

MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

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One Binding, Two Binders? A Greek-Style Binding Made in Italy: The Case of Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS 11344

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THE BINDINGS OF GREEK manuscripts of the Byzantine and early post-Byzantine periods have been the topic of rather prolific research in the past twenty years. Specific binding ateliers and binders have been identified, techniques have been further explored or described for the first time, evolutionary patterns have been suggested, and relations to other binding traditions have been recognized.¹ Even if it has just scratched the

We are grateful to Carlo Federici, Federico Macchi, Stefano Martinelli Tempesta, Nicholas Pickwood, Silvia Pugliese, and Enrico Valseriati for their comments and suggestions during the writing of this article, and Benoît Labarre, Alexia Melianou, Tatiana Gersten, and Sara Lummens of the Royal Library of Belgium for facilitating our research. We thank the anonymous reviewer for their careful reading and helpful comments.

1 See János A. Szirmai, *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 62–92; B. Leggas and N. Tsironi, eds., *Βιβλιοαμφιάστεις*, 3 vols. (Athens: Ellēnikē Etaireia Vivliodesias, 1999, 2004, and 2008); Annaclara Cataldi Palau, “Legature costantinopolitane del monastero di Prodromo Petra tra i manoscritti di Giovanni di Ragusa (†1443),” *Codices Manuscripti* 37–38 (2001): 11–50; Paul Canart, “Les reliures au monogramme des Paléologues: État de la question,” in *La reliure médiévale: Pour une description normalisée: Actes du colloque*

surface, this research has resulted in a much clearer understanding of what Byzantine bindings are; how, when, where, and by whom they were made; where they came from; and what they were substituted with after the demise of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. As the Byzantine Empire was coming to an end (at least officially), the Renaissance was maturing in Italy, fueling a constant need for texts of the classics. For decades, such texts moved from east to west together with scholars, intellectuals, diplomats, and teachers escaping from the former empire. An intense activity of teaching and learning Greek in Italy went hand in hand with an intense activity of book production—both manuscript and printed—bookbinding, and book collecting.²

For about a century and a half after 1453, the production of bookbindings made by imitating Byzantine techniques saw significant success in cities like Venice, Florence, and Rome.³ Of the main characteristics of Byzantine

international (Paris, 22–24 May 2003), ed. Guy Lanoë and Genevière Grand (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 155–81; Georgios Boudalis, “The Transition from Byzantine to Post-Byzantine Bookbindings: A Statistical Analysis of Some Crucial Changes,” in *Konserviranje knjig in papirja 2 = Book and Paper Conservation 2*, ed. Jedert Vodopivec Tomažič (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2016), 12–29; Georgios Boudalis, *The Codex and Crafts in Late Antiquity* (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2018); Raphaële Mouren, ed., *La description des reliures orientales: Conservation, aspects juridiques et prise de vue* (London: Archetype Publications, 2013).

One of the initiatives that greatly influenced research in this field is without doubt the St. Catherine’s Library Conservation Project sponsored by the St. Catherine’s Foundation and run and supervised by Nicholas Pickwoad and Camberwell College of Arts. The amount of data collected through the survey of the almost 3,500 codices of the library and the many conservators who participated in this huge survey are a legacy that will continue generating primary research and literature in the years to come.

2 The large body of literature on this topic cannot possibly be summarized in a footnote. See, for instance, Leighton Durham Reynolds and Nigel Guy Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1975); Jean Irigoin, “Les ambassadeurs à Venise et le commerce des manuscrits grecs dans les années 1540–1550,” in *Venezia, centro di mediazione tra oriente e occidente (secoli XV–XVI): Aspetti e problemi*, ed. Hans-Georg Beck, Manoussos Manoussacas, and Agostino Pertusi (Florence: Olschki, 1977), 399–416; Robert S. Nelson, “The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts, ca. 1200–1450,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 209–35; Jean-Christophe Saladin, *La bataille du grec à la Renaissance* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2000).

3 See mainly Szirmai, *The Archaeology of Mediaeval Bookbinding*, 84–87; Piero Scapecchi, “Legature ‘alla greca’ dal circolo di Aldo Manuzio,” *Rara volumina 2* (1994): 5–12; Piccarda

bindings (unsupported sewing structures; smooth spines; bookblocks cut flush with the boards; endbands projecting and sewn over the edges of the boards; grooved board edges; and interlaced fastenings), not all were reproduced in every binding: bindings where all such features are present are generally called “genuine” Greek-style bindings by book historians, while bindings where Western features are also present are called “hybrid” Greek-style bindings. It is possible that the mixing of Greek and western features was done out of habit, lack of practical knowledge, distrust of “foreign” techniques, or instructions by the person who had commissioned the piece; however, among the thousand or so identified Greek-style bindings made in Italy (called “alla greca” by early modern scholars, and also often by book historians today), a clear desire to imitate “Greekness” for its cultural currency is on display.⁴

Bookbinders in Renaissance Italy

While the identities of those who commissioned and owned Greek-style bindings in western Europe are often investigated and increasingly better

Quilici, “Legature greche, ‘alla greca,’ per la Grecia,” *Accademie e biblioteche d’Italia* 52 (1984): 99–111; Gabriele Mazzucco, “Legature rinascimentali di edizioni di Aldo Manuzio,” in *Aldo Manuzio e l’ambiente veneziano, 1494–1515*, ed. Susy Marcon and Marino Zorzi (Venice: Il Cardo, 1994), 135–79; Konstantinos Choulis, “The Relationship Between Byzantine and ‘Alla Greca’ Bookbinding Structure: A Preliminary Study on the Structural Elements of ‘Alla Greca’ Bindings in the Vatican Library (Fondo Antico, *Vatt. Gr.* 1-1217),” in Lanoë and Grand, *La reliure médiévale*, 183–96; Nicholas Pickwood, “How Greek Is Greek? Western European Imitations of Greek-Style Bindings,” in *BIBΛΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΑΣΤΗΣ 3: The Book in Byzantium, Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Bookbinding: Proceedings of an International Symposium (Athens 13–16 October 2005)*, ed. Nikis Tsironi (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2008), 177–200.

