

J. A. SZIRMAI

## The girdle book of the Museum Meermannno-Westreenianum\*

### INTRODUCTION

‘A fine copy of this volume, in its original binding, such as were used at the schools at that time’, reads the information on lot No. 4028, a ‘*Gebet-büch*, Nürnberg, 1484’, in the *Catalogue of the Library of Dr. Kloss, of Franckfort a.M., Professor, [...]*, sold by auction by Mr Sotheby and Son in London in 1835.<sup>1</sup> Dr Georg Franz Burkhard Kloss (1787-1854)<sup>2</sup> was a distinguished physician, a freemason and an ambitious book collector, who envisaged completing and extending Panzer’s *Annalen der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*<sup>3</sup> and assembled his library according to this scheme. Having unsuccessfully offered his large collection to several German libraries, he decided to have his library auctioned in London.

Remarkably enough the auction catalogue does not reveal the true nature of the binding of lot No. 4028. It seems even more remarkable that Dr Kloss, a learned scholar and bookman, should not have noticed that he was dealing here with such a rarity as an original girdle book. Yet data from his archives, still kept in Frankfurt,<sup>4</sup> seem to support this. The only statement of No. 129 in his handwritten catalogues is ‘Gebet = büch. (Nürnberg 1484). Sehr schönes Ex. im alten Einband als Schulbuch zum Anhängen’, a sentence which appears to have been duly translated in the Sotheby catalogue mentioned above. A curious sentence: what did Dr Kloss have in mind when he referred to a schoolbook hanging on the belt? And why did he not use the term girdle book for this volume? The answer is probably that

\* I wish to thank R. E. O. Ekkart, former Director of the Museum Meermannno-Westreenianum, The Hague, for his permission to study this binding and for his help in preparing this publication.

1 *Catalogue of the Library of Dr. Kloss, of Franckfort a.M., Professor; including many original and unpublished manuscripts, and printed books with ms. annotations by Philip Melancthon [...]* which will be sold by auction, by Mr. Sotheby and Son, [...] (London 1835), p. 290.

2 G. A. E. Bogeng, *Die grossen Bibliophilen* (Leipzig 1922), vol. 1, pp. 340-1; *Biographisches Lexikon der hervorragenden Aerzte*, A. Hirsch [ed.]. (Wien & Leipzig 1886), vol. 3. p. 497.

3 G. W. Panzer, *Annalen der ältern deutschen Litteratur* (vol. 1, Nürnberg 1788; vol. 2, Nürnberg 1805; *idem, Zusätze*, Leipzig 1802).

4 I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr G. Powitz (Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, Frankfurt am Main), who has undertaken the task to locate our girdle book in the Kloss archives kept in that library. Unfortunately Dr Kloss did not record the origin of his purchases in the catalogue, and so the provenance of this girdle book remains unknown.

he could not use the German term for girdle book, 'Buchbeutel' or 'Beutelbuch', since it had not yet been invented, or at least was not used in that context. These terms appear to have come into use only towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Nor was he probably aware of the fact that girdle books were mostly used by members of the clergy and of the religious orders (and probably not by schoolboys), since the many documented examples in sculpture, painting and other artefacts were not yet known in his days. Among the first examples of such illustrations are those of Loubier in 1904, followed by a list of 160 such instances by Glauning in 1926; the Alker monograph of 1966 covers 477 numbers and by now the number of recorded representations of girdle books on various artefacts approaches five hundred.<sup>6</sup> This figure is in marked contrast with the extant original girdle books, the number of which probably does not exceed a dozen and a half.<sup>7</sup>

5 Anon., 'Merkwürdiger Bucheinband von 1471', in: *Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit*, 9 (1862), pp. 323-5; Messmer & G. K. Frommann, 'Ein Buchbeutel in der kgl. Hof- und Staats-Bibliothek München', in: *Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit*, 24 (1877), pp. 115-16; P. Adam, *Der Bucheinband, seine Technik und seine Geschichte* (Leipzig 1890), pp. 5-6. For the etymology of the terms 'Buchbeutel' and 'Beutelbuch' see the above article of Messmer & G. K. Frommann, and H. Schreiber, 'Buchbeutel und Hülleneinband', in: *Archiv für Buchgewerbe und Gebrauchsgraphik*, 76 (1939), pp. 492-6.

6 H. Loubier, *Der Bucheinband in alter und neuer Zeit* (Leipzig 1904), pp. 74-6; O. Glauning, 'Der Buchbeutel in der bildenden Kunst', in: *Archiv für Buchgewerbe und Gebrauchsgraphik*, 63 (1926), pp. 124-52; L. & H. Alker, *Das Beutelbuch in der bildenden Kunst* (Mainz 1966); H. Petersen & D.-E. Petersen, 'Unbekannte Beutelbuchdarstellungen', in: *Philobiblon*, 11 (1967), pp. 279-82; R. Neumüller-Klauser, 'Auf den Spuren der Beutelbücher', in: *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, 55 (1980), pp. 291-301.

7 The precise number of extant original girdle books is uncertain. This is partly due to the fact that in the early reports no clear distinction was always attempted between *a*, a leather or textile bag in which a book could be protected and carried (this being probably the original meaning of the term 'Buchbeutel'); *b*, a binding with a pouch-like extension of the cover adapted for the purpose of being carried on the girdle ('Beutelbuch'; girdle book; *reliure à queue* [or: *à l'aumônière*]), and finally, *c*, a binding with leather or textile covering extended to overlap the three edges, mainly meant to fulfil a protective function and not necessarily intended or fit to carry the (often too heavy) volume ('Hülleneinband'; wrapper binding). For problems in clearly distinguishing such overlapping forms reference is made to H. Schreiber, 'Vom Buchbeutel und seinen Verwandten', in: *Sankt Wiborada* (1940), pp. 13-28, and to A. Rhein, 'Falsche Begriffe in der Einbandgeschichte', in: *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, 35 (1960), pp. 366-70. Uncertainties result also from the very sketchy nature of many early descriptions, often based on communications by friendly librarians rather than on personal research. A detailed and well-illustrated report on 7 girdle books was presented by S. Larsen ('To minder fra de aabne ting', in: *Ex Bibliotheca Universitatis Hafniensis* (København 1920), pp. 15-50). In the second edition of his *Der Bucheinband von seinen Anfängen bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig 1926), pp. 93-6, H. Loubier claims to know already of 15 girdle books but describes only 13 of them. His list partly overlaps with that of O. Glauning, *op. cit.* (n. 6), pp. 148-51, who gives 14 examples. Looking over carefully the data of these three sources, and keeping in mind the definition given above under *b*, one arrives at a probable number of a dozen original girdle books. Since then a few more have been described or briefly presented: the one of the New York Public Library (K. Küp, 'A fifteenth-century girdle book', in: *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 43 (1939), pp. 471-84), that of the Univer-

