Wrapped in Color:
A Survey of Paste Paper Bookbindings

Written by Sem Sutter
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During the Renaissance, European bookbinders began using decorated paper to enliven the book as an esthetic object as well as an intellectual medium. Colored paper over boards, as wrappers, or as endpapers inside a book served a utilitarian purpose, to be sure. More significantly, it afforded an inexpensive means of beautifying a volume.

The simplest decorated papers originated in the binder’s shop. Among the most unpretentious were speckled “plover’s egg” papers sprinkled with black, red, or sand-colored inks. Another simple technique was painting new paper or even printed scrap with a single color in fast, broad strokes. A kind of faux marbling was created by painting paper with ink, then hanging it up and trickling water or soap solution across the top. As the ink ran down, it formed a streaked or variegated pattern.

Specialized artisans prepared a variety of more sophisticated decorated papers for bookbindings, box linings, and wrapping paper. In sixteenth-century France dominotiers, who derived their name from the popular religious pictures that they also produced, printed decorated papers using wood blocks and water colors. Typically, the printing was executed in a single color, most often black or blue, with further hand-stencilled coloring added by women called pinceuses. By the eighteenth century these papers were the dominotiers’ primary product.

Marbled papers, perhaps the most familiar genre, are made by floating ox-gall pigments on a bath of carrageen moss or gum tragacanth size and laying the paper on it to take up the pattern. The technique began in the East and papers of Turkish and Persian origin started appearing in Europe in the late sixteenth century. Early seventeenth-century travel accounts still described them as exotica, but imported stocks for a few deluxe bindings soon gave way to French and German products that enjoyed wide usage.

German craftsmen, particularly in Augsburg and Nürnberg in the first half of the 18th century, prepared attractive gilt embossed papers for book wrappers. An imitation gold leaf sheet was laid between dampened paper and a heated, engraved copper plate and put through a roller press, causing the gilt to adhere. Sometimes the paper was colored all over before embossing, or spots of different colors were applied to the embossed sheet.

But decorated paper reached its height of popularity, diversity, and creativity in the paste papers of the eighteenth century, especially those produced in Germany and Italy. The techniques, motifs, and artistic impulses of that period have continued to inspire modern book artists and designers.
SECTION I

Four examples of simple decorated papers prepared in the binder’s shop.


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*Dominotier* papers from the Orléans firms of Perdoux and Letourmy.


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Two *dominotiers* papers printed from the same block in different colors.


The *Encyclopédie methodique* offered a detailed depiction of the eighteenth-century paper marbler’s shop and tools.


Three representative gilt embossed papers, one the work of prolific Augsburg embosser Georg Christoph Stoy (ca. 1703-1750).


The use of so-called paste colors to produce decorated paper began in the late sixteenth century. Starch or wheat flour binder's paste was colored with pigment and diluted to an easily spreadable consistency, applied to a sheet of paper, and manipulated by a variety of means to create a design.

Bookbinders undoubtedly made the simplest paste papers themselves. The most primitive procedure was to paint two sheets of paper all over with paste of one or more colors, lay them together with the wet paste inward, and rub the upper surface gently before pulling them apart to reveal a veined design. In a variant technique paste of several colors was daubed onto the two sheets. The artisan also could shape the design by laying strings, or felt rings or strips between the papers.

More sophisticated and purposeful designs were possible by painting a single sheet with colored paste and then working the paste in some way to create a pattern. One might employ paint brushes, sponges, feathers, fingers, combs, sticks, carved stamps or rollers, or a combination of several of them.

In the last third of the eighteenth century the single sisters of the Moravian religious community at Herrnhut in Saxony produced large quantities of paste paper of such imagination and quality that in eastern and central Germany the genre came to be known as *Herrnhuter-Papier*, whether it was manufactured by the Moravians or not. Typical colors for the Herrnhut craftswomen and their imitators were Prussian blue, light or dark carmine, or olive green. They developed a distinctive style that is quickly recognizable.
SECTION II


Johann Beckmann, a German economist and historian of technology, was the first known author to publish a description of Moravian paste paper making at Herrnhut:

A third kind of colored and patterned paper was first made in Herrenhuth [sic], so in Leipzig they have given it the name Herrenhüther [sic] Papier. One first paints the paper with a priming of paste and then immediately with the strong colored paste prepared for it. Then the artisan takes a piece of wood, scalloped in the chosen pattern, and moves it free-hand across the paper according to a planned design. As a result, the pigment is removed from the paper again, creating a white figure, whether twining, or serrated, or latticed. The spaces between are in part pressed with wooden stamps which take the color away, or may add another color. Or one may use small sponges to remove pigment, creating a kind of clouds, which are not unattractive. Often the artisan may simply use his finger instead of a piece of wood.

The Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg Collection.

The Ludwig Rosenberger Library of Judaica.


The Berlin Collection.


The Ludwig Rosenberger Library of Judaica.
The most diverse and colorful paste ink papers of the eighteenth century were printed with woodblocks. The process employed carved pearwood (or, less frequently, applewood or walnut) blocks with copper pins or strips driven into them for fine details. Because similar blocks were used to print textiles, in Germany this style of paper came to be called Kattun-Papier, cotton or chintz paper. In fact as fashions changed, blocks retired from printing cloth with oil-based inks often enjoyed second lives printing paste papers.

