

EARLY BINDINGS - TRANSCRIPTION

This segment is about early bindings. As is the case with so much in our cultural history what we think of as sometimes being new was done a long time ago. That's the case with bindings as well. Most binding decorations and styles in the 19th and 20th and even into the 21st century have already been used in some way or another at an earlier time.

This is an example of what's called an entrelac binding or an interlocking binding or a strap work binding. Done in Lyon. As you can see, it's painted. It is based on Islamic design patterns. It's apparently a design, a style, that came through Italy into southern France and centered in Lyon.

A number of these bindings were produced, we're talking about middle of the 16th century, for the libraries of the great collectors. Not just in France. Jean Grolier had a number in his binding but also in Germany Marcus Fugger had entrelac bindings from Lyon and Thomas Whatton in England. The book is by Lactantius, an early defender of Christianity, and it's an important book in itself. Not to mention the covers.

These two bindings look very much alike. This is elegant, this is elegant. They're both French. This is elegant in a special way in that it has these inlaid and painted straps. This is all gilt. It is important because of its owner and it's important because of its content.

It's a book by a man named Orabasius a 4th century Greek physician whose encyclopedia of medicine involved excerpts from a number of authors whose work we would not know except for Orabasius' excerpts.

The book comes from a library that was owned by Pietro Duado, and Duado was a Venetian diplomat at the French court. When he was there he commissioned the binding of I think 133 volumes, 90 works and 133 volumes, as a portable library containing philosophy, history, theology, and botany and medicine.

He color-coded his library so that the various subjects would have different color morocco. Of the 90 volumes, only 15 were in this citron morocco reserved for medicine and botany.

The book belonged to a man named Michel Whittock in the 20th century. He had the finest collection in Belgium anyway of early bindings. It's a sensational little book. When Duado was at the Paris court he was called back to Venice, his library stayed, he had other appointments. The library stayed basically unknown for a couple of hundred years and that's part of the reason why you find copies so well preserved.

This is a so-called Apollo and Pegasus binding. It's probably the most famous 16th century binding. It's Italian. The book is a biography of Marcus Antonius. It's actually fictionalized. The main thing is it's edifying. It's the kind of thing that a young reader would find useful in forming his character.

It belonged to a guy named Grimaldi. For many years there was a heated debate, a protracted debate, on where these bindings came from. The bindings that had this oval plaque showing Apollo and his chariot racing towards Parnassus where Pegasus was located at the top.

Finally a man named Anthony Hobson quieted all of the controversy and said these books belong to a young man named Grimaldi, who was heir to a grand Genoese fortune. He went to Rome. He met a humanist named Ptolemy and this guy Ptolemy told him that he needed to . . . Or Ptolemy arranged to have books bound for his library with this special plaquette. A binder named Grolier did this binding, one of 71 that we know he did.

There were about 200 Apollo and Pegasus bindings that were executed. About 150 of them survive. As I said, 71 were by the binder who did this. Like the Orabasius that we looked at a minute ago this is color-coded. If it's in a vernacular language, as this one is, it was in red morocco, reddish-brown. If it were in a classic language it would be in green or brown.

This book was also owned by Robert Hoe, the man who founded the Grolier Club, America's most important collector. It is the kind of book that in the past has fetched very important amounts of money. The last one that sold at auction, which is not terribly different from this one, went for more than \$100,000.

This is a forgery. The Apollo and Pegasus binding has always been famous and by the end of the 19th century it was famous enough to warrant the attempts to pass off as genuine something that obviously wasn't.

There were two Italian binders, one of whose names was Vittorio Villa, who took books and either started with modern materials, not the case here, or started with a genuine 16th century book that may have had some minor embellishment on it and then actually put the plaquette, the Apollo and Pegasus plaquette, into the board to make it look as if it were a book that was owned by this guy Grimaldi and part of this famous collection.

Now we know that it's a forgery because these books have been studied. The legend, the caption around the collar is the same. It says, "Run your chariot straight to the mountain." In other words, don't get diverted in your studies. The spokes in the wheel there's only four. In the real Apollo and Pegasus there are six.

Anyway, this particular binding, is on an edition of Homer, is one I think is great and it's way less expensive than the real thing. It looks absolutely convincing if you don't count the spokes. It's a book worth having as an example of a forgery. So long as you don't try to pass it off for the real thing there's absolutely no reason why it isn't something that you should add to your collection.

People ask me all the time about forgeries. They say, "How do you know that you're buying the real thing?" The answer is that if you're dealing with autographs of persons who are very famous and whose signed name is worth a great deal of money and therefore somebody could make a lot of money for forging then you might be in trouble but nobody is going to make a book that's worth a lot of money that's going to endanger you as a bookseller.

I do have two other things here to show in this vein. One of them is a forged book on Mark Twain. It was owned by the son of Eugene Field. Eugene Field was a journalist and a poet. His son was basically a ne'er do well who spent most of his life figuring out how to forge signatures.

He did a fabulous Mark Twain. You cannot tell. You cannot tell the difference between Mark Twain's real signature, which tended to be quite consistent over the years. Eugene Field Jr's forged signature. It's right here on the title page. Because we know that these things have been on the market we're suspicious, we know that this guy Eugene Field also forged Bret Hart's name. We've got Bret Hart here and Mark Twain here. It could be the real thing but I don't think so. I think it's a forgery.

Finally we have an early choir book leaf. This was sold to me by a dealer at a book fair and I knew right away that the vellum was 15th century. You can't fake this. You can't age it. It just can't be done. It's deteriorated at the corner where the oil from people's fingers has caused this kind of damage turning the pages over the years.

The initial is wrong. It's not 15th century. For one thing, it overlaps the notes in the music. For another thing, it's pre-Raphaelite. It's not 15th century. The colors are wrong, the nose is wrong, the pose is wrong, but it's actually well done. The dealer said, "I don't know anything about it." He gave me a good price. We're happy to advertise it in our catalogs as a 15th century leaf with a 19th century historiated embellishment, which actually is rather attractive.