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Nineteenth Century Book – Underestimated Beauty

Abstract

The poor state of preservation of 19th century books is not only the matter of paper, but also of other materials used in their construction.

Although the particular books printed in quite high print run are apparently identical, each item bears the birthmark of the bookbinding workshop. The books differ in materials used for their binding as well as the applied structural and artistic solutions.

The authors of this paper have investigated 1529 volumes from the years 1801–1914 from the collections of two Toruń libraries. The analysis of the results of that research allowed the detection of strong similarities in both book collections. They regard both the technique of the making, materials used and decoration. The 19th century book, like the books of previous centuries, bears the unquestionable testimony to its times and its outer form informs on the technical possibilities, the artistic formation of both the makers and the readers and dominant tastes, styles and fashions and as such deserves protection and preservation for the next generations.

Unfortunately, due to the complexity of their structure, the character and quality of the materials and techniques applied in the making of both the block and the cover, the 19th century book is a challenge and still unsolved problem for conservation activities. An additional obstacle lies in their quantity and the necessity to approach the problem on a mass scale, the scale of entire library collections and not single, unique items.