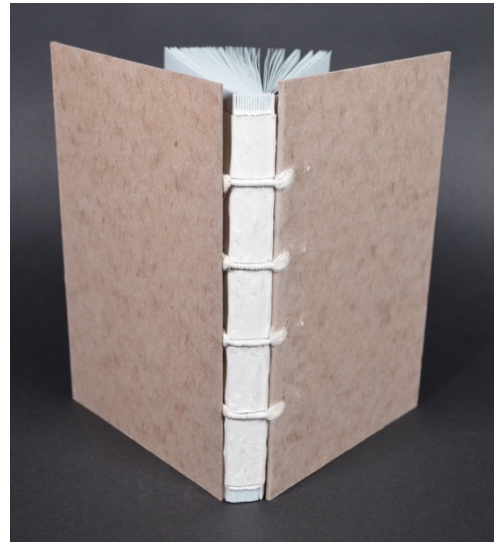
## Herringbone and Knot-Tack binding



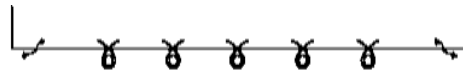
- Sewn over double cords
- Demonstrates four different sewing methods, each used to create a less flexible spine
  - Head: knot tack sewing
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>: herringbone linked under one signature
  - 3<sup>rd</sup>: herringbone linked under two signatures
  - Tail: packed herringbone
- Consolidated with wheat starch paste
- Flat spine
- Leather patch linings (a method popular in the Romanesque binding period 1000-1100 CE)



## Single Cord sewing



- Sewn over single cords
- Paper patch spine lining
- Lightly rounded and backed
- Modern binders board (similar to historic paste board, but harder)
- Cords laced into the front boards, then the holes were smashed flat
- Cords frayed and glued onto the back boards



## Appendix C: Other Supplementary Material

### Introductory Statement Outside Exhibit:

*“We are in danger of losing the thread of history represented by the successive stages in the life of the book, the development and changes in its structure and decoration. . . . A different type of loss occurs when a book is in a collection, but its historical significance is unnoticed.”*

*-Julia Miller, book conservator and historian*

Both the contents of books and their bindings have meaning and the power to transport the reader away from their present situation and into a new place. For a book historian, books *themselves* tell a story about the priorities, beliefs, resources, and culture of the original creators. Medieval bookbinders exemplified the ideals of their time, basing their work around longevity, availability, and a more subdued beauty than later periods.

Louisa Eastley (English, 2023) shares Julia Miller’s belief that library collections should be used and appreciated. This exhibit is the culmination of her thesis project, with the goal to enable students and visitors to experience an aspect of history that they may never have considered. With items from Special Collections alongside modern models, the textures, methods, and ideologies of the past are exposed to the world.

### Bookbinding Conference Description:

#### *Session Description*

“Books are a uniquely portable magic,” Stephen King once wrote. They have the power to transport readers away from their present situation and into a new place. For historians, they are the means by which knowledge is kept safe through the decades and centuries. Though the information contained in books is frequently studied, the housings themselves are often ignored. In the past, even the bindings of important books were often discarded or replaced by people who didn’t realize their potential importance. Many more everyday books were no doubt read out of existence, and we will never know what they looked like or contained.

Of the several hundred books from the Late Middle Ages (1250-1550 CE) in BYU’s Special Collections, only a relative handful remain in their original bindings. These, however, let us examine the inner workings of the medieval book. This ‘gallery stroll’ will guide you through a showcase of some of the most interesting, unique, and beautiful examples of medieval bookbinding BYU has to offer, with emphasis on studying the methods and materials, as well as the priorities and habits of the original bookbinders and book owners. The aim is to lend additional insight not only into an antiquated art form but into the minds of individuals long dead.

These books are on display as part of a senior honors thesis. The goal of the project is to expand the public understanding of book history, and to provide a place to learn more



from the artifacts in BYU's collection. As book historian Julia Miller has attested, though rebinding or discarding objects inevitably results in a primary loss, "A different type of loss occurs when a book is in a collection, but its historical significance is unnoticed."

The stroll will include a presentation and explanation of the medieval books on display, as well as an opportunity to handle and examine detailed replicas created by the student.

