

The Salzennes Antiphonal project continued: Treatment and exhibition of a 16th-century liturgical manuscript

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The Salzennes Antiphonal is a 16th century liturgical manuscript from the collection of the Patrick Power Library, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Originating from the Abbey of Salzennes in Namur, present day Belgium, the Salzennes Antiphonal was commissioned by the former cantrix and prioress Dame Julienne de Glymes in 1554-1555. This presentation is a follow-up to the presentation on the examination and historic context of the manuscript at the Care and Conservation of Manuscripts 13 symposium.

In 2007, the Salzennes Antiphonal came to the Canadian Conservation Institute for technical examination in order to determine its condition and need for conservation treatment. The manuscript consists of two volumes containing 240 parchment folios, which were previously bound together in a contemporary binding with leather and brass over wooden boards with evidence of previous (19th-20th century) binding repairs. The music and text are written in iron gall ink on parchment, with numerous foliated initials, six elaborate historiated initials and six vibrant full page illuminations. The project was undertaken in collaboration with Library and Archives Canada, and in consultation with Judy Dietz, Associate Curator of European Historical Art at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. After the extensive examination discussed at the Care and Conservation of manuscripts conference in 2013, the Canadian Conservation Institute agreed to take on the antiphonal's conservation. In order to ethically come up with treatment solutions, the book conservator and the paper conservator at CCI consulted with several conservators in order to develop a treatment methodology for this large scale book.

The largest conservation concern was the consolidation of the pigments and the detached wooden boards. The book would be returning to its owner in a minimally controlled library environment. The intention was to limit access generally but there would certainly be an exhibition upon its return. Although the book was in fair condition overall, the damage to the pigments was extensive and had been aggravated by the detachment of the boards. The goal of our intervention was consolidate the pigments and re-attach the boards while minimally interfering with intact portions and remnants of the previous 16th century binding. Previous 19th-20th century interventions were also left in instances where they were not causing further damage to the manuscript or the boards. The full treatment was done co-operatively by several book and paper conservators and included assistance from furniture and textile conservators. The collaborative aspect was unique, as it led to a complex multi-levelled project which relied upon skills from many different disciplines over an extended period of time. Several steps of the treatment were done with two or more conservators simply due to the size of the book. After treatment a 'pressure wrap' was further designed at CCI to apply gentle overall pressure to the manuscript now that its boards were attached.

This paper provides background on the treatment of the antiphonal as well as the ethical quandary of developing a sound methodology for the treatment of the uncommon artefact in a Canadian context. Aspects of exhibition decision-making will also be addressed as the project culminated in the return of the artefact with a large six month exhibition at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Curated by Judy Dietz, the exhibition focused on the manuscript, its conservation, and the Antiphonal's historic and spiritual meaning within Canada.