

Directions for making a soft covered Coptic Book

Supplies needed:

Bone Folder
Punch
Wood to protect tabletop when punching... about 5" square or so
Right Angle Triangle (preferably one that is about 6" or more on one side)
Waxed Linen Thread (2 lengths about 36" long each)
Bookbinding Needles (4 each) #16 blunt
Text Weight Paper (9" x 12")
Leather (about 5" x 12"), plus a long 36" x 1/4" strip for tying the book together

Directions:

1. Fold all sheets of paper (12 sheets to start) in half and tear carefully. The book should have no less than four gatherings of six pages folded in half (Fig. 1). It would be best if the pages are folded individually and then placed together in the gathering. If you want more gatherings, your leather cover must be longer to compensate.

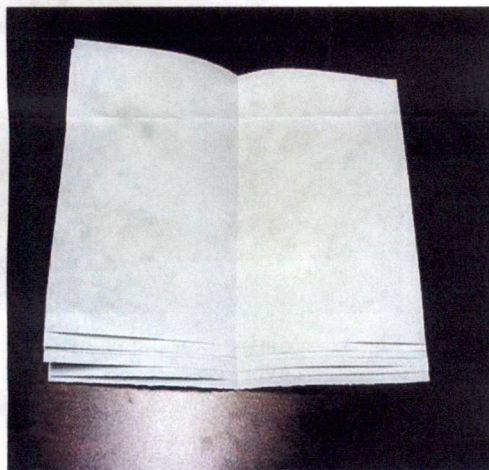


Fig. 1 — 6 folded pages per gathering.

at the same time. Then, turn each gathering outside-in so that the marks are now on the inside fold.

2. Before you do any punching or sewing, you should do the page layout if you intend to use this book in a Medieval manner... you should also do all calligraphy and illumination before it is sewn together, ideally. If this is to be a book just for notes, then you don't need to follow through with this layout. (See attached directions for page layout.)

3. You will need four holes punched in each gathering, starting in no closer than 1/2" from outer edges. I suggest you set them about 1" to 1.5" apart, but the distances are your choice. It looks good to have a wide space in the center between the two sets of holes (Fig. 2). Holding all four gatherings together, mark them all

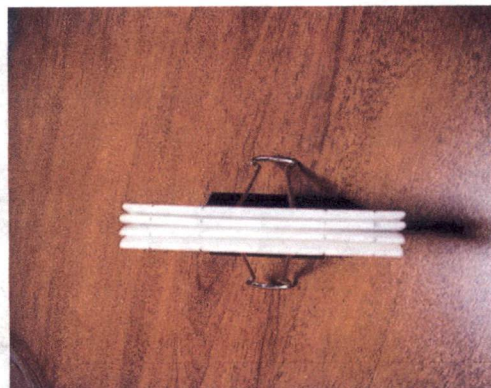


Fig. 2 — All four gatherings marked for punching.

4. From the center inside fold, using the marks you made, punch each gathering all the way through its six pages... make hole large enough to get your needle through after it has been threaded. Try your best to keep all the holes even. (Fig. 3.)

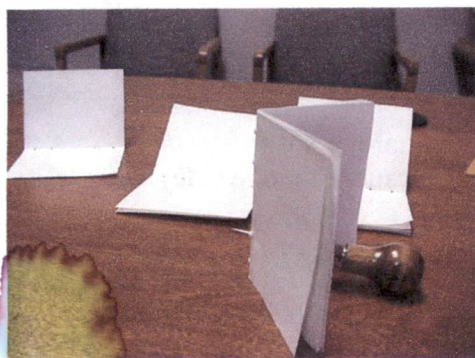


Fig. 3 — Punching through all pages of each gathering from the inside.

5. After you have punched all four gatherings, it is time to set up the leather for punching. Depending upon the weight of the leather you chose, this is an easy task or a difficult one. You want leather with enough body to hold up to abuse, and yet soft enough to be flexible. Open out your leather with the suede side up and place your first gathering at square end, cut/torn ends about 1/8" from the top/lower edges of the leather. Use a pen to mark the holes of your gathering. Now, using your triangle as a ruler, set another three sets of markings... more if you have more gatherings... no less than 1/4" apart. Much closer and you might experience difficulty punching all the way through the leather without

tearing it. (Fig. 4.)

6. Thread one needle on each end of your two lengths of waxed linen thread. You don't need to leave long tails, as the waxed thread should hold fairly well once it is folded over the eye tightly.

