

*Par la Bibliothèque Cantonal
et Universitaire à Lausanne*

B. H. BRESLAUER

*de la part de
Mantoux
24:IX:75*

VALENTIN KRAER,
GIBBON'S BOOKBINDER
AT LAUSANNE



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ON SATURDAY, 27 September 1783, at about ten o'clock in the morning, Edward Gibbon made his entry into Lausanne for his third, and, as it turned out, his final stay there.¹ Two matters only cast a shadow over his immediate happiness: unexpectedly he found that he could not move into his allotted part of 'La Grotte', Jacques Georges Deyverdun's fine and spacious house overlooking the Lac Lemman, which the two friends were to share, so that he had to take up temporary furnished quarters for seven months until the present occupier's lease had run out; and for almost as long the books which he had selected from his library in Bentinck Street to follow him into voluntary exile failed to arrive; when at last they did, in the first days of February 1784, after having been held up in Paris 'by some strange neglect' until 3 January,² they received a rapturous welcome from their owner.³

Once settled at 'La Grotte', Gibbon resumed his work on his *magnum opus*, and apace with it went the restocking and enlargement of his library, to which he had begun to add 'a number of books most requisite and least common'⁴ even before it had arrived, at least since December 1783. Only six booksellers' bills have been preserved among the Gibbon Papers in the British Library covering purchases made between 28 December 1783 and 19 May 1789 from two local firms, that of François La Combe (associated with Bonfils in 1787) and of Jules Henri Pott & Comp.⁵

¹ Gibbon, *Letters*, ed. J. E. Norton, 1956, 3 vols, No. 605, to Lord Sheffield.

² Letter No. 612, to the same.

³ Letter No. 613, to the same.

⁴ Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life*, ed. G. A. Bonnard, 1966, p. 179.

⁵ Add. MS 34,715, ff. 1-2, 4, 7-10, 12: I. François La Combe, bill covering supplies 28 Dec. 1783 to 3 Jan. 1785, including some 75 publications; total £1251 7s 'arg[en]t de France'. II. Jules Henri Pott & Comp., 22 works

The earliest and largest of these, totalling 1251 *livres*, 7 *sous*, is of special interest on account of the number of works—some seventy-five of them, comprising 380 volumes, excluding a few maps, periodical subscriptions, &c.—supplied at various dates between 28 December 1783 and 3 January 1785, and because of two of the items invoiced; they are: 'Relieure de 324 vol. 12° ou 8° à 12s = £193.4 - idem de 6 vol. 4° à 1:4 = £7.4'. There is no indication as to the nature of these bindings, but from their price we may assume that they were bound in half calf or, more likely, in half roan. About eighty per cent of the books invoiced by La Combe can be found in Sir Geoffrey Keynes's work on Gibbon's library;⁶ about half of the others could not be identified, as the titles given are too rudimentary, the other half does not appear in Gibbon's own Lausanne card index, or the subsequent catalogues on which Sir Geoffrey's compilation is based, but unfortunately the whereabouts of the eighty per cent are today unknown, with two exceptions: one is the Racine of 1768, seven volumes full calf gilt, now in the Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire at Lausanne, but this was almost certainly bought already bound; this may also apply to the other, one of two editions of Brantôme's works owned by Gibbon, both in 15 volumes, 12mo, now in the library of Lord Rothschild; it is bound in 'contemporary half calf, orange and brown lettering-pieces, sprinkled buff paper boards, sprinkled edges'.⁷ Whether this is the work of the anonymous binder to whom La Combe had farmed out the work it is impossible to ascertain until other bound books appearing on the bill have turned up.

supplied 30 Dec. 1784 to 18 Feb. 1786; total £804 4s 'arg[en]t de France' paid on 3 April. III. F. La Combe, paid 4 March 1787; some 50 works, total £788 8s 'argent de France' = £525 12s en 'argent de Suisse'. IV. J. H. Pott & Comp., 18 works supplied 11 Apr. to 28 Dec. 1786; total £282 10s 'argent de France' = £188 6s 8d 'arg[en]t de Suisse'. V. La Combe & Bonfils. 12 items supplied between 6 March and 10 May 1787; total £82 16s 'de France' = £55 4s 'de Suisse'. VI. J. H. Pott & Comp. 29 works supplied between 5 Aug. 1788 and 19 May 1789; total £389 19s arg[en]t de France = £260 'argent de Suisse'.

