

Scientific report

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THE ORIENTAL BOOK

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The COMSt workshop was a very interesting and exciting experience that offered to me the opportunity to add to my practical background the theoretical approach of the oriental book.

Because in the last years I have been involved in projects on the Islamic book and the islamic world.

Infact , I worked from 2009 to 2011 at the re-housing of the Chester Beatty Library Persian collection loose folios from *Shahnama* manuscripts.

Since October 2011 I'm working on an 11-month project at the Vatican Library for the conservation of 48 Arab, Turkish and Persian manuscripts selected and paid by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation from Azerbaijan. They have chosen 48 Vatican manuscripts based on the importance of the texts for the Azeri cultural heritage.

The COMSt meeting was so useful in term of exchange of information with people from the same field and It provided a unique change to research, allowing me to build on my experience and further develop my practical skills.

I really appreciate the possibility to listen lessons with a different approach of professors to the oriental book and to know more of the projects are running in these years focused on the oriental book.

It provided the possibility to look the book from different perspectives: from the codicology to the archeology.

I also learn new things on books from different cultures: armenian, islamic, greek, byzantine, syriaque, hebrew, georgian and ethiopian.

The meeting opened my mind on the important role that the book had in different cultures, books were instruments of culture, peace, religion and they had an important diplomatic role in many situations.

The Conference explored the full range of manuscript production in the Oriental world of book production essential to increasing our understanding of the codicology, preservation and conservation, terminology, digitalize rules and other features of manuscripts.

The first two days were mainly focused on the layout (size, proportion and *mise en page*) of the oriental book.

Marilena Maniaci gave us statistics and information of the different proportions, the filling and the exploitation of the greek and byzantine manuscripts in parchment and paper.

Malachi Beit Arie studied the page layout and the spatial organization in different Hebrew manuscripts, F.Briquel-Chatonnet spoke about the general layout and the ruling of syriaques manuscripts. A.Desreumaux analyzed the *mise en page* of a collection of arameens manuscripts.

I was very interested on the Valentina Sagaria Rossi layout patterns on the islamic manuscripts, on the hidden treatment of the blank page, the use of the *Mistarrah* and the differences between the islamic manuscripts made in Egypt, Yemen and East Asia.

In all the lectures the main problems bring out, related to the oriental books were:

- the absence of database of manuscripts,
- the difficulties on the interpretation of the sources
- the lack of sources

I really appreciated the Hamburg University project Ethio-spare on the study of the ethiopian manuscripts.

They were very conscious on description of the layout of ethiopian manuscripts in connection with the content of a book. They explained the differences on the layout of gospels, missals, psalters and the connection between the *mise en page* and the destination of an ethiopian manuscripts.

It was so exciting for a book conservator understand the important and the archeological rule of the manufacture of the book in the ethiopian world.

A very conservative world in term of structures and manufactures of the book.

The first day morning, I got the impression we had analysed the blank page of the book with all the related features.

Then in the first day afternoon I got the impression we analysed deeply the colours, the decoration and pigments used to illustrate and enhancing syriac, armenian, byzantine, ethiopian, georgian, islamic and coptic books.

The differences in term of miniatures, initials and decorations was very clear but also the research of an universal vocabulary of decorations between the VIII and X century in these different cultures.

In term of illustration many of the lectures where based on the relationship between the content of the manuscripts and their decoration characteristics but also on the cooperation between different cultures (for example the syriac and the islamic).

I really appreciate the presentation of the V.Sagaria Rossi book titled *I manoscritti in caratteri arabi*, published in 2012 by Viella.

The discussion between the writer, the publisher, M.Maniaci and L.Parodi analyzed the importance of another Islamic Codicology book after the french and islamic Deroche one. The new aspects Sagaria Rossi analized in the book and a chapter on the conservation of islamic manuscripts at the Corsianiana Library in Rome written by C.Colini who presented part of her project at the COMSt meeting was very interesting.

Another important theme that was analyzed in the different lectures was the commission of a book.

In these different world the book was made in private enterprises or produced for sultan, or realized by private people. The commission is closely related with the *mise en page*, the layout, the decoration of a book.

The materials available in the place of production of the book that influenced the book characteristics.

From the analysis of the colophons in different book culture you can understand the social state or other informations of the scribes. The analysis of the various expression of humility can give us the range of a scribe.

In the third day of the workshop the attention was focalized on the materiality and the archeology of the book.

The link between the theoretical and the practical approach to the book was underlined by P. Hepworth with the need of a universal vocabulary of terms on the description of a book.

Infact to start a discussion between these different manuscript tradition we need a common vocabolari.

I found the discussion very intriguing but I think will be very difficult find a solution with a common lexicon of terms for codicology, conservators, historians of the book.

I really appreciated the discussion during the third and the fourth day of the workshop, the idea of the round table organization works really well.

It was very useful listen the archeological approach of conserators and the way they can analyze a book.

A conservator is constantly examining manuscripts in detail, trying to understand how they were made and why particular method of manufacture were used.

A book conservator concentrate his mind on the sewing sytems the endbands characteristics, the bindings structures, endleaves and doublures structures, the boards attachments.

From the old repairs you can have information of the history of a manuscripts. Add to these features, a conservator can analyse the different damages of a book to aggiungere historical information to a manuscript.

The important rule of a conservator in relationship with codicology was very clear. A conservator must conserve the traces and the patina of a book and document with photographs and detailed reports the conservation treatments.

A bad conservation treatment can cancel traces of the history of a manuscripts and It was done in the past, so I think now

It is necessary try to give to the codicology world the demonstration of our archeological approach to a book.

In this prospective, the study of the archeology of the book can help the codicology and versus.

The K.Schepher lecture was useful for my studies and researches because many of the islamic book structures she described I found in some of the Vatican manuscripts I conserved and repaired this year.

Some of the features I found on the Vatican manuscrits looks peculiarities but after the K.Shepher lesson It was clear that are common in the islamic binding production and in the repaired manuscripts history.

It was important listen the lectures on the decoration of bookbindings, another theme that can link the way of the manufacture and artistic features of the book.

There is a lack of information also in these field, It is necessary create a project that can investigate tools of different book traditions to generate a database of tools.

The digitalization of binding can help this research.

In the last day other important themes have been approached:

- the importance of the cataloguing of the oriental book
- the difficulties related with the transilleration of the different languages.

The oriental book world needs rules to be described and characterized.

In the end the book is a composite item so for a book conservator is important have both practical and theoretical knowledges.

It was also very important have the possibility to present the Azerbaijan Vatican project at the Arles workshop, listen the questions and discuss the project with people from the same world.

I will write, with my colleague Herre de Vries, who worked at the Azerbaijan project with me an article for the COMSt Newsletter on the main characteristics of the turkish, arabs and islamic manuscripts we conserved this year at the Vatican Library.

We might focalize our attention on the features of the islamic structure book we found at the Vatican Library.

We will give some important tips on the conservation of islamic bindings and paper, different repairing techniques you can use to conserve very fragile and delicate object like islamic binding.

Our prospective of conservation is a *minimum intervention* ethics. To secure the safe handling of a manuscript It is necessary to stabilize the physical condition of an item to minimize the risk of loss of material and to allow full accessibility of a text.

In our project we tried to be very sympathetic with the archeological structures and features of the manuscripts we worked on.

We will guess our contribute to the COMSt workshop and newsletter will be appreciate.

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