



**CONSERVATION BY DESIGN**  
A Larson-Juhl Company

Marco Fagiolo

**Report of my experience:**

**MONTEFIASCONE CONSERVATION PROJECT 2016**



## Introduction

This year I was very lucky because I win the runner-up prize of the Nicholas Hadgraft Memorial Scholarship that permitted to attend the course: *An Al-Andalusian Islamic Binding* at the Montefiascone Conservation Project 2016 from 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> August, given by Ana Beny, Kristine Rose and Alison Otha.

I live in Rome, not too far to Montefiascone but I never seen it. It's a typical medieval town of Central Italy with many ancient house and palace and small street. The most interesting place is the belvedere to the lake Bolsena and the Fortress of the Popes where passes the famous Via Francigena.

In this context there is the "MonteProject", where book conservators, archivists, librarians and other interested in the history and the structure of the book from all over the world they meet, at the Barbarigo Seminary, to exchange ideas and share knowledge and information about the wonderful world of ancient books.

The book we studied in this course is a XVI<sup>th</sup> century Al-Andalusian devotional small manuscript from Southern Spain. This manuscript is very interesting because the leather binding was anchored to improperly textblock last "restoration" performed by an erroneous view of the flap. It is decorated with typical geometric elements of the Andalusian region (*Fig.1*). The other fact to note is that the text was written on a paper with a watermark of Venice to indicate, therefore, an influence of Italian manufactory. The papers block was anchored directly to the inside structure of binding and using the same thread of the textblock's sewing (*Fig.2*).

*Fig.1*

The outside of the binding of the original manuscript where you notice the small, geometric decoration and the precarious state of conservation.



*Fig.2*

The inside of the binding of the original manuscript where you can see the topstitching, the leather work, the fragments of the cloth for the spine lining, the sewing threads and the headbands.

## Day 1 – Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> August

The first day started with an introduction of the course tutor Alison Otha from Royal Society of London.

She has historically framed the events that revolve around the composition of the manuscript by linking different cultural fields from which it has sprung. In particular the references are Arabian architecture of the Iberian peninsula with the great monuments of the cities of Seville, Cordoba and Granada. The geometric patterns such as stars, crossed lines and the use of an intensive decoration are found both on the monuments on both the bindings of the manuscripts written for the most part on paper because the ink is more homogeneous than on parchment.

Before starting work on the books, Ana Beny, a restorer, has provided us with very useful information on the society that was formed in Spain before under the Emirate and later under the Caliphate of Cordoba; a stratified society because there was the presence of Christians, Jews and Arabs. It is from these different traditions takes the features Islamic-Andalusian book that has a "flexible" binding, hollow back, boards anchored directly to the textblock. Unfortunately there aren't many historical information because the existing specimens of Andalusian bindings are only 6, and 2 of these are written on Venetian paper.

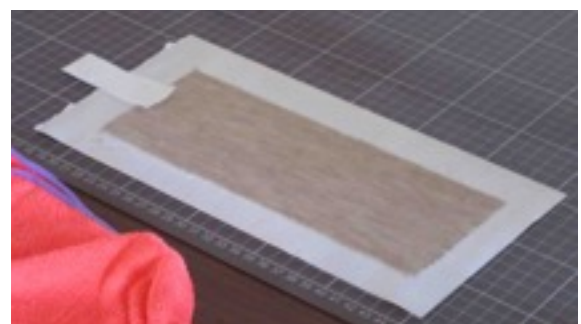
For a better understanding of the course objectives, we saw the realized models by Ana and Kristine Rose. During the lesson Ana showed us how to make the board in paper and the internal structure of cloth of the manuscript (*Fig.3, 4, 5, 6*).

Then we received the textblocks from a facsimile edition of this manuscript, and we were excited to get started!



*Fig.3-6*

Preparation of boards with paper (3,4); internal structure with paper and cloth (5,6).





## Day 2 – Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> August

The second day begins with a description of the steps required to implement the facsimile given dates by Kristine Rose who works at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. After checking the chronological order of the sections, the first step was to sew the textblock. This was done through a simple chain of two stations without the help of the sewing-frame and using a blue silk thread beginning with the last gathering (*Fig.7, 8*).



*Fig.7, 8*

The sewing with blue thread outside and the passages inside the book.

