

The materiality of painted documents: between history and preservation

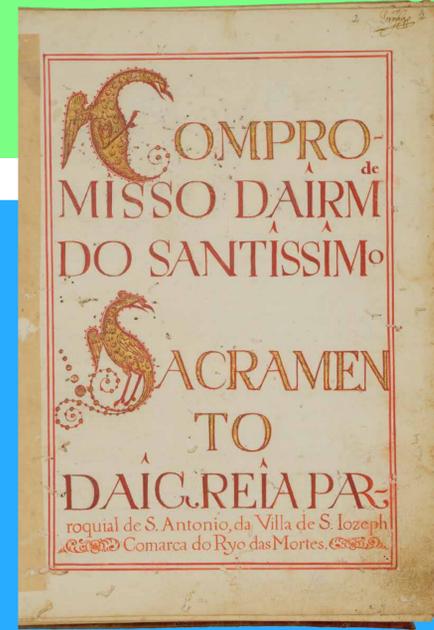
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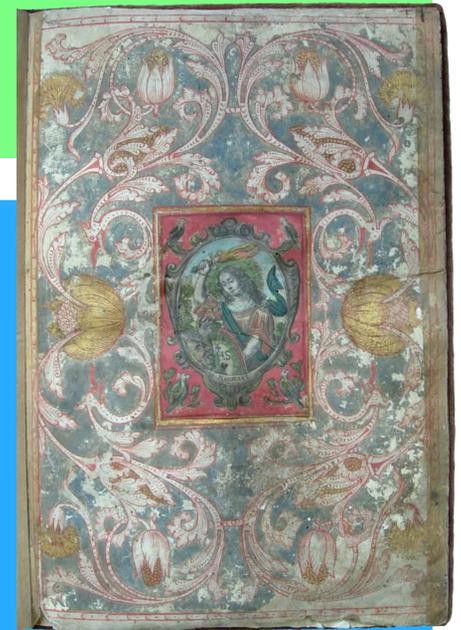
The research project “*The materiality of painted documents: between history and preservation*” (Fig.1) (ALMADA), held in Centro de Conservação–Restauração de Bens Culturais – CECOR/ Escola de Belas Artes / UFMG (Conservation –Restoration Center of Cultural Heritage / School of Fine Arts/UFMG), intends to reflect about *practice and interdisciplinary methodologies of knowledge building between History and the Conservation-Restoration of graphic documents*. The first phase of the research was developed in 2014 and aimed at address *historical research procedures that incorporate the material qualities of the manuscript as a source of information*.

Once some paths to the historian are identified, the following steps of the project consider the *methodological approaches of conservators-restorators in relation to preservation treatments of graphic documents taking into account the maintenance of the historical remains*, reflecting about the limits of our performance. The broader objective of the research is to establish an effective interdisciplinary dialogue between the two sciences.

This poster presents the *initial results of the research*, which refer to the application of *basic analysis procedures used by conservators-restorators among historians, systematizing the kind of information that can be obtained through material investigation of graphic documents*.



Figures – Painted manuscripts from the 18th century – Brotherhood statutes “Compromisso da Irmandade do Santíssimo Sacramento da Igreja Paroquial de Santo Antonio da Vila de São José, Comarca do Rio das Mortes, 1722 – Arquivo Público Mineiro, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.



“Compromisso da Irmandade do S. Miguel e Almas do Purgatório”, 1722. IPHAN – Arquivo Histórico do Museu da Inconfidência, Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Methodology and selection of the procedures:

1. *Theoretical and methodological study* of the recent scientific production in both fields of knowledge prioritized in this research: History of Written Culture and Conservation-Restoration of Graphic Documents.
2. Performance of *non-destructive tests on 68 painted manuscripts documents of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, in nine archives in Brazil, Portugal and Spain, for analysis of the *conservation condition* and the *constructive technique* based on the following procedures: *organoleptic test* with visible and reverse light; examination with *USB digital optical microscope*; examination with *ultraviolet light* (Fig. 2)
3. Analysis of the data collected and *categorization of techniques, materials and use marks* from the presented *degradations*, reflecting on the potential of these *characteristics as a source of information for the History of Writing Culture*.

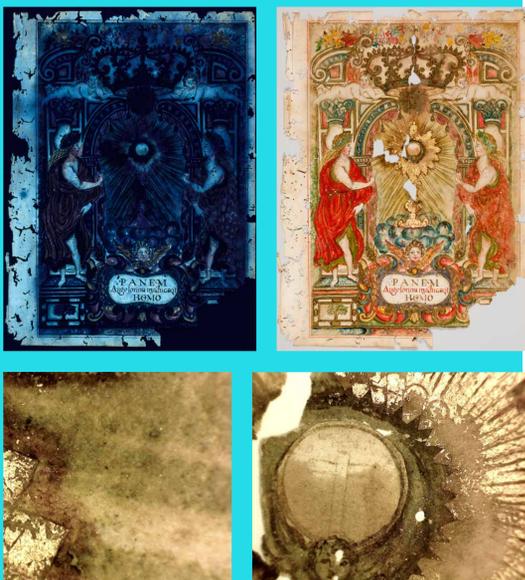


Figure 2 – Non-destructive tests performed: examination with ultraviolet and visible light and with USB digital optical microscope. Details of the technique: montage of the gliding details. “Compromisso da Irmandade do Santíssimo Sacramento da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar das Congonhas de Sabará”, 1725. Arquivo Público Mineiro, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Results and observations