But let us return to the fate of the curious little volume, lot No. 4028, at Sotheby's in 1835. The auction turned out to be a financial failure: in spite of the mystification that many books were annotated by Melancton,<sup>8</sup> the valuable collection of 4682 lots did not fetch more than the miserable amount of £2261. Neither did our 'Gebet-buch' attract special attention. It appears, praised by the same doubtful eulogism, a year later under No. 1614 in the sales catalogue of Longman & Co.,<sup>9</sup> from which it was purchased in July 1836 by Willem H. J. Baron van Westreenen for the sum of 6s.<sup>10</sup> This is how the only original girdle book in the Netherlands happened to arrive here, soon to become part of the collections of the Museum Meermanno-Westreenianum in The Hague (shelf-mark 1 F 50). Although it has been exhibited on several occasions and briefly described,<sup>11</sup> it had not yet been studied in detail and appears to be unknown in the literature on girdle books. The aim of the present report is to provide a description of this binding and to compare it with those of some other extant girdle books.

#### THE BINDING

**Dimensions.** The binding (fig. 1) measures 166 × 133 × 53/61 mm; the extension of the leather cover at the tail (the 'pouch') has apparently been

sitätsbibliothek in Halle (B. Weissenborn, *Der hallische Handschriftenschatz in Auswahl* (Halle 1939), p. 3; H. Schreiber, 'Neues von alten Bucheinbänden', in: *Archiv für Buchbinderei*, 39 (1939), pp. 71-3; F. Juntke, 'Ein altes Nürnberger Beutelbuch', in: *Marginalien*, 26 (1982), pp. 47-50), and the girdle book at the Newberry Library in Chicago (D. Miner, *The History of Bookbinding 525-1950* (Baltimore 1957), p. 56; W. H. Blumenthal, 'Girdle Books for Waist Wear', in: *The American Book Collector*, 13 (1963), pp. 17-23). Two girdle books found shelter in private collections: one in Sweden (*Uställning av 1400- och 1500-talstryck samt konstnärliga bokband ur Thore Virgins samling* [Exhibition catalogue] (Hälsingborgs och Malmö Museer 1943), p. 63; *Rariteter ur Virgin-Wistrands boksamling* [Exhibition catalogue] (Stockholm 1968), p. 3), another in Germany (*Andachtsbücher des Mittelalters aus Privatbesitz* [Exhibition catalogue] (Köln 1987), p. 247)—I am grateful to Dr Anna S. Korteweg and to Dr Jan Storm van Leeuwen for drawing to my attention the above two examples. The binding described by R. Klauser ('Ein Beutelbuch aus Isny', in: *Bibliotheca docet. Festgabe für Carl Wehmer* (Amsterdam 1963), pp. 139-45) fits in more with the definition of a 'wrapper binding'. The Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich owns an unpublished girdle book, unfortunately extensively restored (shelf-mark Inc.c.a. 220a; I thank Dr D. Kudorfer for permission to examine this binding). At present an effort to compile a reliable list of the extant original girdle books is being undertaken by Mrs. Ursula Bruckner (Kissingenstrasse 22a, DDR-1100 Berlin), who would welcome relevant information on unpublished examples.

8 G. A. E. Bogeng, op. cit. (n. 2), p. 341.

9 *A catalogue of old books, for the year 1836, containing a valuable and useful collection of books in every class of literature and various languages* (London, Longman & Co., 1836), No. 1614, p. 117.

10 *Register van aankoop van boeken, 1833-8, fo. 23v.*, Museum Meermanno-Westreenianum, shelf-mark 15 A 9.

11 E. de la Fontaine Verwey, *Boekbanden in de Nationale Bibliotheek* [Exhibition catalogue] ('s-Gravenhage 1941), p. 4; *Het begin van de boekdrukkunst in de Nederlanden* [Exhibition catalogue] (Utrecht 1973), No. 30; Eline van Leeuwen, 'Buidelboeken', in: *Spiegel Historiaal*, 11 (1976), pp. 630-31; J. Storm van Leeuwen, *De meest opmerkelijke boekbanden uit eigen bezit* [Exhibition catalogue] ('s-Gravenhage 1983), p. 22; J. Storm van Leeuwen, 'De band tussen restauratie en opleiding', in: *De Boekbinder*, 3 (1984), pp. 7-8.



1. Front cover of the girde book with pouch and hook. Note that the book is shown 'upside down', the tail portion of the cover having been prolonged

shortened and measures not more than 120 mm when fully extended, including the hinged hook (see also fig. 3). The book weighs 510 g.

**Book block.** The binding contains one of the three known copies of an undated incunable, the 'Gebet-buch' attributed to the 'Printer of the Rochuslegend' of Nuremberg,<sup>12</sup> which was presumably printed between 1480 and 1484 (Hain \*7507; BMC II 466; Goff G-113; IDL 1900).<sup>13</sup> The book block contains 214 leaves, divided over 27 sections of 8 leaves each, except for section 2, which lacks the first numbered leaf [i], and for section 27, where the last unnumbered blank leaf is missing (see note 13 for data on collation). The leaves measure 154 × 103/105 mm. The text starts with the index on the third leaf of the unnumbered first section; the first and second leaf contain at the bottom a line of blind impression, consisting of about 10 to 12 typefaces larger than those of the text.<sup>14</sup> The first blank leaf carries in the upper part the handwritten title 'Gebeth = Būch' in ink, and underneath it, also in ink but in a different hand—probably Dr Kloss's, to judge from comparison with his handwritten catalogue—the text 'Panzers Annalen d. deutschen Litteratur. Zusätze. S.7.' The final three leaves (ccxi-ccxiiij) of the last section have been crudely repaired by pasting white paper over the fore-edge and bottom margins (both *recto* and *verso*).

