

Tip: *Shimbari* at the Book Conservator's Bench

Shimbari is a Japanese term for a method of clamping using flexible sticks. Traditionally made of bamboo, *shimbari* sticks are placed between the area in treatment and a rigid frame. This system allows for extremely precise pressure that can be applied in a wide range of strengths in any direction.

This system is used most often in furniture conservation, especially for the treatment of lacquered or veneered items that require many minute points of pressure around a three-dimensional area. When treating objects as large and irregular as furniture, conservators often construct custom *shimbari* frames to provide the system's counterpressure.

For book conservators, however, a sewing frame can be employed as a *shimbari* frame (fig. 1). Sewing frames benefit from their adjustable crossbars, which can be shifted as needed for different angles or pressure strengths. Since the

crossbar of the typical sewing frame is not secured, but rather rests on the thread nuts of the uprights, it will need to be clamped in place to provide counterpressure against the *shimbari*. The object in treatment can be held in place with a cradle or finishing press, if necessary.

While traditional *shimbari* sticks are made of bamboo, fiberglass rods make for a stronger, more flexible alternative (fig. 2). The addition of a vinyl endcap provides gentle contact and friction to hold the *shimbari* in place.

With *shimbari*, pressure can be applied to virtually any area of a book: the gutter of a tight binding, narrow spines (fig. 3), headcaps, and even board edges. Multiple *shimbari* sticks can be used in conjunction to achieve pressure in different directions (fig. 4).

The *shimbari* sticks can also make an effective clamping system to support stiff or delicate leaves during digitization (fig. 5) and while sewing on the frame.

Shimbari makes for an affordable addition to the toolkit, running at roughly \$2 per stick. Both the fiberglass rods and vinyl endcaps can be purchased from kite-making suppliers, such as Goodwinds, LLC. The rods come in a wide range of

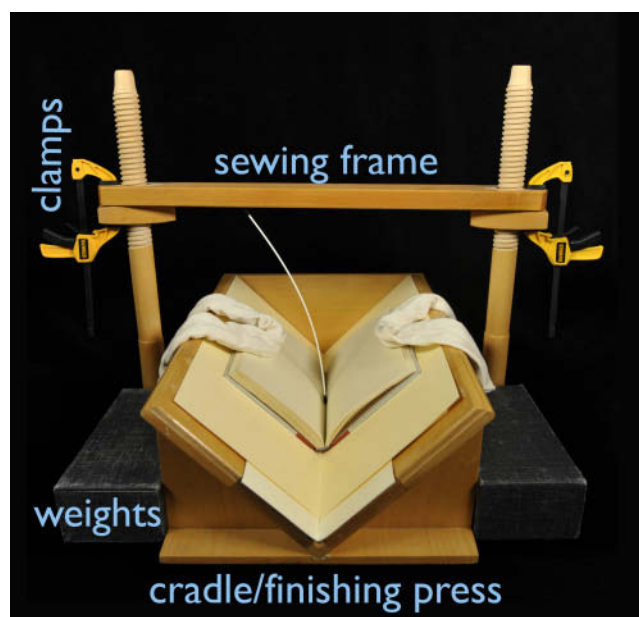


Fig. 1. Tools to use when employing a sewing frame for *shimbari*.

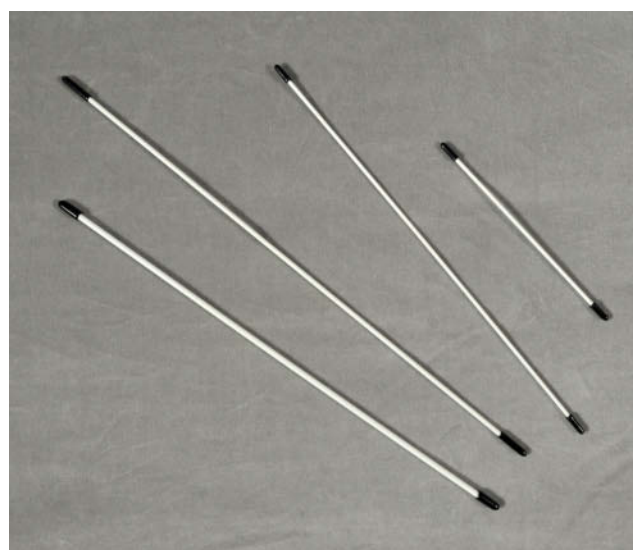


Fig. 2. A set of *shimbari* sticks.

