
CARE AND CONSERVATION OF MANUSCRIPTS 17 COPENHAGEN, 11-13 APRIL 2018 CALL FOR PAPERS

THE TRANSFORMING ROLE OF THE BOOK CONSERVATOR WHEN DEALING WITH MANUSCRIPTS: THE DECISION MAKING AND CONSERVATION TREATMENTS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE PRESERVATION OF AN ACCOUNT BOOK FROM 1508 (ANTT, N.A. 810)

This presentation will describe a unique opportunity that came from a collaborative project between the National Archives Torre do Tombo in Lisbon and Parques de Sintra, a publicly owned company that ensures the conservation of its heritage. The National Archives Torre do Tombo holds a Conservation department with a team of experienced conservators, with whom the external project Conservator was able to work with. As part of an interdisciplinary research that included exams and analysis, decision making and conservation treatments according to established practices and available resources, the treatment performed enabled the digitization and accessibility of this manuscript.

N.A. 810 (<http://digitarq.dgarq.gov.pt/details?id=4621339>) belongs to the National Archives Torre do Tombo and is part of the collection Núcleo Antigo. It is an account book from the year 1508 and presents the revenue and expenditures of Paço de Sintra for that year. Sintra is a town situated 30 Km away from Lisbon and this manuscript represents a very important historical account of the 16th century.

This account book is a perfect example of the flexible binding typology known as "ledger binding", although some of the elements and characteristics identified seem to differ from the known bibliography (R. Dudin and J. A. Szirmai). The conservation state in which this account book arrived to us prevented its safe handling and digitization. There was a significant number of missing quires which caused the deformation of the sewing structure, spine and covers, along with having signs of fungal and insect activity with material loss.

Following a methodology based in an archaeological analysis developed by Ms. Inês Correia within the mentioned Institution, we were able to study and separately identify each layer of this unique binding in different values: materials and techniques used, dating, identification of previous transformations caused either by additions, losses, restoration, re-bindings or any changes this manuscript may have been subject to in the past. The information gathered by this method greatly contributed and substantiated the decision making for the treatment proposal.

If changes occurred in the past, either by necessity, by will or damage, it is then understandable that the Book Conservator plays a role of changing or transforming a manuscript that is inaccessible. Accepting these changes as part of the history and value of the manuscript implies the acceptance of further changes in order to preserve and make all of the information and technical data that it holds accessible to further generations. The minimal intervention, for this case, resulted in what can be called an extensive conservation and restoration treatment aimed at the stabilization of its sewing structure.

The Conservator is a unique professional endowed with in-depth knowledge of the history of bookbinding, its evolution and characteristics, and possesses the skills for seeing, recording and identifying what is unknown to him, to question and evaluate each object as single and unique. Because of the quality of the data the Conservator can gather, it is the one professional that could be responsible for changing an object without risking the loss of vital information, whether it is a binding material, a unique sewing structure, or any other characteristic that requires preserving. As all areas of knowledge and considering Conservation is a quite recent one, it is established with norms and ethical codes which were considered during the conservation process presented.