**Sewing.** The sewing is all-along with unbleached thread on three double cords (diameter about 3 mm). The sewing stations are spaced at about equal distances along the spine (from the bottom to the head 41, 38, 38 and 37 mm respectively), the kettle-stitches being located at about 16 mm from the edges. The sewing holes appear to have been pierced by the sewing needle, except for the first section in which cuts have been made with a knife; the thread in the middle of the first section is broken and the greater part is missing. The swelling produced by the sewing is limited, the spine of the book being only slightly rounded.

**Edges.** The edges have been trimmed by a draw-knife or plane, the characteristic scratch-lines of this procedure still being discernible at the bottom edge. Under the headbands traces of yellow colouring can be observed, indicating that originally the binding had painted edges.

12 F. Geldner, *Die deutschen Inkunabeldrucker* (Stuttgart 1968), vol. 1, p. 174.

13 The other two copies are preserved at the British Library (IA 8132) and at the Library of Congress (Incun.X.G.); *The Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection* (Washington 1977), pp. 22-3.

14 These blocks of uninked type obviously performed the function of a stabilizer when blank pages were contained in the printing forme; cf. D. L. Paisley, 'Blind printing in early continental books', in: A. L. Lepschy, J. Took & D. E. Rhodes, *Book production and letters in the West European renaissance* (London 1968), pp. 220-33. I am grateful to Mr W. K. Gnrirrep of the University Library, Amsterdam, for drawing to my attention this phenomenon and for much valuable advice in preparing this article.

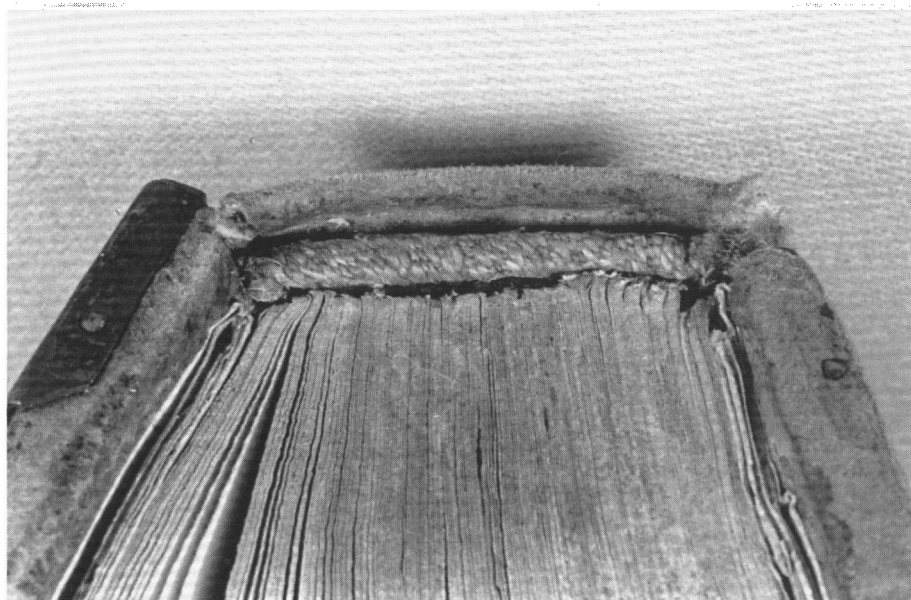
**Boards and their attachment.** The boards, slightly larger than the text block (squares amount to about 5 mm), are made of beechwood and are about 5 to 6 mm thick. The double cords have been laced in, having been taken first over the spine edge of the boards, which have been sloped off along the spine, except for the last 25 to 30 mm towards the corners. The latter parts, as well as the other edges, are square. The exact manner of attachment of the cords could not be ascertained due to the overall adherence of the paste-downs.

**Endpapers.** The endpapers are not contemporary; they consist of a fold of white paper, presumably early nineteenth century, without a watermark. They have been tipped on along the spine onto the first and last leaf, respectively, and the upper part is pasted down on the inside of the boards. The paste-down of the front cover carries a paper label with the present shelf-mark (1 F 50), partly covering an inscription in two lines in ink, reading 'Panzers A. III.7.....(Nürnberg 1484)'. The middle part is occupied by a line-engraved book-plate, measuring 41 × 88 mm, with the text 'Georgius Kloss, M. D., Francoforti ad Moenum'. At the foot the book-plate of the Museum Meermannno-Westreenianum, measuring 44 × 30 mm, has been pasted in. The front flyleaf shows in pencil the text 'Incomplete deest fol.I.'

**The headbands** (fig. 2) consist of an inner cord, about 2.5 mm in diameter, around which a woven textile band, about 5 mm wide, has been wound spirally. The band is greyish, with traces of reddish brown and green, and shows about 5 to 6 turns along the length of the headband. The ends of the headband core are broken, but they must originally have been laced into the boards, as indicated by the presence of a peg at the exposed lower back corner. There is no evidence that the core of the headband was tied down in the middle of the sections.

