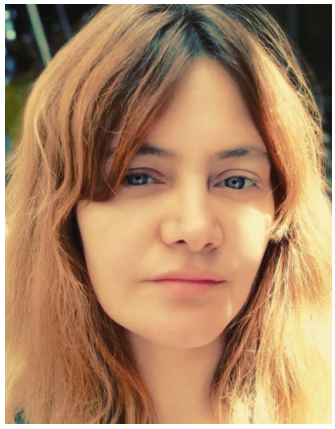
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ORGANISATION, RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION OF AN EX-LIBRIS COLLECTION: CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS



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Organisation, research and conservation of an ex-libris collection: contemporary approaches and historical analysis

Abstract. The aim of the article is to analyse trends in the field of digital management of graphic archives in the context of the rapidly changing information environment, to consider issues of data security and accessibility. To raise the issue of popularising the study of the bookplate as an independent genre in the fine arts and as a historical document that attests to the era, events and people. The history of ex-libris goes back to ancient times, with the appearance of the text and its first owner. This history is multifaceted, diverse and touches on various aspects of the worldwide development of human culture. The development of bookplate collecting and the study of bookplates dates back to the Middle Ages, from which time we can trace the history of the transformation of the bookplate from a bookmark with a protective function to an independent art object and collector's item.

This paper examines several modern methods of organising and preserving an ex-libris collection, providing an overview of the key technologies involved in these processes, drawing on contemporary and historical research. The research results are primarily intended for use in the collections of the Pushkin Museum in Chișinău and are based on the largest ex-libris collection in the country, which includes over 15,000 items. The collection needs to be described, systematised and assigned in order to prepare it for further research and exhibitions.

Keywords: ex-libris, collection, museum, conservation, preservation, storage, research, book, history.

Organizarea, cercetarea și conservarea unei colecții ex-libris: abordări contemporane și analiză istorică

Rezumat. Scopul articolului este de a analiza tendințele în domeniul managementului digital al arhivelor grafice în contextul tehnologiilor informaționale care sunt în schimbare rapidă, pentru a lua în considerare problemele de securitate și accesibilitate a datelor. Studiul vine să ridice problema popularizării exlibrisului ca gen independent în artele plastice și ca document istoric care atestă epoci, evenimente și oameni. Apariția ex-librisului începe în antichitate odată cu apariția scrisului. Această istorie atinge diverse aspecte ale dezvoltării culturii mondiale. Evoluția colecției și a cercetării ex-librisului este legată de Evul Mediu, perioadă în care parcurge transformarea de la un semn de carte cu funcție de protecție într-un obiect de artă independent și obiect de colecție.

Articolul scoate în evidență câteva metode moderne de organizare și conservare a unei colecții de ex-libris, oferind o privire de ansamblu asupra tehnologiilor cheie implicate în aceste procese, bazându-se pe cercetările contemporane și istorice. Rezultatele cercetării sunt destinate în primul rând colecției Muzeului Pușkin din Chișinău care deține cea mai mare colecție ex-libris din țară, care include peste 15.000 de unități. Colecția necesită o descriere, sistematizare și atribuire pentru următoarele cercetări și expoziții ulterioare.

Cuvinte-cheie: ex-libris, colecție, muzeu, conservare, păstrare, depozitare, cercetare, carte, istorie.

Over the centuries, only noble and affluent individuals had the opportunity to own handwritten and printed books. The ownership rights to these treasures required formalization, leading to the emergence of ex-libris in medieval Germany. This emblem of ownership, legally recognized by the court, became an integral part of the libraries of distinguished families.

Ex-libris, translated from Latin as "from the books," was a bookplate or stamp, often found on the front endpaper or outside the cover. Its origin is linked to Johannes Gutenberg's invention of printing in 1445, which propelled its widespread use.

Initially serving a protective function, ex-libris was a mandatory attribute of aristocratic libraries. Over time, it evolved from a simple mark to an elaborate decorative item and a collectible object. This transformation took centuries, emphasizing the aesthetic aspect of the art of ex-libris. Exploring the evolution of bookplates allows us to delve into historical context and sense how these marks gained significance, becoming symbols of not just luxury but also erudition, reflecting the grandeur of progress and cultural heritage.