First produced in the 1730s, cotton papers reached their artistic as well as popular height between 1760 and 1790. While Dutch and French papers exist, it was in Italy and Germany that the art reached its pinnacle and papers from both countries were sold widely throughout Europe. Production continued well into the nineteenth century with the leading Italian firm of Remondini, located in Bassano northwest of Venice, enduring until 1861.

Remondini's woodblocks generally measured 34 cm. by 22 cm. and were printed twice, side by side, to produce a colored area of 34 cm. by 44 cm. on a sheet of paper typically 40 cm. by 50 cm. After inking the block with paste, the printer laid it on damp paper brushed with a background tint and struck the block with a mallet. Remondini printed up to five colors in one design, using a different block for each color with pins in the corner of each to ensure proper registration.
SECTION III


The John Crerar Collection of Rare Books in the History of Science and Medicine.

Gift of John Fleming.


From the Baldeschi-Balleani Library.


Purchased from a book fund given by a member of the University faculty in honor of Herman H. Fussler.


From the Baldeschi-Balleani Library. Gift of John Fleming.

The Berlin Collection.


The Ludwig Rosenberger Library of Judaica.
About 1900, some four decades after the dissolution of Remondini, a group of Italian paper enthusiasts succeeded in reassembling about a thousand of the firm’s old woodblocks. They licensed Giuseppe Rizzi of Varese to print from them, provided he used the original methods. These Rizzi or Varese papers continued in production until 1939 and were widely used on the Continent and in Great Britain by book restorers and handbinders as well as for binding complete editions of a number of small presses.

The Insel-Verlag of Leipzig used Rizzi papers to good effect for a number of its early bindings. So in 1912 when Insel launched its Inselbücherei series of inexpensive but high-standard editions of classic texts, the press chose to reproduce a number of Rizzi papers for the bindings, employing a photolithographic process. The esthetically pleasing results contributed strongly to the initial popular success of the series, which continues to this day.

Rizzi's papers stimulated invention at a British press as well. The Curwen Press in Plaistow, London, had likewise imported papers from Varese for its bindings. In 1920 at the Press’s request Claud Lovat Fraser, Paul Nash, and other book artists designed a collection of contemporary patterned papers in the same spirit for lithographic reproduction. They became the basis for the Press’s bindings.

Other Italians pursued the art of block-printed papers in a modern context. Between 1947 and 1959 the three Vitali sisters produced beautiful papers at their Laboratorio del Castellare in Peschia. Giovanni Mardersteig used these Castellare papers on a number of Officina Bodoni bindings.

The free-style German paste papers of the eighteenth century also enjoyed revival and adaptation in the twentieth. Many binders and conservators took advantage of the simplicity of the technique to recreate traditional designs in bolder hues. In the flowering of German book art between the wars imaginative designers pushed paste paper design in new directions. And in this country Veronica Ruzicka, daughter of artist and typographer Rudolph Ruzicka, created blind-stamped paste papers of particular charm.
SECTION IV

The seam between two block impressions is visible one-third of the way from the bottom of this turn-of-the-century Rizzi paper used in a German publisher’s binding.


A Remondini paper and its Rizzi counterpart.


Giuseppe Rizzi recarved a classic Remondini wood block to produce the patterned paper used to rebind the small seventeenth-century volume shown here. Insel-Verlag chose this design to reproduce photolithographically for the binding of *Inselsbuch Nr. 1*.


Two volumes printed by Giovanni Mardersteig on the hand-press of the Officina Bodini in Verona and bound with papers hand-blocked by the Vitali sisters of Castellare.


WRAPPED IN COLOR: A Survey of Paste Paper Bookbindings

The colorful and wide-ranging historical use of decorative papers produced with paste inks is the subject of a new exhibition in the University of Chicago Library's Department of Special Collections. "Wrapped in Color: A Survey of Paste Paper Bookbindings" will be on view March 1 - June 20, 1994.

During the Renaissance European bookbinders and other artisans began producing colorful decorative paper with paste inks similar to "finger paint," employing woodblocks, brushes, combs, sponges, or their hands to manipulate the paste and create designs. Colored paper--when used over boards, as wrappers, or as endpapers inside a book--afforded binders an inexpensive means of beautifying a volume and enlivening it as an esthetic object.

Curated by Sem C. Sutter, Bibliographer for Western European Languages & Literatures at the University of Chicago Library, the exhibit traces the development of paste paper as a genre, distinguishing it from other methods of decoration such as marbling, gilt embossing, and woodblock printing with water colors.

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In the twentieth century, Italian paper enthusiasts reassembled many of Remondini's old woodblocks and revived the craft of printing from them. This in turn provided inspiration for modern Italian artisans as well as for book artists in Germany and Great Britain.

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The exhibition includes a wealth of examples of paste paper and its uses, providing visual proof of the popularity this medium through the centuries.