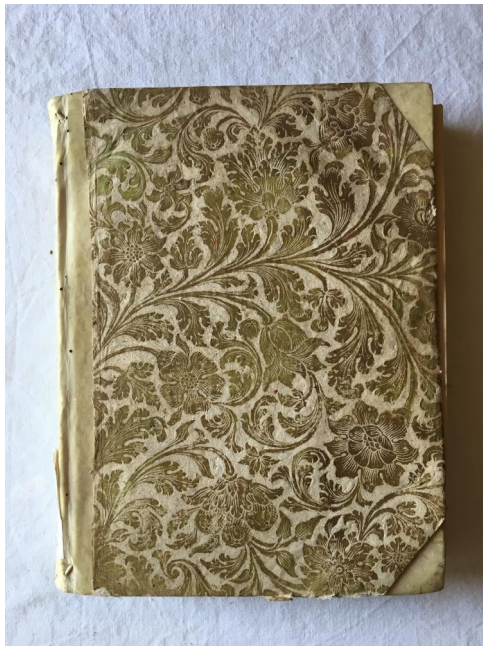


## Montefiascone Review by Winner 2016 Samuel Foley

The historic hilltop town of Montefiascone (Photograph 1) is perched on the edge of an ancient volcano whose crater is now Lake Bolsena. The town dates back to the Etruscan period, though it's height of prominence was as a Papal possession as evidenced by a fortress, the *Rocca dei Papi*, which dominates the town. Montefiascone is on the pilgrim route *Via Francigena* and boasts a number of Romanesque and Gothic style churches. The Basilica of Santa Margherita was one of these churches but after ruin in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup>. Its dome, which is the third largest in all of Italy, can be seen for many miles around.



Photograph 1 - View over lake Bolsena from Montefiascone



Photograph 2 - An example of a decorated paper binding

Despite the town's beauty and long history the main reason for me being there was the library in the Seminario Barbarigo. The library is the focus for the Montefiascone Conservation Project and has been for the past 26 years. The courses provided the much-needed funds to save and maintain the library. This could not happen without the hard work and determination of the people who run the course and the generosity of all those who support the project, including the tutors who give up their time to teach. I had the very special privilege to be able to spend time in the library and study the bindings. Having been almost entirely untouched the library provides a rare resource for conservators and book historians with original structures preserved and sometimes exposed by historic damage. For me one of the highlights of the library were the beautiful Italian Decorated Paper bindings.

As ever the first course was *Re-Creating the Medieval Palette* with Cheryl Porter. The course took us through the history, chemistry and use of pigments in illuminating both Islamic and European medieval manuscripts. The unique advantage of this course was the ability to actually create and use the pigments ourselves. [Photograph 3] This gave the class a far better understanding of the make-up and chemistry of the individual pigments, as well as an appreciation of the skill of the illuminator. Lectures supported the practical elements covering sources of raw materials, the production methods, history of use and the trade in pigments and their continuant parts. An area I found particularly interesting was the history of trade in raw materials that affected the use of pigments. Availability was often affected by larger political concerns and wars across Europe, for instance the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in the 1450s affected trade routes from the East therefore restricting and even halting the use of many goods, including pigments and mordents.



Photograph 3 - Pigment and ink samples

Being able to identify pigments and inks is crucial when working with manuscripts as each has its own properties, for instance organic colours fade readily and are sensitive to pH. These properties must be considered when either treating or displaying an object. During the week the class practiced identifying pigments by eye and studied analytical techniques that can also be used. Furthermore, the samples made in class can aid identification when used as a reference.



Photograph 4 - My finished Unicorn binder model showing the board tooling

*The Unicorn Binder: A 15<sup>th</sup> Century Book Structure* was the course held in the second week by Jim Bloxam and Shaun Thompson. The Unicorn binder is an unknown binder located in Cambridge identified by his use of an intaglio unicorn finishing tool. Jim and Shaun have studied a number of bindings bound by the Unicorn Binder and identified techniques and methods he regularly employed. The model the class created is based on a binding Jim and Shaun had studied in Jesus College Cambridge. It is of a Gothic style with double alum-tawed supports, sewn with a 'half packed' herringbone stitch, quarter sawn oak boards and covered in oak tanned calf leather. The boards were shaped with a slight 'cushion' to the outside edges with the spine edges being slightly more rounded. The inside spine edge was given a slight bevel



to accommodate any swell. Tunnels and channels were also cut to accommodate the sewing supports. Jim and Shaun had brass tools produced in some of the original designs for us to use, which gave the model an extra authentic look. The tooling consisted of two intersecting boards with a lozenge pattern in the centre. Brass furniture was created for the strap, strap plate and catch. [Photograph 4] The whole week was very interesting and informative, though trimming the textblock was one element that was particularly intriguing. We trimmed the edges of the textblock with a sharp knife held flat and drawn back and forth against the top of a lying press. The theory is that this technique exists somewhere between the drawknife and plough. This technique produces cut marks similar to those found on bindings bound by the Unicorn binder. [Photograph 5] It was an intense week, with a few late nights required to complete our books within a week, but this only heightened the sense of achievement by the end.



