

CORPUS CHARTARUM ITALICARUM

Practices and technologies for preservation, knowledge and enhancement

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Over the last decade or so, the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro e la Conservazione del Patrimonio Archivistico e Librario has carried out research, using advanced technical means, on the papers found in medieval books. This research has produced some important results.

Studies made on ancient papers by the Institute date back to the period in which it was founded – 1938. Unfortunately, however, around the time of the Second World War, a vast collection of watermarked sheets that had been accumulated seemed to disappear without trace.

Happily, in 2003, when the Institute's library was modernised, some 36 box files containing 4,500 watermarked papers, placed in single folders, came to light. The folders were labelled *Corpus Chartarum Italicarum*.

Clearly, one was dealing with the lost material. An in-depth analysis of the sheets contained in the box files revealed some interesting details.

For example, in some sheets we noticed that a corner had been removed, presumably in order to carry out some kind of test. We are not certain what kind of test this might have been, and there are no original notes to help us.

The Corpus contains many different kinds of sheets; some are manuscripts, some are printed sheets, and there are also some large format engravings.

The state of preservation of the watermarked papers is pretty good, overall. Some sheets, however, show signs of damage in the form of wrinkling, while others show rust stains left by metallic paperclips. In some cases, there is damage caused by acidic inks or insects such as woodworm or silverfish. A few sheets are affected by foxing, such as this one. Some of the blemishes are, in fact, caused by impurities in the original paper pulp.

The Institute has planned a programme with the following aims:

The conservation of the *Corpus*;

The identification of watermarks and, wherever possible, the period and region in which they were produced;

Instrumental measurement of some of the papers' characteristics;

The creation of a database that's accessible online and contains images of the watermarks and the historical and instrumental data collected.

The Project's Phases

Dusting of every sheet and the substitution of old files with new, acid-free ones that are more suitable for archival conservation

Training of technicians in the use of instrumentation, the definition of measuring methods, assessment of the chosen methods, and the drafting of a work protocol;

Measurement of the following values: thickness, permeability, roughness and brightness;

The reproduction of watermarks using a digital camera in transparency mode;

Contrast has been increased so as to emphasize the mould impressions and the watermarks themselves.

A special program was applied in order to carry out direct, on-screen, measurements of watermarks.

A database has been created to archive all the information relating to the watermarks' motifs in addition to their positions on the sheets.

We also made reproductions of whole sheets, both in reflection and transparency mode.

The project also permits us to accurately locate the position of watermarks on sheets.

The watermarks' motifs can be checked against repertories, such as Briquet's.

For each sheet we create a very simple record card, which includes a description of the watermark's elements, and their relationships to each other.