

## **Traditions of Papermaking in the Islamic World**

### **London, 23–27 March 2015**

From 23 to 27 March, the four-day course and one-day symposium ‘Traditions of Papermaking in the Islamic World’ was held at The British Library Centre for Conservation (BLCC) in London, UK. The course—sponsored by The Islamic Manuscript Association in cooperation with The Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation and The British Library—offered participants engaged in work with the papers of Islamic manuscripts a chance to gain a greater practical knowledge of papermaking itself. The Islamic Manuscript Association hopes that this will be the first of several such courses on the materials and techniques of Islamic manuscript production.

The course began with a brief overview of approaches to the study of Islamic papers and papermaking and the state of the field from librarian and manuscript specialist Evyn Kropf. Next, papermaker-historians Timothy Barrett and Katharina Siedler introduced the specific work that directly inspired and informed the practical content of the course—observation, documentation, and replication of the traditional practices of living Indian papermakers. Siedler in particular has been modelling these traditional practices in her experiments with equipment and techniques—first at the Center for the Book at the University of Iowa and now in Berlin at her papermaking studio. Kropf next reviewed sources for study, including primary historical sources and secondary sources from the literature, as well as bibliographic resources for ongoing study. Barrett introduced the preparation of fibre for papermaking. Finally, conservator Cathleen A. Baker introduced techniques for material investigation of fibre type, degree of processing, sizing agents and fillers which she and Kropf conducted in their study of a selection of dated and localized papers from the Islamic Manuscripts Collection at the University of Michigan. The second and third days of the course were filled with practical, hands-on papermaking sessions conducted in the BLCC Mary Welch Conservation Studio. After an introduction by Siedler and Barrett to the practical steps of sheet formation and couching, participants took their own turns at the vats, working separately with hemp and flax at different degrees of processing and in different concentrations (in order to produce thicker and thinner sheets). They formed and couched their own sheets, and then were guided in pressing, parting and drying the sheets. The next day, Siedler and Baker introduced participants to the steps of sizing dried sheets with starch paste, allowing them to dry, and then burnishing them with smooth agate stones. All participants had a chance to attempt sizing and burnishing before continuing to make sheets of paper at the vats. Papermaker Jacques Brejoux introduced fiber beaten in his

reconstructed medieval stampers, and participants also produced sheets from the resulting pulp. The newly made sheets were again pressed and dried. That afternoon, Brejoux introduced some of his attempts at replicating historical papermaking techniques, and anthropologist and paper historian Alexandra Soteriou briefly surveyed her travels through areas of India documenting the practices of living papermakers. Barrett taught participants to sort their newly made papers by quality. On the last day of the course, participants were introduced to a selection of historical paper samples and subsequently to examination techniques for papers appearing in manuscripts working from a few samples from The British Library collections.

On 27 March 2015, a symposium was held with a number of contributions from course instructors, participants and British Library colleagues. Siedler presented on reconstruction of Islamic papers and Kropf presented on assessing the material qualities of Islamic manuscript papers in the course of cataloguing and more sophisticated material investigation. Next, conservators Zoe Miller and Flavio Marzo presented on their work with Islamic manuscripts from The British Library's collections. Soteriou presented her journey through India to document the extant papermaking heritage there, researcher Jean-Louis Estève presented the results of his investigations of the zig-zag in Arabo-Andalusian papers, and Brejoux presented some of his experiments with historical papermaking practices. Finally, a few of the symposium participants were treated to a demonstration of papermaking by Barrett and Siedler.

For the full programme visit <http://www.islamicmanuscript.org/symposia/traditions-of-papermaking-in-the-islamic-world/programme.aspx>.

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