Foot’s cat. no. 172 (Davis 541) which in 1978 and 2010 she attributed to J.-A. or N.-D. Derome. Miller’s “Virtual Bookbinding” web site compares enlarged impressions of the finishing tools of 13 seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French bookbinders. These show that Davis 541 was tooled by Pierre-Paul Dubuisson, whose designs and tools Derome le jeune closely imitated.

In volume 1, the books were usually photographed so that the spine was visible as well as the cover. Volumes 2 and 3 show only the cover. Yet, from the mid-sixteenth century, the tooled spine was sometimes part of the design. Reproducing the spines, and even details of some doublures and text-block edge treatments, would have given a better idea of the tout ensemble than the descriptive text on its own. Such photographs can help cataloguers with identification as well as do justice to the aesthetic qualities of these bindings. Again, to give these handsome objects their due, some of the bindings, particularly those with onlays, could have been reproduced in colour. These additions would have made this volume weightier and a little more expensive, but both would have been justified. While in this critical vein, I should mention that the binding of this volume is inferior to that of the previous volumes. Before opening it, readers should position supports for the covers, as the 32-page signatures are so heavy that the middle signatures have a tendency to fall forward, cracking the spine liner.

A small selection of the Davis gift was displayed in a purpose-built case in the old British Museum soon after the collection was donated. I remember coming across it in the midst of a sea of manuscripts and printed books, and being impressed by the beauty and colour of these bookbindings. This was a reminder that collectors are not motivated only by intellectual considerations, or by the interior of the book. Like Pepys, who confessed in his diary on 15 May 1660 while at The Hague, “Bought, for the love of the bindings, three books,” collectors can be seduced into acquisition by the cover. This volume gives many examples of such books, valued for their elegant and sumptuous outsides as much or more than for the text.

Foot has produced a rich, factually precise catalogue, which is more than a compilation. It will, as Foot promised in the previous volume, be of use to binding historians, librarians, booksellers, collectors, and other book lovers. It should also inspire the next generation of book historians.

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