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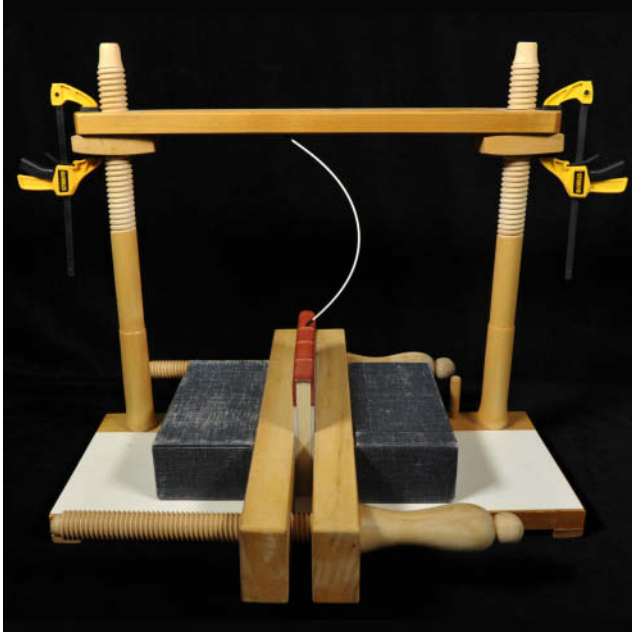


Fig. 3. *Shimbari* applying pressure to a narrow book spine.



Fig. 4. Three *shimbari* sticks applying pressure in multiple directions inside a book gutter.

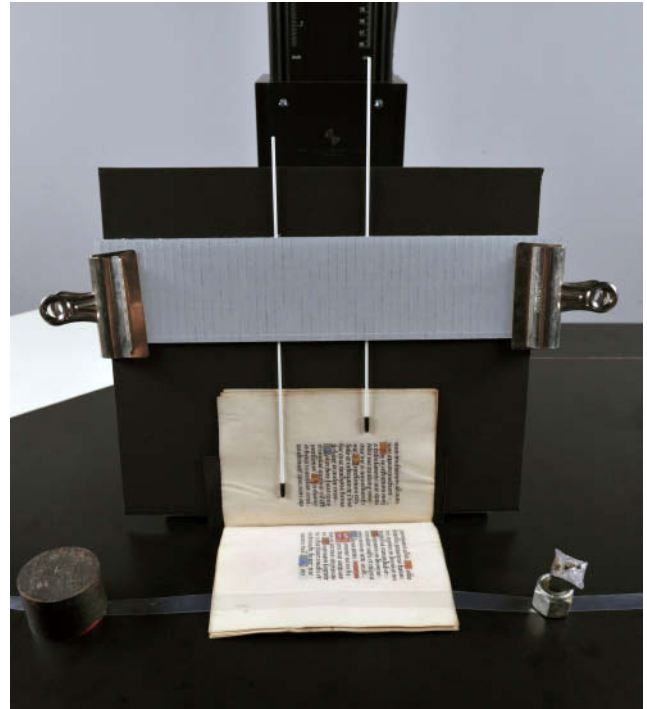


Fig. 5. *Shimbari* used to support a manuscript during its digitization process.

thicknesses, but the narrowest options (0.062 in. and 0.08 in.) work best.

FURTHER READING

Bainbridge, T., et al. 2015. Goberge, *shimbari*, go-bars: The use of flexible sticks for clamping. *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 54 (2): 65–73.

ROGER S. WILLIAMS
 Conservation Fellow
 Northwestern University
 Evanston, IL
 roger.shaw.williams.jr@gmail.com