4 Anthony Hobson, *Humanists and Bookbinders: The Origins and Diffusion of Humanistic Bookbinding, 1459–1559* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), mainly 60–90; Anna Gialdini, “Alla Greca”? *Matter and Meaning of Greek-Style Bookbindings in Renaissance Venice* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of the Arts London, 2017); Anna Gialdini, “Antiquarianism and Self-Fashioning in a Group of Bookbindings for Gian Vincenzo Pinelli,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 29 (2017): 19–31.

known, the same cannot be said of those who made them.⁵ Signing one's work was a less common practice among bookbinders than it was among scribes, with some variation across Europe: in Flanders, for instance, some binders incorporated their names into the panels impressed onto covers, while Italian binders infrequently included their names in the books they bound.⁶ When a group of bindings is identified as produced by the same hand, the binder is therefore often named by historians after a distinctive finishing tool or an identifiable patron.

Such is the case for several of the makers of Greek-style bindings in western Europe. A prolific Venice-based binder initially known as Wanderbuchbinder (for his presumed mobility across Italy) or the Mendoza Binder (after his work for the bibliophile Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, among others) was subsequently identified by Anthony Hobson as Andrea di Lorenzo, from Verona, an identification now accepted by most historians.⁷ The Fugger Binder (or Venetianischer Fugger-Meister, again after his primary customer, the banker Johann Jakob Fugger), also known as the Venetian Apple Binder (after a tool), remains unidentified.⁸

Some names of binders are indeed known to us, but their ethnicity is not Greek (or, when only a first name is recorded, cannot be confirmed). Another

5 See Anna Gialdini, "Bookbinders in the Early Modern Venetian Book Trade," *The Historical Journal* 65, no. 4 (2022): 901–21; <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X21000728>.

6 Robert J. Milevski, "A Primer on Signed Bindings," in *Suave Mechanicals: Essays in the History of Bookbinding*, ed. Julia Miller (Ann Arbor: Legacy Press, 2013), 1:163–246; Staffan Fogelmark, *Flemish and Related Panel-Stamped Bindings* (New York: Bibliographical Society of America, 1990). Some examples are recorded in Tammamo De Marinis, *La legatura artistica in Italia nei secoli XV e XVI*, 3 vols. (Florence: Alinari, 1960).

7 Ilse Schunke, "Venezianische Renaissanceeinbände: Ihre Entwicklung und ihre Werkstätten," in *Studi di bibliografia e di storia in onore di Tammamo De Marinis*, 4 vols. (Verona: Valdonega, 1964), 4:123–200 at 163–69; Hobson, *Humanists and Bookbinders*.

8 See mainly Mirjam Foot, *The Henry Davis Gift: A Collection of Bookbindings*, vol. 1: *Studies in the History of Bookbinding* (London: British Museum Publications, 1978), 312–13; Mirjam Foot, *The Henry Davis Gift: A Collection of Book Bindings*, vol. 3: *A Catalogue of South-European Bindings* (London: Oak Knoll Press, 2010), 354–60, nos. 293–98; A. Hobson, *Renaissance Book Collecting: Jean Grolier and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza: Their Books and Bindings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 119–38.

binder to receive Johann Jakob Fugger's patronage, the Flemish Anthoni Lodewijk, was based in Venice in the 1550s and also worked for the printer Gabriele Giolito.⁹ Niccolò Fery (known as Franzese) (d. 1570/1571), from Reims, worked in Rome, binding books and restoring Greek-style bindings for the Vatican Library.¹⁰ Payments for Greek-style bindings or their parts (often fastenings) are also recorded for Maestro Luigi and a certain Johannes at the Vatican Library, and Lorenzo Rossi (active 1482–1521) in Ferrara.¹¹

The actual input or influence of ethnic Greek binders on Greek-style bindings made in Italy is unclear. Based on a letter sent from Michael Trivolis to John Gregoropoulos around 1500, it is known that a scribe by the name of Paulos, from Crete, bound at least one manuscript he had copied himself, a copy of Dioscorides. The manuscript, “that he [Paulos] bound himself in Padua” (“ὄν ἐκεῖνος ἔχει εἰς τὴν Πάδουαν δεδεμένον”), has not been identified, and none of the manuscripts that have been attributed to his hand are in the sort of binding that one could expect of a Cretan craftsman (several have been rebound; one is in a hybrid Greek-style binding likely to have been made in England).¹² Very little in general is known of Paulos's life, but it is

9 Ilse Schunke, “Antonius Lodoicus Flander ligavit Venetiis,” *Fund og Forskning* 5–6 (1959–58), 193–207; Mirjam Foot, *The History of Bookbinding as a Mirror of Society* (London: British Library, 1998), 52–53; Hobson, *Renaissance Book Collecting*.

10 Anthony Hobson, *Apollo and Pegasus: An Enquiry into the Formation and Dispersal of a Renaissance Library* (Amsterdam: Van Heusden, 1975), 76–86; Foot, *The Henry Davis Gift*, 3:364–67, nos. 303–5; Franca Petrucci Nardelli, “Il fiore di loto in legatoria: Da un ferro floreale ai meccanismi della produzione,” *Archivio della Società romana di storia patria* 111 (1988): 267–84 at 273–76.

11 For Maestro Luigi, see Léon Dorez, “Le registre des dépenses de la Bibliothèque Vaticane de 1548 à 1555,” in *Fasciculus Ioannis Willis Clark dicatus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909), 142–85 at 175. For Johannes, see Eugène Müntz and Paul Fabre, *La Bibliothèque du Vatican au XVe siècle d'après des documents inédits: Contributions pour servir à l'histoire de l'humanisme* (Paris: Ernest Thorin, 1887), 155; De Marinis, *La legatura artistica*, 1:32. For Lorenzo Rossi, see De Marinis, *La legatura artistica*, 2:45.

