

THE BONE FOLDER

MONDAY: A DISCUSSION ABOUT BOOKBINDING

BIBLIOPHILE (looking around the studio of the master bookbinder): Master, what is this wonderful tool that you have here? It looks intriguingly dangerous.

BOOKBINDER: That, my good sir, is a harmless but important tool. We call it a bone folder. I use it to fold paper, make signatures, rub down the linings on the spine, and work leather and any number of other materials that I encounter every day. With it I can take a collection of papers and craft them into a book. It is an extension of my hands and serves as a continual reminder of the value of good craft work, even if the aura of the trade is no longer what it once was.

BIBLIOPHILE: Quite right, Master. As a bibliophile I know how to value a finely handbound book. I just can't find pleasure in reading an ugly, poorly-bound book that falls apart as one is reading it. In contrast a well-bound, indestructible book helps bring me to the time and place of the story and gives me the sensations I need when reading. If I were to ask you, Master, could you tell me about your work? Please don't think idle curiosity is my motive or even that I want to steal ideas from you.

I think I will be a better client if I understand your craft and can judge its complexity. My opinion is that a bibliophile who doesn't understand books is following a trivial pursuit. However, someone who isn't interested only in the content of the work but also understands how a book is made—beginning with papermaking and through to titling the finished binding—has embraced book collecting with his heart and soul. So, won't you introduce me to the secrets of your craft in a few short discussions?

BOOKBINDER: I would be willing to do that, but you can't expect me to teach you everything, as that would require an apprenticeship of three to four years, plus as many more years of work and experience in order to become a competent master bookbinder. A master binder doesn't appear out of nowhere. Why don't we do it this way: I'll tell you about some of the most important binding styles first, and tell you only enough about the structure so you can visualize it. We'll talk about the specific details that interest you when you bring me your books to bind.

BIBLIOPHILE: That sounds fair. So, Master, why don't you start?

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