Photograph 5 - Shaun demonstrating edge trimming with a knife

The third week *An al-Andalusian Islamic Binding* was taught by Ana Beni and Kristine Rose, with an introductory lecture on *The Western Islamic Tradition* by Alison Orta. Al-Andalus was a medieval Islamic territory that at its greatest covered most of the Iberian peninsular. During this time Muslims, Christians and Jews coexisted and each culture influenced the art that appeared from Islamic Iberia. The bindings the class made were influenced by a 15<sup>th</sup> century al-Andalusian binding found hidden in a wall. It is suspected it may have been placed there for safe keeping during the Morisco expulsion of Spain between 1609 and 1614. The Moriscos were descendants of Spain's



Photograph 6 - The textblock attached to the cover lining

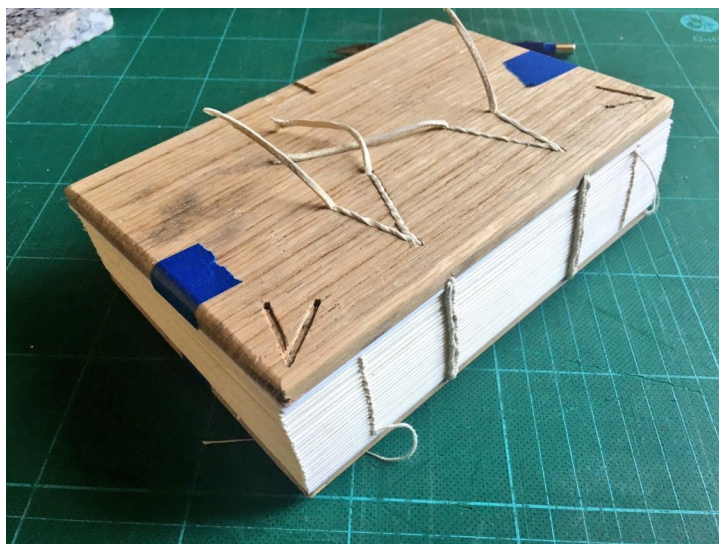
Muslim population that had converted to Christianity by Royal Decree in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Books relating to Islam and even writing in Arabic were banned during Christian rule, but were secretly kept and practiced, explaining the fashion for small books; our model being just 65x62x20mm. Interestingly the book was not a case binding, which is typical of Islamic book structures, but was sewn to a cover lining by lacings at the shoulders and the primary endband sewing. This creates a hollow, also not typical for Islamic structures. [Photograph 6] The boards are then adhered to the cover lining and then covered in goatskin leather. The sewing is a two-station double link stitch in blue silk thread. The secondary sewing on the endband is a chevron pattern in silk thread. Unlike Western style tooling

the binding was finished with 'warm' rather than hot tools, using wax or almond oil rather than water to aid the impression. [Photograph 7] An interesting element to this style of binding is the fact that the textblock is attached to the cover with no adhesive, making the structure a good option in conservation treatments, having less affect on the textblock if the treatment needs to be reversed.



*Photograph 7 - The complete binding, showing tooling and the chevron pattern endband*

Our tutor for the last week was Michael Burke whose course looked at the techniques used in Carolingian bindings and more specifically a book held at Canterbury Cathedral. The book is a manuscript containing the Song of Songs, the Pauline Epistles, and the Apocalypse that was put together at Saint Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury in the late eleventh century. It is thought to be the only surviving Carolingian style binding in Britain. The sewing is herringbone, sewn around double twisted alum tawed supports at two stations. The supports are single lengths of tawed skin looped through the front board to create a double support. The boards are quarter-sawn oak. The alum-tawed supports are unusual for Carolingian bindings. [Photograph 8] The endbands are also a



*Photograph 8 - Carolingian binding after lacing on the boards*

herringbone stitch with twisted alum tawed cores that lace into the board. The endband tie downs are sewn through an alum tawed spine lining that extends beyond the head and tail to form tabs. The cover is alum tawed skin turned in onto the boards but left extended at the spine and cut to form tabs, with the spine lining, a typical Carolingian feature, it is suggested they were used to lift the bindings out of storage chests.

I had an unforgettable time in Montefiascone, the courses were exceptional and I learnt a huge amount. The icing on the cake though was the people I got to meet and share this experience with. It is strange to find a group of warm, friendly, like-minded people from all over the world gathered in a small rural town in Lazio. Everyone was great fun and was open to sharing ideas and experiences. Many people I met had been to





*Photograph 9 - Unicorn binder class and tutors with their finished models*

Montefiascone more than once, and some many times since the project's inception. This speaks volumes about how unique the project is, not only for the library but also to the people who attend. It seems I have also caught 'the bug' and cannot wait to go back. [photograph 9]

So I must thank all the people who make all of this possible. Thank you to the Director of Studies, Cheryl Porter; to all of the tutors, and to the many people who help support the project. Also a huge thank you to Conservation by Design for without their very generous scholarship I would not have been able to attend. I feel honoured and privileged to be the Nicolas Hadgraft Memorial Scholarship winner, 2016.

Thank you,

Sam Foley



*Photograph 10 - Sunset view over a moody lake Bolsena*