

4.2. Conclusions

‘From the end of the 17th century and especially during the 18th, the way to bind books changes. Millboard is now used for the boards instead of wood, and instead of the many small lozenge etc impressed motifs large representations are preferred, like the Crucifixion or the Annunciation in the centre and the four Evangelists or Seraphims in the corners. Many times the sewing is not recessed but is visibly raised along the spine under the cover. The bindings of this kind are also often precious and very beautiful.’

(Πολίτης 1961, p. 48)

Considering what has been said before, mainly in section 4.1. we will try to give a chronological outline of the major changes occurred in the bookbinding structures of the post-Byzantine era from the late fifteenth to the early eighteenth century based on the collections of the two libraries of the research.

As far as the bookbinding technique is concerned, the sixteenth century in the bindings from the St. Catherine’s monastery represents quite literally a precise continuation of the Greek-style technique with signs of influence from the west mostly in the decoration of the bindings (the Klimis bindings). In the Iviron monastery instead the first signs of divergence are visible already from the last quarter of the century with the use of the Greek-Islamic bindings which to an extent are probably related with the fashion for decorated liturgical manuscripts of the school of Loukas Bozau and Mathaios Mireon . These bindings, with a strong Islamic influence which were widely used in the Athonite community were never really adopted in the Sinai, the few example recorded, together with a few examples of Islamic bindings on Greek manuscripts are all imports from outside as gifts and donations. Some other features such as the use of laminated boards in at least three bindings, the use of a preliminary endband sewing, the use of board tab markers, are all features which can hardly be fully appreciated because of the lack of enough evidence of bindings from the Byzantine period. As far as the laminated boards are concerned it is certain that some kind of light binding structure will have probably been used for more informal text-blocks but there is no evidence to this end so far. The board tab markers on the other hand, encountered both in the Sinai and the Iviron libraries, seem to have been a fairly widespread habit already identifiable in Coptic binding structures, from which probably derive, but again their use needs to be further investigated.

The seventeenth century proved to be, as Politis already guessed (see previous page), the turning point in the tradition of Greek-style bindings. In the course of this century Greek-style bindings are irreversibly abandoned in both areas, in the Iviron not a single example recorded in the second half of the century, in the Sinai instead some of them are still found as isolated examples in the Elusive and the Raithos ateliers, often hybridised (see for example the three Greek-style bindings with supports of the Raithos atelier, S. 76, S. 88, S. 1856), and probably dated no later than the third quarter of the century. As said above a major difference is the adoption of the Greek-Islamic bindings, which were much appreciated in Athos but clearly not so in the Sinai. A clear gradual change is evident in all major features of the bindings. In the first half supported sewing appears and is exclusively used by the beginning of the next century. The number of sewing stations used seems to be related to the type of sewing: it is clearly evident that the gradual establishment of supported sewing favoured an increase in the number of sewing stations on the basis of simple mechanical considerations. While slight differences in the material used for the sewing supports are recorded in the second half of the century between the two libraries, by the beginning of the eighteenth century cord supports are almost exclusively used in both areas. Also of interest is the fact that recessed supports were never widely used, only a few isolated examples have been recorded in the Iviron library. Spine lining is found in all the bound volumes recorded. In the first half of the century only very few examples are recorded with panel spine lining, the rule is an all along lining. In the second half a difference is evident between the two libraries which becomes even more marked in the first half of the eighteenth century: while in the Sinai all-along spine lining is still the rule in the Iviron panel spine lining is gradually established instead.

Excluding the laminated boards recorded in two bindings of the Iviron scriptorium, real pasteboards are firstly recorded around the end of the sixteenth century and are widely used in the seventeenth century in the Iviron, always related with the Greek-Islamic bindings, but they are gradually abandoned by the end of the century. In the Sinai instead pasteboards are established a bit latter though by the eighteenth century they completely supplant the wooden boards. This difference is related first to the different acceptance of the Greek-Islamic bindings and secondly to the environment itself, wood been scarce in the Sinai never really made a comeback once pasteboards were established. Board edge grooves are abandoned in the Iviron by the first half of

the century and about the third quarter in the Sinai. Projecting boards appear in both libraries by the first half of the century, the two examples recorded in the Ivron are due to imported bindings from Wallachia. By the beginning of the eighteenth century they are clearly prevailing in both libraries. They are not related to the material of the boards. The system used for the attachment between the text-blocks and the boards is related to the material of the boards and the type of binding, II Uns system was never really used in the Sinai. Greek style endbands, either simple or compound are not used latter than the end of the sixteenth century in the Ivron and not latter than the third quarter of the seventeenth in the Sinai. Simple endbands are almost completely abandoned from the first half of the century and no less than seven different types of secondary sewing have been recorded in both libraries, often used in the context of the same atelier. This pluralism is quite marked in the second half of the century in both libraries and by the first half of the next century the choice is clearly restricted. This same tendency is also evident in the Sinai in the primary sewing of the endbands but not quite so in the Ivron where basically only two different types have been recorded. The projection of the endbands onto the boards is a feature which was not easily abandoned and from the data of the research it is apparent that this was still the rule by the first half of the eighteenth century though using various anchoring systems which conform to the different material and dimensions of the boards. Protruding endbands also gradually decline, none recorded in the eighteenth century in Sinai and only a few in the Ivron. No clear change in the percentage of the volumes with markers resulted from this research. Nevertheless it is apparent that compound string markers were gradually preferred from simple string markers, tab markers were abandoned by the first half of the sixteenth century.

