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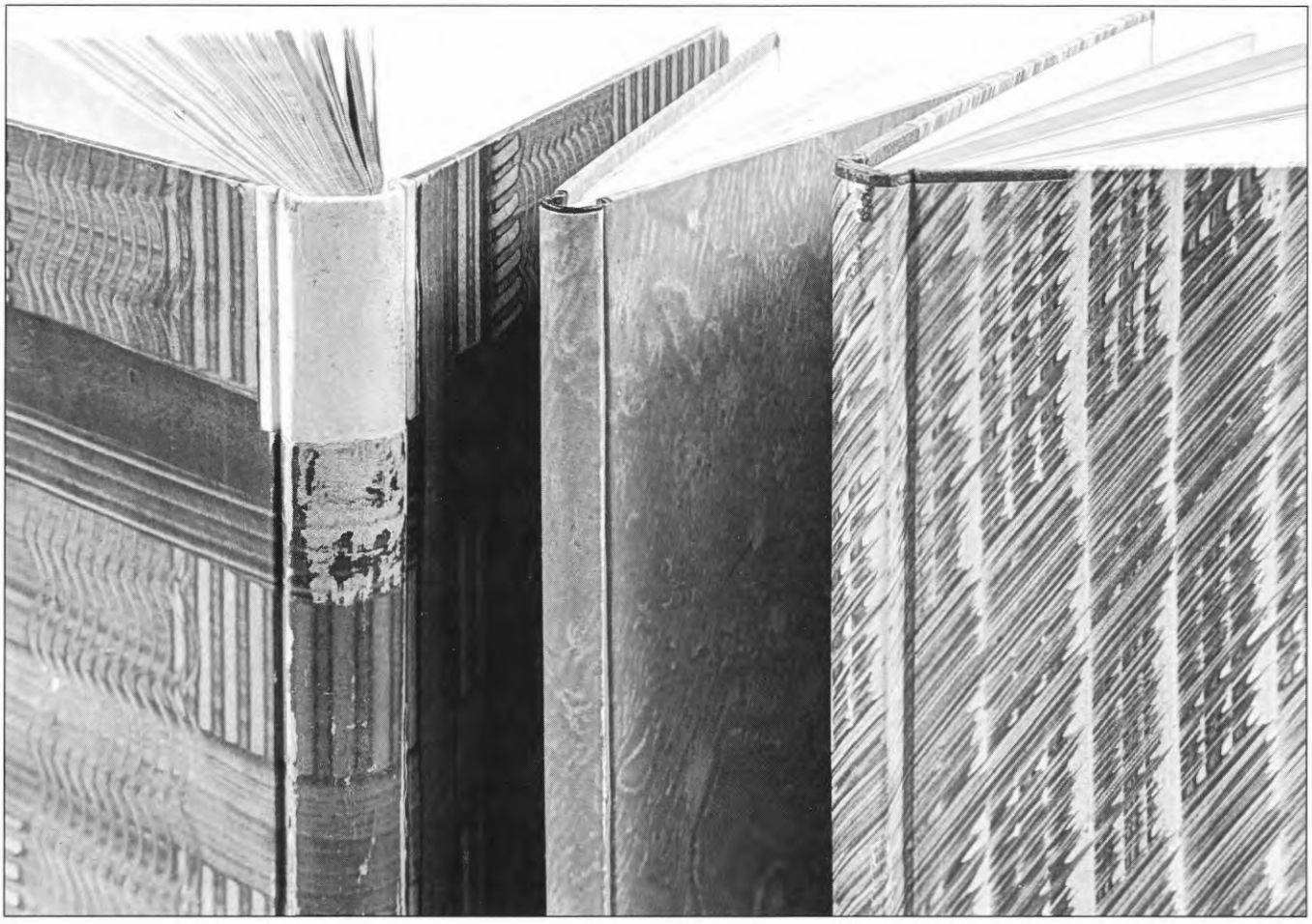
**2025 Standards of Excellence in Hand Bookbinding Scholarship Recipients**

**Article** by Peter D. Verheyen

# A History of the Edelpappband (Millimeter Binding)



Three volumes of *Der Buchbinderlehrling* showing variations in reinforcement placement. All bindings presumably by apprentices. From left: 1930, 1938, 1941.