Subsequently we modeled the textblock to gently rounded to facilitate the opening of the book with an hollow back and glued with starch (*Fig.9*). We then prepared the material for attaching the spine lining with cloth lined with paper. The operation, in this case, is very delicate and must be careful, because the textblock is anchored directly to the cloth



*Fig.9*

The small round on the back.



and we have not the book moves otherwise the seam will not be solid and straightforward (*Fig. 10, 11*). Finally Ana told us about the historical use of the flap with use others facsimiles who brought at lesson (*Fig. 12*).



*Fig.10, 11* The anchoring of the thread inside and outside.

*Fig. 12* Ana Beny explains the evolution of flap.

## Day 3 – Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> August

Wednesday was the day of preparation of cores for the handbands. The maximum width is between 3 and 4 mm and the length should not exceed 10/12 cm long because they are too uncomfortable during the realization of the handbands. We have



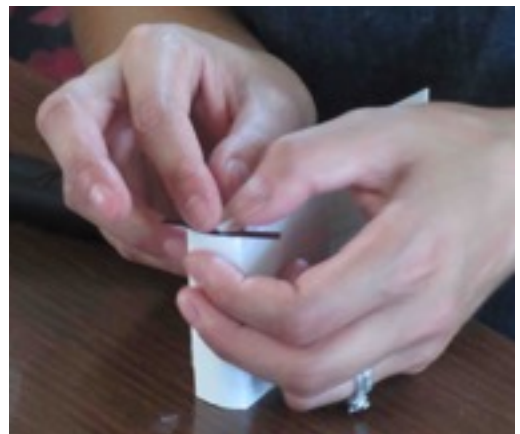
*Fig.13*

One of the core of the headbands.

used a goat vegetable tanned leather (*Fig. 13*). The leather was gaunt first with the various steps in a special table tool to remove the most "thick layer" of the skin; It was later finished with a sharp scalpel. It then moved to the paste on the flesh side and shaping it with your hands was given the form. It was also necessary to cut the excess paper from pastedown (*Fig. 14, 15*). Now everything is ready to realize the primary sew of the head and tail endband.

*Fig.14, 15*

Preparation of boards with paper (3,4); internal structure with paper and cloth (5,6).



I used a white cotton thread by passing the needle within each gathering and being careful not to overstretch the thread because it will be the base to the secondary sew and will have to pass a needle both above and below (*Fig.*



*16*). The next step was to attach the boards to the textblock with the spine of the same height of the board to be set out in leather (*Fig. 17*).



*Fig.16, 17 The endband and the attach of the boards.*

## Day 4 – Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> August

The fourth day was the most intense day of the week considering the realization of the secondary sew of endbands (*Fig. 18*).

First of all, I package the textblock for each late because is more easy to work without fly leaf! Making the endbands required quite some time because every mistake is easily visible and one has to work concentrated and precise to receive two similar and even looking endbands.

These endbands have 9 lines of two colors, in this case, I chose hellow and blue, like the original manuscript (*Fig. 19, 20, 21*).

There are two methods to realize:

- the first expected that there is one pass with one colour and an one pass with another colour;
- the second that one color works while the other one acts as a “guide”.



*Fig.18*

Example of the endband of the facsimile.



*Fig.19, 20, 21*

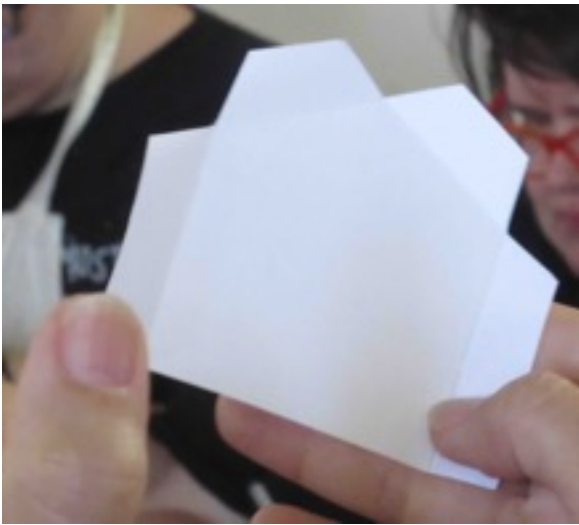
Three steps for realization the endbands. The needle passes under the primary sew to ensure that it achieves that particular design with 9 lines.