**The leather cover.** The cover of the binding consists of a yellowish-grey soft leather with a suede finish, generally designated by trivial names like 'chamois', 'deerskin', or 'buckskin'. A few areas where the grain on the inner surface of the pouch is still intact show a structure that supports the assumption that the animal or origin belongs to the family of *Cervidae*;<sup>15</sup> the structure is certainly not typical of a goat or a sheep skin. The thickness of the leather varies from 0.6 to 1 mm. In protected folds it shows traces of light terracotta colouring. The leather has been used flesh-side up; the binding has a tight back, showing clearly the three raised bands but without traces of tying-down. The turn-ins are irregular and vary in width up to 30

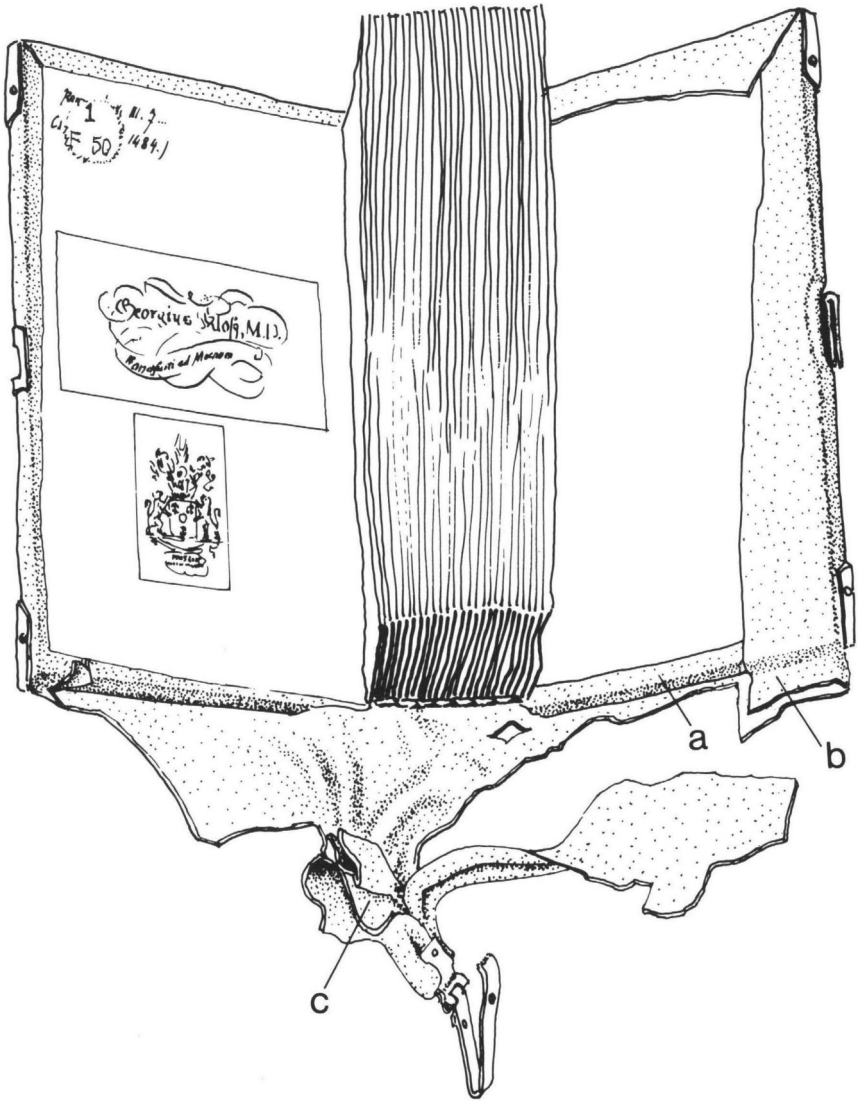
15 cf. M. Dempsey, *Hides, skins and leather under the microscope* (Egham 1957).



2. Headband of the top edge

mm. The bottom edges of the boards, where the cover is prolonged to form the pouch and consequently cannot be turned in, are covered with a separate strip of leather, about 20 mm wide, giving a 'turn-in' of about 5 to 6 mm on either surface of the board (fig. 3). The leather of the spine shows over a dozen large worm-holes and a few can also be found on the covers; tears expose the wooden board at the lower spine corner of the back cover. On the lower half of the front cover there is an oblong gap in the leather of about  $40 \times 24$  mm with slightly thickened edges, which indicates that this discontinuity was caused by gradual retraction of the stretched leather after some sort of damage. This would conform with the apparent intrinsic weakness of the skin used, which is also borne out by the damaged state of the pouch. The latter shows a considerable number of tears, some of them rather old as the browned edges indicate, others possibly of more recent date. It is probably due to the poor quality of the leather that the pouch was in a bad state after some time so that it was folded back and possibly shortened (fig. 3) and the hinged hook remounted, all this apparently some time ago. No signs of blind tooling or any other decoration can be found on the leather covers.

**Brass fittings.** The binding still contains six of the eight original brass cornerpieces (the two along the spine of the back cover are lacking), two central



3. Opening of the girdle book showing the inside of the covers and the pouch. The paste-down of the back cover has been omitted to show the turn-ins and the extra leather strip at the tail edge of the board (a); the turned-in leather of the pouch is torn away and lost (b), the end of the pouch has been folded back (c) and probably shortened

bosses, remnants of the attachment of a single strap (the clasp itself and the main portion of the strap are lacking) and a hinged brass clasp (hook) at the end of the pouch.

The decoratively shaped cornerpieces (fig. 4) measure about  $40 \times 31$  mm diagonally and are about 1 mm thick. They are bent over the edges of the



board at two sides and are fastened with three brass nails. They show a half-dome elevation (a 'buckle'), three repoussé areas and four decorative tear-shaped holes, and they are ornamented by embossing. The two centrepieces (fig. 5) measure about 33 mm diagonally and have a central dome, four heart-shaped openings and ornamentation similar to that of the corner-pieces; they are fastened with two brass nails.

The original single strap to keep the volume closed consisted of an inner strip of brown leather, about 18 mm wide, covered with the same leather as that of the cover. The strap was fastened with two brass nails under a brass plate (19 × 8 mm, showing parts of embossed gothic type) at the fore-edge of the back cover. Still present is also the catch-plate (fig. 5) on the front cover, measuring about 28 × 18 × 6 mm and embossed with a framed 'flower with leaves' pattern; the clasp and most of the strap are missing.