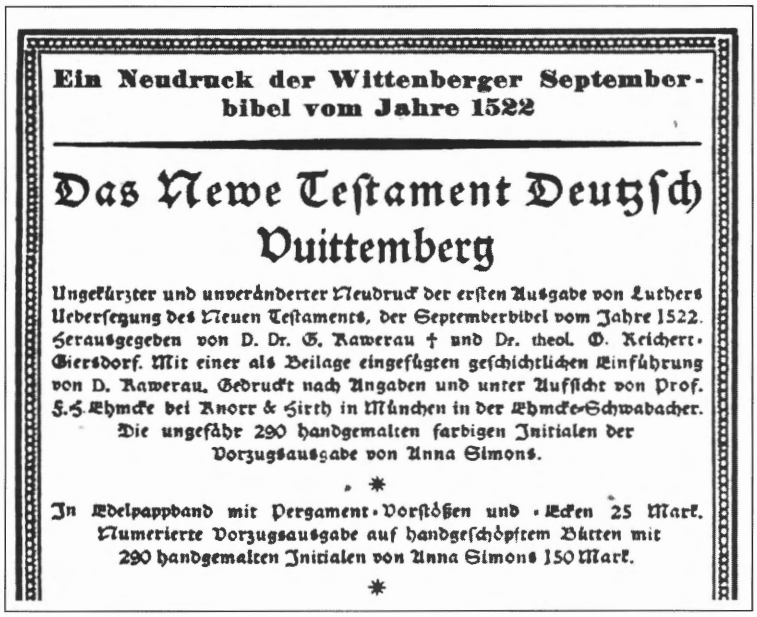
The German *Edelpappband* (known commonly as the "millimeter" binding, and not to be confused with the "Danish millimeter") is a "nobler" version of the quintessential German Pappband (paper-covered binding). The *Edelpappband* features parchment reinforcements at the head and tail of the spine, minimally on the boards, as well as "invisible" corners. The modern versions of this structure were described by Renate Mesmer (adhered boards)[1] and Peter Verheyen (case binding).[2]

Both Mark Andersson's *GBW Journal* article about August Sandgren, and his later PBI binding workshop on this structure led to discussions about its origins, and to this author diving into the German trade binding literature. Nuances of binding structures were not always described, much less illustrated, in these manuals; they were written to accompany apprenticeships and trade school, so some things were left unwritten and transmitted in the shop and school. Techniques are also often broken into discrete sections, such as end sheets, sewing, and forwarding. Details, like those that distinguish the *Pappband* from the *Edelpappband*, might be "hidden" in a section toward the end of the manual. As a result, the reader often flips between sections, learning that not every technique is distinct, and that there are many commonalities between the different styles.

[1]Mesmer, Renate. "Edelpappband". Handout from Standards presentation. Portland October 26th–30th 2005.

[2]Verheyen, Peter D. "Millimeter Binding / Edelpappband". *The Bonefolder: an e-journal for the bookbinder and book artist.* Vol. 1, No. 2 (2005).

The origins of the *Pappband* are rooted in the German tradition. It has been foundational and fundamental to the German bookbinding tradition since the second half of the 18th century, with numerous variant structures based on it. In the US and elsewhere, it is referred to as the Bradel, lapped component, bonnet binding, and by other names. I trace this varied terminology in a three-part series on my *Pressbengel Project* blog, including an extensive review of the German bookbinding literature.[3] A 1906 article in *Archiv für Buchbinderei* "justifying" the *Pappband* places its beginnings in the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). At that time, it was viewed as an austerity *Ersatz* for parchment bindings, with similar forwarding techniques for the construction of the spine and cover. The article also mentioned the parchment reinforcements at head/tail and corners as having been an option from the beginning. The Napoleonic wars that followed had an even greater impact on the availability of parchment and leather, so that the *Pappband* became the German all-purpose binding structure for books and libraries.[4]


Ein Neudruck der Wittenberger September-bibel vom Jahre 1522

Das Newe Teſtament Deutzſch
Vuittemberg

Ungekürzter und unveränderter Neudruck der erſten Ausgabe von Luthers Ueberſetzung des Neuen Teſtaments, der Septemberbibel vom Jahre 1522. Herausgegeben von D. Dr. G. Kawerau † und Dr. theol. O. Reichert-Giersdorf. Mit einer als Beilage eingefügten geſchichtlichen Einführung von D. Kawerau. Gedruckt nach Angaben und unter Aufſicht von Prof. H.H. Ehmcke bei Knorr & Hirth in München in der Ehmcke-Schwabacher. Die ungefähr 290 handgemalten farbigen Initialen der Vorzugsausgabe von Anna Simons.

*

In Edelpappband mit Pergament-Vorſtößen und -Ecken 25 Mark. Numerierte Vorzugsausgabe auf handgeſchöpftem Bütten mit 290 handgemalten Initialen von Anna Simons 150 Mark.

*

Ad for the New Testament as an Edelpappband describing reinforcement at head/tail and corners. In Zwiebelfisch, vol 10, 1919.

