

THE EVOLUTION OF A CRAFT:
POST-BYZANTINE BOOKBINDING BETWEEN
THE LATE FIFTEENTH AND THE EARLY
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FROM THE
LIBRARIES OF THE IVIRON MONASTERY IN
MOUNT ATHOS/ GREECE AND THE ST.
CATHERINE'S MONASTERY IN SINAI/ EGYPT.
Volumes I, II, III

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Volume I
Text

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ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates the ways through which the Greek-style bookbinding was gradually supplanted by European bookbinding, a process which occurred between the late fifteenth century, after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, and the early eighteenth century. The Greek-style bookbinding is a distinctive typological binding structure confined in the milieu of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine civilization.

The research is based on two major monastic libraries, those of the Iviron monastery in Mount Athos/Greece and of the St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai/Egypt. The primary material of the research consists of a detailed survey of 419 bookbindings dated between the late fifteenth and the early eighteenth century. To collect and store the collected data a survey methodology had to be devised and a computer database appositely built. Through the analysis of the collected data twelve major bookbinding ateliers are identified and described in full detail, representing both monastic communities, providing the most extensive body of information on bindings of the Greek-Orthodox Christian monastic communities so far. It is through the description of these ateliers that the various influences, both from the West and the East, under which the aforementioned evolution occurred, are identified, considered, and interpreted. A statistical analysis is provided at the end of the thesis using tables and graphics in the effort to illustrate the major changes in time and space of the most significant bookbinding features, both technical and decorative.

Except providing a full photographic survey of the bookbindings described in the examination of twelve different bookbinding ateliers, graphic representations of many technical and decorative features, and a complete indexed list of all the 593 decorative motifs recorded, the thesis also tries to explore, whenever possible, how these bookbindings reflect the social, religious and commercial life of the time.

Since there is only little, isolated and dispersed, information published, and practically no systematic research on this specific subject and for the specific period considered here, the thesis aims to contribute in filling in a gap as well as providing a methodology for further research in the subject.

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LIST OF TABLES

A list of the tables containing all the data of the bindings considered in the thesis is provided in Appendix 2 in volume III.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

A list of the acronymic abbreviations used in the main text of the thesis but mostly in the data tables is given in Appendix 1 in volume III.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The present study was undertaken in November 1988 with a studentship from the London Institute, now the University of the Arts London. Until 2002, when accreditation was granted to the LINST, the research was registered to the Open University. The Camberwell College of Art is well known for its long history on the teaching of crafts in general and especially on bookbinding and book conservation. Nevertheless the reason behind the studentship which made possible this research lies in the St Catherine's Library Project, which was undertaken jointly by the St Catherine's Foundation and the Camberwell College of Arts in 1998. From the very beginning the scope of the project was to help the Sinai monastic community to cope with the preservation of its library, one of the most important libraries in the world, by providing the necessary expertise and funding. The project from its constitution was supervised by Dr Nicholas Pickwoad who correctly insisted on an empathetic approach to the material, putting as a priority the survey of all the bound manuscripts preserved in the library from a book archaeologist's point of view at the same time as making a detailed record of the condition and the preservation of every single manuscript.

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