

## Book Reviews

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**Georgios Boudalis.** *On the Edge: Endbands in the Bookbinding Traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean*. Ann Arbor, MI: The Legacy Press, 2023. Hardcover, xii, 334p. \$80 (ISBN 9781953421111).

In the preface to the original 1986 edition of *Headbands: How to Work Them*—long considered by many to be the first stop on the bookshelf when faced with an endband conundrum—Jane Greenfield and Jenny Hille assert that, “the number of variants [of endbands] is so great that it would be impossible to identify and describe them all.”<sup>1</sup> Georgios Boudalis—at least as it concerns the Eastern Mediterranean manuscript world—has given Greenfield and Hille a run for their money, and then some. From their modest twelve, Boudalis takes us to a bountiful fifty, all documented, described, and diagrammed in meticulous detail.

*On the Edge: Endbands in the Bookbinding Traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean* is a book of colossal scope. Begun as an article describing a handful of endbands found on Byzantine bindings in the journal *The Paper Conservator*, the endeavor expanded via the author’s doctoral work at the libraries of St. Catherine’s Monastery in Sinai, Egypt, and Iviron Monastery in Mount Athos, Greece. The present volume benefits from the close examination Boudalis was able to conduct of those collections, as well as those held in other repositories. More than 300 manuscripts from across the Eastern Mediterranean world from Late Antiquity to the twentieth century have been cited.

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1. Jane Greenfield and Jenny Hille, *Headbands: How to Work Them* (Oak Knoll Books, 1986), vii.

If the book's scope is colossal, its approach is comprehensive. It is a remarkable accomplishment to create order, to classify, to name the observed, and to understand its functionality. Fittingly, the book begins with a Linnaean aphorism, "If you do not know the names of things, the knowledge of them is lost, too" (xii). And like Linnaeus, Boudalis has crafted a systematic, descriptive taxonomy. With scientific precision, Boudalis groups endband types and variants into seven families that reflect their methods and materials of construction: loop stitch and blanket stitch; wound; bead; chevron; warps and wefts; stitched and stuck; and braided and interlaced. Because similar techniques can be evident across multiple geographies, time periods, and cultures, the organizational schema is based purely on these technical aspects; Boudalis deliberately avoids names with specific religious or cultural connotations apart from points of clarification (i.e., Armenian, Islamic, Syriac, etc.). Rather, the endband names reflect the experience of the maker (i.e. front-and-back-bead, wound-without-core, split-chevron). This is as logical as it is descriptive and holds true to the materiality of the object although, admittedly, by the time one gets to full-wrapped-on-multiple-additional-cores-flat-and-vertical-twined, one does find oneself a bit knotted.

The book is organized into three sections, accompanied by three appendices and an extensive bibliography. Part 1, General Information sets the intention: previous scholarship is discussed, along with the purpose and function endbands serve as binding components, their evolution, and their literary and iconographical evidence. Boudalis' taxonomy is laid out and presented in chart form. Notably, the codices under consideration here generally do not include printed books, as Boudalis chooses to focus on binding structures made according to Eastern Mediterranean traditions and many bindings on printed books from Eastern Mediterranean lands bear imported influences from Western Europe. Hybridized bindings, such as the *alla Greca* style of binding found in Italy and France during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are touched upon, however. Of particular interest is a section that draws connections between endbands and textiles, which, as the author notes, is certainly an area worthy of further research. Later in the book, specific comparisons are drawn between endband working and tunic, curtain, and mat edges, as well as basketry, and even fence making.

Part 2, Definitions, Materials, and Processes offers exactly that, all with extensive diagrams and illustrations (more on these later); it gives the reader a basic understanding of the intricacies to come. It is in its third and most substantial part that the book comes into its own: The Endbands. Working through his seven identified families of endbands—generally, from simple to compound, primary to secondary components, fewer cores to many cores, with some interesting extra twists—Boudalis details each endband and variant in turn. The entries include: previous bibliography when available (many never before published); class (simple or compound, primary or second-

ary); historical context and dating (with citations of specific manuscripts upon which the endband appears); remarks (regarding method, design, comparisons to other examples, and other points of interest); materials (cores and threads); and technique (in step-by-step illustrated detail that is both a dissection of the process and a very followable set of instructions).