12 Manoussos Manoussakos and Christos G. Patrinelis, “Η αλληλογραφία του Ιωάννου Γρηγοροπούλου μετά του Μ. Μουσόρου, Α. Αποστόλη, Ζ. Καλλιέργη και άλλων λογίων της Αναγεννήσεως χρονολογούμενη (1494–1503),” *Επετηρίς του Μεσαιωνικού Αρχείου* 10 (1960): 163–201 at 184–85, no. 12. Gialdini, “*Alla Greca?*” 1:121–25. On the English-made Greek-style binding (Oxford, New College, MS 244), see Pickwood, “How Greek Is Greek?”

interesting to note that around the turn of the sixteenth century he was active in the Aldine circle, where many (often genuine) Greek-style bindings were commissioned and collected.¹³

Another ethnic Greek, Giovanni Onorio da Maglie (d. 1563), worked as a copyist and, it has been suggested, as a binder at the Vatican Library starting in 1535. He also frequently restored books for the humanist Fulvio Orsini.¹⁴ The influence of the Cretan scribe Angelos Vergikios, who took up a position at the court of France and may have overseen the first phase of production of Greek-style bindings there, has also been discussed.¹⁵

Paulos, Giovanni Onorio da Maglie, and Angelos Vergikios all came from areas that were culturally, if not ethnically, hybrid: Crete and southern Italy. Crete, which was under Venetian rule between 1204–11 and 1669, was home to Latin and Greek (as well as Jewish) communities, which often shared cultural practices.¹⁶ It was also an active locale for the production of Greek manuscripts and bindings.¹⁷ Maglie is located in Apulia, in the Salento region,

13 What little is known of Paulos's life comes from the epistolaries, his own and of those who knew him. See mainly Manoussakas and Patrinelis, "Η ἀλληλογραφία του Ιωάννου Γρηγοροπούλου"; Manoussos Manoussakas, "Sept lettres inédites (1492–1503) du recueil retrouvé de Jean Grégoropoulos," *Thesaurismata / Θησαυρισματα* 13 (1976): 7–39; David Speranzi, *Marco Musuro: Libri e scrittura* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2013), 185–86.

14 Maria Luisa Agati, Paul Canart, and Carlo Federici, "Giovanni Onorio da Maglie, *instaurator librorum graecorum* à la fin du Moyen Age," *Scriptorium* 50 (1996): 363–69; Maria Luisa Agati, *Giovanni Onorio da Maglie, copista greco, 1535–1563* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 2001).

15 Pickwood, "How Greek Is Greek?"

16 See mainly Sally McKee, *Uncommon Dominion: Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); David Jacoby, "Jews and Christians in Venetian Crete: Segregation, Interaction, and Conflict," in *"Interstizi": Culture Ebraico-Cristiane a Venezia e nei suoi domini dal Medioevo all'Età Moderna*, ed. Uwe Israel, Robert Jütte, and Reinhold C. Mueller (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2010), 243–79.

17 Jean Irigoïn, "Un groupe de reliures crétoises (XVe siècle)," *Κρητικά Χρονικά* ΙΕ–ΙΣΤ (1961–62): 102–12; Paul Canart, Dominique Grosdidier de Matons, and Philippe Hoffmann, "L'analyse technique des reliures byzantines et la détermination de leur origine géographique (Constantinople, Crète, Chypre, Grèce)," in *Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio: Atti del seminario di Erice, 18–25 settembre 1988*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo (Spoleto: CISAM, 1991), 2:751–68, and plates I–VIIIb.

where famous medieval centers of production for Greek manuscripts, such as Otranto and Gallipoli, are situated.¹⁸

The picture painted is therefore quite varied: some binders known to have made or repaired Greek-style bindings in western Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were Greek, and some were not; even those who were Greek came from areas where cultural influences were mixed. Most binders remain nameless. Some Greek scribes who relocated to Italy were also active as binders, but it is unclear to what degree: indeed, Greek *émigrés* in Italy often took up whichever career their education and native language allowed, from teaching, to copying manuscripts, to occupying positions in the Church.¹⁹ In addition, the possibility always exists that when a binder ceased their activity, their tools would change hands, for instance through a sale, which can make attributions difficult or impossible.

Finally, it is possible that different binders (including binders from different ethnic backgrounds) may have worked on the same bindings, possibly in different phases. Binding books is a process that entails a number of actions in approximately the same consistent order, from sewing, attaching boards, and sewing endbands (if present), to covering (known as forwarding) and decorating the cover (finishing). It is sensible to suggest that within the same workshop, parts of the binding process could be assigned to different individuals, with the final steps often performed by more experienced binders. Several sources indicate that “unfinished” books existed on the early modern European market and remained in such a state until purchase by the final user, the customer, who would eventually get to determine the style and extent of the cover decoration if they so wished.²⁰

Unfinished Greek-style bindings are rare, but their appearance may have been very similar to that of a printed volume of the Giunta edition of

18 Santo Lucà, “Il libro bizantino e postbizantino nell’Italia meridionale,” in *Scrittura e libro nel mondo greco-bizantino*, ed. Carla Casetti Brach (Bari: Edipuglia, 2012), 25–76.

19 Stefano Martinelli Tempesta, “Filologia e società nella carriera di un maestro greco fra Quattro e Cinquecento: Giorgio Ermonimo di Sparta,” in *Filologia e società: Episodi e contesti lungo la storia*, ed. Stefano Costa, Federico Gallo, Stefano Martinelli Tempesta, and Marco Petoletti (Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2020), 177–282, esp. 179–80.

20 Nicholas Pickwood, “Unfinished Business: Incomplete Bindings Made for the Booktrade from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century,” *Quaerendo* 50 (2020): 41–80.

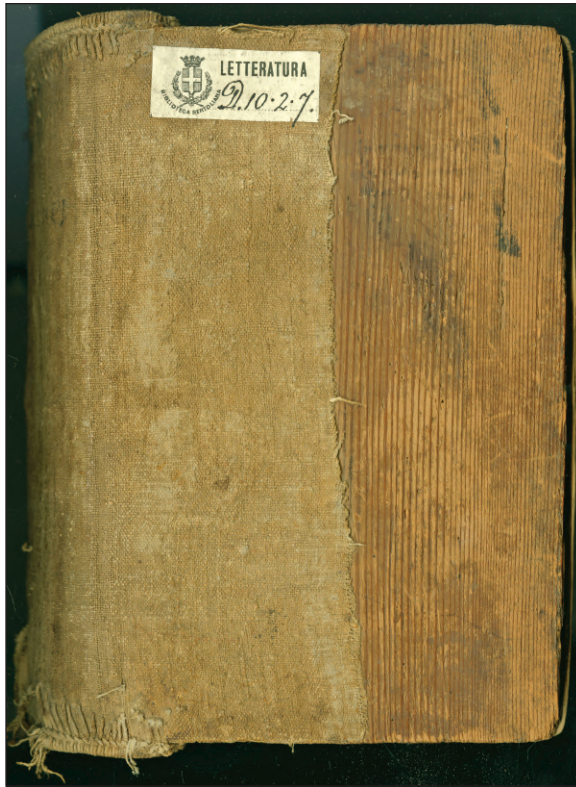


FIGURE 1. The Greek-style binding of the Giunta edition of Aristophanes's *Comoediae*, 1525. Vicenza, Biblioteca Civica Bertoliana, D. 10.2.7. Reproduced with permission from the Biblioteca Civica Bertoliana di Vicenza.

