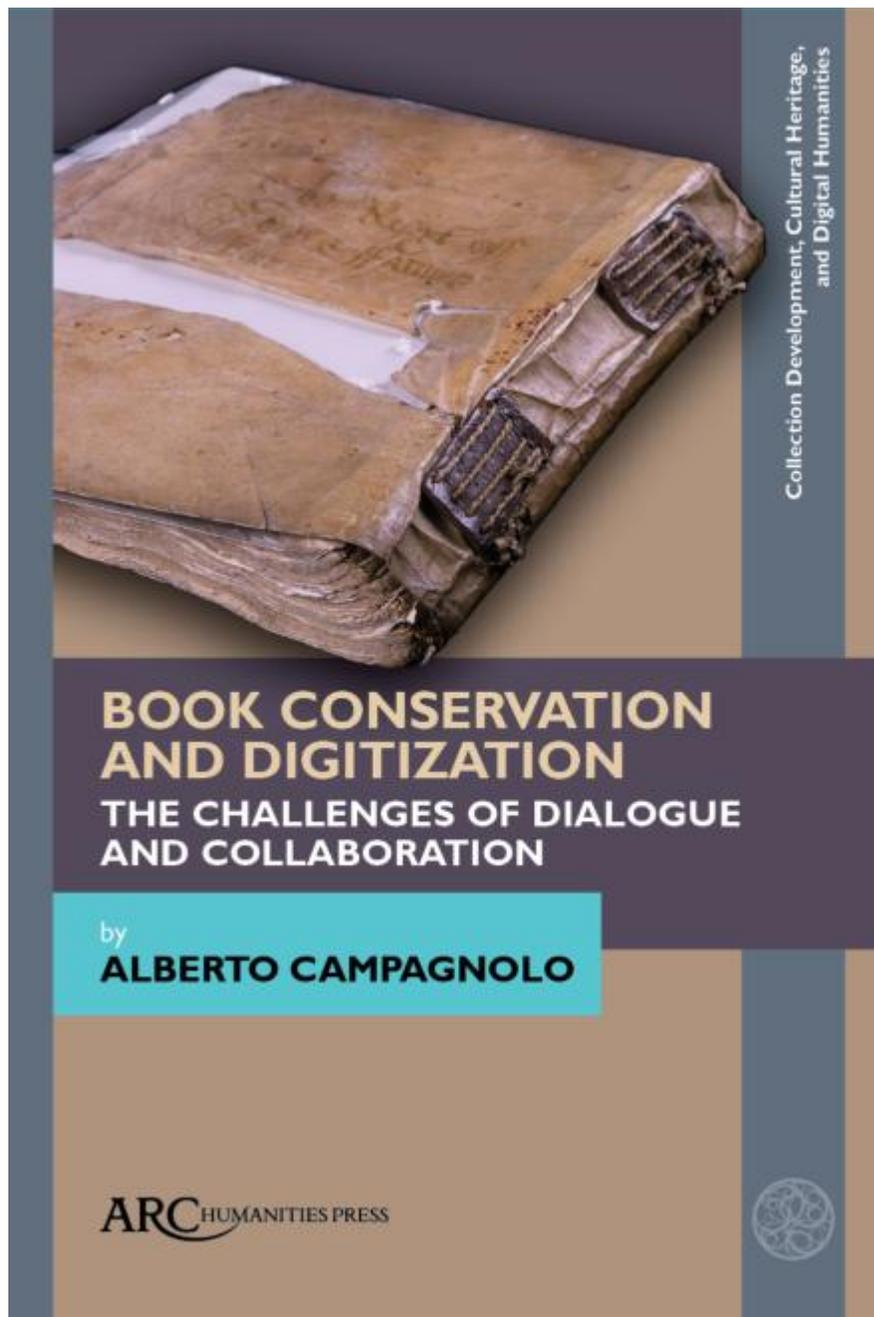


Book Review: Book Conservation and



Reviewed by Marc Holly

Book Conservation and Digitization – The Challenges of Dialogue and Collaboration.