"The bookplate is a document of humanities; behind it always stood a specific person. The ex libris has always been a document of its era, a kind of barometer of the political 'weather' of society, as evidenced by the entire history of the bookplate. The book has always been the driving force behind the ex libris, and the idea expressed in the bookplate has always, in all times, inspired artists – ex librisists." [1]

Ex-libris has long ceased to serve only a utilitarian function – protecting its owner from theft – and has become a full-fledged and independent artistic object with its own style, theme, and production technique. While in the past the value of an ex-libris was measured by the book it was in, today its artistic qualities are of paramount importance.

Bookplates are categorized into four types based on their content: heraldic, monogram, pictorial, and typographic. They also differ in execution techniques, such as wood engraving,



Bookplate "Guildenbrand Brandenburg from Bieberach" 1470-1480. Collection of the A.S. Pushkin House-Museum in Chișinău

etching, burin engraving on copper or steel, lithography, linocut, and zincography.

Nowadays, in addition to traditional methods, laser engraving and various rubber or plastic stamps are often used to create personal bookplates. Thus, today in the art world, ex-libris is an incredibly fascinating form of engraving, a graphic miniature that encompasses both illustrative and documentary materials.

Massive collecting of bookplates began in the late 19th century among scholars, bibliophiles, bibliographers, and antiquarians. Ex-libris aided in tracing the origins of old libraries and studying artistic graphics of individual artists. Currently, there are over 50 national societies of bookplate collectors, united in the international federation FISAE.

Today, researchers and collectors aim to gather diverse ex-libris for the analysis and documentation of their styles and themes. This is not only a means of preserving unique works of art but also maintaining a connection with the historical contexts they reflect.

Storage and exhibition are two fundamental functions of the owner of unique collections. But what is collecting, and what is its role and function? Collecting, in its essence, extends beyond the simple act of gathering; it represents a form of responsibility towards history and cultural heritage. Collectors, whether museums or

private individuals, as custodians of cultural treasures, bear the burden of preserving and transmitting valuable artifacts to future generations.

The responsibility of a collector includes proper storage, restoration, and documentation to maintain not only the physical integrity of the objects but also to preserve their context and historical significance.

Museums, besides ensuring sustainable storage of exhibits, are also obliged to provide public access to them for the purpose of education and societal upbringing. It is important for museums to take measures to preserve and disclose the significance of their collections through exhibitions, educational programs, and research.

Thus, collecting is not only a process of gathering but also an important element of preserving cultural heritage. Primarily, collecting means responsibility.

Storage of museum exhibits, in turn, can be divided into two main parts: 1. Conservation and storage of the exhibit as a physical object; 2. Documentation accompanying the exhibit, including attribution and description of its current condition.

The rules for storing bookplates fully comply with the rules for storing paper and various types of graphics. Rules for storing museum graphics may vary depending on the specific museum or collection. However, despite some differences and specificities, there are globally accepted standards for any museum. [2]

Standards for the conservation and storage of cultural heritage, including artistic works, are usually developed by international organizations such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC), as well as national organizations and institutes in the field of art and science.

Standards and rules developed by ICOM serve as the basis for high standards of conservation and storage, ensuring the longevity of valuable artworks and cultural heritage. These standards are actively updated based on scientific research and technological advancements, guaranteeing their relevance in modern museums.

The main methods of storing museum collections include:

Temperature and Humidity Control: the necessity to maintain stable conditions to prevent the deterioration of materials (The optimal parameters for museum microclimates, in which organic materials are preserved for a long time without damage, are as follows: temperature +17-19°C, relative humidity 45-55%. Temperatures above +24°C and relative humidity below 40% lead to the dehydration of the object and its mechanical damage, while relative humidity above 65% leads to the risk of biological contamination. Additionally, when transferring works from storage with a low temperature to an exhibition hall with a higher temperature, acclimatization of the objects is necessary, i.e., the adaptation of the object to new storage conditions);

Light Restriction: Exhibits must be protected from direct light to prevent fading (Different materials have varying degrees of lightfastness, with paper being less resistant to light exposure. The permissible illumination level for paper objects, which include graphic works, is 30-50 lux. Considering risk factors, the exhibition period for engravings and other similar exhibits should not exceed three months);

Oxygen Isolation: Exhibits must be stored in an atmosphere with controlled oxygen content. Only acid-free materials should be used (archival-quality paper that does not release chemicals that can damage objects; resistant to chemical and mechanical degradation; neutral, with acids removed or neutralized, having a pH of 7 or higher, with a small alkaline reserve; free from lignin, which causes paper to yellow and become brittle; or made from rag fibers (100% linen and cotton); long-fibered, giving it greater mechanical strength) for both packaging and maintaining cleanliness.