Aristophane's *Comoediae* (1525), currently at the Biblioteca Civica Bertoliana in Vicenza (D. 10.2.7), bound in the genuine Greek style and supplied with both endbands (primary sewing only) and boards. This book may have never received a covering (the covering and any tooling could have been left to a different time and craftsman), or its covering may have fallen off. Close inspection of the surface of the boards under the microscope or chemical analysis could confirm one hypothesis or the other (fig. 1).²¹ Regardless, this

21 We would like to thank Sergio Merlo for pointing out this volume to us.

rare example is useful for visualizing the appearance of a forwarded, but not finished, Greek-style binding. While identifying and naming individual craftsmen may often be an unattainable goal, the study of bookbinding techniques on a geographical basis can be extremely productive. This approach can not only situate bindings even when decorative elements are missing or ambiguous, but it can also cast light on the cultural identities and ethnicities of the individuals involved in the production, distribution, or consumption of a book.

Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS 11344 (Omont 79), and Its Binding

Having established the context, in the remaining half of this article we will consider a specific case study, that of a manuscript at the Royal Library in Brussels (MS 11344 [Omont 79]) and its binding, which displays both Greek and Italian elements.

The manuscript, copied in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, contains two of Aristophanes's plays, *Wealth* (fols. 4v–54r) and *The Clouds* (fols. 54r–112v), preceded by their *argumenta*. One of the scribes (fols. 1r–32v) has been identified as Georgios Alexandros Chomatas, a priest from Crete who, in addition to being a productive copyist, taught Greek in Rome, Venice, and Padua and became bishop of Arkadi (d. 1501).²² Folios 33r–112v have been copied by a scribe whose name is thus far not known, but who was

22 Stefano Martinelli Tempesta, “Trasmissione di testi greci esametrici nella Roma di Niccolò V: Quattro codici di Demetrio Xantopulo e una lettera di Bessarione a Teodoro Gaza,” *Segno e Testo* 13 (2015): 271–350 at 295–96. On Georgios Chomatas (Alexandrou), see Ernst Gamillscheg, Dieter Harlfinger, and Herbert Hunger, eds., *Repertorium der griechischen Kopisten, 800–1600*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981–97), 1:54, 2:79, 3:89; Eleftherios Despotakis and Thierry Ganchou, “Géorgios Alexandros Chômatas, successeur de Dèmètrios Chalkokondylès à la chaire de grec de l'Université de Padoue (1475/76–1479),” *Revue des études byzantines* 76 (2018): 233–65; Guillaume Saint-Guillain, “Le copiste Géorgios Chômatas et les moines de Patmos,” in *I Greci durante la venetocrazia: Uomini, spazio, idee (XII–XVIII sec.): Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Venezia, 3–7 dicembre 2007*, ed. Chrysa A. Maltezou, Angelika Tzavara, and Despina Vlassi (Venice: Istituto ellenico di studi bizantini e postbizantini di Venezia, 2009), 163–81.

active in Venice or the Venetian mainland around the end of the fifteenth century and was an acquaintance or collaborator of Demetrios Moschos (d. after 1519); he is sometimes given the name of “Ps. Demetrios Moschos.”²³ Both scribes were also active in the circle of Michael Apostolios in Crete, which constitutes another possible locale for the copying of the Brussels manuscript.²⁴

There is no information about the provenance of the manuscript and its binding (fig. 2). The description of the binding given in Henri Omont’s 1885 catalogue of Greek manuscripts at the Royal Library of Brussels only mentions that it is “a stamped ancient binding” (“rel. anc. estampée”).²⁵ Berthe van Regemorter considered it in one of her studies of Byzantine bindings (which also included Greek-style bindings from western Europe) and hypothesized that the binding was “from a sixteenth-century Italian-Greek workshop” (“d’un atelier italo-grec du XVIe siècle”).²⁶

23 The distinction between the hand of this anonymous copyist and that of Demetrios Moschos has only been made in recent years. In addition to fols. 33r–112v of Brussels MS 11344, the following manuscripts have been attributed to the hand of the “Ps. Demetrios Moschos” in part or their entirety: Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Library, MS Gr 17 (fols. 2r–36v); Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III, MS II.F.11; Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS H 117 sup.; Ambrosiana, MS E 87 sup. (fols. 1r–93v); Paris, BnF, MS gr. 2755 (fols. 248r–303v); Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 1379 (fols. 59r–110v and potentially fols. 111r–115v). See mainly Martinelli Tempesta, “Trasmissione di testi greci esametrici,” 295–96. See also David Speranzi, “La scrittura di Aldo e il suo ultimo carattere greco (con uno sconosciuto esemplare di tipografia),” in *Five Centuries Later: Aldus Manutius: Culture, Typography and Philology*, ed. Natale Vacalebri (Florence: Olschki, 2018), 29–60, esp. 46–47, 50; Teresa Martínez Manzano, “La Juventud de Demetrio Mosco,” *Scripta* 12 (2019): 143–67 at 162 no. 8.

24 As suggested in Micol Muttini, “Appunti sulla circolazione del Pluto di Aristofane in età umanistica (II): I codici misti,” *Segno e Testo* 14 (2019): 305–64, esp. 332. It should not surprise us that a manuscript could have been copied in Crete but bound in Italy, as the circulation of unbound manuscripts was neither uncommon nor practically difficult. See Daniele Bianconi, *Cura et studio: Il restauro del libro a Bisanzio* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2018), 95–100.

25 Henri Omont, *Catalogue des manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque royale de Bruxelles et des autres bibliothèques publiques de Belgique* (Ghent: Picard, 1885), 26 no. 79.

26 Berthe van Regemorter, “La reliure byzantine,” *Revue Belge d’archéologie et d’histoire de l’art* 36 (1967): 99–162, pl. XVIIb. Van Regemorter mentions the same manuscript in 1954 when considering the methods used for the attachment of the boards in the bindings of Greek manuscripts. See Berthe van Regemorter, “La reliure des manuscrits grecs,” *Scriptorium* 8 (1954): 3–23.



FIGURE 2. The left board of the Brussels codex. Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS 11344. © Royal Library of Belgium.