⁶ Geoffrey Keynes, *The Library of Edward Gibbon. A Catalogue of his Books. With an Introduction*, 1940.

⁷ *The Rothschild Library. A Catalogue of the Collection of eighteenth Century printed Books and Manuscripts formed by Lord Rothschild*, 1954, 2 vols, No. 964.

This large binding order appears to have remained the only one which Gibbon placed with La Combe. Perhaps he found him too slow in comparison with a local binder whom he had discovered early in January 1784, whose prices were equally reasonable, if not cheaper, and who certainly worked with commendable dispatch. One of the main reasons for Gibbon's move to Lausanne had been financial: there he would be able to live within his income instead of having to eat into his capital. His economies appear to have also affected the binding of his books. No longer for them the neat full calf bindings with their gilt backs of the Bentinck Street days; from now on, simple half roan with single gilt lines had to do. At the same time he could count on being able to place on his shelves, bound and ready for use, his latest acquisitions often within a week or so after their arrival from the local booksellers. The name of his new binder was Valentin Kraer;⁸ not the most literate of men, and in addition hampered by a scanty command of French, he exhausted all possible permutations in the spelling of his Christian name, but never wavered from adorning the e in his surname with a diaeresis, a usage alien to his native tongue. He was born in Nürnberg, the son of Johann Friedrich Kraer, in 1749; from 1779 onwards he is found in Lausanne where, in the German Church, he marries Margeretha Hennings, of Mauraz, in September of that year. Ten children are born of the couple, of which three die in infancy. Valentin himself dies rather young at forty-six, on 9 June 1795. Only two events have inscribed themselves in the short and simple annals of his obscure and blameless life: in 1787 he was indirectly involved in a criminal investigation: one of his employees, named Shirak, was alleged to own several copies of a French book on exorcism and sorcery, a serious matter in the Switzerland of those days; and for several years he was able to assist, in however humble a manner, one of the great minds of his age in his pursuits, by rendering his working tools a little more easily usable.

⁸ Madame Hélène Piccard, librarian at the Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire in Lausanne, to whom this article owes a great deal of most generously given information and time-consuming assistance, has drawn my attention to the numerous documents concerning Kraer and his family preserved in the Archives Cantonales Vaudoises; the references to the most important of these are: A.C.V., Bb 25⁸¹; Eb 71⁴⁷, fol. 136; Bn 7, dossier 3; Bg 13 bis 16, fol. 145 v, Eb 71⁴⁸, fol. 37 v, x & 40; Eb 71⁶³.

II

Six of the bills for work done by Kraer for Gibbon have been preserved; the earliest of these is in the author's bibliographical collection,⁹ the others in the British Library;¹⁰ the first five cover without interruption the period between 12 January 1784 and 30 June 1787, that is almost up to Gibbon's departure, on 29 July, for his visit to London from which he returned during April of the following year. The last bill is for bindings supplied between 12 January and 26 June 1789. From then on both booksellers and binders' bills cease. This may not be entirely accidental: Gibbon had completed his great work for which so many of the books had been assembled. There are a few references to continued book purchases in his correspondence, such as the mention of an expected 'cargo of books' from Peter Elmsley, his London bookseller, in his letter of 12 June 1791 to Lord Sheffield,¹¹ but there were only about thirty works published after 1789 in his library, apart from some continuations of earlier publications.

