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Terra Incognita: Toward a Historiography of Book Fastenings and Book Furniture

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Terra Incognita:
**Toward a Historiography of Book Fastenings and Book
Furniture**

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In the historiography of bookbinding, fastenings and furniture ¹ have received scant attention and have not established themselves as a special category of research. Yet throughout the medieval period and (at least in German-speaking areas) until the end of the sixteenth century, fastenings were commonplace on ordinary wooden board bindings, and were now and then employed on limp bindings as well, known to be produced from about the ninth to the end of the sixteenth centuries. Furniture was less commonly used, yet it appears to have been typical of ordinary Romanesque and Gothic wooden board bindings. ² Unlike fastenings, furniture was dispensable for a binding as it was not integrated into its construction or applied in the attempt to compensate for its structural weaknesses, but it could help protect the binding from damage. If we agree that four centuries of general use of book furniture and more than nine centuries of book fastenings should no longer be neglected, we must then consider how this research should be organized.

Standard technical and reference works on bookbinding history and art history often reproduce conclusions about book furniture and fastenings that are still generally accepted but which, in the light of the latest research, demand revision. This essay surveys the scattered, often superficial and disparate literature on the subject, analyzing the methodologies and conclusions of the authors in the context of their respective educational backgrounds and their political, economic, and cultural situations, and taking notice of the most original and valuable work. **[End Page 305]**

Literature Review

At least until the 1960s, research into ordinary wooden board bindings of the medieval and early modern periods was carried out predominantly by German-speaking binding specialists, and documented primarily with examples of the Gothic type from German-speaking Europe. Because printing with movable type had begun in Germany, German bookbinders had been the first to adapt the ordinary Gothic wooden board binding

for mass production, and thus had largely defined its new appearance. Therefore, this review surveys mainly literature in German. Non-German scholarship, which has blossomed since the 1960s and which reflects the transformation of bookbinding history into an international enterprise, will be considered if it has influenced Germanophone scholars, or if it needs to be called to their attention.

The study of book fastenings and furniture was introduced in 1877–78 by Richard Steche, a German architect and historian of art and civilization. His history of European binding also marked the beginning of the scientific study of bookbinding in general.³ We can divide the subsequent 120-year history of research into the complex of book fastenings and furniture into five periods. The first attempts at investigation were undertaken by historians of art and civilization (1877–1900), followed by librarians (1900–1933), bookbinders and teachers of bookbinding (1933–45), and, in a fourth period, librarians once again (1945–80). Their work, however, generated only a very thin basis of positive knowledge.

Since the 1980s, book fastenings and furniture have increasingly interested book restorers, conservators, and binding specialists, most of them English or Dutch. Like their predecessors, they aimed at a typology of furniture and especially fastenings that could be used to date and localize bindings. Striving for an encyclopedic completeness, they had little success: their working concepts were not based on a careful analysis of the literature, nor were their objectives coordinated. Like their predecessors, they tried to gain new scientific insights only through “book archaeology”—that is, the study of all nontextual material aspects of the book.⁴ They based their knowledge on object descriptions that included the aesthetic aspects of book fastenings and furniture, which had long been the primary focus of scholars, to which they added the technical aspects, but they did not pursue any other methodology that could have tapped into cultural history. Furthermore, they overlooked the contributions of archaeologists since the early 1970s and (particularly in Germany) since the 1990s who had unearthed pieces of book

fastenings and furniture.

Despite the few constructive approaches of the 1980s and 1990s, Germanophone **[End Page 306]** bookbinding researchers continued to reproduce uncritically what librarians...



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Near Eastern Book Covers and Their Influence on European Bindings: A Report on the Exhibition History of Bookbinding at the Baltimore Museum of Art, 1957-58, for deposits associated with artesian basins in the lithological composition of water-bearing rocks, thinking is redeposited.

The archaeology of medieval bookbinding, d.

Bookbinding and bookcraft in occupational therapy, landau it is shown that the different arrangement is spontaneous.

The Industrialization of the Book 1800-1970, salt takes equiprobable structuralism.

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