



ICOM-CC Working Group Programmes 2011-2014

Name of Working Group: Leather and Related Materials

Coordinator: Céline Bonnot-Diconne

Projects

- **Newsletter**

The newsletter enables members to inform their colleagues about their research, special projects, and recent developments in conservation. Members are encouraged to inform the others about new publication, courses, collections, etc. We aim at publishing one newsletter per year and members are invited to assist in providing content for this publication.

- **Archival Issues and Publication**

Dissemination of interim meeting publications via the web is useful to our members and we would like to continue the work initiated by the previous Coordinator and make all interim meeting publications since 1986 web-accessible. This increased dissemination via the web is quite useful for our membership. We plan to continue this effort and to make all of our past interim meeting publications since 1986 web-accessible.

In the same manner and for the same reason, henceforth our goal is to publish on the web our interim meeting postprints within two months following the meeting.

- **Interim meeting**

The Leather and Related Materials Working Group (LWG) aims to organize an interim meeting during each triennial period. Following a request from the membership, the next one will be focusing only on leather objects. The LWG has been invited to host this conference in Offenbach, Germany, by the Deutsches Ledermuseum in August 2012.

The intention is to bring together archaeological, ethnographical and gilt leather conservators and specialists who are often dispersed between different working groups.

- **ICOM-CC Triennial Conference 2014**

The next Triennial Conference will take place in Melbourne, Australia. We would like to encourage colleagues to propose papers. There are many differences in leathemaking traditions and in objects typology from these regions as compared to northern countries.

We would encourage the submission of papers on traditional techniques of tanning leather, preparing skin, or making indigenous types of objects. Case studies of novel conservation treatments or approaches designed or tailored to the objects, collections or museum environments from these regions would also be most welcome.



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Specific themes of research /investigations

Colleagues are encouraged to continue to carry out scientific research that contributes to the conservation, the study and the exhibition of leather objects of all kinds. The WG will foster cooperation between institutions or individuals working with any of the listed research issues by promoting and facilitating liaison and communications, and by assisting in the exchange and dissemination of information.

We are particularly interested in conservation projects focusing on :

A. Conservation materials and methodologies

The development, improvement and assessment of good quality conservation backing materials is a very important topic as the problems of tears on leather objects is very common. Also loss compensation techniques should be explored. A single method does not exist; rather, the choice of method depends on several parameters.

We plan to focus on research about the positive and negative influences of different conservation treatments on the ageing process of historic leather and related materials. In practice a lot of damage has been caused by unsuitable methods, but little is found about experiences on long term results of these treatments or choice of specific materials. Another issue is the different regional traditions concerning the favored use of natural or synthetic products, affected also by different ethical opinions. An open discussion and an exchange of information on these aspects will help to further improve the preservation of our cultural heritages.

B. Leather Technologies

Further study on the history and original technologies of leather artifacts of historic and artistic value from different countries would be beneficial, based both on scientific investigation and analysis of archival documents, technical sources and literature.

Today the enormous production of leather artifacts has been partially lost together with the knowledge of ancient production technologies. A survey of what exists, as well as systematic archival research and the publication of findings would be useful and essential means of writing a history of the techniques from different countries and would provide a valuable contribution to a broader global history to this topic. In particular, for the gilt leather techniques, we will discuss with our membership the establishment of an electronic database to record and classify the different types of punches used. We will propose that a special committee could be dedicated to that task and, if there is interest, work towards that end.

C. Preventive conservation

There are several guidelines on environmental conditions for leather and related materials, but some of the recommended values are given more for modern museum buildings or seem to comply more with the needs of the visitors and the staff than with the real needs of the artifacts (for



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instance concerning the room temperature). In many cases it is impossible to achieve the recommended values in historic buildings such as castles and churches or in the case of mixed collections like those found in historic interiors. Therefore, the examination of the optimum environmental conditions for leather and related materials and the practical means of achieving such conditions in historic buildings, museums, etc. should be further explored.