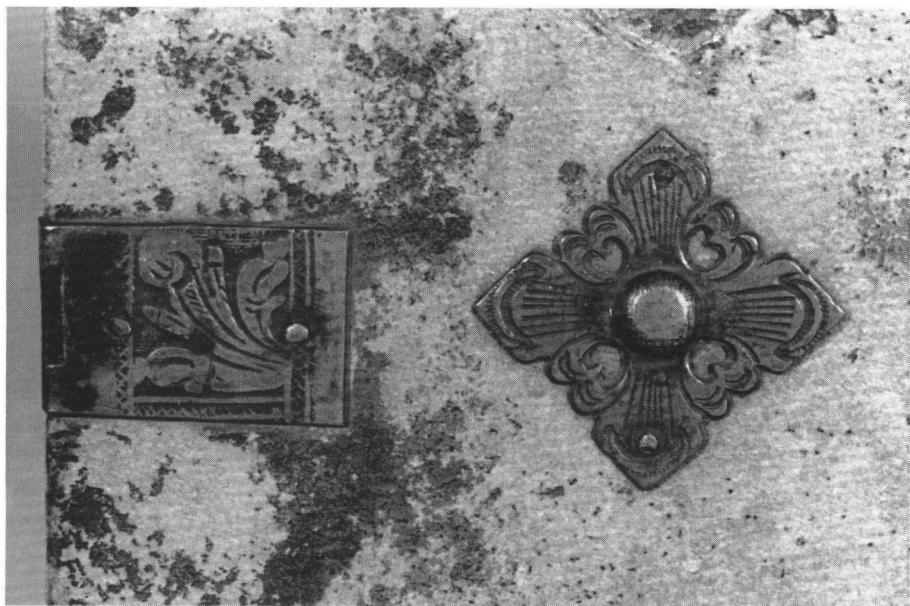
The end of the pouch-like extension of the covering leather carries a hinged brass clasp or hook of peculiar construction (fig. 6 and 7), showing signs of having been altered in the course of time. The ends of the leather are enclosed and fastened with two rivets within the base of the hinge, shaped from a folded plate, measuring about 20 mm in width and about 21 mm up to the hinge axis. The front part is ornamented with an embossed rosette and parts of gothic letters. The other part of the hinge is made of a brass strip, like the base-plate only about 0.7 mm thick, about 11 mm wide, and of a total length of 58 mm. This strip is bent approximately half-way along it (26/30 mm) and it ends in a broken surface. The strip has two holes, one at the beginning (close to the hinge), the other about 10 mm from the broken end; the latter still contains the head and a very short end (about 1-2 mm) of what was probably a rivet.

#### DISCUSSION

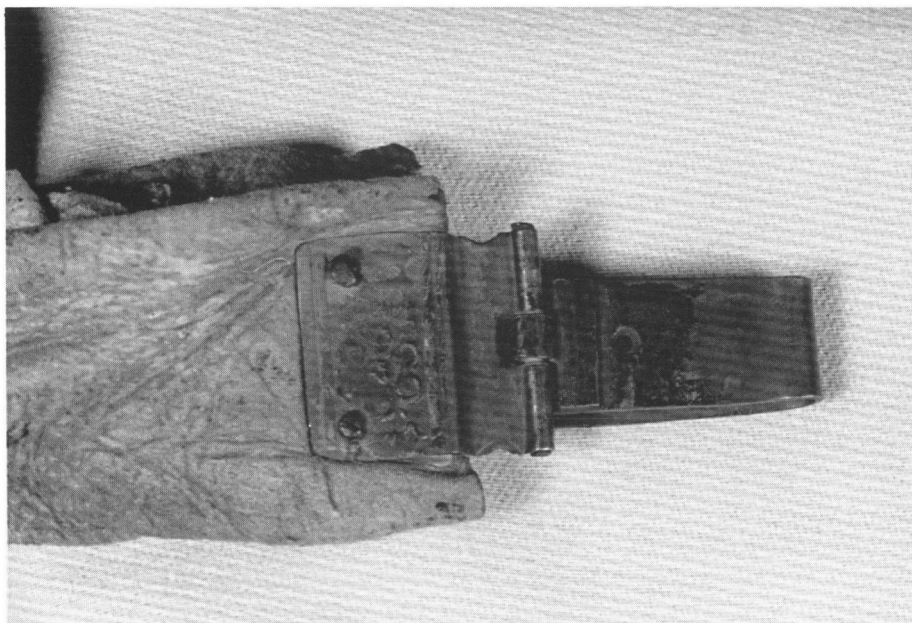
It seems that the volume described is a girdle book in its original binding, in spite of some blemishes and alterations in the course of time. It is certainly the first sewing of the book: the thread is so distinctly restricted to the only pierced holes in the middle of the sections that a later resewing can be ruled out. The fact that the first index section also shows knife cuts could indicate that it has been replaced or added later. There are two arguments in favour of a later addition: first, there is a difference of 1 mm between the leaves of the first and second section indicating that they were not trimmed at the same time; second, the last leaf of the first section was tipped onto the second numbered leaf of the second section, i.e. after the first numbered leaf was lost. A later addition is also favoured by the broken state of the sew-



4. Cornerpiece (right lower corner of the front cover)



5. Central boss and catch-plate of the front cover



6. The hook at the end of the pouch, front view



7. The hook at the end of the pouch, rear view

ing of the first section, in contrast to the still perfect and solid condition of the sewing of the main text block.

Loss of the original endpapers is no argument against the genuine nature of the binding, since endpapers were very often removed for a variety of reasons. Their replacement belongs to the lesser sins of the bookbinder-restorer,<sup>16</sup> and in this case was executed probably sometime before 1835, since the renewed paste-down carries the book-plate of Dr. Kloss, whose library was auctioned in that year.

