

The Use of Japanese Paper as an Alternative Material in the Repair of Leather-Bound Items in Academic Research Libraries

By Ann Carroll Kearney

THIS ARTICLE IS BASED ON A talk presented on May 12, 2010 at the 38th Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation and Artistic Works (AIC) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The subject of that presentation was the use of Japanese paper as an alternate material in the repair of leather bound items in academic research library collections.

Meeting and Presentation Themes

“The Conservation Continuum: Examining the Past/Envisioning the Future”—the theme of AIC’s 2010 Annual Meeting—provided a receptive environment for a preliminary presentation on the adaptation of a traditional procedure (leather repair) through the use of an alternative material (paper) to a contemporary application.

The initial steps in the consideration of this topic were to develop and conduct a survey of academic research library preservation departments. Those that performed “Level 3” procedures (an ARL-designated level based on time required to complete procedures—in this case over 2 hours—that would accommodate working on leather volumes) were contacted. They were asked to complete and submit an eight-item online survey.

The survey and its results are presented below. Implications of these results—including identifying variations on techniques and material, attitudes toward the use of one material to repair a different one, levels of

knowledge about the substrates involved—are also briefly reviewed and will lay the groundwork for further research. These aspects can guide us in a thoughtful and appropriate use of paper in the use of a procedure that can make and has made a significant contribution in the ability of conservation professionals to “make whole” compromised items in collections that are constrained by budgets and a lack of trained personnel.

Goals of Study

The purpose of this investigation was to begin to explore the “what, why and how” of the use of Japanese paper in leather-bound book restoration. To narrow the focus, the study was limited to its use in the Association of Research Libraries’ (ARL) preservation departments. The first steps were to conduct a literature review and then develop a brief survey for identification purposes.

Background on the Development of the Techniques and the Original Materials Used

In 1995, Don Etherington described his repair techniques using Moriki papers in the repair of leather-bound collections materials in *The Abbey Newsletter*.¹ Having presented these methods at workshops over the previous decade, Etherington’s article here provided specific identification of materials and directional information to aspiring practitioners. A different technique involving the use of Japanese paper for hinge repair was

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presented at the 1991 AIC Meeting by James Brock and published in a 1991 edition of *The Abbey Newsletter*.²

In 1996, then-conservation student Donia Conn published “Board Reattachment for Circulating Collections: A Feasibility Study” in *AIC’s Book and Paper Annual*, which succinctly documented the above contributions in light of their relationship to a larger framework of board reattachment initiatives.

Kristen St. John and Olivia Primanis both in published articles involving the use of Japanese papers in leather repair in *The American Institute for Conservation’s 19th Book and Paper Group Annual*. St. John’s “Survey of Current Methods and Materials Used for The Conservation of Leather Bindings,”³ covered some of the ground examined in this current survey by touching on Etherington’s and Brock’s methodology, as well as by identifying some of the surface consolidants and colorants being used at that time.

Whitney Baker and Liz Dube, in the American Library Association’s *Library Resources and Technical Services* 2010 issue,⁴ presented an overview of standard practices in research library book conservation and devoted several survey questions and study conclusions to the use of Japanese papers in the repair of leather volumes.

Survey Development/Population Selection/Survey Distribution

A brief (eight-item) survey was designed to collect general information on the use of Japanese papers in the repair of leather bindings. The population for distribution was determined by reviewing preservation statistics of Association of Research Libraries’ members that listed “Level 3” statistics in their annual reports.⁵ Sixty-nine library preservation departments were identified and contacted regarding blind survey participation. The survey was distributed in early March, 2010 and 32 responses were received before the collector was closed on April 15, 2010.

The survey itself addressed the use of paper in leather repair procedures, the selection of paper and qualities that affect this choice and the application of treatments to paper that makes it more suitable to restoration work. It also requested opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of this Japanese paper for the repair process.

Limitations

The questionnaire was designed to be brief in order to encourage participation and focus responses. Consolidating questions, however, paved the way for providing answers that offered little useful information. This became apparent once the completed questionnaires were returned. The less-specific format did, on the other hand, give greater rein to participants in their responses and provided information that might not have otherwise been obtained.

