

Theodore C. Petersen, *Coptic Bookbindings in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, edited by Francisco H. Trujillo. Ann Arbor 2021. Pp. xxiv + 497. ISBN 978-1-953421-04-3.

Between the years 1929 and 1950, Theodore C. Petersen (1883–1966) undertook a detailed study of the bindings of the Coptic manuscripts that had been purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913) and his son during the first decades of the twentieth century. These included a remarkable set of manuscripts discovered at the site of Hamuli in Egypt in 1910 that were associated with the Monastery of the Archangel Michael.¹ Although Petersen had delivered a complete draft of the manuscript to the authorities at the Morgan Library in 1951, the manuscript was never published.

Over the years, a number of scholars have been able to consult Petersen's unpublished typescript, and citations of it appear with some regularity in the footnotes of specialist publications.² These references indicated that Petersen's work contained detailed studies of specific bindings along with a highly informative overview of binding techniques. And in fact, many of us with an interest in ancient codex construction and bookbinding have acquired and circulated grainy copies (of copies of copies...) of parts of the original typescript. So, the publication of the complete study in 2021 was a very welcome development.

The book begins with an introduction by the editor, Francisco H. Trujillo of the Morgan Library and Museum, that explains how and why a manuscript that was substantially complete by 1949 remained unpublished until 2021. It is largely a story of three interesting personalities — Petersen himself, an autodidact in the field of bookbinding, his teacher Henri Hyvernat (1858–1941), who had been entrusted with producing a photographic edition of the manuscripts and a descriptive catalogue, and the director of the Morgan Library, Belle da Costa Greene (1879–1950). The fact that the three seem not to have shared a fully coherent idea of exactly what it was that Petersen was tasked with producing and the unfortunate coincidence of Greene's retirement in 1948 just as the manuscript was coming to completion both seem to have played a role in the stalling of the publication process.

After the editorial explanation, Petersen's monograph begins with a very brief introduction (1–4) followed by a synthetic essay, "Early Techniques of Book Sewing and Bookbinding Used in Egypt" (5–83) which provides a clear and very well illustrated survey of the different methods of binding quires and constructing covers that makes use of the data available in the first half of the twentieth century. Codices that appeared post-1940 feature only minimally. The Nag Hammadi codices, for instance, had just recently been discovered, and their bindings had received nothing more than cursory study; Petersen thus mentions them only in passing. Nevertheless, this overview does not disappoint. It is definitely data-driven, but Petersen also thought through such issues as the development of techniques for sewing together multiple quires and postulated textiles as a source.

¹ On Morgan's purchases of Coptic manuscripts, see Depuydt, Leo. *Catalogue of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library*, vol. 1. Leuven 1993, lv–lxxxii. For further evidence concerning the discovery of the Hamuli books, see Nongbri, Brent. *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts*. New Haven 2018, 86–91.

² Depuydt's catalog (note 1 above), for instance, regularly refers to Petersen's work.

In the early days of the codex, “numerous methods of lacing and interlacing threads and cord in fancy sewing, braiding, weaving, embroidering, and rug-making were already known in every textile shop of Alexandria and Rome. Thus, for the mere asking, early bookbinders probably could get any advice needed on how best to lace things together” (21).³

The second part of the monograph is Petersen’s “Description of Fifty Pierpont Morgan Library Coptic Bindings” (85–219). A typical entry in this catalogue consists of the shelf mark, a short description with date and provenance, bibliography, a drawing (and occasionally a black and white photograph), and a longer discussion that includes measurements, decorations, boards, sewing or hinging, headbands (endbands), endsheets (endpapers), clasps, markers, lifting tabs, page tabs, and other remarks. Not every entry contains all these items, but there is some data for most categories in most of the fifty entries.⁴ Then follow color plates of the inside and outside of each of the fifty covers described by Petersen (221–411).

The third section consists of Petersen’s catalog of fifty additional early bindings (numbered 51–100), “Bibliographical Notes on Fifty Ancient Greco-Egyptian and Coptic Bindings in Various Other Collections” (413–475). This group is not limited to Coptic manuscripts. It also includes a few Greek manuscripts and one Syriac manuscript, as well as fragments of covers that have survived independent of the manuscripts they once contained (I provide a list of these fifty bindings at the conclusion of the review). These entries vary widely in terms of detail and independent value. In some cases, Petersen provides only the barest summary and a short bibliography, but in other cases, he provides in-depth descriptions that seem to be the result of careful personal inspection.