During the five and a half years which Kraer can be shown to have worked for Gibbon he bound for him just under 260 works comprising about a thousand volumes; he also made book boxes ('*Etui facón de livres*') and a portfolio, backed and provided with rolls and a couple of maps (one of the Canton de Vaud, by

⁹ Bought at Sotheby's sale of 23 June 1969, lot 153, 'The Property of a Lady'; 1½ pp. folio, with a conjugate blank leaf. 'Kraer I': some 37 works (170 vols), 1 portfolio and 2 maps, supplied 12 Jan. to 8 Oct. 1784. Total £84 19s; Gibbon's payment order 14 Oct., Kraer's receipt 16 Oct. (See Plates 27, 28.)

¹⁰ Add. MS 34, 715, ff. 3, 5, 6, 11, 13: Kraer II. 65 works (231 vols) and a portfolio, supplied 16 Oct. 1784 to 1 July 1785; total £134 12s; payment order and receipt 2 July; 2 pp. folio. Kraer III. 53 works (280 vols), plus 4 '*Etui facón de livre*' in fol., 4to and 8vo, 2 '*Livres Blancs Racommodé & rayé en Rouge*', and Dion Cassius, 2 vols folio repaired; supplied 31 Dec. 1785 to 24 June 1786. Payment order and receipt 1 July; 2 pp., folio. Kraer IV. 38 works (102 vols), plus '*Avoir mis des petits rubans a 14 vol.*', stitching and paging 2 blank books, and repairing Dion Cassius, 2 vols (again) and Plinius, 3 vols folio; between 5 July and 29 Dec. 1786; total £42 15s; payment order and receipt on 1 Jan. and 2 Jan.; 2 pp., folio. Kraer V. 32 works (89 vols) plus 6 blank books paged, between 10 Jan. and 30 June 1787; total £40 4s; payment order 24 July, receipt 26 July. 1 p., folio. Kraer VI. 32 works (155 vols) plus 8 blank books paged, 12 Jan. to 26 June 1789; total £80 16s '*de Suisse*'; payment order 1 July, receipt 2 July. 1 p., folio.

¹¹ Letter No. 787.

Mallet),¹² foliated and ruled some exercise books, and repaired some old bindings. The invoices are arranged in the chronological order of the dates on which the bindings were delivered—the same method of accounting was employed, with one exception, in the bills of Gibbon's two Lausanne booksellers—and give the short, often hardly recognizable titles of the books, number of volumes, nature of binding, price per volume and total cost; they were submitted for periods covering roughly between five and eight months—quite a long credit to give for a bookbinder, but the booksellers gave credit for up to a year and more. Gibbon would then append, in his own hand, to all these bills an instruction for payment to his local banker—who on two occasions is named by Pott as Jean Jacques Soulzer—using the formula '*Bon sur sa quittance generale*' or '*Bon pour le montant sur la quittance generale*' or similar wordings; underneath this, the payee put his receipt for the payment. Kraer's bills were written by various hands, but never his own which only appears in the receipts.

Gibbon obviously decided to have his books bound as cheaply as possible in Lausanne. As Sir Geoffrey Keynes has pointed out, 'his was a working library'¹³ to which no book was ever added 'from a motive of ostentation'.¹⁴ He first experimented with bindings '*en carton couvert*', i.e. boards covered with marbled or sprinkled paper: the first bindings supplied by Kraer, between 12 January and 23 April 1784, were of this kind. But Gibbon apparently did not like them, because he had some of the books re-bound soon afterwards: Sinner's *Voyage dans la Suisse*, 2 vols and Richard Pococke's *Voyages en Orient*, 6 vols (not in Keynes) were re-bound in '*dos et Coins Basanne*' (*sic*) on 28 August, De Brosses's French Sallust in 3 vols 4to, on 8 September, and the 12 volumes of Büsching's *Géographie* on 16 October. From then onwards, half roan with corners became the standard binding, from which there were few exceptions: only twice was a book bound again in boards (Kraer V & VI), and the second time this, too, was re-bound, and on three occasions (Kraer III, IV & VI) Gibbon, perhaps in a renewed access of thrift, had a number of volumes put in wrappers and labelled on the backs ('*broché et*

¹² Keynes, p. 189.

¹³ Keynes, p. 16.