The decoration of the bindings was apparently a custom never really abandoned, though it is evident that using different patterns for each of the two boards is a feature of the earlier bindings which was abandoned by the end of the seventeenth century. Gold tooling is found to have been used only occasionally in both libraries and certainly after the middle of the century. Silver tooling and painted decoration are also only occasionally found, the former as an influence from Wallachia and Russia. Therefore blind tooling remained the rule throughout the period we are dealing with. Nevertheless a clear change is evident in the type of tools used for the decoration: creasers and concentric rings tools are abandoned definitively by the end of the seventeenth century, the use of centrepieces increases with time and cornerpieces are

used only in the Iviron bindings. Furthermore the number of different tools used to decorate one single binding follows, generally speaking, the same slightly decreasing tendency in both libraries.

In both libraries the use of bosses is abandoned by the third quarter of the seventeenth century and the same is true for the interlaced leather fastenings. Though from the second half of the sixteenth century onward bindings without any fastenings are increasingly found, apparently still by the eighteenth century most of the bindings still preserve some kind of fastenings in the Iviron while in the Sinai in the same period they are almost completely abandoned.

The data exposed and features such as the increase in the number of sewing stations, the preference for compound endbands and markers, the basically unchanged tendency to decorate the bindings, all indicate that we are dealing with an evolution rather than a decline of the bookbinding craft in the post-Byzantine monastic communities. Nevertheless it is apparent in most of the features described in this part of the thesis that changes in the Sinai occurred as a rule latter than in the Iviron which proved to be more open to new techniques and tendencies.

Change, the adoption of new techniques and the abandon of the old ones, proved to be a process related to two factors: the geographical position of each of the two monastic communities and the resulting relation with the outside world and second the conservatism of each one of the two communities, in part explained by its geographical position. In the Iviron it is apparent that the centres of influence are mostly the hegemonies of Wallachia, Moldavia and Russia, while in Sinai Crete and Venice, in both cases the major centres of financial income and cultural influence. In both monasteries the seventeenth century is a fertile period of experimentation and innovation. Nevertheless the isolation of the Sinai and of the Orthodox populations in the middle of the Arabic world for centuries resulted in a marked scepticism and reserve toward the form of the book. Though there are isolated examples which support the contrary it is clearly evident that in the Sinai where Islamic bindings will have been clearly known and appreciated at least for their decorative qualities, non of their features, technical and decorative has been adopted. The bindings of the Antioch ateliers and the history of Simeon Basam are eloquent examples to this, already suspected and expressed by Sonderkamp (1991, p. 439).

A few things need to be said about the effectiveness of the survey form. As it will have become evident only a part of the various features included and described in the survey form (and consequently recorded for each binding surveyed), have been actually elaborated, processed, and fully described, both in the description of the various ateliers and the statistical analysis in section 4.1. This is for the following reasons:

1. The limitation in the number of words of the final text of the thesis, which implied a selective, but yet comprehensive and representative, consideration of the data, accumulated through the research.
2. The nature of the research, which focused from the very beginning to the main features and the major changes, occurred in the period and the areas defined by its aims. Since it was not but at an advanced stage of the research that these main features and major changes became evident, it was necessary from the beginning to record all the potential change-bearer features in order to avoid missing any of them which might prove important at a latter stage.
3. Certain features proved to be inappropriate for statistical analysis because they either follow no consistency even among the work of the same atelier or even binder (for example the arrangement of the endleaves, the corner mitre, the extension of the endbands onto the boards in Greek-style bindings, the way the pastedowns were pasted on the boards etc), because they proved to present no significant variation in time and place (for example the trimming of the turn-ins, the thickness of the supports, the thickness of the spine lining, the way the title has been written on the books, the treatment of the cover in the spine area, the turn-ins cut etc), or because significant gaps were found in the information gathered (for example the use or not of preliminary sewing, the tool marks left from the trimming of the text-blocks, and the working of the wooden boards). Therefore, fro these features no clear pattern was evident, that could be related to areas, eras, or persons. Nevertheless this does not diminish their value but only impedes their statistical elaboration.
4. Certain features though potentially of value proved to require longer survey times and possibly a more experienced eye. This is particularly true for the precise number of the gatherings and their construction, the identification of the various threads and the description of their twist and ply, the weave of the spine lining, the identification of the various leathers etc.

What probably limits the potential value of the information gathered is the accuracy in collecting and interpreting it rather than the fact that it may not have been fully exploited in this research. It can always be of use in the future when more published research will be available.

As far as the methodology of this research is concerned and as far as the two different approaches to the material of the libraries imposed by the different conditions and infrastructures it became evident that though the one followed in the Sinai library was less precisely defined it was at the same time certainly more intriguing and fascinating but also more complex and time consuming. This is because it was based to a great extent on the personal observation of the researcher and very little on safe bibliographical targeting of the bindings to examine. It nevertheless proved to permit the formulation of a broader view of the interconnections and influences which lie behind the bookbindings themselves, therefore offering results of greater analytical value. The research in the Iviron library from its very planning was almost exclusively confined to the monastery and its immediate premises therefore is probably lacking the broad view on the subject offered by the methodology followed in the Sinai. In other words, it proved that relatively free access to a book collection without any strict criteria for the selection of the research material, so that hints and clues can be followed up freely, partly guided by intuition and interpretation of evidence, can probably produce results of higher academic value in terms of soundness, cross-relation and consistency.