Scientific conservation methods: Material analysis: Spectroscopy, X-ray fluorescence, and microscopy help determine the composition of materials; Controlled storage conditions: Stable temperatures and humidity prevent degradation; Restoration and conservation: Application



Bookplate of A. Kantemir, first half of the 18th century. Collection of the A.S. Pushkin House-Museum in Chișinău



Bookplate of Y.V. Bruce, early 18th century. Collection of the A.S. Pushkin House-Museum in Chișinău

of methods to restore and maintain the original condition of works; Light control: Use of filters and lighting to prevent fading.

Ethical considerations: Monitoring pest protection: Use of technologies to monitor and protect against insects and rodents.

Proper exhibition: Lighting control, stable framing, correct placement of exhibits, as well as adherence to temperature and humidity conditions.

However, alongside collection and research, proper preservation of ex-libris becomes crucial. Collections face various risks, including the effects of time, humidity, light, and human factors. Therefore, specific preservation measures, including proper storage and treatment, are necessary.

The main sources of danger to the preservation of collections are:

1. Technical and technological properties and peculiarities of the object itself.
2. Conditions and mode of storage.
3. Handling and use.
4. Natural disasters and accidents.

All these points constitute the content of preventive conservation, which should be the main focus of museums. Preventive conservation is a system of measures ensuring comprehensive protection of documents, aimed at slowing down the ageing processes by creating and maintaining normative storage conditions and using phase conservation. The main task of preventive conservation is to create and permanently maintain a stable microclimate and appropriate illumination of museum objects in storage rooms and at expositions.

Also, one of the methods of preventive conservation is phase conservation. Such a method consists of placing the documents in microclimatic containers made of acid-free cardboard (a construction material designed to house cultural monuments on a cellulose and collagen base for phase preservation purposes) or inert material. Such preservation allows to ensure reliability and consistency of paper condition during storage and exposure. Phase preservation is a promising form of storage that allows museums to preserve exhibits for a long period of time, protect them from harmful environmental effects and mechanical damage, reduce the need for restoration and rationally spend the funds used for preservation.

One of the modern methods of preserving museum exhibits, documents, manuscripts, and images is specialized graphic archives. [3]

Digital graphic archives are data repositories containing digital images, illustrations, photographs, and other visual materials. They are used for storing, managing, and exchanging digital graphic files. These archives can be organized by themes, time, place, and other parameters. Digital graphic archives in the field of art

are online collections containing digital copies of artworks, photographs of artistic objects, archival materials, and other visual resources. They facilitate access to art, allowing researchers, students, and the public to study and evaluate artworks from different epochs and styles.

Such archives may include collections from museums, galleries, libraries, and private collections. Electronic platforms enable virtual tours and provide convenient search and organization of materials. This contributes to education, research, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Digital graphic archives are an integral part of the future of museums, offering a range of advantages but also posing certain challenges.

Advantages and benefits:

Accessibility and coverage: Digital archives provide maximum accessibility to the public worldwide, significantly expanding the museum's audience and promoting education;

Art preservation: Creating digital copies of artworks ensures the preservation of originals, which is crucial for preventing wear and tear and preserving national and cultural heritage;

Research opportunities: Researchers benefit from deeper analysis and comparison of artworks thanks to the convenience of searching and organizing digital data;

Virtual tours: Digital archives enable the creation of virtual museum tours, making exhibitions available to remote visitors.

Disadvantages and drawbacks:

Loss of physical contact and experience: Online museum visits cannot fully replace live experiences, and visitors may miss aspects of visual, auditory, and tactile perception;

Data security: Digital archives are vulnerable to hacking threats, which can lead to loss or damage of valuable data;

Technical issues: Technical malfunctions or outdated technologies may hinder long-term access to digital materials;

Financial investments: Creating and maintaining high-quality digital archives requires significant financial investments, which may be a burden for some museums.

Thus, digital graphic archives represent a powerful tool for the evolution of the museum industry; however, their implementation requires careful consideration of technical and sociocultural aspects. Finding a balance between preserving museum traditions and embracing new technologies is a key aspect of ensuring the successful future of the museum industry.

In the Statutes of the International Council of Museums, the term "museum" is defined as "a permanent, non-profit institution serving society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment."