Whether or not the headbands represent a contemporary construction seemed at first difficult to decide. They are admittedly a very modest affair when compared with the elaborate plaited or embroidered headbands generally found on late mediaeval and renaissance bindings. They are as such not listed in recent studies on the subject,<sup>17</sup> but a somewhat similar twisted headband has been reported in a study on mediaeval headbands by Säuberlich.<sup>18</sup> In order to settle the issue, several continental restoration centres and experienced restorers have been consulted.<sup>19</sup> There were several positive reactions: Sister Lucie M. Gimbrère recalled seeing a headband similar to that of our girdle book on the binding of a manuscript of 1491, originating from the Carthusian convent of Buxheim, Southern Germany (now: University Library, Nijmegen, shelf-mark Hs. 293 a); Mr Heinz Petersen was also familiar with the construction and did not doubt its authenticity. A lucky accidental observation while studying bindings at the National Széchényi Library in Budapest provided further evidence: a headband consisting of a coloured woven band, twisted around a cord and laced in through grooves in the corner of the wooden boards was found on a Koberger binding of the same year (1484) as assumed for the printing of our

16 He was, in fact, advised to do so: 'Das alte Vorsetzpapier wird weggerissen und frisches auf beyden Seiten daran gesetzt, [...]' reads the instruction in the chapter on the repair of old books in the anonymous *Anweisung zur Buchbinderkunst* (Leipzig 1762), p. 233.

17 K. Jäckel, 'Alte Techniken des Buchbinderhandwerks in der modernen Schriftgutrestaurierung. 2. 'Das Kapital'', in: *Bibliotheksforum Bayern*, 3 (1975), pp. 207-19; Barbara Giuffrida, 'Book Conservation Workshop Manual. Part 3. Endbands', in: *The New Bookbinder*, 2 (1982), pp. 29-39; Monika Gast, 'A History of Endbands. Based on a Study of Karl Jäckel', in: *The New Bookbinder*, 3 (1983), pp. 42-58; Jane Greenfield & Jenny Hille, *Headbands How to Work Them* (New Haven 1986).

18 L. Säuberlich, *Mittelalterliche Kapitalformen*. Abschlussarbeit der Fachschulausbildung für Restauratoren (Berlin, Museum für Deutsche Geschichte, 1979). Also in: W. Wächter, *Buchrestaurierung* (Leipzig 1981), p. 162.

19 I am greatly indebted to Mr E. Bartelt (Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin), Sister Lucie M. Gimbrère O. S. B. (Oosterhout, Neth.), Mr K. Jäckel (formerly Institut für Buchrestaurierung, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München), Mr H. Petersen (Düsseldorf) and Dr W. Wächter (Deutsche Bücherei, Leipzig) for generously offering their advice.

girdle book.<sup>20</sup> A privileged visit through the stacks of the University Library in Budapest resulted in the finding of a headband of twisted coloured threads, attached to the spine with a few stitches, quite similar to that described by Säuberlich (see note 18), on a Venetian incunable in a (probably) German binding.<sup>21</sup> Both the above bindings were in their original state without obvious signs of restoration, thus indicating that the headbands are contemporary. It is significant that one of these headbands, representing quite a time-saving construction, occurs on a binding from Nuremberg, where the flood of book production towards the end of the fifteenth century necessitated the considerable speeding up of binding procedures. Finally, it must be added that these simplified headbands had already been noticed: a remark on the occurrence of a headband with twisted band around a cord is hidden in a series of articles on ancient Regensburg bindings by Adam in 1919.<sup>22</sup> A comparison of these headbands with that of our girdle book is shown in fig. 8.

It should be remembered that the leather covering of a girdle book extends over the tail (and sometimes over the top) edge of the spine, which would not allow the construction of a plaited headband encompassing the covering leather, nor would it justify the use of fancy embroidering techniques, since the result would remain virtually invisible under the leather flaps. It is significant in this context that the headband of one of the extant girdle books in its original state, that of Halle,<sup>23</sup> has for its headband only a piece of brown leather, possibly folded over a thread and pasted on the ends of the spine.

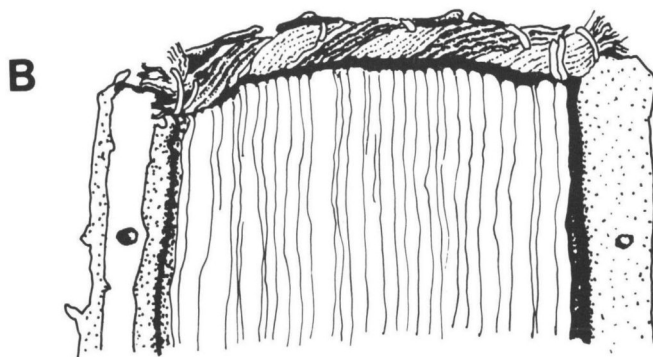
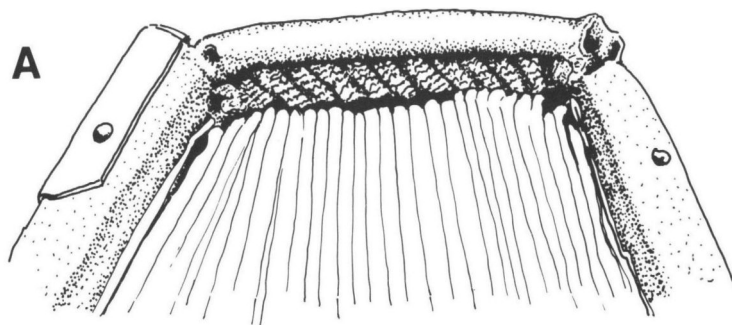
A puzzling aspect of this binding is the obviously broken and modified hinged brass clasp or hook at the end of the leather pouch. In order to arrive at a correct interpretation of this structure I decided to pay special attention to similar metal fittings on other original girdle books. Three of these prove

20 *Reformation der Stadt Nürnberg* (Nürnberg 1484), National Széchényi Library Budapest, shelf-mark Inc. 518. The binding has been identified as being of Nuremberg origin by Marianne Rozsondai (*Anton Koberger működése és a Koberger-kötések problémája* [Die Tätigkeit Anton Kobergers und das Problem der Koberger-Einbände] (Budapest 1978), p. 95. I am indebted to Dr E. Ferenczy for her permission to study and to photograph this binding.

