

Codex MS02: Conservation of a restoration

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The subject of this work is the study and the complex conservation treatment of an extraordinary and unique southern Italian medieval manuscript, now preserved in the Historical Diocesan Archive of Palermo (Italy), known as Ms02.

The manuscript is an illuminated liturgical parchment codex and it is one of the few surviving manuscripts written in the Latin scriptorium of Palermo around the mid of the 12th century. The codex was almost certainly produced within the environment of the Norman court showing the unique cultural syncretism of the period and the combination of Byzantine, Arabic and Latin elements in Sicily.

The condition of the codex was quite singular because during a previous restoration in 1965 it was laminated with a PVC film that raised serious concerns for its future survival due to its interactions with the parchment. Very stiff parchment repairs created dangerous stress to the original material during the opening and often the repairs were overlapping and obscuring both text and decorations. Even the sequence of the quires was altered during the rebinding.

So the conditions of the codex were precarious, while its interest for scholars remained very high with frequent requests for consultation.

The goal of the new conservation treatment was to restore structural features for a safe use and long term survival of the manuscript.

This required a careful preliminary study about the feasibility of a safe removal of the lamination and of the old repairs without any risk for the parchment, the inks and the pigments; once the lamination was removed the losses and the tears could be mended with materials suitable for conservation and the textblock re-bound in a sympathetic structure giving the right order to the text.

The manuscript has also been fully digitized before rebinding to provide a digital surrogate in order to decrease the impact of physical consultation when possible.

In order to plan the most appropriate treatment, non-destructive analysis and observation were carried out on the codex, including parchment, inks and pigments used for text and decoration.

The choice of a delamination treatment implied the careful study of the various lamination techniques used in the past to try to identify the materials used on the manuscript Ms 02 and the revision of the published literature on the subject. Anyway several experiments were required to find the optimal approach for the specific case, to avoid issues occurred during previous similar attempts.

All the codicological characteristics of the codex were analysed and compared to the few other coeval manuscripts of the same provenance and its text has been fully transcribed.