This leads us to a discussion of one of the most remarkable facets of the book: its 424 diagrams, illustrations, and color photographs. The endband diagrams were first sketched by the author in pencil, then refined in pen, and finally rendered digitally in the open-access software Inkspace (139). Boudalis intends them to be “a visual synopsis of their making” (67), and indeed they are, with the finished product to the left and an “exploded view” (67) to the right, as if the endband were being worked from left to right. Directional arrows show thread movements; numbers correspond to steps in the explanatory text describing the technique, while circles indicate points at which one thread rests while the action is taken up by another. An accompanying profile diagram gives a view of the endband construction from the side, in a cutaway fashion that instantly communicates the composition of cores and how those cores relate to the bookblock.

The diagrams are intricate and detailed, yet practical; they are, in fact, essential for comprehending how these complex objects were fashioned. Similarly, the photographs are chosen with care to illustrate concepts in the text and encourage the reader to linger, to trace, to follow along. The labor-intensive nature of creating the diagrams is evident; moreover, one is struck by the fact that the author has not only identified and classified the endbands but recreated them. He knows and understands their composition as a maker and that knowledge benefits his scholarship. When an endband’s construction remains unclear or elusive, reasonable speculation (always identified) is made as to how it might have been done, with reference to modern binding practices and most likely method. The inclusion of this abundance of rich material is to the credit of the Legacy Press, which does not disappoint in its typical luxury treatment in producing a book (yes, the volume has endbands—how embarrassing if it didn’t!—although they are regrettably the modern decorative type as opposed to any sort of Byzantine splendor). As a point of mild criticism, the text might have done with some additional proofreading in terms of spelling, word choice, and punctuation, but that is not to detract from its quality or effectiveness.

Although the emphasis thus far has been on the technical, the book’s approach, as stated in its introduction, is two-fold: to offer the material examination traditionally sought by bookbinders, book conservators, and conservation scientists, and to provide the historical and textual context necessary for book historians, with emphasis placed on the utility of understanding endbands in the context of, for example,

codicological description and provenance research (5). With its focus on endband construction, the book artist interested in historical forms and techniques could also gain inspiration from the endbands' inherent beauty. There is, of course, no denying the book's technicality—it is not a breezy introduction and assumes some previous knowledge of book structures—but the non-technician should certainly not shy away nor be intimidated by the diagrams. There is much to be learned here for readers from a variety of backgrounds, and the book will particularly appeal to those who are eager and enthused that such thorough, evidence-based work has been undertaken by an expert.

Boudalis' impeccable scholarship will make *On the Edge* an authoritative work on the subject for some time to come, although the author is clear to state that more discoveries are yet to be made—even providing helpful guidance on identifying and describing endbands according to his taxonomy in one of the appendices. Indeed, the mind turns to other repositories with Eastern Mediterranean manuscript holdings to explore; with the recent increase in binding descriptions included in catalog records and binding images in digitization initiatives, more potential is becoming available all the time. For now, the author is to be congratulated on unraveling the mysteries of these intricate, often lovely—even dazzling—components of these important bindings. — *Diane E. Bockrath, Hagley Museum and Library*

**Jessica Brantley.** *Medieval English Manuscripts and Literary Forms*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. Hardcover, 346 p. \$65. (ISBN: 9780812253849).

A handbook for the use and understanding of medieval English manuscripts is a significant undertaking. A good version of such a handbook is even more significant—but it can pay dividends for a generation as it introduces a new crop of students to the field, while also advancing scholarship. In addition, the benefits of creating a central repository for information relating to such manuscripts include the very significant opportunity to allow those who don't have access to the physical manuscript the ability to participate in its examination and interpretation. Even in the age of digitized manuscripts, this is important. The new monograph from Jessica Brantley is one such book; *Medieval English Manuscripts and Literary Forms* ably threads the needle of providing content of interest for scholars and teachers, while remaining an accessible work for students. Of note, it is also at times visually arresting with sixteen pages of well-printed full color plates.

Brantley's book is made up of two parts: 'The anatomy of the medieval manuscript,' followed by twelve case studies. The first part provides an introduction to important