¹⁴ Memoirs, p. 97.

etiqueté—sic!), among them Voltaire's *Correspondance*, 18 vols, part of the Kehl edition (not in Keynes—Kraer VI). As will be seen, hardly any of these standard bindings can now be traced; the few that can be have brown roan backs, a light lettering-piece and single gilt fillets and meandering lines, and light sprinkled paper sides. The lettering seems to have been clear and regular. No distinguishing tools appear on them, with one possible exception, as will be seen. A new departure took place in 1789: a number of the half bindings are stated to be of 'basanne rouge'.

Twice, however, Gibbon did have books bound in a more sumptuous fashion. On 1 July 1785 Kraer charged him 7 livres 4 sous for binding 'en Marocquin doré sur tranche' the three volumes of Jacques Necker's *De l'administration des finances de la France* which had appeared in December 1784. It may be assumed that this copy is the one presented to him, as he himself noted on the half-title of vol. I, on 8 January 1785, by the author, the vastly rich banker and powerful French statesman, husband of that 'inestimable treasure',¹⁵ Suzanne Curchod, Gibbon's erstwhile fiancée, both of whom had become his close friends. The Rothschild Catalogue¹⁶ describes it as follows: 'Contemporary green French morocco, yellow lettering-piece, gilt, red and white patterned end-papers, gilt edges, orange ribbon markers'. It is, of course, just possible that the copy presented by Necker was already bound, and that Gibbon had a second copy bound for a friend, but it appears much more likely that we are here in the presence of Kraer's one and only masterpiece to have survived. It is therefore particularly sad that it cannot be reproduced here, as it has recently passed into new ownership by gift and will not be available for photographing for some months. The other work which received a full binding was a folio edition of Homer's *Iliad*, originally bound in 'carton couver' for 16 sous on 27 May 1789 and, on 22 June, re-bound at the price of 4 livres, 'relié en anglois' (Kraer VI), that is, in all probability, in Russia. No folio edition of the *Iliad* is listed by Keynes; the one in question may have been that edited by D'Ansse de Villoison, Venice, Coleti 1788.

Kraer worked with a rapidity which to the present-day patron of bookbinders must seem to border on the miraculous. Thus, the

¹⁵ *Memoirs*, p. 86.

¹⁶ No. 992.

Sallust in French by De Brosse was supplied by La Combe on 11 January 1784 and delivered by Kraer on 17 March, bound in boards, later on re-bound in half roan (Kraer I); the Aeschines Socraticus, 1740, Anacreon, 1740, and Chariton Aphrodisiensis, 1783, all invoiced by Pott on 30 December 1784, were supplied by Kraer, bound in half roan, six days later, on 5 January 1785 (Kraer II); Corsini, *Series praefectorum*, 1766, took only four days (Pott 18:II:1786—Kraer III, 22:II:1786). The 25 folio volumes, bound in 28, half roan, of Muratori's *Scriptores rerum Italicarum* (not in Keynes), bought from Pott on 23 December 1785, were ready bound on the 28th of the following month (Kraer III); the same author's *Antiquitates Italicae mediaevi*, 6 volumes folio, took a fortnight to bind (Pott 30:XII:1784—Kraer II, 14:I:1785). In some cases, Gibbon may, of course, have kept the books for a while before sending them to the binder. Kraer also bound most of the books which Thomas Cadell sent out to Gibbon on 13 November 1784¹⁷; they were all bound by 11 June 1785 (Kraer II), the long interval being no doubt accounted for by the slowness of transport from London to Lausanne.