The next section consists of three short appendices. Appendix 1 is a single page containing a list of several bindings meant to supplement a list of eighty-three Coptic bindings published in 1938 by G. D. Hobson. Most (though not all) of these are included in the third section of Petersen’s monograph. Appendix 2 is a one-paragraph summary description of the sewing of the Hamuli codices by Enrico Castellani, the conservator at the Vatican who disassembled and rebound the books. An English translation of the paragraph is also included. The third appendix (also labelled “Appendix I”) is a short description of what the manuscript colophons reveal about the Monastery of St. Michael (478–483). The book concludes with a bibliography and a very brief (4-page) index.

Petersen’s monograph is exactly the rich source of data that one would expect from the tantalizing references to the unpublished manuscript that have appeared over the years. Especially useful are Petersen’s excellent drawings, which often highlight details that can be difficult to see in photographs.⁵ The editor has exercised a very light touch in updating and explaining Petersen’s work within the text of the monograph itself. Overall, this seems like a wise decision, although it should be recognized that some of Petersen’s comments were outdated already

³ See now Boudalis, Georgios. *The Codex and Crafts in Late Antiquity*. New York 2018, which itself contains many references to Petersen’s then unpublished manuscript.

⁴ Trujillo notes that these first two parts of the monograph were edited by Dorothy Eugenia Miner (1904–1973) during the 1940s.

⁵ A small group of these drawings were published by Petersen in an article in 1954: Petersen, Theodore C. “Early Islamic Bookbindings and their Coptic Relations.” *Ars Orientalis* 1 (1954), 41–64.

in 1951. Users of the volume should note, for example, that the dates that Petersen assigned to some of the manuscripts stray quite far from the dates generally accepted by scholars today. For instance, the date of the papyrus codex of Philo of Alexandria in Paris (Bibliothèque nationale Suppl. Gr. 1120) is given by Petersen as “VI(?) century” (424). This was the date assigned by the original editor in 1893. Yet, it was tentatively reassigned to the third century CE already in 1899 by Frederic Kenyon, a date confirmed by Arthur S. Hunt in 1912 and which has met with general assent since then.⁶ More seriously, Petersen’s outright errors of fact have not been noted (e.g., RMO Ms. Anas. 9 has papyrus rather than parchment leaves as stated at 433; P.Ryl. Gk. 457 consists of a single fragmentary folio, not two folia as stated at 4, n. 14). Editorial notes would have been advisable in cases such as these.

One other critical observation: The index does not do justice to Petersen’s book. Remarkably, it does not include manuscripts, so the reader is left without an easy way of cross referencing the catalogued manuscripts with Petersen’s synthetic discussion in the first part of the monograph.

The book is lavishly produced with excellent illustrations. The Legacy Press should be commended for this superb production. Indeed, Coptologists should also be aware of other publications by this press. Julia Miller, an expert of historical bindings, has published a series of studies with this press that often involve Coptic bindings and papyri.⁷ Miller’s analysis of the covers of the Nag Hammadi codices (co-authored with Pamela Spitzmueller) should also be more widely known.⁸

High-quality images of the Hamuli bindings at the Morgan Library have been available online for some time (<https://www.themorgan.org/collection/coptic-bindings>).⁹ Trujillo’s edition of Petersen’s magnum opus now provides a convenient guide for navigating this material. Although the field has advanced considerably since the completion of Petersen’s manuscript in 1951, the publication of this book is a milestone. The editor and the press have our gratitude for making this material available.

Finally, as neither the table of contents nor the index provides a listing of the bindings outside the Morgan collection that Petersen discusses, I append a list of

⁶ Kenyon, Frederic G. *The Palaeography of Greek Papyri*. Oxford 1899, 145 and Hunt, Arthur S. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, volume IX. London 1912, 16.

⁷ These have often appeared in sets of collected essays edited by Miller and published by The Legacy Press, *Suave Mechanicals: Essays on the History of Bookbinding*. See, for instance, Miller, Julia. “Puzzle Me This: Early Binding Fragments in the Papyrology Collection of the University of Michigan Library,” in *Suave Mechanicals 2* (2015), 198–297; Miller, Julia. “Modelling Ambiguity: The al-Mudil Codex (David Psalter),” *Suave Mechanicals 6* (2020), 306–362; and Miller, Julia. “The Glazier Codex (MLM MS G.67),” *Suave Mechanicals 7* (2022), 296–338. Planned volumes will include similar studies, such as a detailed investigation of RMO Ms. Anast. 9 by Eliza Jacobi, Eve Menei, and Karin Schepers. “A Complete Coptic Codex: A Material Study and Conservation Approach of a Relatively Unknown Bound Papyrus Manuscript.”