Today,there are numerous museums worldwide dedicated to books, printing, and bookplates. However, few are aware that the first museum of bookplates in the territory of the former USSR was established in Chișinău (Moldova) in 1988, thanks to the efforts of the renowned Moldovan artist Grigory Bosenko, who served as its first and only director. Gr. Bosenko, an architect, graphic artist, collector, researcher, and enthusiast, organized various art competitions dedicated to book graphics. His personal collection of bookplates and a thematic selection of books formed the basis of the new museum. Unfortunately, for unknown reasons, this museum of bookplates existed for only one year, during which time it significantly expanded its collection of bookplates and held a large-scale exhibition-competition of book graphics, in which artists from many countries participated.

Today, this collection belongs to the A.S. Pushkin House-Museum in Chișinău, comprising over 15,000 exhibits, and is the largest collection of bookplates in Moldova. The collection spans from the 15th to the 20th century, containing examples of bookplate graphics created by many renowned artists and library owners.

"The presented bookplates introduce viewers to the work of artists from different generations, each of whom creates in their own way, but what unites them all is their high craftsmanship, reflecting an individual vision of the world around them..." [4]

The collection of bookplates in Moldova is undoubtedly a true asset and cultural heritage of the country.

Today, in the modern world, the study of bookplates carries not only the importance of being able to decipher heraldic symbols but also a wide range of various artistic directions. The main goal of popularizing bookplates is to reveal their multifaceted nature – from individual symbols and images to entire book collections and libraries.

Bookplates are a unique language that humanity has used for centuries. The ability to read these messages encrypted in various symbols requires a special art. Libraries, book collections – they all exchange this encoded language, which, despite the diversity of countries and cultures, remains international.

One of the main aspects of studying bookplates is their importance in the study of books and libraries. This small book sign can turn every book into a unique work of art, embodying its content and history. Modern technologies can become a powerful tool for preserving and disseminating this heritage.

The main objectives in spreading and popularizing bookplates are as follows:

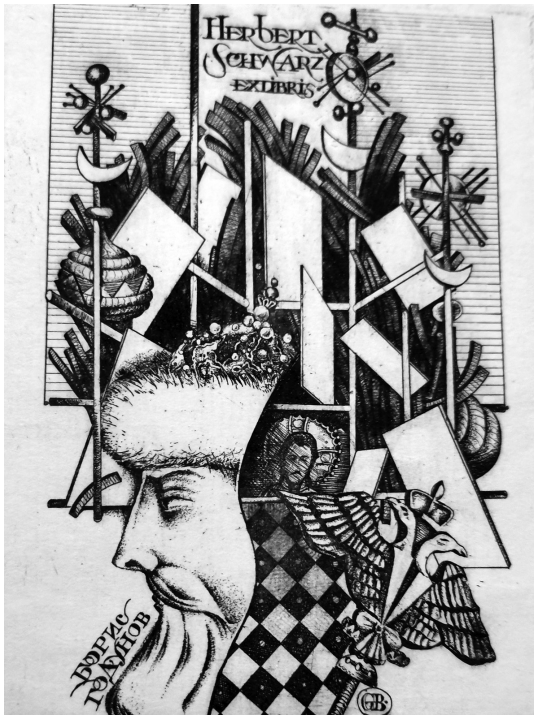
a) Popularizing bookplates contributes to the preservation and transmission of cultural traditions, the art of heraldic engraving, and the language of symbols, allowing for a deeper understanding of historical periods associated with the use of coats of arms and symbols in literature, art, and society.

b) It helps stimulate the creativity of artists, inspiring them to create unique symbolic images.

c) Since bookplates are an important part of book culture, studying them contributes to the preservation and value of rare historical books.

d) It becomes an interesting point for tourists, prompting them to explore the history of symbols in various cultural places.

e) Studying the language of symbols in bookplates can contribute to academic research in the field of symbolism, expanding understanding of human communication through the centuries.



Bookplate by G. Bosenko, 20th century. Collection of the A.S. Pushkin House-Museum in Chișinău

To achieve the goals of popularizing bookplates, the A.S. Pushkin House-Museum plans to use various methods, including educational programs, virtual exhibitions and events, thematic webinars and competitions, interactive meetings, and collective art projects dedicated to bookplates. This will help draw attention to the richness of this art and introduce a wide audience to its unique significance for culture and the history of humanity. Storing museum exhibits is a complex and responsible process, and preserving this heritage for the future is the main task of the museum.

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