From the bibliographic discussion, it was noted that few historians are interested or are able to perform a material examination of the documents or historical objects, being only privileged the written information. As for conservators, there is a debate about the end of the reversibility myth, the historicity of the objects, the need to consider all types of evidence that can provide information and the risk of losing or modifying original objects, interfering in future analysis (CORREIA; ZERVOS et al.). However, the main discussions about the preservation of documentary collections further relates to risk management, preventive conservation and digitization processes, actions that prevent the physical contact of historians with the documents.. Listed below some of the links between the identified damage in the manuscripts and the information obtained from the historical remains:

1. Generalized soiling and fading of paint indicate that the object was exposed for a long time to dust and light; the most degraded parts detect information (textual or visual) that deserved more attention (Fig. 3). Similarly, dirt at the edges of a document suggests handling and intense use of certain passages of text, marking the most important parts from the point of view of its users.



Figure 3 – Two different pages of the Testament of Martim Afonso de Sousa, first donated of Hereditary Captaincy of São Vicente, Brazil, in the Portuguese Empire (16th century). The fading ink indicates that the first page was privileged to exhibition, as it has the name of the testators. “Testamento de Martim Afonso de Sousa e de Dona Ana Pimentel”, 1560. Setor de Obras Raras da Biblioteca Universitária, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

2. Surface abraded of the paper and different inks in the text are testimony of corrections. It is interesting to notice if, at the time, there was a concern about maintaining the same style of the font used, which is an indicative of the appreciation of the aesthetic/ symbolic potential of the document (Fig. 4).



Figure 4 – Surface abrade of the paper shows the changing of an adorned capital letter model and it is an example of the circulation of engravures and the transformation of some visual concepts during the 18th century.

“Alfabeto de Letras debruadas por diferentes modos. Do uso de Frei Jozé de Nossa Senhora das Neves, religioso Terceiro de S. Francisco, natural da Bahia”, 18th century. Academia de Ciências de Lisboa, Portugal.

FIGUEIREDO, Manoel de Andrade. “Nova Escola para aprender a ler, escrever e contar”. Lisboa, Oficina de Bernardo da Costa Carvalho, 1722.

3. Migration of inks, metallic pigments fragments and paper fibers to the previous or next pages shows the construction process and its phases. However, they may also be evidence of moisture action that caused the dissolution of paints and adhesives, providing information on previous ways of storage. The observation of the shapes left by the migration and oxidation of inks and of media loss by action of insects on sequential sheets allows the analysis of the original structure of the binding, and can be seen the document changes such as deletions or substitutions of certain folios (Fig. 5).



Figure 5 – Migration of inks from a missing page. This is the testimony of a previous presence of a painted frontispiece with symbolic elements. “Compromisso da Irmandade do Arcaño São Miguel da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar do Ouro Preto”, 1735. Arquivo da Paróquia do Pilar de Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

4. The analysis of differential degradation of the inks is an element to confirm development of a text in different moments and to detect particular characteristics of handwriting trajectory, with the recurring accumulation of ink on certain features. In the case of decorations painted in the manuscripts, the change of color of the paints by oxidative degradation can inform about the type of pigment used. That is one of the most important features to understand the relationships between customers and painters/calligraphists and the technical and aesthetic abilities of the professional (Fig. 6).



Figure 6 – Detail of metallic pigment degradation. The green coloration indicates the use of brass instead of gold to illuminate the letters.

“Compromisso da Irmandade do Santíssimo Sacramento da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar das Congonhas de Sabará”, 1725. Arquivo Público Mineiro, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Conclusions

The findings of this first phase of the research serve as a motivation for professionals to reflect an interdisciplinary way on their working methods, considering the gains that can be achieved with the collaboration of sciences that work on the same type of object:

- For historians, the use of already current analysis techniques in conservation-restoration can collaborate in deepening the interpretation of handwritten and printed sources, allowing to go beyond the text. The information that can be obtained refers to the stages of development of the document, its origin, purpose and ways to guard it, which are practices that express historical social relations;
- For conservators-restorators, awareness of the value of material traces of graphic documents for historical research purposes should be on the agenda of discussions prior to preservation interventions, as occurs with archaeological objects. In addition, new ways of digitization of manuscripts should include the provision of information about the materiality of the manuscript (REYDEN), not only for documents considered specials, but for the mass of current documents.

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