
TEXTS AND MANUSCRIPTS: DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH

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CENTRAL ASIAN MANUSCRIPTS' BINDINGS (1730s — 1930s)*

Central Asian bindings during the period in question were extremely specific — easily recognizable and very similar in appearance (a well-established range of colours, very subdued graphic design, the complete absence of a flap). They were not full leather bindings, but 90% paste-board (*muqawwā'*) [1]. Both covers of such a binding were usually made from poured whole paste-board, although well pasted and pressed paper-board of separate sheets (*papier-mâché*) was sometimes used. The edges of paste-board covers were strengthened with light, thin, well-worked leather and reinforced with a back spine of the same finish and colour. The back spine sometimes had two tongued flaps that extended upward and downward (1.5—2.0 cm) for pulling the manuscript out of a pile on the shelf (Eastern manuscripts were kept lying, not standing as in Europe).

The practice of producing *muqawwā'* bindings spread rapidly through all the khanates of Central Asia and binding masters (*muqawwā'sāz*, *ṣahḥāf*) “clothed” manuscripts in Bukhara and Samarqand, Fergana and Kokand, Khiva and Gurgandj. Of course, such bindings were inferior to leather bindings in elegance and artistry; the *muqawwā'* was a much more modest affair. It was, however, durable and functional, and cost several times less than leather, though it was just as hardy. This does not mean that the art of manufacturing leather bindings was entirely eliminated from the repertoire of binders; demand for them simply diminished significantly. They were prepared exclusively to order for calligraphic, illuminated manuscripts and for large-format lithograph editions (from the 1880s on).

The production of *muqawwā'* bindings was standardized and usually consisted of the following: the edges of the paste-board covers were lined with leather of a single colour that covered 0.4—0.5 cm. The back spine, which reinforced both covers, was made of thin leather of the same colour. Paper of a single colour was pasted onto the inner faces of the covers (usually white, but sometimes so-called “marble”—*abrī* [2]); it was usually left unadorned. As a rule, these sheets of paper extended 0.2—0.3 cm over the leather border at the edge of the paste-board. Monotone colour

sheets of paper were usually pasted onto the outer faces of the covers as well, also covering 0.2—0.3 cm of the leather edging. After this, the paper was coated with two or three layers of colourless or pale yellow lacquer. If the colour range of the paper was originally limited to two or three favourite colours (green, claret, deep orange), as time passed it broadened (undoubtedly under the influence of local traditions, tastes, and priorities) to include such colours as yellow, yellow-green, mustard, light-brown, orange, deep-orange, deep-green, pistachio, cherry, raspberry, dark-raspberry, etc. As concerns the colour of the leather backings and edging, there were fewer colour variations. One notes a preference for red, brown, dark-red, green, and orange. No well-defined pattern of colour combinations emerges for the backings, edgings, and covers. In selecting contrasting colours, the binder apparently relied both on tradition and, to a significant degree, his own taste, experience, and possibly his client's wishes. Still, Kokand and Khivan binders displayed a marked preference for darker hues: claret, dark-raspberry, dark-brown, cherry, and black. This led to corresponding contrasts in the colours of the leather edging and back spines: light-green, pale-orange, light-brown, sometimes blue or pale-raspberry.

Muqawwā' bindings bore limited adornment and displayed little variation. Decoration usually consisted of various lines in geometric formation; straight embossed lines (*tarāq*) along the entire border (usually two parallel lines), or two radial lines (bisecting the corners) that sometimes intersected in the centre. In a number of cases, a border lined the edges in the form of a chain with oval, lancet-shaped, or rectangular (*band-i rūmī*) links. More rarely one finds an embossed wavy line along the border, more frequently painted. The outer faces of the covers bore an embossed oval boss (*turunj*), usually with floral ornamentation; above and below it were two vertical embossed palmettes (*sarturunj*) [3]. In the overwhelming majority of cases, these palmettes, reminiscent in shape of a stylized lotus flower or one of its petals, contained the binder's personal stamp. Such stamps are typical of Central Asian

* Except for a highly informative article by G. N. Chabrov (see “K izucheniiu sredneaziatskogo knizhnogo pereplēta” (“On the study of Central Asian book-bindings”), *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 2 (1964), pp. 136—41. There is an English translation of the article in *Manuscripta Orientalia*, VII/1, pp. 60—6. In my article, I refer to the Russian version of Chabrov's work), I know of no works specifically on this topic aside from two unpublished studies by Prof. A. A. Semenov to which Chabrov refers in his article.