THE BINDING STRUCTURE

The codex is bound according to the Byzantine technique and is in a very good state of preservation. The bookblock is in perfect condition, and the structure of the codex is sound, although it is missing the two fastening

straps from the right board and has some minor damage in the leather cover along the spine, toward the head, as well as some damage to the headband, as will be explained later.

The codex is sewn on six sewing stations—four main stations and two changeover stations—with unsupported sewing using the loop-stitch, or link-stitch, sewing technique (although the good condition of the codex does not allow any further insights to be gained regarding this aspect). Unlike the typical V-shape cuts found in Greek-style bindings, here the sewing stations are marked with U-shape cuts. These are used to allow for easy passing of the needle and the sewing thread, as well as to accommodate and recess the bulk of the “chains” produced in the sewing process transversely to the spine. The sewing is done with a medium thickness S-twist plain thread.

Starting from the head edge, the distances in millimeters between the edges and the sewing stations are the following: mm 14 – 18 – 43 – 43 – 43 – 20 – 13, and the pattern they form in the spine is the one shown in figure 3. Apparently, the same thread was used for attaching the boards to the bookblock. Again, the condition of the codex does not allow for any further details of the method used to be recorded. It is not possible, for example, to say if the sewing was made by sewing the boards first (although this seems more likely), if it was sewn in one block or in two blocks according to the double-sequence sewing, what the exact route of the thread is on the outer face of the board, and what pattern this threading presumably forms. Instead, what is clear on the inner face of both boards are scored lines marking the points where the board was drilled to allow the sewing thread to be laced through it. There is a scored line parallel to the spine about two centimeters away from the edge; perpendicular to that line, there are six more short lines marking the exact places of the board attachment links. Similar marks, either scored or made with graphite, can occasionally be found in Byzantine bindings or similar bindings of the eastern Mediterranean.²⁷ The boards are drilled at those points, allowing the sewing thread to be drawn through them.

27 Examples are Sinai, St. Catherine’s Monastery, MS Syriac 220 and Athens, National Library of Greece, MS 63, both with scored marks, and Sinai, St. Catherine’s Monastery, MS Syriac 46 and 166, both with graphite marks.



FIGURE 3. The distribution of the sewing station along the spine of the bookblock. Drawing by Georgios Boudalis.

On top of the sewing of the boards the codex is covered with a pasted plain canvas-like textile as a spine lining, a typical feature of Byzantine bindings. The textile extends beyond the spine (although it is not possible to determine how far) and is pasted on the outer face of each board, thus reinforcing the connection of the boards to the bookblock and at the same time leveling and smoothing any unevenness caused by the sewing and the board attachment.

On top of the spine lining and through the boards and the bookblock gatherings, two endbands were sewn at the head and tail of the spine of the codex. This is the most interesting feature of the binding and will be considered in more detail later.

COVERING AND TOOLING

The codex is covered with a piece of good-quality brown tanned goatskin. The leather was cut to shape beforehand, but the mitering of the corners was done once the cover was pasted to the codex, as the knife cuts are clearly visible in those areas. Atypically for a book bound in the Byzantine manner, but fairly common in Italy, the leather cover shows signs of the turn-ins having been pared, especially on the lower edge. The cover is decorated with blind and gold tooling using motifs that are typical of Italian bindings of the period but were unknown, like gold tooling itself, in the Byzantine tradition. There are five tools used and a triple fillet (fig. 4). The fillet (tool number 1) is used to create the two frames on each board. Within these frames, the two rectangular knotwork tools (tools 2 and 3) are used in repeated impressions carefully aligned to give the impressions of rolls. The two roundels (tools 4 and 5) are made of a material perhaps similar to gesso,

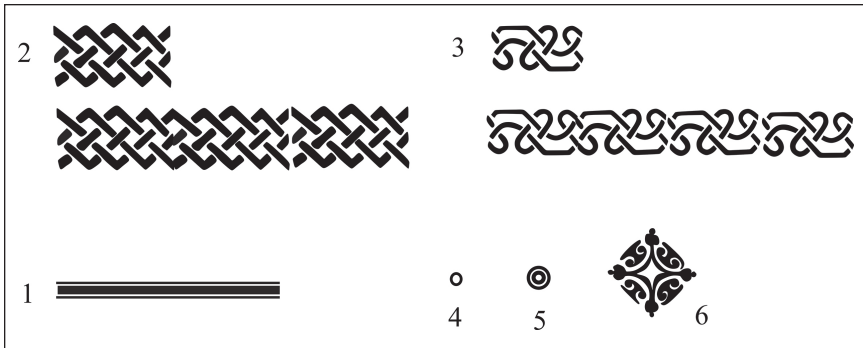


FIGURE 4. The tools used for the decoration of the binding. Drawing by Georgios Boudalis.

apparently gilded, and set into holes punched in the leather; they are used in the corners of the inner frieze and the spaces between them, as well as above and below the central motif. In the center of each board is a gold-tooled impression of a lozenge tool with a fleuron inscribed within it (tool 6).

Both the knotwork (*cordame*; tools 2 and 3) and the roundels (*occhi di dado*; tools 4 and 5) are well known as typical motifs of Italian bookbinding in the period 1450–1600 (and especially between 1450 and 1525); the knotwork in the inner frame was a particularly popular design.²⁸ The combination of the two elements was common in Venice, Naples, Florence, and Rome.²⁹ The lozenge fleuron tool (tool 6) seems to be a design common in Venice, possibly a match with the one found on a binding that was in Tammaro De Marinis’s private collection in the 1960s.³⁰

28 See, for instance, Foot, *The Henry Davis Gift*, 3:305–6, no. 245. The small tool used in this case is not the same as that used in the Brussels binding. See also Philippe Hoffmann, “Reliures crétoises et vénitiennes provenant de la bibliothèque de Francesco Maturanzio et conservées à Pérouse,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome: Moyen Âge, Temps modernes* 94 (1982): 729–57.

29 De Marinis, *La legatura artistica*, 1:90; Anthony Hobson, *French and Italian Collectors and Their Bindings Illustrated from Examples in the Library of J. R. Abbey* (Oxford: The Roxburghe Club, 1953), xxix.

30 We would like to thank Federico Macchi for sharing this information with us. De Marinis, *La legatura artistica*, 2:93 no. 1785 and tav. C38; possibly in combination with the smaller roundel (tool 4).