#### *Bio Statement*

Louisa Eastley is an undergraduate honors student graduating in English and History. The emphasis of her study has been on book history and medieval literature and history. She has been an employee in the HBLL's conservation and book repair labs since 2019 and intends to pursue a master's degree in Rare Book Conservation after graduation. She enjoys reading, bookbinding, historical costuming, and rock climbing.

**Promotional Material:**  
Flyer for faculty boxes


LOUISA EASTLEY—HONORS 2023

# BOUND AND FOUND

MEDIEVAL TREASURES FROM THE VAULT

Come to see and experience the contents of a medieval library, with original artifacts and modern models

9.15.22 – 11.30.22  
HBLL GALLERY ON FIVE



Ad for elevator screens in JFSB



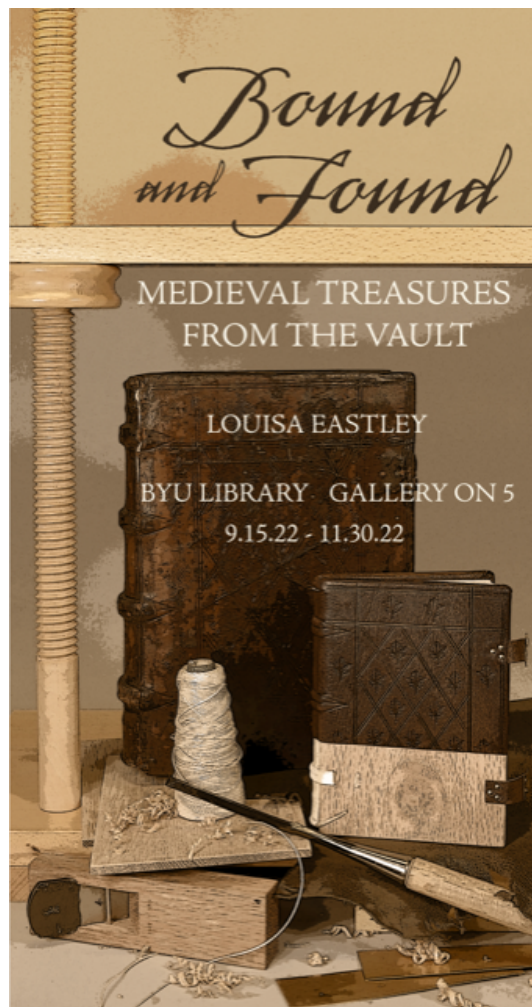
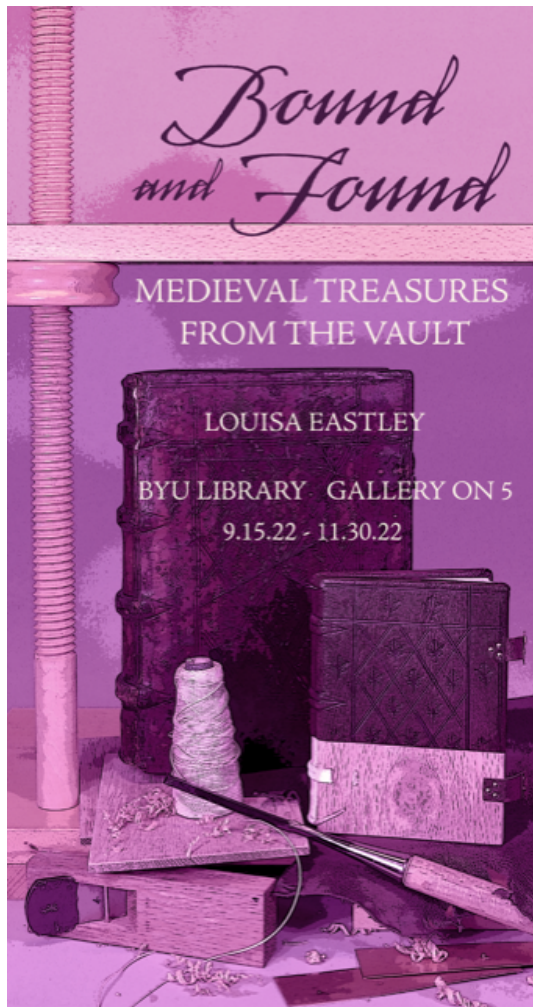
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Posters for HBLL Atrium and Outside Gallery



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