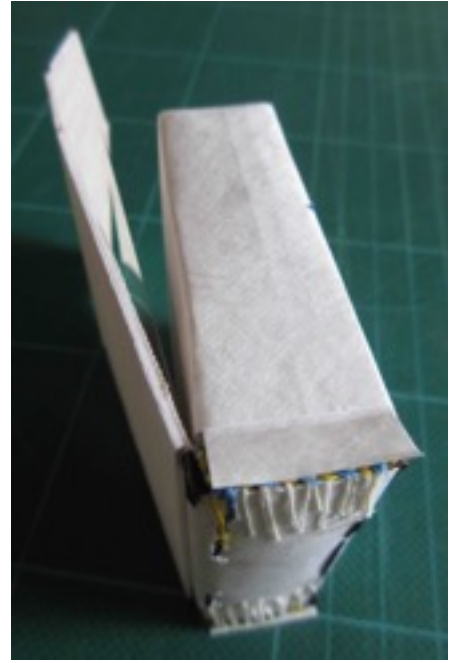
## Day 5 – Friday, 12<sup>th</sup> August

On the last day of the course the endbands were made and the final steps were to be carried out to finish the models successfully.

Before working with the leather we have "package" the textblock and protected the endbands with the paper so as not to spoil the work, leaving the dishes and the flap (*Fig. 22*). It was later made the pattern for cutting the flap topstitching and eliminated on all sides the excess leather (*Fig. 23*).



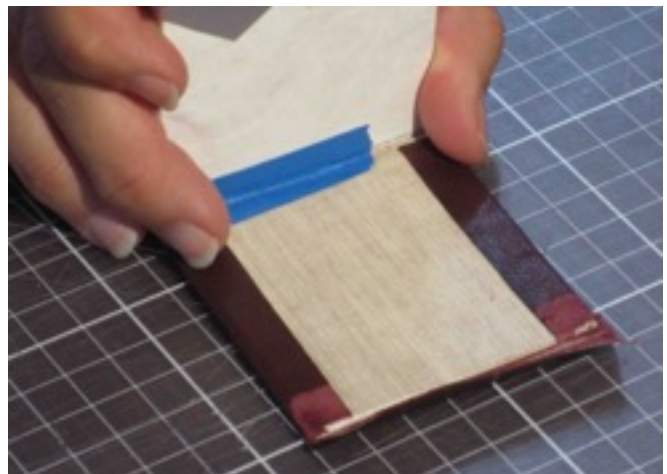
*Fig.23 The pattern for the flap.*



*Fig.22*

*The "package" of the textblock.*

It began to glue the long sides, then the short sides and finally the flap being careful fleshing the leather at the corners where there is overlap between the two layers of the leather (*Fig. 24*).



*Fig.24*

*The corners of leather.*

Once dry the paste, we went to the final stages: the decoration with finishing tools. This could either be one with a dry hot irons, both moistening with a specific oil for the leather and by pressing upon the hot iron (*Fig. 25*).

We could choose from many types of geometric form brought by Ana and Kristine. I tried to be as faithful as possible to the original, filling boards and the flap with repeated geometric patterns (*Fig. 26*).



*Fig.25*

*Kristine Rose used the finishing tool on the flap.*



*Fig.26*

*One board of the book with intensive geometric decoration.*

Now the work is really finished and has been included in the original box which was also inserted a small book explaining the history of the manuscript (*Fig. 27, 28*). The last day of the week ended up with a debriefing session where we talked about the course and took some pictures.

*Fig.27, 28*

The book finished outside and inside the





## Acknowledgements

I want to thank Conservation by Design Ltd. for the Nicholas Hadgraft Scholarship and by providing a short report of my week in Montefiascone.

The Montefiascone Book Conservation Summer School offer a fantastic opportunity to spend the whole month in a beautiful town. It also offered a unique opportunity for conservators to have more interactions with experts, to share ideas and to establish friendship for the future. I am so grateful for this wonderful experience and for this I invite everyone to attend the Montefiascone Summer School because is an outstanding possibility to join it for making a unforgettable experience.



A special thanks to Cheryl Porter who I had the pleasure of meet in Copenhagen for the first time, and to which I owe this beautiful opportunity.

Thank you very much for everything!

## Marco Fagiolo

