

Medieval book coverings for transport or protection

- A quick overview

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There are several different types of book coverings to protect books which can also aid in protection during transportation in the medieval period, these are not limited to:

Girdle books - is now the common description for a bound book which can be hung from or by the girdle (belt). The English term of girdle book has been used in reference to precious books illuminated with miniatures during the 1500's and 1600's. These precious books were often worn by noble ladies on gold chains. Plus more recently the term has also been used to reference leather bound books with a tail that is hung from or by the girdle. Girdle books were made from the 14th century and are known to have been used until the 16th century (Vervliet, Szirmai). Ranged in size but generally smaller, studied extant examples ranged from 132 to 900g. For my paper on girdle books please see <http://isabell.paradise.gen.nz/Bookbinding/girdle%20books.pdf>

Girdle pouches, Pouch napkin, Pocket books, Posebind (bag or a binding bag in Danish). In German Beutelbuch (pouch book) and Buchbeutel (book pouch), these terms have often been used interchangeably (Smith, 2004). It is worth noting the two German terms describe two different concepts, pouch book is more of an accurate description of the book than book pouch by which one would envision a separate pouch into which the book was dropped (like a chemise cover) Smith (2004).

Bogpunge or bag tie - Danish term for a girdle pouch (Sofus Larsen)

Split pouch - carried as a shoulder bag rather than at the girdle. Vervliet (1972) describes this way of carrying books was in a leather wallet, hung from the shoulder by a strap for carrying books on journeys, extant example of a legal text bound in this manner is quite large in size and weighed 1624gm.

Hakenband – hinged hook binding that does not have a pouch but instead a hook is mounted directly onto the tail edge of the lower board of the book in a similar manner to that of metal covered books which were worn by noble ladies on gold chains.

Chemise covers – an outer covering that the book fits into like an enclosed dust jacket. To protect the book or give a different outer appearance, for instance to make a book look more regal with say an embroidered velvet cover.

A bag of cloth or soft leather - was seen being used in the later middle ages.

A casket book or capsule - is one where the covers and sides of a casket are firmly attached to the binding of a book and often made of wood or metal of appropriate size and ornamented. Examples can be seen in Ireland and Scotland and are often referred to as Cumdach (a metal slipcase or box) up to the 12th century.

Wrapper binding - these were books that had flaps of leather or cloth hanging down on three sides so that the book could be wrapped up, these were intended only for protection and not for transport. These did not have a tail. Reference found in Vervliet.

Vade Mecum - The phrase means 'goes with me' in Latin and refers to a portable book (often suspended from the belt), frequently consisting of leaves folded in a concertina or fold out format.

Such 'books' could be consulted easily by physicians, for example, and often contain calendars, almanacs, and medical information, these are mentioned by both the British library and Brown.

Pugillaria or calendar booklets – Often Italian and of the 13th - 15th centuries were carried at the belt. Their pages could be folded into small compass, laid between the leather covers, and made fast by a metal clasp with a ring for securing to the owners belt (Vervliet).

There are limited extant examples of these types of coverings for books, by their nature they were designed to be used and as such it can be expected that wear, negligence and other factors most likely played a range of roles into the limited number of surviving examples.

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