The codex originally had two fastening straps consistent with the typical Byzantine technique. Of these, only the two pins survive on the fore edge of the left board and the two sets of three holes drilled through the thickness of the wood of the right board close to the fore edge. It was through these holes that the triple interlaced straps were originally laced through the boards. At the fore edge of the left board there are also two sets of three holes corresponding to the pins and the straps on the right board; these were probably due to a mistake, as they have been carefully sealed.

ENDBANDS

The endbands of Greek-style bindings made in the west have not yet been studied in detail.³¹ Generally speaking, they can be divided into those endbands that fit the tradition and techniques of western endbands and those that fit the tradition and the techniques of Byzantine endbands. Four of the former have been identified among the bindings of the royal library of Fontainebleau and have thus been called *Tranchefile Royale*.³² The latter are more or less exact copies of the endbands found in Byzantine bindings made in Byzantine territories, occasionally using materials that were common in the west but rarely used in the east, such as for example the use of alum-tawed skin instead of cord for the cores around which the endbands were sewn.³³ The typical Byzantine endband is often encountered, although more elaborate endbands, unknown in the west, such as twined endbands, are occasionally also recorded, calling into question the identity of their makers.³⁴ In all cases, and independently of the technique used to sew them on the edges

31 For a general introduction, see “Endbands,” in Gialdini, *Alla Greca?*, 51–57.

32 See *Les tranchefiles brodées: Étude historique et technique* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1989), 62–69, modèle 21–24.

33 Gialdini, *Alla Greca?*, 53, chart 1.12.

34 See Georgios Boudalis, “Endbands in Greek-Style Bindings,” *Paper Conservator* 31 (2007): 37–38, figs. 27–29, where they are called Greek-on-one-core and Greek-on-two-cores. See also Georgios Boudalis, *On the Edge: Endbands in the Bookbinding Traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Ann Arbor, MI: Legacy Press, forthcoming). As the terminology used for these endbands evolves in parallel with our understanding, these endbands are called slanted-

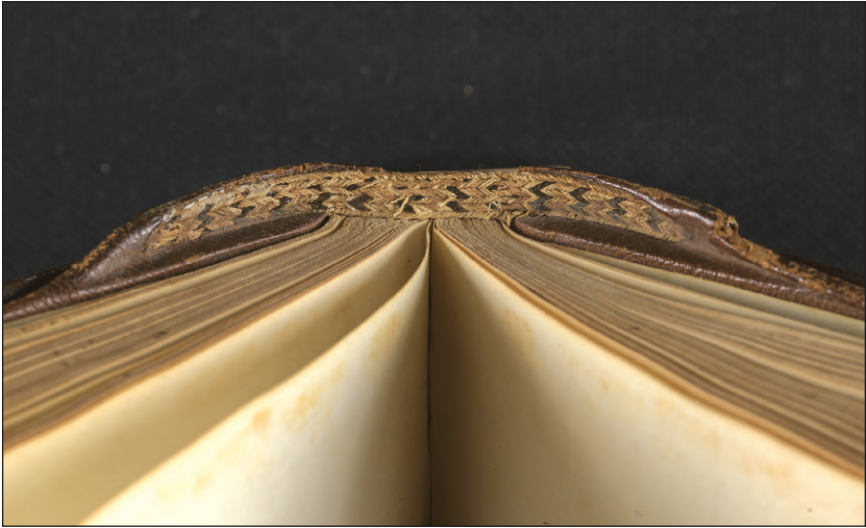


FIGURE 5. The headband of codex Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS 11344.
© Royal Library of Belgium.

of the books, these endbands always project and are sewn to the edges of the two boards, making them one of the most distinctive features of Byzantine bindings. Such endbands prevent books bound in this way from being efficiently stored vertically: the volumes were, in fact, meant to be stored horizontally.

The codex considered here has compound endbands at head and tail, which extend onto the head and tail edges of the two boards in a way typical of Byzantine bindings (fig. 5). The term *compound endband* is used to describe endbands that consist of two clearly distinct components, the primary and the secondary. The former is sewn on the book with thread that is tied down (usually) in the centerfold of each gathering and around one or more cores made of cord, leather, or parchment. The latter consists of a sewn or otherwise worked embellishment worked only on top or around the primary component without ever being fixed or secured through the bookblock. Endbands in Byzantine and similar binding traditions, which evolved in the eastern

stitch-on-one-core and slanted-stitch-on-two-cores. This endband is so typical of the bindings of Greek manuscripts that is often called “Greek” or “Byzantine” endband in bibliographies.

Mediterranean region, were an important part of the structure of the book, but often also very decorative. Throughout their history, from late antiquity to the seventeenth century, they underwent great variation in structure and technique.³⁵ The endbands of MS 11344 are of a type that was widespread in that part of the Mediterranean. These endbands are known as twined endbands, and in their various forms were commonly used in the bindings of Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, Armenian, Byzantine, and Islamic manuscripts.³⁶ Twining is a sort of weaving technique, but unlike weaving, it has never been mechanized, with the exception of tablet weaving, which was used since antiquity for making rather narrow strips of fabric.³⁷ The specific type of twined endband used in the binding considered here is a further elaboration of the common twined endbands used in Byzantine bindings.

The primary component of the endband is sewn around a flat strip of what appears to be thick parchment; the strip is about one centimeter wide and a couple of millimeters thick. The thread used is a medium-thickness Z-twist thread (unlike the one used for the sewing, which is of similar thickness but S-twist); it winds around the parchment core and is tied down in the centerfold of each gathering, passing through the changeover sewing stations. This process creates the base upon which the secondary component is subsequently produced. The windings of the thread for the primary component act as warps upon which the twining of the threads is performed.

For the secondary component, three different colors of silk threads are used, which, although faded, must have been black, pink, and white originally. The threads of each color were doubled, with each of them threaded through a different needle; therefore, there were altogether most likely four threads and four needles used in the following color sequence: white, black, white, pink. For those familiar with Greek endband techniques, it can be helpful to

35 Boudalis, "Endbands in Greek-Style Bindings," 29–49.

36 Georgios Boudalis, "Twined Endbands in the Bookbindings Traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean," in *Historical Bookbinding Techniques in Conservation*, ed. Georgios Boudalis, Marzenna Ciechanska, Patricia Engel, Rodica Ion, Istvan Kecskeméti, Elissaveta Moussakova, Flavia Pinzari, Joseph Schirò, and Jedert Vodopivec (Vienna: Verlag Berger Horn, 2016), 135–52. See also Boudalis, *On the Edge*.

