Fish Skin Binding: [Re]introducing this distinctive material for unique bindings

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The Guild of Book Workers Standards
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Wild/Life!

How did we get here?

Two beautiful bindings in fish parchment.
Fish skin preserved and used in many cultures.

Resurgent in indigenous cultures, fashion, and more.

I had used commercial skins occasionally on bindings.

Finding increasing sources as part of my Ernst Collin *Bone Folder* project.

First mentioned as material in Zeidler (1708), then by Martini in 1916 with materials tests...

Austerity measure in WW I and post-war Germany, later means to reduce dependence on foreign sources...

Fish may have usefulness for objets d’art (Galanteriearbeiten), but said that bookbinders might try their hand at making it once or twice before returning to their favorite [real] leathers. From *Das Falzbein*, 1960.
Most articles described making parchment.

My favorite material.

Reached out to Jesse Meyer/Pergamena who offered some suggestions, but had no experience. Still, very useful.

How hard could it be? If “Fips” could, I can.
Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Tests</th>
<th>Final Averages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fish Parchment</td>
<td>Fold</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>79,138 GPa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tear</td>
<td>3, Disqualified</td>
<td>NA (Did not tear across full width due to strength)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat Parchment</td>
<td>Fold</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12,015 GPa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tear</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>784 g/cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UBCB Flax Papercase Paper, circa 1992</td>
<td>Fold</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>828 g/cm²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tests conducted by Timothy Barrett, Thank YOU.

Duplicated as best as possible given nomenclature and unknowns of original 1916 tests made on Franz Martini’s skins.

Incredible strength!

https://pressbengel.blogspot.com/2019/10/some-shorts-of-testing-process-on-my.html
Thank you Erin Fletcher

From left: Atlantic salmon, Arctic char, haddock, lane snapper, sea bass, mackerel
Atlantic salmon with paste paper
Quarter rainbow trout over USGS map

Material and process as metaphor (Minsky)
Mackerel, shark, wood with goat parchment
Text from 1910

Mix of green tea tanned steelhead, and walleye and char parchment, with salmon details

Material and process as metaphor
Fish skin in binding never really took off.

“Try it and move on”.

Shared on my blog and in two journal articles.

COVID project and a Bind-O-Rama challenge.

Despite sharing for a few years, was “put up” to demonstrate via a webinar.

21 participants spread from Sweden to Australia, no Germans, 3 added after, will continue to add.

https://www.philobiblon.com/bindorama20

Others teaching workshops on making parchment and/or tanning.

2 in GBW *Wild/Life* exhibit; Karen Hanmer and Kyle Clark.
Some Bind-O-Rama entries

From top left (clockwise)

Lili Hall, Bertil Gustavsson, Gloria Conti, Karen Hanmer
Learning more

• Parchment “easiest”
  • “Fips’ and His Eels: Fish Skin in Bookbinding”. Book Arts
    arts du livre Canada (Vol. 10, Nr. 2, 2019)
  • “Fish Tales, experiments with fish skin for bookbinding”.
    The New Bookbinder: Journal of Designer Bookbinders
    (2020)
  • Fish Skin Posts on the Pressbengel Project blog

• Tanning
  • Janey Chang in Vancouver has also been offering terrific
    online tanning workshops.
  • Fish Leather: Tanning + Sewing by Lotta Rahme and Dag
    Hartman. Available in North American from Janey
    Change and elsewhere.

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Others teaching workshops on making parchment and/or tanning.
So, be like ‘Fips’

Make parchment or tan, bind, and share in exhibits, the Bind-O-Rama, and elsewhere. Once you try, you’ll be hooked!

For more information, verheyen@philobiblon.com

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