Throughout these years Kraer's prices remained constant, until 1789 when they increased slightly. For wrappers and labelling he charged 2 sous per volume; 'carton couvert' was 4 sous for octavos, 8 sous for quartos, 12 sous for large quartos and folios (in 1789, 16 and 18 sous). The half roan octavos first varied between 7 and 8 sous (Kraer I), but then settled down to 8 sous until 1789, when they rose to 9 sous for ordinary roan and 10 sous for 'basane rouge'; half roan quartos were 16 sous (18 sous in 1789 and 1 livre for red half roan) and the folios, according to size, £1 7s, £1 8s and £1 12s, rising in 1789 to £2 for the red variety. The total amount of Kraer's bills comes to £556 12s; only in the last of these does he specify these 'livres' as being 'de Suisse', but it is obvious that the other invoices were also in Swiss livres. The actual currency of the Canton of Berne which then included Lausanne was the *batzen*, but the *livre* was used as a 'monnaie de compte'¹⁸ (the denominations 'livre' and 'franc' were interchangeable, the former

¹⁷ Add. MS 34,886, 199; this is the only bill of any of Gibbon's English booksellers to have survived.

¹⁸ Cf. *Dictionnaire Historique et biographique de la Suisse*, 1921 f., II, p. 127; IV, p. 532.

being generally applied to sums which included *sous*, the latter to round figures; there were 20 *sous* to the *livre*). The Swiss *livre* was worth $1\frac{1}{2}$ French *livres*—even in those days the Swiss seem to have enjoyed a particularly healthy currency. By contrast the bills of La Combe and Pott were established in French *livres*—no doubt because many of the books were of French origin—which Gibbon's banker paid out in Swiss *livres*.

About thirty-five works on Kraer's bills are not recorded by Keynes (this also applies to a number of works invoiced by La Combe and Pott which are not known to have belonged to Gibbon), the titles of another thirty-five are too vague to allow identification. But it is a remarkable fact that of the 260 works Kraer bound for Gibbon, hardly a handful can now be traced. Among the books Gibbon left to the 'public library of the Academy of Lausanne', now Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire, in his Will dated 1 October 1791,¹⁹ there were 'Meursii Opera twelve Volumes in folio, the first Edition of the Biographia Britannica seven Volumes in folio . . . and all the works of Muratori'. The first two of these, and most of the third, were bound by Kraer: the Meursius on 8 October 1784 (Kraer I), the *Biographia* on 25 June 1785 (Kraer II), and, as we have seen, Muratori's *Scriptores*, 28 vols folio (Kraer III), his *Antiquitates Italicae* (Kraer II), and also his *Novus Thesaurus veterum Inscriptionum*, 4 vols folio (Kraer II, 8 April 1785). But only in the case of the *Biographia Britannica*²⁰ can we be reasonably certain that the copy bequeathed by Gibbon is identical with the one now in Lausanne. The Meursius, though bound in the same style as the *Biographia*, figures already in the library's catalogue of 1792, as do the works of Muratori, of which the *Novus Thesaurus*, bound in marbled calf, and already listed in the library's 1764 catalogue, is certainly not identical with Gibbon's copy. Muratori's *Antiquitates* is in a binding similar to that of the Meursius and the *Biographia*, but has a gilt fleuron on the backs, repeated several times; if it is the set bound by Kraer, it would be the only one of his bindings decorated in this fashion. None of these works have Gibbon's

¹⁹ Add. MS 34,715, 14-16; Keynes, p. 27.

²⁰ I owe the information concerning these books in the Bibliothèque Cantonale et Universitaire to Madame Piccard, as well as photographs, Xerox copies and rubbings of them.

bookplate nor any other mark of identification. But it is possible that by 1792 Gibbon had already deposited in the library of the Academy the voluminous works of Muratori and Meursius, especially the former's *Scriptores* which was never included in his own library catalogue, perhaps because they took up too much of his own shelf space. Of the 1412 volumes from Gibbon's library sold at Sotheby's on 20 December 1934, originally acquired, in 1825, by John Walter Halliday from Dr Frederic Schöll,²¹ the vast majority were bound in full calf; only a few half bindings were by Kraer: Bonnet's *Oeuvres d'histoire naturelle*, 1779-83, 18 volumes (Kraer I, 28:VIII:1784), Forster's *Observations*, 1778 (Kraer II, 18:VI:1778), and Harles's *Introductio*, 1778 (Kraer IV, 15:VII:1786—acquired from Pott on the 7th of the same month). All the other books bound by Kraer have disappeared. Some, perhaps on account of their insignificant exterior, must have been discarded during the years between Gibbon's death and the publication of Dr Schöll's catalogues of 1832 and 1833, the rest, after having been listed by the Doctor, never turned up again. Some of these volumes may today stand, unrecognized, on the shelves of libraries all over the world, others have probably been re-bound.

