

Paper History During the Golden Age in Fabriano, Using Illustrations from the Zonghi Historical Archive in Fabriano and the Rare Book and Special Collections of the Library of Congress

ABSTRACT

A nine-month research grant funded in 2002 by the Kluge Foundation at the Library of Congress helped support the research for this presentation. The grant period was the culmination of a number of years of exploring the subject during brief trips to Italy and to Fabriano in particular. Although most American book and paper conservators are familiar with the role of the Italian papermaking industry in the early dissemination of the craft throughout Europe, the specific contributions of Fabriano are perhaps less widely acknowledged. Literature published in Italian over the last twenty years fills out the role of Fabriano, which though not the first location for the transfer of papermaking technology from the Arab world, was the source of important technical innovations in the craft, including the use of the multiple-head stamping machine, the substitution of gelatin for starch in paper sizing, and the introduction of the watermark. In addition, the city's key position along firmly established trade routes contributed to making it the principal supplier of paper in Europe by the first half of the fourteenth century. The focus of the AIC presentation was on the period of 1300 to 1500 and explored the reasons why Fabriano both politically and geographically became the ideal location for the advancement of this new technology.

Paper made in this region during this era is still remarkable today for its pristine quality and permanence, such that acid-free modern papers mimic the elemental components in Fabriano paper made nearly one thousand years ago. A collection of paper samples housed in the Fabriano Museum of Paper and the Watermark and assembled in the nineteenth century by the accomplished historian, archivist, and prelate Aurelio Zonghi was described.

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Zonghi collected watermarked blank sheets of handmade paper from dated documents in the local archives with known provenance from 1280 to 1600 and created a consecutive record of papers used in the Fabriano area during its "golden age" of papermaking. His watermark tracings were published in 1953 in a volume issued by the Hilversum Paper Publications Society of Holland. Zonghi corresponded extensively with the noted Swiss filigranologist Charles Briquet about his collection in the 1880s and the exchange of letters still kept in the Fabriano city archives was discussed. Briquet did fiber analysis for Zonghi on sixty samples of paper and concluded that all the early Fabriano papers were made from hemp (or *canna-pa* as it is known in Italian).

The presentation briefly went over the identifying paper characteristics of these early Fabriano sample papers including fiber content, color, sizing, alkaline earth content, laid and chain patterns, and watermarks which document the technical development of hand papermaking in Italy at this time. These features can help conservators recognize early Fabriano papers in artworks, manuscripts, and books which they come across in the course of their work. Examples of rare books, fine prints, manuscripts, and printed maps from the Special Collections of the Library of Congress made with Fabriano papers were shown.

An AIC publications grant from the Kress Foundation beginning in August of 2003 is supporting the eventual publication of the research conducted for this AIC paper. A digital album of watermark samples made from the Zonghi collection is also in progress. The planned completion date for the publication is January 2005.

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