⁸ Miller, Julia, & Spitzmueller, Pamela. “A Gift from the Desert: A Report on the Nag Hammadi Codices.” In: *Meeting By Accident: Selected Historical Bindings*. Ann Arbor 2018, 420–589.

⁹ Black and white images of the folia of the Morgan Hamuli manuscripts are also available online through archive.org (<https://archive.org/details/PhantooouLibrary/m566%20Combined%20%28Bookmarked%29/mode/2up>).

the current shelf marks of these bindings so that students of these codices will be able to know whether Petersen discussed them. This portion of Petersen's catalog is laid out in no discernable order, so I list the bindings here alphabetically by city and collection (the first numeral is Petersen's entry number). When possible, I provide the reference number in the Trismegistos (TM) database in parentheses. Entries marked with an asterisk (*) include drawings:

- 63: Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina 522 (ex. Egyptian Museum JdE 10759; TM 59976)
- 56*: Ann Arbor, University of Michigan MS 167 (TM 107872)
- 69*: Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, P.Mich.inv. 4972
- 67: Berlin, Staatliche Museen P. 8502 (TM 107765)
- 61*: Berlin, Staatliche Museen P. 14016
- 77*: Berlin, Staatliche Museen P. 14018
- 78*: Berlin, Staatliche Museen P. 14021
- 79*: Berlin, Staatliche Museen P. 14022
- 80*: Berlin, Staatliche Museen P. 14023
- 81*: Berlin, Staatliche Museen P. 14019(?)
- 51: Berlin, ex. Staatliche Museen P. 15997 (TM 108138)
- 83: Berlin, ex. Kaiser Friedrich Museum I. 4123 (lost, presumed destroyed)
- 84: Berlin, ex. Kaiser Friedrich Museum I. 4124 (lost, presumed destroyed)
- 65: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Ms. or. fol. 3065 (TM 107764)
- 66*: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Ms. or. oct. 987 (TM 107968)
- 92*: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3811 (ex. JdE 47547; Hamuli B)
- 87*: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3815+2703 (ex. JdE 47551; Hamuli D+A; TM 114340)
- 90*: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3816 (ex. JdE 47552; Hamuli E)
- 91*: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3819 (ex. JdE 47555; Hamuli G₂; TM 114339)
- 86*: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3820 (ex. JdE 47556; Hamuli H)
- 85*: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3821 (ex. JdE 47557; Hamuli I₂)
- 88*: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3822 (ex. JdE 47558; Hamuli I₁)
- 89*: Cairo, Coptic Museum 3823 (ex. JdE 47559; Hamuli J)
- 64: Cairo, Egyptian Museum JdE 10758 (TM 64999)
- 53: Dublin, Chester Beatty Library "Coptic MS A" (TM 107868)
- 54: Dublin, Chester Beatty Library "Coptic MS B" (TM 107869)
- 55: Dublin, Chester Beatty Library "Coptic MS C" (TM 107870 + 108045)
- 52: Geneva, Fondation Martin Bodmer, P.Bodmer 58 (ex. Phillipps 18833; TM 107785)
- 70*: Leiden, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Ms. Anast. 9 (TM 100023)
- 74*: London, British Library Papyrus V (TM 108635)
- 60*: London, British Library Papyrus 1442 (TM 19869)
- 76*: London, British Library Papyrus 1786
- 100*: London, British Library Ms. Or. 1239
- 75*: London, British Library Ms. Or. 3367
- 72*: London, British Library Ms. Or. 5000 (TM 108024), with photo
- 73*: London, British Library Ms. Or. 5001 (TM 107789), with photo
- 98*: London, British Library Ms. Or. 6801
- 96: London, British Library Ms. Or. 7023

- 99*: London, British Library Ms. Or. 7027
94: London, British Library Ms. Or. 7028
95: London, British Library Ms. Or. 7029
62: London, British Library Ms. Or. 7594 (ex. Sambon Collection; TM 107763)
97*: London, British Library Ms. Or. 7597
93*: London, British Library Ms. Or. 12689 (now in modern binding)
58*: Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana C 313 (TM 116135)
68: Moscow, I.1.b. 686 + IG 4795 (TM 108154)
82: Offenbach, Deutsches Ledermuseum, inv. no. 4114
59*: Paris, Bibliotheque nationale Suppl. Gr. 1120 (TM 62376)
71*: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek P.Vindob. BD 37
57*: Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art 06.274 (TM 61831)

Brent Nongbri