37 On tablet weaving, see Peter Collingwood, *The Techniques of Tablet Weaving* (1982; repr., McMinville, OR: Robin & Russ Handweavers, 2002).

examine the process used here in more detail: the process started from the bottom of the primary component where a thin cord core (possibly consisting of two lengths of the thread used for the sewing twisted together) was placed at its front face in contact with it. Each of the four double silk threads in the sequence mentioned above was subsequently wound around this additional cord core, catching one of the threads of the primary component each time. Because of these windings of the silk threads, the additional cores were completely covered. The sequence of colors was repeated until the opposite end of the endband was reached, creating a row of twining with an incline toward the direction of twining (i.e., if the twining was done from left to right, the incline of the twining would be toward the right). At that point the cord core was folded in the opposite direction, and the twining process with the four silk threads was repeated in the opposite direction, creating a second row of twining with the opposite incline. Once the opposite end of the endband was reached, the process was repeated in the opposite direction, and so on, as many times as necessary to completely cover the front face of the primary component. The alternation of the incline and the consistent use of the color sequence creates a zigzag pattern. In the specific example considered here, there are six rows of twining, of which the top and bottom ones are made with only white thread rather than the combination of black, white, and pink. The drawing in figure 6 gives a graphic representation of the making of the endbands of the volumes. This type is known as a “Full wrapped on multiple additional cores twined endband,” and its making is as complex as its name.³⁸ The same type of endband with a similar color pattern is found in a number of high-quality fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Byzantine bindings. Some of these bindings should be presumed to come from a major bookbinding workshop, most likely in Constantinople, as some of the codices on which they are found relate to the ruling Palaeologan family.³⁹

38 See Boudalis, *On the Edge*. See also “Twined Endbands in the Bookbindings Traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean,” 140–41 and fig. 5, where it is called “full wrapped twining.”

39 This is, for example, the case with Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS gr. 67, which bears the monogram of the Palaiologoi tooled on the cover of the codex. Other bindings with the exact same type of endband and the same number of twined rows and the same colours used are, for example: Sinai, St. Catherine’s Monastery, MS Gr. 162 (1346, rebound in the

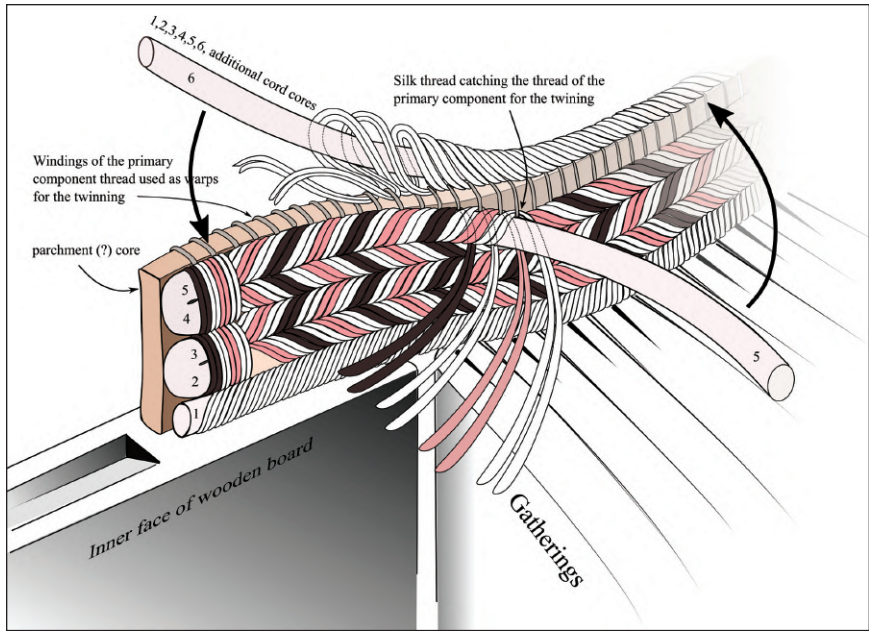


FIGURE 6. The structure and making of the endband of codex Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS 11344. Drawing by Georgios Boudalis.

The type of endband considered here is probably the most complex one encountered among eastern Mediterranean bindings, and as far as we know such a type was never used in western bindings.⁴⁰ Therefore, its presence in a binding apparently made in the west raises interesting issues as to how the knowledge required to make it was transferred from east to west. Was the endband made by an Italian binder who somehow managed to learn the

fifteenth century); Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, MS Gr. 1293 (second half of the fifteenth century, with contemporary binding); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Barocci 193 (late fourteenth century with contemporary binding); Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. gr. 508, 1117, and 1149 (all three dated to the fourteenth or early fifteenth century with contemporary bindings).

40 With minor differences, essentially the same type of endband is found in Armenian and Syriac bindings. See Boudalis, *On the Edge*. See also Boudalis, "Twined Endbands in the Bookbindings Traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean," 147–49, figs. 12, 13.

technique from a Greek binder, or was the binding as a whole made by two people in collaboration, a Greek and an Italian, the former responsible for working the endbands (and possibly also for sewing the gatherings and the boards to the bookblock), and the latter for the tooling of the binding? Could these individuals have been working in the same workshop, somehow dividing the work, or could they have been working completely separately, and if so, were they necessarily active in the same town or city?⁴¹

The Byzantine bindings on which these endbands are found represent the high end of the market, as one might say. Some of the texts these codices contain, especially classical Greek texts and theological works, might have been written and possibly bound specifically to be exported to humanists or ecclesiastical authorities in the west. This is the case, for example, for the volumes with similar endbands preserved in Wolfenbüttel, Venice, Oxford, and the Vatican. If this hypothesis is valid, then the specific endbands employed, elaborate and decorative as they are, might to some extent and for some people have assumed the status of a signifier, alluding to Byzantine books and Byzantine or Greek learning. This might explain why someone would expend effort and time to make them and why someone would cover the extra cost. The fact that the endbands on the Brussels volume are a unique example among the hundreds of Greek-style bindings preserved is clear evidence that such endbands were never widespread in the west, for obvious reasons—namely, because of the extra time needed to make them (and the corresponding extra cost) and presumably also due to the limited number of artisans who knew how to make them.