With industrialization, the structure was also adapted for case bindings, evolving with changes to the trade, the industrial revolution, and the needs of customers. Increasing discussions of the *Pappband* and its future began to appear in the trade journals in the early years of the 20th century. These discussions, largely between Paul Adam (Teacher, author, and editorial voice of the *Archiv für Buchbinderei*) and Paul Kersten (perhaps the leading binder and author of the time), continued across numerous articles. Was the *Pappband* still relevant? Among the concerns were its "archaic" structure and "lack of durability". These were accompanied by calls to go back to its roots, i.e. covering in parchment[5] or cloth, even if just as half-bindings to take advantage of all the new and innovative decorated papers being developed.[6] But, is a quarter-cloth or quarter-leather binding still a *Pappband*?

Forwarding these bindings would have been largely similar: hooked endsheets, later tipped-on, with or without a guard or waste sheet; sewing on recessed cords or tapes, frayed out, or stapled through mull or similar; square or rounded spine backed to 45°; stuck on or sewn endbands… As always, there were variations in these details, based on the binder's preferences, habit, or the nature of the book.

The first mention of what is now referred to as the *Edelpappband* can be found in L[udwig] Brades' *Illustriertes Buchbinderbuch* (1904) with the suggestion to reinforce the head and tail of the spine as well as corners with parchment, especially on heavier books. The paper covering was cut to expose 3 mm or less of the parchment reinforcement.[7] In 1909, Paul Kersten described this structure, addressing the concerns about its durability. He described reinforcing the *Pappband's* most vulnerable areas at head and tail and the corners with parchment, while still covering the case overall with paper. The paper would be cut out at the head and tail so that only a millimeter of the parchment showed, and the corners would be invisible on the outside of the boards. The result was a binding that had a better "marketing value" and was worth the extra cost.

An editorial rebuttal of Kersten's article took issue with the increased inefficiencies and cost of this "reinforced" *Pappband*, also stating that the structure was behind the times. What would English binders think of this structure when handling an example?[8] This sentiment was also expressed in other articles. At this time, German binding was considered not on par with French and English binding, something that was acknowledged by the German Court bookbinder W. Collin.[9]

Binders began to show greater interest in both this "reinforced" *Pappband* and the fully-paper-covered *Pappband* (also referred to as a *Papierband*), especially during the First World War and during the economic and political chaos that followed, something reflected in the literature. In bookbinding, wartime

[3]Verheyen, Peter D. "Disbinding Bradel". *Pressbengel Project Blog*. Three parts series including "who was Bradel?", tracing the technique via the German literature, tutorial for early 19th century style. https://pressbengel.blogspot.com/2023/10/disbinding-bradel-part-2-walk-through.html

[4]"Die Berechtigung des Pappbandes", in *Archiv für Buchbinderei*. Halle a. S. : W. Knapp, Vol. 6, 1906–1907 (pp. 131–133)

[5]Ibid

[6]"Der Pappband im Gewande unserer Zeit". *Archiv für Buchbinderei*, Halle a. S. : W. Knapp, Vol. 9 1909–1910 (pg. 86–89)

[7]Brade, L[udwig]. *Illustriertes Buchbinderbuch* ... Halle a. S. : W. Knapp, 1904 (pp. 155–157)

[8]Kersten, Paul. Der Pappband ... *Archiv für Buchbinderei*, Halle a. S. : W. Knapp, Vol. 9. 1909–1910 (pp. 109–111)

[9]Growoll, A. *The Profession Of Bookselling: A Handbook of Practical Hints for the Apprentice and Bookseller*. New York: The Office of Publishers' Weekly, 1895. (pg 107)

austerity measures meant shortages, including fewer skins for leather and parchment, but an increase in the variety of decorated papers and their use. "Good" conditions for the *Pappband*. Sandgren would likely have learned the structure during this time, while was studying and working as a binder in Berlin.

The book trade periodicals with advertisements for books in publishers' bindings are an additional source in the quest to trace the name and properties of book structures, and it was no different when tracing the term *Edelpappband*. These periodicals provided both the term itself and a description of its defining characteristics. It should be noted, however, that *Edelpappband* as a term was not used consistently, but the structure was often described instead as a modification to the *Pappband*. This was the case in Ernst Collin's Pressbengel where it was described simply as a *Pappband* with reinforcements.[10] What differentiated these publishers' bindings from their hand bindery counterparts was that they were case bindings rather than adhered boards, making them appropriate for high-volume production and keeping costs down. The difference is the sequence of steps, but the component parts are the same.