Valentin Kraer was decidedly not a bookbinder meriting much note during a period which witnessed, especially in neighbouring France, the achievement of new heights of technical and artistic perfection by his art; he owes his modest resurrection entirely to the patronage of one great man, Edward Gibbon.

²¹ A comprehensive account of the fate of Gibbon's library is given by Sir Geoffrey Keynes in *op. laud.*

Ouvrages fait pour M^r Gibbon par Valentin Kraer Maître Relieur L. S. D.

Month	Description	Price
1784		
Janvier	12. Apollodori Itayra 1 volume en carton couvert	
	Voyage dans la Suisse, 2 vol. en carton couvert	4
	Dictionnaire Geographique de la Suisse, 2 vol. en carton couvert	8
Mars	17. Geographie de Pusching, 12 vol. 8 ^{vo} en carton couvert	8
	Voyage de Bodlauche, 6 vol. en carton couvert	2-8
	Salluste par des Brytes, 3 vol. grand 4 ^{to} en carton couvert	1-4
19	Voyage de Bodlauche, 6 vol. en carton couvert	1-16
Avril	23. Atlas folio en carton couvert	1-4
May	6. 1 porte feuille 4 ^{to} dor et Coins Basane	12
Juin	29. Carte du pays de Vaud, fourni la Toile, les Rouleaux et le collage	1-
Juillet	25. Mysteres du Paganisme 1 vol. dor et Coins Basane	6-10
	Memoires de Villars, 4 vol. dor et Coins Basane	8-
	28. Oeuvres de Charles Bonnet, 18 vol. dor et Coins Basane	112
	Voyage de Bodlauche, 6 vol. dor et Coins Basane	27 flent 6-6
	Generations de Haller, 2 vol. dor et Coins Basane	2-2
	Dictionnaire de la Suisse, 2 vol. dor et Coins Basane	27 flent 14-
	Voyage dans la Suisse par Sinner, 2 vol. dor et Coins Basane	27 flent 14-
Septembre	4. Histoire naturelle de Buffon, 43 vol. dor et Coins Basane	27 flent 15-1
	8. Salluste des Brytes, 3 vol. 4 ^{to} dor et Coins Basane	2-2
	Mirchoud H. E. L. P. Regum, 1 vol. 4 ^{to} dor et Coins Basane	2-2
	La Croze Epistol., 2 vol. 4 ^{to} dor et Coins Basane	14-
	Dionysius Halicarnaspensis 5 vol. dor et Coins Basane	2-2
	Aristophanes Brunck, 6 vol. dor et Coins Basane	27 flent 2-2
	Analecta Graec Brunck, 5 vol. dor et Coins Basane	2-2
	Maximus Tyrius 2 vol. dor et Coins Basane	1-1
22	Apolonius Rhod., 5 vol. dor et Coins Basane	14
	Brunck, Fragig. Graec. 4 vol. dor et Coins Basane	1-1
	Fischer Gram. Graec. 1 vol. dor et Coins Basane	1-8
	Xenophon. Oeconom. 1 vol. dor et Coins Basane	7
	Plutus Aristophan., 1 vol. dor et Coins Basane	7
	Diogenes Laertius, 1 vol. dor et Coins Basane	7
	Leses Graec. 1 vol. dor et Coins Basane	7
	Xenophon Memorabi., 1 vol. dor et Coins Basane	7
	Erasmus Epistola, 1 vol. dor et Coins Basane	7
	Apolonius Rhod. Brunck, 2 vol. dor et Coins Basane	7
		14
		3714

PLATE I. Valentin Kraer's bill for binding books for Edward Gibbon 1784
Collection: B. H. Breslauer