The possibility that we are witnessing the work of two separate binders seems to be supported by the following observations:

- A) The sewing of the gatherings and the attachment of the boards to the bookblock are perfectly consistent with the Byzantine technique, with the exception of the U-rather than V-shaped cuts at the sewing

41 Although there is no evidence to suggest it, the possibility should not be excluded that a manuscript could have been bound in Crete but sent to Italy to be covered and decorated or just decorated. See also the example of Italian humanists sending books to Cairo to be tooled in gold (Hobson, *Humanists and Bookbinders*).

stations. The endbands are also typically Byzantine, completely unknown as far as we know in a western context. In fact, the example of the binding considered here is the only one known.

- B) The leather cover is thinly pared at the turn-ins, a feature literally unknown in the Byzantine tradition, where the leather used for the covers was very little pared if at all. The motifs of the tools used as well as the use of gold tooling are typical western motifs, likewise unknown in the Byzantine tradition.
- C) We do know from archival evidence that some binders working for the Vatican Library were paid for (re)making fastenings, showing that commissions for individual parts of bindings were possible.
- D) The motifs of the finishing tools used on the binding considered here are also common to a number of Greek-style bindings made in Italy.

The inner knotwork, for instance (tool 3), appears on an eleventh-century manuscript of Justinian's *Institutiones* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS gr. 1364) rebound at the end of the fifteenth century, as well as on two twin bindings on copies of the *Anthologia Graeca Planudea* edited by Janus Lascaris (ca. 1445–1535) and printed in 1494 in Florence by Laurentius de Alopa.⁴² The copies of the *Anthologia Graeca Planudea* are held respectively by the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin (Inc. 2989) and the British Library in London (IB 28002), and both are decorated with a tool that can possibly be identified with our knotwork (although these bindings are thought to be have been made in Florence), in addition to other small tools (all tooled in gold) and an Alexander the Great medallion. In addition to their luxurious bindings, both incunables also feature vellum leaves. The early modern provenance of the London copy is not known, but the Berlin copy belonged to Matteo Battiferri, a physician originally from Urbino who had received

42 *Institutiones*: De Marinis, *La legatura artistica*, 3:38, no. 2693, tav. CCCCLXXIII. See also Davide Muratore, *La biblioteca del cardinale Niccolò Ridolfi* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2009), 2:285 (*Iur.* 9). The manuscript is digitized and available via <https://gallica.bnf.fr>, but the binding is not included. *Anthologia Graeca Planudea*: Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC) ia00765000. De Marinis, *La legatura artistica*, 3:38, no. 2690; 33, 38, no. 2692; Hobson, *Humanists and Bookbinders*, 100–103, 219, no. 12C.

an extensive humanistic education and who was active in Venice, Ferrara, and Rome.⁴³ Battiferri also had the first two pages of the book lavishly illuminated and inscribed in Greek.⁴⁴ These bindings are generally considered to be of Florentine origin, but it is interesting to note that the same knotwork (or a very similar type) also appears on two Venetian bindings on manuscripts that belonged to Francesco Maturanzio and are now held in the Biblioteca Augusta in Perugia—namely, C 56 (173) and G 84 (495), as observed by Philippe Hoffmann.⁴⁵ These two manuscripts are part of a group of three, copied in 1471–73 but bound in Venice, probably at the end of the fifteenth century or the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁴⁶

The other type of knotwork, on the other hand (tool 2), also seems to appear on a copy of the Isocrates's *Orationes*, edited by Demetrius Chalcondylas and printed by Uldericus Scinzenzeler and Sebastianus de Ponte Tremulo in 1493, now in the Edward Worth Library in Dublin (L. 4. 22).⁴⁷

Of these bindings, all in the Greek style, the copies of the *Anthologia Graeca* are hybrid; the binder(s) made no attempt to hide their thick sewing supports. The Isocrates, on the other hand, is a genuine Greek-style binding, with an unsupported structure.

Such typically Italian tooling on an otherwise perfectly Greek book is no surprise—it is, in fact, one of the most recognizable characteristics of Greek-style bindings made in the west, and it may have been one of the strongest selling points of these books, which combined evocative, elegant Greek (or hybrid) structures with fashionable local decorative language. If anything,

43 In the modern era, the book belonged to Clayton Mordaunt Cracherode (1730–1799), who bequeathed his collection to the British Museum.

44 Curt F. Bühler, *The Fifteenth-Century Book: The Scribes, the Printers, the Decorators* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), 64–65.

45 Hoffmann, “Reliures crétoises et vénitiennes,” 750, 747 (tool E). Hands-on examination has confirmed that both bindings are in the hybrid Greek style, although G 84 (495) has been restored.

46 On these manuscripts, see also Donatella Nebbiai and Maria Alessandra Panzanelli Fratoni, “La biblioteca dell’umanista,” *Bollettino della Deputazione di storia patria per l’Umbria* 116 (2019): 343–494 at 353, 468–469.

47 ISTC ii00210000. We would like to thank Nicholas Pickwood for bringing this copy to our attention.

this opens even more questions—if the tooling did not offer such clear indication that a binding was (at least partly) made in western Europe, how would we identify the place of production? We do not know how many bindings featuring both Greek structures and Greek decoration could have been made by Greek binders (or even Italian binders who had learned these techniques) in the west. The binding of MS 11344 exposes the complexity of the production of “Greek bindings” in a time of transition and migration.

Conclusion

One of the unresolved questions regarding the production of Greek-style bindings in early modern western Europe has always been the degree of involvement of ethnically Greek binders, partly owing to the difficulties inherent in naming individual craftsmen.

The binding of Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS 11344 (Omont 79), and more specifically the techniques used for its endbands suggest that at least this part of the process was carried out by someone with a sophisticated knowledge and understanding of Byzantine bookbinding techniques. Although it is common to find typical Byzantine endbands used in Greek-style bindings made in Italy, the endbands of the codex considered here are the most elaborate endbands ever used in Byzantine bindings, typical of some of the best fourteenth- to fifteenth-century bindings made in Constantinople, and apparently unique among the Greek-style bindings made in Italy. This may indicate either the use of Italian tools by an ethnically Greek binder to decorate a binding that otherwise seems to follow all the features of Byzantine bindings, or, as seems likely, a collaboration between Greek and Italian craftsmen. In conclusion, this case study shows the importance of a holistic analysis of bookbindings, which considers all their parts and relies just as much on the study of bookbinding techniques as it does on decoration and tooling.