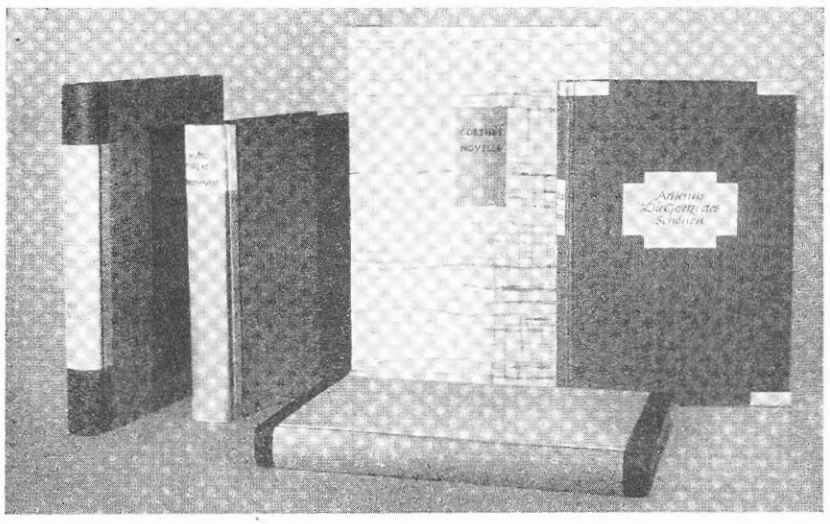


Abb. 281. Pappbände.

1. Mit breiten Kapitalstücken, verschiedenfarbigem Rücken und Überzug, blind abgestrichene Linien und Rückengoldtitel; 2. das obere Pergamentkapital zum Titelschild vergrößert, handgeschriebener Rückentitel; 3. der regelrechte Pappband, Pergamentkapitale und Ecken unsichtbar, Deckelschild schwarz gedruckt; 4. breite Kapitale und Ecken, vertieftes Deckelschild handgeschrieben; 5. verschiedenfarbige Kantenstreifen oben und unten, Rückengoldtitel.

Buchbinderbuch 13

A variety of options. From Rhein, Adolf. *Das Buchbinderbuch*. Halle (Saale): VEB Wilhelm Knapp Verlag, 1953. (pg. 193)

So, where did the term *Edelpappband*, loosely translated as "noble" paper binding, originate? In his memoirs, Hermann Nitz describes coining the term to describe a "reinforced" trade paper-covered binding during the First World War. Nitz was a fine binder who was promoted to operations manager at Spamer, one of the largest trade binderies in Leipzig. This case binding had strips of parchment at the head and tail of the spine (as well as invisible corners), as was common in craft-/hand-bookbinding versions. The decorated paper was die-cut. For larger editions, or when parchment became unavailable, book cloth and other materials came into use. To Nitz, *Edelpappband* was an appropriate term because of the structure's combination of reinforcement and the ability to show off the new and innovative decorated papers that were created during that time.[11] An essay by the Fritzsche A.G., another large trade bindery, described how the *Edelpappband* was an outgrowth of the increasingly symbiotic relationship between the extra- and publishers binding departments of these large binderies. The greater strength of the *Edelpappband*, and its attractiveness as a platform for the new decorated papers, justified its increased cost. It was not designed to replace traditional quarter-, half-, or full-leather trade bindings, or compete with hand-bindings.[12]

Whether or not it was referred to as *Edelpappband*, the structure evolved aesthetically, too. It was included in every comprehensive bookbinding manual, in articles, and was learned by apprentices everywhere in their binderies and/or trade schools. The reinforcement placement became much more varied as well, with, for example, the material extending fully along the top and bottom edges, or along the fore-edge instead of just the corners. It also became a regular part of journeymans' and masters' exams. While the *Edelpappband* is a comparatively simple structure, that simplicity can be challenging to master. So how should we refer to it in English? An expanded version of this article with more illustrations and a survey through the binding literature appears at bit.ly/4gRdBpj.

**Peter D. Verheyen** is a German-trained binder, conservator, and librarian. He has researched, taught, and published about techniques and the history of the trade in [mostly] early 20th century Germany. You can find him at his Pressbengel Project blog, pressbengel.blogspot.com/.

[10]Collin, Ernst. *Der Pressbengel*. Berlin: Euphorion Verlag, 1922. (pp. 20–21) Translated as *The Bone Folder* by Peter D. Verheyen in various editions 2009–2017. See all at https://pressbengel.blogspot.com/.

[11]Nitz, Hermann. *Aus einem reichen Buchbinderleben*, [Berlin]: [Graefe], [1951]. (pp 36–37) Nitz was one of the most technically innovative binders in Germany, blurring the lines between hand- and trade binding. For more, see https://pressbengel.blogspot.com/2016/01/hermann-nitzs-kombinationseinband-ur.html.

[12]Schramm, Albert (ed). *Taschenbuch für Büchersammler*. Munich: Verlag der Münchner Drucke, 1927. (pg. 113)