



The Montefiascone Experience: an International Bookbinding Training Opportunity



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Introduction

In 1992, the Montefiascone Book Conservation Summer School was established. It runs parallel to and helps fund the Montefiascone Conservation Project established five years earlier. For four weeks a year, the School brings people from all over the world to learn specialist bookbinding skills. The courses, taught by expert conservators, disseminate vital skills and knowledge about bookbinding, create an international network and raise awareness for the conservation project. It is geared towards conservators around the globe interested in the conservation of books. Once the courses are over the conservators return to whence they came, bringing with them new skills and knowledge to utilise, share and disseminate. In 2017, I was awarded the Nicholas Hadgraft Scholarship from Conservation by Design that enabled me to attend the School. Below is a summary of what we learned over three weeks. Understanding the materials and techniques of binding is vital to book conservation.

Conservation Project

Montefiascone, a walled town close to Rome, is the site of the historical Seminario Barbarigo. Built in the 17th century, it is still operational today. The Montefiascone Conservation project was started by Australian Cheryl Porter in 1987. It's aim was to save the valuable, virtually derelict library collection (5,000 volumes) held at the Seminary. Due to no longer meeting the needs of the Seminary, the books were in terrible condition and suffered from neglect. The Library itself had become home to animals and insects, living and dead. Flooding had led to mould outbreaks and books being no longer in an identifiable form. For one month each year in the Summer, conservators from around the world have volunteered to be a part of the project. The collection has been preserved, maintained and moved (twice!). The books have all been cleaned, rehoused as necessary and a catalogue was created. The Project has achieved a lot over the past 30 years and will continue to do so with the help of diligent volunteers.



Italian 15th Century Binding

Course tutors: Jim Bloxam, Shaun Thompson & Alison Ohta
Aim: Create model of Cicero's Topica from the late 15th century held in the Cambridge University Library Collection (CUL Add. 8445). Use same materials & techniques as original.



Packed straight sewing on slit alum tawed sewing supports. Endband with alum taw core.

Decoration: stamped central motifs coloured with lapis lazuli & shell gold, blind tooled covers, hot tooled spine.

Cushion shaped Beech boards with channels for endbands & sewing supports for board attachment with nails & EVA.

Covered in goatskin leather with spine left unadhered.

10 pieces of material (brass, leather & parchment) shaped, adhered & nailed for clasp.

Clasp attached with nails. Completed binding with Islamic influences.

14th Century Italian Ledger

Course tutors: Scott Devine, assisted by Stacey Devine
Aim: Create cutaway model of the Secret Ledger and Memorial Book of Pepo degli Albizzi held by the Newberry Library. It is a durable, non-adhesive tacketed binding.



Sewing supports, endbands & taw tacket laced into cover.

Experimented with Brazilwood & Lac dye to replicate original.

All along sewing on dyed, slit alum tawed support. Endband with alum tawed core.

Sewing supports laced into vellum wrapper.

Laminated cover (alum taw, paper & dyed alum taw) sewn with decorative stitch at edge.

Conservation Ethiopic Binding

Course tutors: Marco di Bella & Dr Nikolas Sarris
Aim: Create a traditional Ethiopic model (traditional) & satchel, and a conservation variation model (con) based on a conservation treatment undertaken by tutors.



Traditional covered with paste & vegetable tanned, leather with textile doublures. Con left uncovered- no adhesive used.

Traditional Ethiopic sewing- four stations in two pairs with unsupported chain stitch.

Con sewn similarly, with stitching through a spine piece (alum tawed & parchment) for strength and protection.

Traditional endband of plaited leather stitched on to con model (& traditional model after covering).

Traditional satchel- parchment (including stitching). Used to carry & store books. Hung from hooks in huts to protect from pests & flooding.

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