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Applied Research and Critical Approach: The Proper Way to Deal with “Real” Library Heritage

Abstract

Characterization of manuscripts and printed books presents several challenges related to the wide amount of the materials involved and to the complexity of their possible interactions. In this paper we want to stress how collecting data – and correctly interpreting them – requires thorough research work: at the state of the art, diagnostics on cultural heritage cannot be limited to routine tests. Knowledge of material superimposition, interaction and degradation patterns is necessary to choose, from time to time, the techniques to be used, the way to compare data and, when appropriate, to prepare *ad hoc* standards. Along decades of conservation science, in fact, a number of specific problems related to document deterioration (cellulose oxidation and hydrolysis, iron gall inks degradation...) have been deeply investigated and, in some cases, even theoretically modelled. Nevertheless, “real” objects are hardly constituted of ideal materials, showing a single, well-defined degradation pattern. Furthermore, in the case of real artwork analysis, non-destructivity is mandatory.

Some effective, non-destructive, methods applicable in manuscript analysis are here demonstrated through laboratory experiments.

Applications to conservation practice are presented by means of some cases studies: the diagnostic campaigns on the manuscripts *In Clementinas* and *Additiones super Clementinas* – Cagliari (Italy), Biblioteca Universitaria, MS 2; *Dictionarium sive alphabeticus* XIV-221, XIV-222, XIV-223 – Biblioteca del Monumento Nazionale di Badia di Cava dei Tirreni (Italy), and the *Attestato Associazione Ottonieri & C.* – Archivio del “Museo Nazionale del Compendio Garibaldino”, Caprera (Italy).