7. Start from the inside of the first gather. You should have two pairs of holes, so you will use one thread for each pair. (Fig. 5.) Your first stitch will go from the inside of the gather to the outside of your leather (with the suede side on the inside). Once all four needles are on the outside, either just cross or do a single knot cross and bring the needles up through the next set of holes in the leather (Fig. 5a)... from the outside back to the inside... they will not go into the next gathering yet. When they are back inside then take them up from the outside fold of the second gathering to the inside. Pull the thread snug, but not overly so... you don't want to tear your paper. Also, make sure you have no knots or extra thread between the gatherings (this can happen very easily).

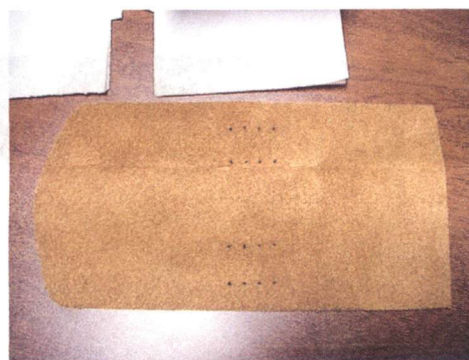


Fig. 4 — Marking for punching of the cover.

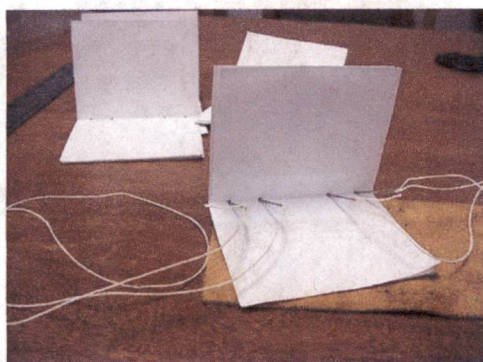


Fig. 5 — Starting the sewing from the inside of the gathering.



Fig. 5a — Crossing stitch on the outside after first gathering.

8. Now, from the inside of the second gathering, you need to cross the needles of each set of holes to return them back through the same holes on the outside of the leather (Fig. 6). Do the knot cross again on the outside, moving to the next set of unused holes. Continue in this fashion until all gatherings are sewn in. You should end up on the inside of the last gathering.

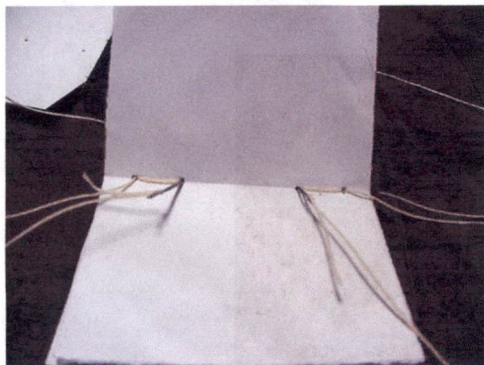


Fig. 6 — Inside second gather, switching sides through same holes to outside.

9. To tie off your threads, start with each of the sets. Make your knot a square knot if you can, but it isn't overly important, as the wax will hold the knot. Place the knots as close to the center of the book as you can (Fig. 7). Now take the four threads and tie them off in the direct center of the book (Fig. 7a). Cut as close to the final knot as you can without actually touching the knot... splay the threads with your fingernail or the punch a bit to ensure security.

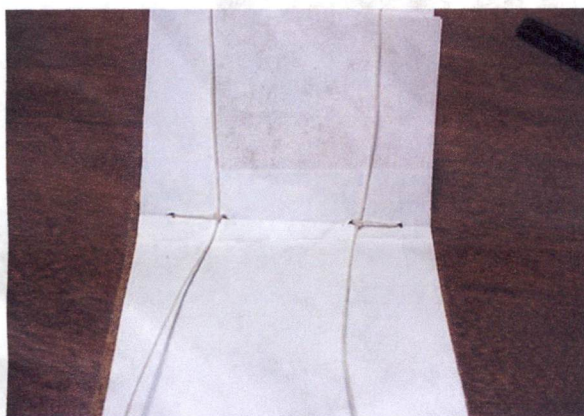


Fig. 7 — First set of knots inside last gathering.

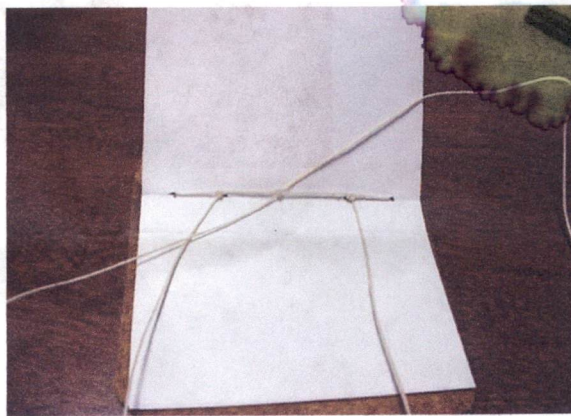
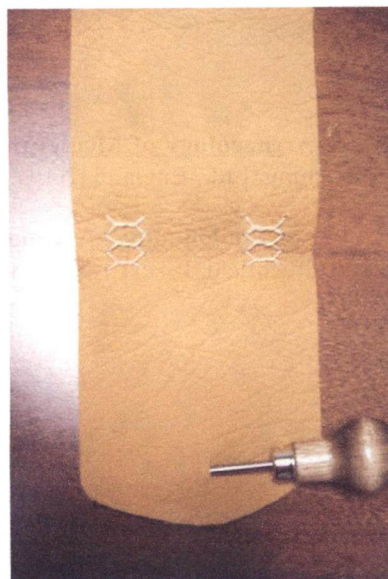


