

JEWELLED BINDINGS - TRANSCRIPT

This segment is on jewelled bindings. Thomas Moore, early 19th century, great friend of Byron's, he was actually his literary executor, was in his own time as famous and as much of a draw in terms of commercial appeal to young women as Byron was himself. Thomas Moore's chief work was an Oriental romance called Lalla Rookh. Publishers paid him this staggering amount of 3000 pounds in advance for Lalla Rookh, absolutely unheard of. This is the first printing of Lalla Rookh, not often seen. It's a book that's what was many times reprinted, but the first printing, especially large format not often seen. The fact that this is the first printing of Lalla Rookh is not probably the most important thing about the book as anybody can plainly see. This is a jewelled binding by Sangorski and Sutcliffe, and the story here is not really very difficult to understand or to perceive. It's just frankly a knock down drag out knock your socks off visually arresting, inlaid and jewelled binding.

First 20 years of the 20th century, Sangorski and Sutcliffe, and Riviere had a rivalry to see who could produce the most glorious inlaid and jewelled bindings. They became more and more encrusted with guilt, and complicated with inlays that you couldn't tell what the color of the original morocco was. Here you can tell right here it's basically kind of sky blue. But anyway, the grandest binding apparently ever done was one done by Sangorski and Sutcliffe for Fitzgerald's Omar Khayyam. A large copy went down with the Titanic. Even though I'm a condition freak, if I were able to recover that book, I would live with the damp stains.

Anyway, this binding, if you look at it carefully, has innumerable inlays of various colors, and it as 226, I have counted those, 226 jewels. The fun doesn't stop with the covers, which two things about the covers I like especially, number one, the recessed panel, and number two, the mother of pearl, not the most precious part, but the part that I find most appealing. Anyway, the fun doesn't stop with the covers. The inside back cover has more of the same inlays and jewels, and the inside front cover has a Cosway portrait of Thomas Moore surrounded by lots more jewels, and lots more inlays, and the whole thing is the grandest binding we've ever owned, and certainly one of the grandest that we've ever seen.

This is a lovely jewelled binding on Alfred Lloyd Tennyson's long poem The Princess, the most important work done during his lifetime. It is not quite in the same category as the Lalla Rookh. Lalla Rookh probably, or could easily have had its design patented, because in the rivalry that I was talking about between Sangorski and Sutcliffe, and Riviere, they went so far as to patent the design so that someone else couldn't steal it. There were probably not more than a couple hundred of these special jewelled bindings done over the course of this rivalry 20 years in particular, although extending probably into the 1920s, so maybe more than 20 years.

Anyway, this isn't quite the same spectacular binding as that, and of course it costs a good deal less, but it has some features that I think, I like here, that are not present there. Number one, it's got tremendous amount of stippling. The application of gold by single dots that gives it a kind of a glistening appeal, that that doesn't have. In the center here, it's got little, tiny, red morocco flowers, much smaller and more delicate than in the Thomas Moore book. There's a lot going on here, lots of strap work, lots of inlays, just like the strap work and inlays here, but in this case, we have areas of quiet on the front and back cover, and on the doublures recessed as with this book, and with very nice and vigorous decoration here, but quiet around to set it off. The same thing is true in the front where we have a Cosway style portrait of Tennyson. There are jewels, but there are many fewer than in the Lalla Rookh.

One thing this binding has that this one doesn't, and in a way it's surprising, it has a lovely gauffed and painted gilt edge, which sort of completes the book and sort of closes it off and makes it whole and complete. It's sort of what you can call governed exuberance. This is exuberance that pushes the envelope. This is governed exuberance. Either way, they're beautiful, glorious bindings that ought to make you smile, and ought to make people who look at your books smile once you've bought them.