21 Johannes Balbus, *Catholicon* [...] (Venice 1497), University Library Budapest, shelf-mark 616a. I wish to express my gratitude to Dr P. Kulcsár for his generous permission to study the incunable collection of that library.

22 P. Adam, 'Buchbindekunst im alten Regensburg', in: *Archiv für Buchbinderei*, 19 (1919), pp. 52, 57.

23 Weissenborn, op. cit.; Schreiber, op. cit.; Juntke, op. cit. (n. 7). I wish to express my sincere thanks to Prof. J. Dietze, Mrs Renate Flügel, Mrs Helma Schacfer and Mr V. Schwarzkopf for making it possible to study the original girdle books of Halle (Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt; shelf-mark Ms. Th.-S.G.-V. 3148) and of Dessau (Stadt-Bibliothek Dessau; shelf-mark 276 Georgs B).



8. Comparison of the headband of the girdle book (A) with two contemporary headbands of similar construction: (B), Headband of twisted silk threads in two colours (brown and beige) with cut ends, not laced in, attached with stitches to the spine. German (?) binding on a Venetian incunable of 1497 (see note 21); (C), Headband of coloured woven band, wound around a core, laced in. Nuremberg binding on a Koberger incunable of 1484 (see note 22)

to have brass hooks with some analogous features: the ones at Erlangen<sup>24</sup> and Halle<sup>25</sup> and a vanished but well documented girdle book from an old private collection in Munich.<sup>26</sup> All three were equipped with a hinged brass hook of corresponding design and dimensions, and they conform remarkably in details to a drawing of a girdle book by Albrecht Dürer, dated 1515, for Emperor Maximilian's Prayer Book.<sup>27</sup> Comparing these fittings with that of our binding (see fig. 9) one notes a striking similarity of the construction principles and of the dimensions: if the bent-over strip of the 'hook' of our specimen were straightened out, it would match the length of the other examples. All this seems to support the suggestion that in the case of the girdle book described the original hook, made of a rather thin plate (only 0.7 mm), happened to break off, whereupon the remainder was bent over. Possibly the new hook was closed by riveting, but the purpose of the latter remains unclear. Finally, it should be mentioned that a hinged hook, virtually identical to those of the girdle books referred to above, has been found attached directly to the lower cover of a binding dated 1536, bound probably near Leipzig and obviously meant to be carried on the girdle.<sup>28</sup>

Having concluded that the hook of our girdle book must originally have been identical to the other three examples given above, one cannot but note a marked discrepancy with the representation on various artefacts. Out of the nearly five hundred girdle books shown on statues, paintings or other art forms,<sup>29</sup> the ends of the pouch are hidden or cannot be clearly seen in about 20% of the cases; about 58% seem to have loose ends and in about 22% the pouch ends in a knot—there is only a single instance of a hinged

24 Glauning, op. cit. (n. 6.), p. 149; O. Pültz, *Die deutschen Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen* (Wiesbaden 1973), p. 32. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr B. Sinogowitz, Dr J. Mayr and Mrs S. Kohlmann who made it possible to study this girdle book preserved at the Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg, shelf-mark Ms.B 17. At that occasion I found conclusive evidence that although the binding was restored a long time ago, it is an original girdle book and did not become one by the later addition of a pouch as suggested by Glauning, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 149.

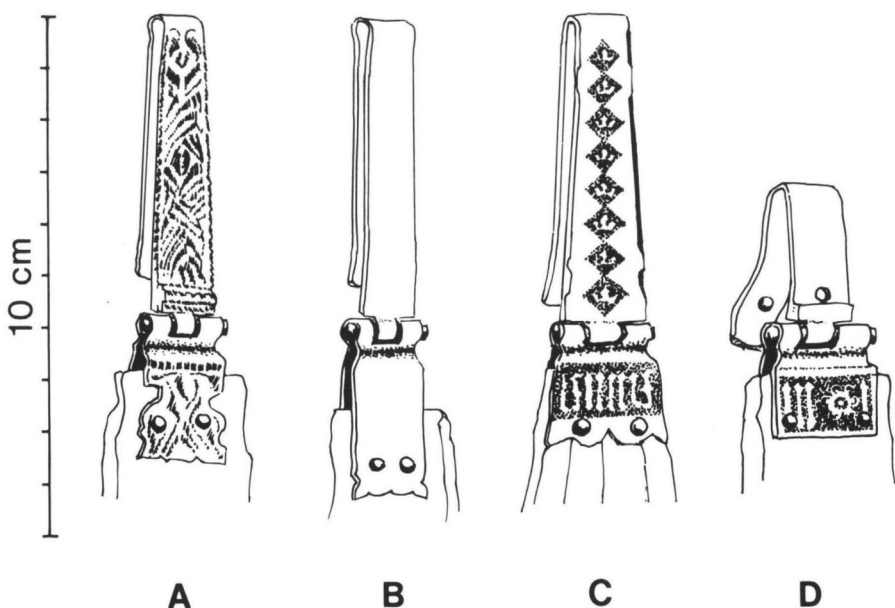
25 cf. n. 23.

26 F. Dressler, 'Ein unbekanntes Beutelbuch-Original', in: *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, 33 (1958), pp. 268-70. This girdle book was part of the collection of J. H. von Hefner-Alteneck (1811-1903), Director of the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum of Munich, who provided a precise drawing and description of it in his *Trachten, Kunstwerke und Geräthschaften vom frühen Mittelalter bis Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt 1883), vol. 4, p. 21, table 261. The illustration of a girdle book in E. Rouveyre, *Connaissances nécessaires à un bibliophile* (Paris 1900), vol. 4, p. 22, was apparently based on this drawing. The girdle book vanished after being auctioned in 1904.

27 Loubier, op. cit. (n. 7), p. 95; L. & H. Alker, op. cit. (n. 6), pp. 28, 60; W. L. Strauss, *The complete drawings of Albrecht Dürer* (New York 1974), vol. 3, pp. 1558-9.