Fig. 7a — Second set of knots for final knots of the last gathering.

started, cut your leather so it forms a triangular flap. This does not have to be a real sharp triangle at the center, but looks nicer if rounded just a bit. Cut a slit that is about $\frac{1}{2}$ " long near this point, running the long way (not the short way — Fig. 8). Tie a single overhand knot in one end of the thong and draw it from the smooth side of the leather through this slit. You can now use this thong to wrap around your closed book, with a single overhand knot to lock it all in place.

Fig. 8 — Outside showing final knots and slit for the tie thong (punch holding open)



NOTE: The figures are made using a much smaller version of this book, and a scrap of leather, it is not quite large enough for this project... nor was the thong long enough... it should wrap around the book at least twice (it wraps only 1.5 times in the image below).



Completed book

Bibliography

"The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding," J.A. Szirmai. ISBN: 0-85967-904-7. Published by Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., England, 2001.

"ABC of Bookbinding, A Unique Glossary with over 700 Illustrations for Collectors and Librarians," Jane Greenfield. ISBN: 1-884718-41-8. Published by Oak Knoll Press, Delaware, 1998.



Figure 1.1 The Nag Hammadi codices in their original state shortly after their discovery in 1945 (from Dorese and Mina 1949).

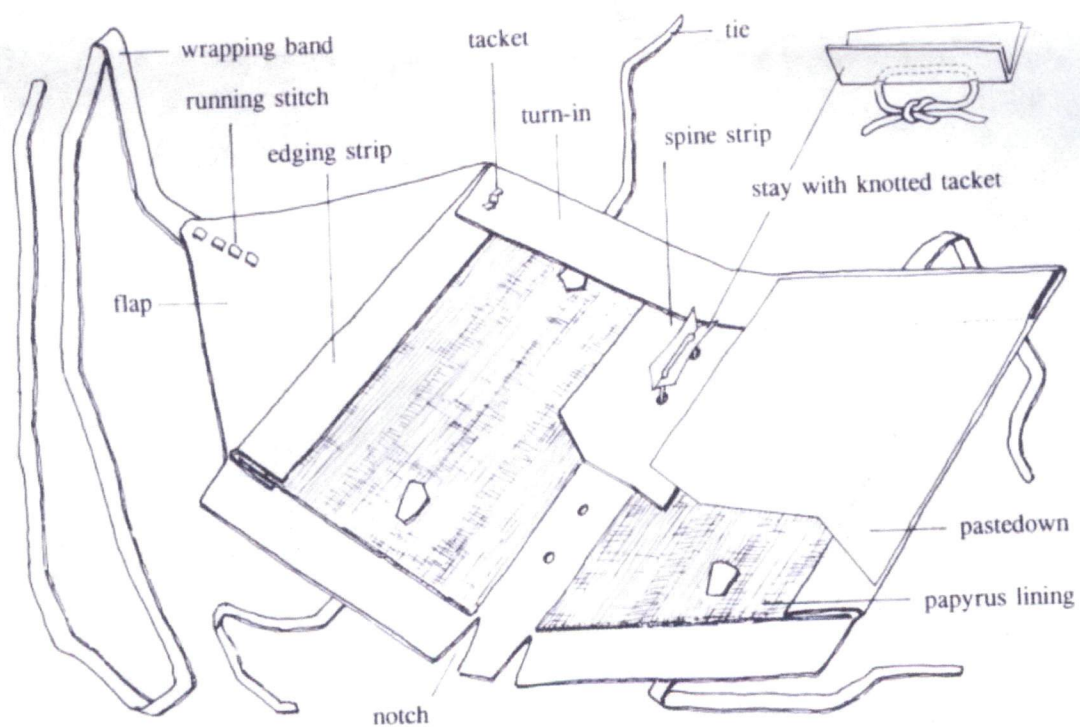


Figure 1.2 Diagram of the construction of the Nag Hammadi codices.

Believed to be 3rd/4th century, these books were found in a large jar near the Egyptian village of Nag Hammadi. Thirteen books were found, all but one were single gathering structure. They all contained religious texts.