Stabilization and Housing of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts

Stabilization and Housing of Palm-Leaf Manuscripts

The traditional housing of palm leaf manuscripts ranges from simple storage in chests or wooden shelves, to wrapping with heavy cloth. There are a number of reasons why these methods are unsatisfactory: in areas where the manuscripts are easily accessible to insects and rodents, the cloth can actually provide a home for these pests; the cloth is hygroscopic (i.e. easily absorbs moisture from the atmosphere), and attracts dust and soil; the cloth does not really protect the manuscripts from crushing or other kinds of structural damage. In most repositories without expensive climate control systems, it is extremely difficult to keep out insects, and often frequent fungation does not prove effective in large areas. Complete enclosures that provide sturdy protection, and have the capability of sustaining a stable micro-environment, are preferred. The dual enclosures described below provide secure casing to each individual manuscript, and the box creates an appropriate micro-environment that can be more easily controlled and monitored than ambient surroundings.

Securing the leaves whether or not the manuscripts are treated prior to casing and boxing, the ties and cover boards should be examined, and the leaves checked for dust and other surface soil. The original ties should be loosened and examined. Whenever possible, the original ties should be retained, but if they are broken and deteriorated, they should be replaced with a soft-fibered cord of roughly the same thickness as the original. If the original wooden cover boards are missing, basic protective binders' boards may be used if they are lined on the inside with an alkaline paper. If new boards are cut, they should be made slightly larger than the manuscript to avoid damaging the manuscript edges with the ties (see figure 1).

The Manuscript Case Each manuscript should be cased to protect the edges and to provide stability to the structure. The case is made from a stout alkaline file-folder stock that is the same length as the manuscript plus .5 centimeter, and in width is three times the width of the manuscript, and twice its thickness. The board should be lightly scored with a bone folder, and folded (see figure 2). A flap is cut for each end of the manuscript, measuring the width of the case minus 1 millimeter, x 5 centimeters + the thickness of the case (see figure 3). The flaps are glued into place, as indicated, and the manuscript placed inside.

The Manuscript Box A separate Manual Guide (Number 6A) fully describes the box-making formula and procedures, which should be followed for this step. Generally, for the construction of boxes and for binding books in tropical areas where insects are likely to be a problem, starch-filled bookcloth should not be used, nor should starch paste or animal (protein) glue. For the box described here, an acrylic-, or Pyroxylin-coated buckram should be used, along with a polyvinyl-acetate (PVA) adhesive. A set of six or four manuscripts in their cases should be measured to fit into one box, with accommodation left for a mild insect repellant, such as mothballs or an impregnated strip. To accommodate the repellant, the box should be made slightly longer to allow a small compartment (see figure 4). The repellent itself should be placed in a paper envelope or cloth wrapper with a date slip indicating when it was put in place.

Figure 1.

Manuscript with protective board and ties.





Library board or stiff file folder stock cut and folded.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

The manuscript cases secured in a folding box (usually two or four per box). Note insect repellent compartment.

