

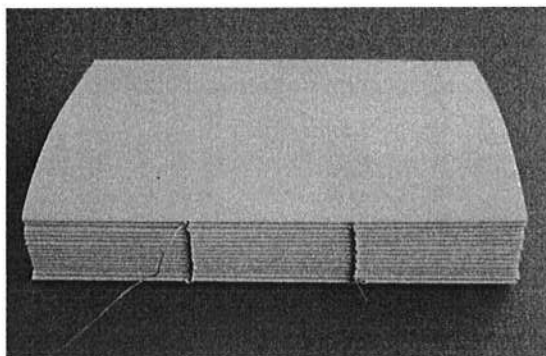
# Islamic Bookbinding

The tradition of Islamic bookbinding spans multiple continents, from Eastern Europe to North Africa to the Middle East and Central Asia. Needless to say, the styles and techniques are as vast and varied as the lands they span. Three common characteristics, Islamic bindings are most easily identified by their flat spine profile, chevron endband, and fore edge flap. Though often regarded as weak, Islamic bindings structures developed within a different cultural function than in a Western context. Islamic bindings were shelved flat and held in the hand or cradle while read, thereby negating the need for supported sewing or convex spine to maintain the structure.

To start, the textblock is sewn with a chain stitch at two sewing stations. Silk threads is commonly used to minimize swell, resulting in a flat spine and shoulder profile. The endbands consist of a primary and secondary sewing over a flat leather core. The primary sewing is tied down into the center of each gathering, acting as a kettle stitch to anchor the sections at the head and tail. Onto the primary threads, the secondary sewing consists of two contrasting colors of silk. To create the chevron pattern, the colored threads are twisted over each other to create the zigzag pattern.

The bindings can be constructed of a variety of materials: leather, paper, cloth, or lacquer. Commonly, the front and back boards are covered as two separate pieces. The front and back boards are attached to the textblock by overlapping leather flanges on the spine. Islamic bindings are typically covered with goat or sheep leather. The pronounced grain of the leather is polished smooth with a heated iron. The boards are decorated with a cold stamped or embossed central mandorla or corner decorations. Shell gold details embellish the stamped designs, which can be painted with a brush or drawn with a ruling pen. Doublures commonly consist of a single pastedown, which extends across the joint onto the textblock with a decoratively cut hinge.

## -Sewing



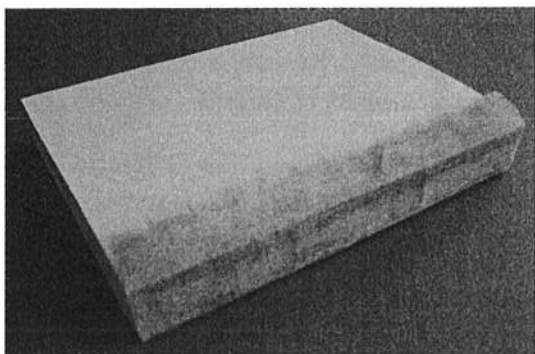
**-Materials:** silk thread, curved or bent needle, a small weight, awl, and dividers

-Commonly, the textblock is sewn with a colored silk thread. Often, the color of the thread is repeated in the primary and secondary sewing of the endbands.

-The height of the textblock is divided into thirds, creating two sewing stations for the link stitch.

-Silk thread is softer than linen thread and more easily flattens out in the gatherings. Sewing with silk thread is desirable to maintain minimal swell and a flat profile.

## -Spine Lining

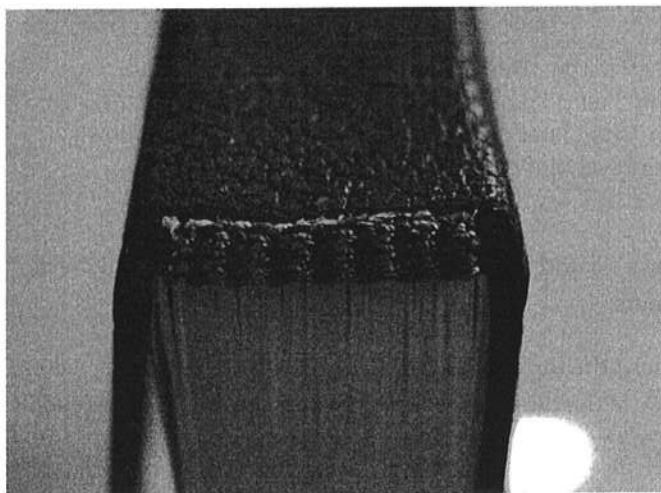
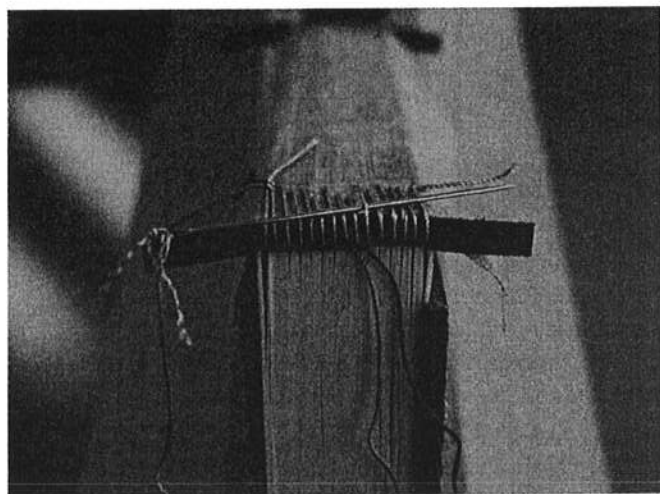