28 C. Alschner, 'Ein "Hakenband"—Weiterentwicklung des Beutelbuches?', in: *Marginalien*, 94 (1984), pp. 57-61.

29 cf. n. 6.



9. Comparison of brass hooks of four girdle books. A: Halle, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt (cf. n. 23). B: Erlangen, Universitätsbibliothek (cf. n. 24). C: The vanished girdle book of Von Hefner-Alteneck, based on his drawing of 1883 (cf. n. 26). D: The Hague, Museum Meermanno-Westreenianum

hook, the drawing by Dürer already mentioned. The remarkably high proportion of 'loose ends' could be misleading, since a knot can be obscured by the hand holding the pouch. Original girdle books with loose ends are a rare occurrence and form a somewhat controversial issue. This can be illustrated by the binding of Gothenburg,<sup>30</sup> considered by some to be a girdle book ('Beutelbuch'), by others as a 'wrapper binding' ('Hülleneinband'). But it is unlikely that obscuring the hook by the hand holding it would explain the conspicuous absence of this feature on the artefacts, nor is it justifiable to accuse artists of being unreliable in representing bookbindings on works of art—many excellently rendered details point to the contrary. However this may be, it remains difficult to explain why the hook—which would seem to be the safest means to carry a pouch binding on the girdle—appears to be so underrepresented in art.

Girdle books are often referred to as leather bindings which have received additionally a second, overlapping and prolonged, leather covering,

<sup>30</sup> Larsen, *op. cit.* (n. 7.), p. 28; Glauning, *op. cit.* (n. 6.), p. 149; Loubier, *op. cit.* (n. 7.), pp. 95-6; Schreiber, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 493; Storm van Leeuwen, *op. cit.* (n. 11: 1984), pp. 7-8.



adapted to be worn on the girdle. Examples of such a construction are clearly described for the girdle books of Stockholm,<sup>31</sup> Kremsmünster<sup>32</sup> and New York.<sup>33</sup> In these cases one could consider the possibility that originally they were not meant to be carried on the girdle but were adapted later for this purpose. This certainly would not apply to our girdle book, which possesses a single cover only, indicating that from the outset it was intended to be a girdle book. It shares this with other girdle books with a single cover in original condition, like those of Nuremberg,<sup>34</sup> Erlangen<sup>35</sup> and Halle.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the above evidence for the original nature of this girdle book, we remain uncertain of the date of its binding and of the geographic region of its provenance. There are some features suggestive of a Nuremberg origin: it carries a rather uncommon type of headband virtually identical to one found on a Koberger binding of the same period. It was very likely equipped originally with a brass hinged hook similar to that on another girdle book, namely that of Halle, presumably bound in Nuremberg,<sup>37</sup> represented also on a unique drawing by the Nuremberg artist Dürer, and finally, its metal fittings are of the sort generally considered to have been produced in Nuremberg.<sup>38</sup> But all these arguments are rather weak, not unlike the last one: brass fittings for bookbindings were manufactured on large scale in Nuremberg and were exported all over Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Just to illustrate this point: the embossed 'flower with leaves' pattern, occurring on the catch-plate of the clasp of our girdle book, could be observed, possibly embossed even by the use of the same tool, at two such distant spots as Amsterdam and Budapest. One, on the catch-plate of a German binding of Cologne incunables from 1486,<sup>39</sup> the other on a Venetian incunable of 1495 in a Hungarian binding.<sup>40</sup> And so

31 Larsen, op. cit. (n. 7.), pp. 19-23.

32 H. Alker, 'Beutelbücher aus Österreich', in: *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, 31 (1956), pp. 282-7; Alker, op. cit. (n. 6.), fig. 13 & 15.

33 Küp, op. cit. (n. 7).

34 Anon., op. cit. (n. 5.); Glauning, op. cit. (n. 6.), p. 150; Loubier, op. cit. (n. 7.), pp. 93-4; G. Bott, et al., *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg* [Exhibition catalogue] (New York 1986), p. 229. I am grateful to Dr Ursula Mende for permission to study the Nuremberg girdle book (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg; shelf-mark Hs 17231) and for drawing to my attention a series of typical brass cornerpieces and fittings of Nuremberg origin.

35 cf. n. 24.

36 cf. n. 23.

37 Juntke, op. cit. (n. 7.), p. 49.

38 P. Hamanová, *Z dějin knižní vazby* (Praha 1959), p. 53; H. Helwig, *Das deutsche Buchbinderhandwerk*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart 1962-5), pp. 55-6; K. Irás-Melis, 'Die Funde aus einer Buchbinderwerkstatt des 15. Jahrhunderts', in *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, 49 (1974), pp. 303-10.

39 University Library of Amsterdam, shelf-mark Inc. 69/70/71.

40 Missale Strigoniense (Venetiis 1495), National Széchényi Library Budapest, shelf-mark Inc. 995.

it seems wise to content ourselves with the modest conclusion that the girdle book in question was made somewhere in Southern Germany, possibly in the Nuremberg area, towards the end of the fifteenth century.

Glauning concludes his article of 1926<sup>41</sup> with the wish that soon all the extant girdle books will be brought together and illustrated in a single publication. Sixty years later such a thorough summary is still wanting, and apparently not even all the existing girdle books have been studied in sufficient detail or even recorded. The present paper is meant to provide one of the necessary building stones for such a future comprehensive work as envisaged by one of the early explorers of the field.

#### SUMMARY

A description is given of a girdle book in the collections of the Museum Meermanno-Westreenianum in The Hague (shelf-mark 1 F 50). It contains a German Prayer Book (by the 'Printer of the Rochuslegende', Nuremberg, 1480/1484). Although the leather pouch of the binding is damaged and the brass hinged hook broken and altered, it represents an original girdle book in its first binding, consisting of a single leather cover. It was probably bound in the Nuremberg area, towards the end of the fifteenth century.

41 Glauning, *op. cit.* (n. 6.), p. 152.