Survey Questions

1. Do you use Japanese paper instead of leather in leather repair procedures?
2. In which procedures do you use it?
3. What type/types of paper do you use?
4. What are your criteria for Question #3?
5. Do you size, tone or line the paper?
6. If “yes,” could you identify the products or items used?
7. Do you use a consolidator, i.e., SC 6000? What do you use, under what circumstances do you use it and to what end?
8. Can you suggest advantages/disadvantages/comments about using paper instead of leather in book repair procedures?

Result Summary and Observations

• **Conservators do use Japanese** (and other, i.e. Cave) papers as an alternative to leather in the repair of leather volumes.

The wording and formatting of the question did not encourage specific responses, so 17 answers listed “various” as the type of Japanese paper used. Of

the responses that did specify a type, Moriki was the most frequently given answer (10) followed by (unspecified) Kozo (4), Hiromi Kozo (2), Tenjugo (2) and Kizukishi (2). Single responses included Paper Nao, “Western,” Hanji and Barrett. “Cave Papers” were listed by two.

- **The procedures in which** Japanese paper is most frequently used are (a) board reattachment closely followed by (b) rebacking.

In addition to the Etherington and Brock procedures mentioned earlier in this article, prior contributions to board reattachment by Carolyn Horton, Christopher Clarkson and Anthony Cains are described by Donia Conn in her 1996 article.⁶

- **Strength is the quality** most frequently identified (four times in Questions 3 responses/seven times in Question 8 responses) when selecting paper. Other highly-rated features include its ease of handling and speed of use and its cost-savings aspect.

- **Many participants tone**, some size and a few line the paper.

The construction of questions #5 and #6 did not differentiate among procedures and did not facilitate obtaining specific information. The results were as follows:

Lining materials used:

Cotton (3)
Linen (8)
Tyvek (1)
Japanese tissue (8)
Pastel (1)
Watercolor (3)

- **Acrylics are the toner of choice** (Golden™ Acrylics were frequently specified).

Toning:

Acrylic (13)/Golden™ Acrylic (5)
Watercolor (4)
Colored pencil (2)
Powdered pigment

- **SC 6000 is the primary** consolidant used; 5 respondents favor mixing it with Klucel-G, 2 respondents with Ethanol.

Sizing:

Klucel G (5)
Methyl Cellulose (1)
SC6000 (4)
Renaissance Wax (1)
Wheat paste (2)
PVA (2)

- **The “advantages” of paper** use offered in response to Question #8 out-numbered the “disadvantages” by 58 to 4. The respondents to the questionnaire appear to have found paper to be a viable alternative to leather in the repair of leather bindings.

- **Ease of handling**, speed of performance, material strength, minimal departmental investment (in money, in training and in the purchase of additional supplies) and media stability were identified as positive consequences of using papers).

- **Color fading**, material durability (argued as a plus above) difficulties in handling and the incongruity of “repairing leather with a material that isn’t leather” were cited as negative consequences of using paper.

Additional Observations

Level 3 procedures often do not include leatherwork; using Level 3 procedure performance as a preliminary qualifying characteristic of an academic library preservation unit for this study may not have been a reasonable qualifier.

A better background in the history and composition of paper would be useful to those charged with using paper in library preservation units (gathered from the use and misuse of terminology and references from several respondents).

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This small study displays a range of paper choice and handling practices and indicates the importance of initiating efforts to evaluate the best possible methodologies and applications.

Preliminary Conclusions and Future Directions

Japanese papers are widely used in the repair of leather bindings by conservators in academic research libraries. This small study displays a range of paper choice and handling practices and indicates the importance of initiating efforts to evaluate the best possible methodologies and applications. Papers, lining options, toning media and finishing consolidants should continue to be examined⁶ for their strength and longevity. This is particularly significant in light of this survey's results showing use of paper based on cost effectiveness of the material as well as of the time of trained personnel.

References

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5. These libraries were selected as those most likely to be using these techniques—the study coordinator acknowledges that these techniques are in use in academic libraries that are not members of the Association of Research Libraries, but that a method for identifying usage by those libraries could not be determined.
6. See Conn, 1996.

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