**-Materials:** fine linen cloth, paste, bone folder, weight

-Knock up your textblock, leaving the spine flat. With your bonefolder, smooth and flatten the backs of the gatherings. Paste up the spine and allow it to dry.

-Attach linen cloth with a second layer of paste, allowing the spine lining to extend an inch or so at the shoulders.

## -Endband (Chevron)



**-Materials:** 2 straight needles, two contrasting colored silk threads, leather strap

-Cut a leather core to extend across the width of the textblock. Since the endband controls the opening, the width of the leather core can vary depending on the desired openability.

-Mark the middle of each gathering with a strip of paper, this will direct your needle for the tie downs. The tie downs will stabilize the textblock laterally, binding the gatherings at the head and tail.

-Primary endband sewing- to attach the leather core to the textblock. The chain stitch and primary endband sewing are often executed in the same color thread.

-Secondary sewing- knot two colored silk threads together at one end, and attach two needles to the free ends. These threads will be woven and twisted across the primary sewing to create the chevron design.

-Ensure that the same color thread always passes under the same warp thread; otherwise your pattern will not form.

- The chevron design can be altered depending on how many tie down threads are gathered by each thread. Gathering 2 or more tie downs is common on thicker volumes.

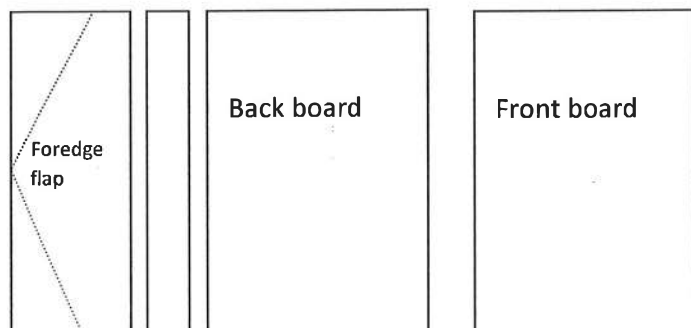
**-Materials:** 4-ply mat board, ruler, dividers, and utility knife.

- Cut three boards the dimension of the textblock, the width can be an 1/8" short. From the third board, cut a strip the thickness of the textblock. The remainder of the third board will be used to make the pentagonal flap.

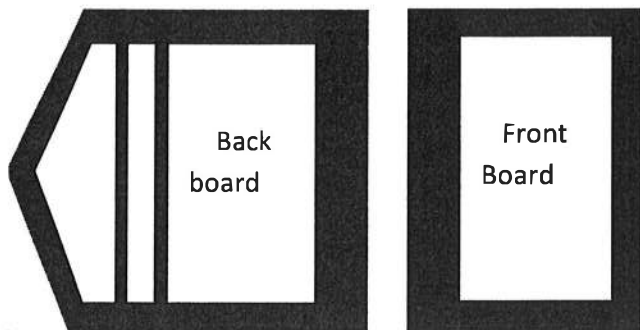
-The pentagonal, fore edge, or envelope flap is typically half the width of the front board. Its width is divided into thirds, trimming the corners back to the center point.

-Islamic bindings are typically constructed from pasteboard (a laminate of many layers of paper glued together with paste). Pasteboards often soften and become more flexible with age.

## -Board Preparation



## -Leather

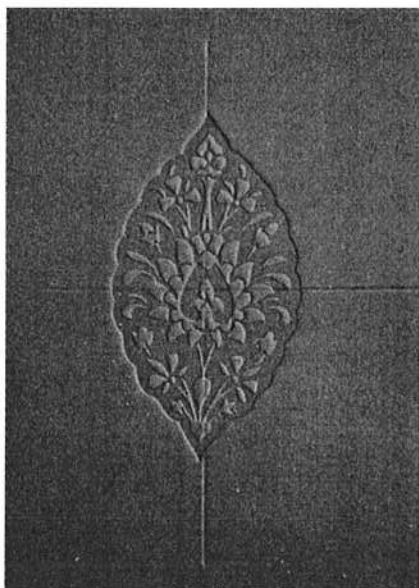


-**Materials:** leather, scissors, paring knife, paste, brush, bone folder.