By / Ed. Alberto Campagnolo (and Contributors)

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The intent of the publication is to provide perspectives on the digitization and technical challenges in the field of book conservation and digitization. The book is intended to represent a dialogue between those who are concerned with the physical preservation of the objects and those who are concerned with the technical aspects.

Structure of the Book

The book is developed in three parts. The first part, “Books as Objects and Their Digitization”, sets the context “by presenting the issues related to the understanding (or lack of thereof) of the artificial value of books as objects” (p. 3).

This chapter helps both conservators and art historians to develop a deeper understanding for the artificial value of books. Campagnolo describes different concepts of value and how they were discussed and improved by the scientific community over the years. The understanding of a book as an object or artifact, and the development of a framework for their study, is described.

The influence of the changing perception of the book as an object on its conservation is repeatedly touched upon. The limitations of digitization and the growing interest in the materiality of the book over the last few years are also taken into account by Campagnolo.

He discusses the effects of digitalization for book collections and raises the provoking question: will we see books in the future more as museums objects? This topic is discussed with necessary complexity and provides comprehensive statements and approaches to solutions.

The author continues to discuss how the standards of book conservation change over time. He addresses both the conservation-to-digitization workflow and digitization-to-conservation. Both topics are taken up in detail by several authors in the second part of the book.

The second part, “Conservation and Digitization in Practice”, presents a series of case studies to illustrate the role of the conservator in digitization projects. The nine authors report on the relationship between the team of object experts (conservators, curators, etc.) and digital data experts (photographers, database engineers, etc.) and how this relationship developed over the project; this insight is extremely valuable. Practical and structural changes and solutions are also discussed.

The projects presented in part two vary in size and aim—from technical solutions for book digitization to the mass digitization of whole collections, from large-scale objects to small almanacs and scrolls, from analog cameras with film to multispectral imaging cameras with digital files. Campagnolo’s well-made selection of projects covers almost every kind of situation

that could be faced within libraries, museums or archives.

The last part, “Conservators and Digitization Experts in Dialogue”, contains two contributions from book conservation and digital humanities: the authors describe the role that they have played in several digitization projects and how they perceive the relationship between the two fields. Abigail Quandt (head of book and paper conservation, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, USA) and Melissa Terras (professor of digital cultural heritage at the University of Edinburgh’s College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences) provide a lively discussion about the goals and expectations within digitization projects based on the perspective of their professional disciplines.

Conclusion

The book addresses a large target group. In addition to conservators and those responsible for digitization, it also offers great added value for art historians, whether they are involved in digitization projects or not. While the first part is an academic discussion of the subject, it becomes more practical in the second and third parts.

It uniquely bundles internationally well-known digitization projects and the authors’ related experiences, thus making them directly comparable and comprehensible. The numerous case studies provide a good insight into the diversity of experiences and procedures related to digitization. The transparent and detailed description of the projects offers the reader a great gain in knowledge. Anyone planning a digitization process, or those designing their own processes around the conservation of large collections, will find important insights and experiences in the book, which will help them to adapt and develop concepts for their own collection, avoiding certain problems from the very beginning.

Some of the projects described date back to the 20th century. However, this is not detrimental to the book’s topicality. On the contrary, the detailed description of experiences in the field of digitization over such a long period of time, help the reader to develop a feeling for his or her own approach to the topic. This approach to the subject makes the book particularly interesting, and it also introduces the subject to readers who have been less involved with book conservation and digitization. The rapidly growing range of technical solutions for digitization can thus be well categorized for the individual processes, and “users become aware of the untransferable qualities of a book” (p. 48).

Author Byline

Marc Holly is a PhD student at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts and is currently working at the Dyestuff Collection of the Hochschule Niederrhein in Krefeld. After his training as a bookbinder, he studied book and paper conservation at the Cologne Institute of Conservation Science (CICS), TH Köln, Germany.

(See the review in the April-May 2021 "News in Conservation" Issue 83, p. 40-41)