

*A Stitch in Time: Repairing the  
Original Sewing Structure on Bound Materials*

4. In-Situ Repair Sewing of Parchment Text Blocks

ABSTRACT

To retain original sewing structure in a damaged binding is desirable to preserve as much of the original binding as possible, even if it becomes hidden after the repairs are made. The article describes a novel repair method for a particular problem—saving sewing of a parchment text block and lining the spine non-adhesively.

INTRODUCTION

A non-adhesive, sewn spine lining can prove an effective method of relining the spine of a parchment text block. The technique was developed to retain fragile, original sewing and sewing supports when repairing a parchment manuscript. The new lining will stiffen the spine, protecting the old sewing and supports by controlled flexing. The following conditions/expectations may be present:

- It is important to save the sewing and sewing supports as evidence.
- The text block is parchment.
- There are adhesive linings that have failed or are too stiff.
- Sewing supports may be broken at board attachment or somewhere across the spine.
- Endbands may be missing.

TREATMENT

The spine is exposed and if old adhesive removal is needed, it is carried out by dry scraping and/or minimal poultices to avoid excessive dampening of the spine folds (fig. 1). Once the spine is freed of linings and adhesive, a

small gap will appear between the gatherings. Parchment gatherings can be bulkier than paper ones, hence more space between wraps of the sewing supports. Any breaks in the sewing and/or supports across the spine can be mended at this stage. I prefer sewing repairs that do not damage the original. Instead of risky resewing either between or through original double cores or repair by replacing cores while trying to keep the thread intact, supports can be strengthened by an encircling wrap around the support in a figure-eight, multi-step manner as in multi-step link sewing such as Greek/Byzantine sewing but around raised cores (fig. 2). This repair sewing does not pierce the gathering but goes behind the support at the gap between gatherings, providing a diagonal reinforcement (the way old fire hoses were woven) and multiple bridges to the old support. Often supports will be broken at the board edge/lacing point. There may be no need to add on new lacing material as the new linings can be used to reattach the boards. This method preserves the remains of the lacings in the original holes. Missing endbands can be incorporated into the repair to strengthen text block solidity in the endcap area and to reestablish board attachment at the ends of the binding (fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Exposed parchment spine

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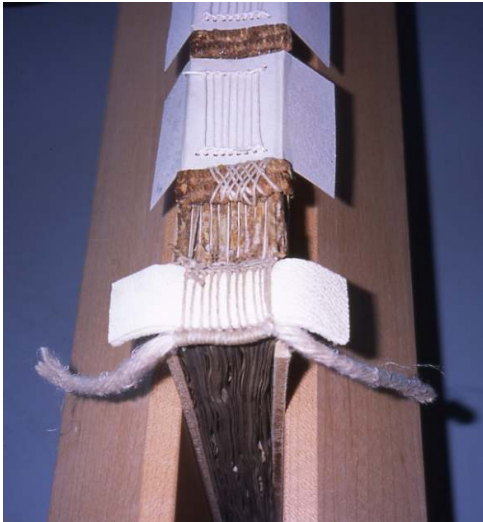


Fig. 2. Figure-eight multi-step repair of broken sewing support and new endband with end of spine band

Since books must be used, which requires the spine to flex, another important element in preserving the sewing structure is limiting stress on the original sewing and sewing supports, without adding an adhesive lining to the parchment spine. The gap already mentioned is necessary for the treatment. First, new endbands can strengthen the end of spine area, using the Clarkson end of spine band construction. Endbands with unabbreviated tie-downs are sewn into the gathering gutter. New endband cores can be added as well as extensions of the tawed skin pad, secured non-adhesively by the tie-downs (fig. 3). The pad flanges can be adhered to the boards. Evidence of old tie-downs in the gutter can remain in place.

Next is the sewing of the lining. A stay (a folded strip of parchment or paper) is fitted against the supports from the inside of the binding in the gap between gatherings. They are placed between every gathering or periodically between several gatherings. This depends on book size and thickness. Stay material is chosen to match the situation. I have used thin parchment or a hard, thin flax paper. Swelling in the spine that could damage the structure should be avoid-

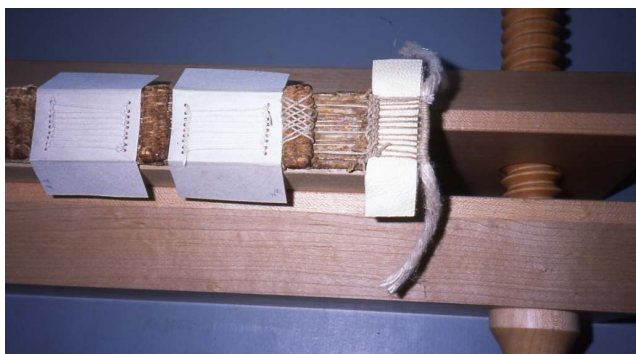


Fig. 3. Tie-downs holding end of spine band to text block non-adhesively



Fig. 4. New spine lining attached to stays via long stitches

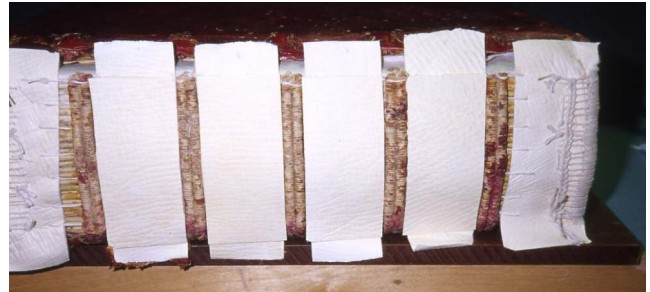


Fig. 5. Second lining applied adhesively to first sewn on lining

ed, but if the gatherings are moderate to thick, this will not be a problem. The stays establish vertical rigidity, parallel to the spine fold. The stay will become a new part of the spine movement of the book. A new endband could also be stitched into the stay. In a spine view of this non-adhesive sewing, the thread weaves in and out along the fold of the stay, and through the pieced spine lining—tawed skin or parchment (fig. 4). Pre-punching the spine lining can greatly ease the finicky nature of this repair sewing. The sewing pattern can vary according to conditions. A second layer of “spine lining” can be adhered if less flexibility to the text block is needed (fig. 5). The sewn lining also provides flanges for reattaching boards. The binding can be rebaked or recovered in the method of choice—loose or tight back. If a tight back, this will further restrict the opening of the binding.

#### SUMMARY

This repair technique was developed for a specific binding problem. My research and practice of long and link stitch structures was probably the subconscious inspiration for this “modified” long stitch. Its usefulness for others may be as much in the approach to a problem as the solution that resulted.

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