-Cut two pieces of leather: One for the front board and one for the back board with fore edge flap. Leave excess at the spine the thickness of the textblock. A third piece of leather will act as the inner hinge over the fore edge flap, and should be pared down.

-The board profile should be square; bone the leather crisply around the edges and turn-ins. The corners are cut as a simple miter.

## -Stamping



-**Materials:** dividers, ruler, bone folder, decorative stamps.

-Decorative medallion or mandorla stamps were often produced out of brass, leather or wood. Stamps were pressed into the damp leather with a mallet or screw press. Skivers of leather or paper were often pressed into the damp leather along with the decorative stamp.

-Mark your front and back boards into quadrants using your bone folder. Position the stamp in the center of the boards, and nip gently in the press.

-If desired, blind lines with your bone folder around the perimeter of the front and back board, as well as the fore edge flap.

## -Polishing

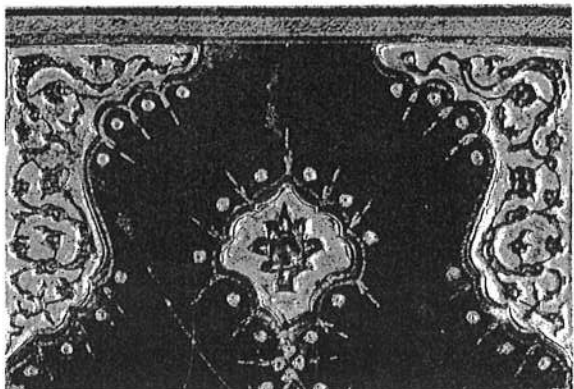
-**Materials:** polishing iron, hot plate/stove, nipping plates, press.

-Though, a majority of Islamic style bindings were executed in goat or sheep skin, the nubby grain of the leather was polished smooth. A smooth surface will create a desirable surface for shell gold painting.

-Metal nipping plates can be used in the screw press. Though depending on how thin your turn-ins were pared, the results may not be even.

-The leather should be mostly dry before applying heat and pressure of the polishing iron. Work in circular or "S" patterns evenly across the surface. Be gentle around your freshly stamped medallions.

## -Gold details



-**Materials:** shell gold (\$\$\$) or mica powders, gum Arabic, ruling pen, fine brush, cork backed ruler.

-**Recipe:** 1 part mica powder: 1 part gum Arabic: 2 parts water. Disperse the particles in water before adding the binding media. Particles will settle as you work, so remember to stir as you work.

-The ruling pen can be filled using a small brush to feed the paint into the reservoir. Draw the ruling pen slowly along a cork backed ruler (a ruler that is not raised off your surface will wick your media underneath).

-Shell gold details will remain water sensitive initially, but with time will harden. Gold painted on the surface is more vulnerable to abrasion than tooled gold which lies just beneath the surface.

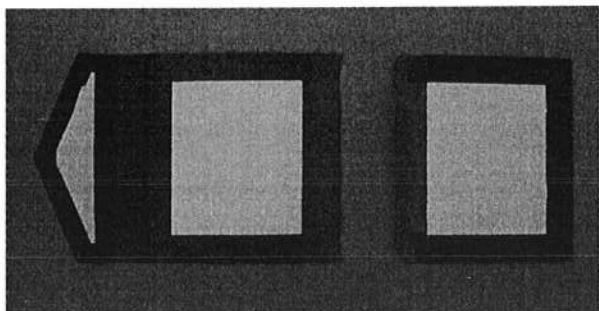
## -Doublures

-**Materials:** paper, paste or methyl cellulose, acrylic paints, gold leaf, and agate burnisher

-Doublures were commonly made from leather, silk or other decorative cloth, marbled or paste papers. Paste papers were often made with a simple colored ground often sprinkled with gold. These papers would be highly burnished with a glass ball or agate.

-Typically, the doublures extends across the joint, creating a hinge onto the textblock. This type of attachment causes the opening of the first and last leaf to be stiff. Zigzag or other decorative shaping would help soften the edge created by the hinge.

## -Board attachment



-**Materials:** paring knife, paste, weights, bone folder

-Pare the spine edge of each flange to create a thin skiver edge. You will need to trim the flange so that it just reaches the far shoulder.

-Start by fitting the back board and fore edge flap around the textblock, paste up the spine, and gently mold the leather across the shoulder. Repeat for the front board.

-Remember, the fore edge flap goes inside the front cover. Be sure to have it in place when attaching the front cover to compensate for its thickness.

-Once dry, open the binding and glue down linen spine lining to the inside of the boards. A 90 degree opening is sufficient for attaching the hinge.