

THE RESTORATION OF A TWENTIETH-CENTURY *BOOK OF PRAYERS*

Abstract: The object of this paper (Fig. 1a,b) is a book printed in the twentieth century, entitled *Book of Prayers*. The book, authored by Kaw Hajaszer, was printed in 1925, in the N. Herszenhorn print shop from Lublin. The text is printed in Hebrew characters, in black print ink. The textblock consists of 159 pages. The text mirror is 18 x 11.5 cm. The text appears in one column, the number of rows varying between 45 and 47. When the book was brought into the lab for restoration, it was established that climatic factors (those that trigger biological and chemical attacks) had been the main cause of the damage the book had suffered. On examination, the binding elements were found to be in a relatively good state of preservation, except for the sewing thread in the textblock. Based on the analysis of all these elements, the diagnosis was as follows: the volume had been damaged under the impact of physical-mechanical, physical-chemical and biological agents, and we therefore proposed its restoration without taking the book apart.

Keywords: book, restoration, consolidation, book disbinding, remedial book repair.

A book represents a testimony of the history of mankind; it is a complex document of human creative genius, which puts us in contact with our fellow human beings across time and space. It plays an important role, providing contemporary and future generations with access to our cultural, natural, artistic and scientific heritage, helping them to know better and to appreciate its richness.

Made of paper or parchment, organic materials that age with time, books and old documents are affected both by the vicissitudes of their own tumultuous history and by poor storage conditions, as well as, sometimes, by inadequate research. The constant concern of those working with books is for the scientific valorisation of information contained therein and for ensuring their preservation and permanence.

The conservation and the restoration of heritage objects are closely related activities. Conservation is aimed at maintaining an object in a state that is as close as possible to its original condition or the one created through restoration, while restoration aims to return the object to a state that is as close as possible to the original one, by repairing any possible damage.

The restoration of old books and manuscripts means not only an opportunity for specialists to restore an object to its original state of health, but also their ability to ascertain, from among the various work methods, the one that would best restore that item's significance of yesteryear. This should happen without affecting the integrity of the piece, so as to keep unadulterated the message of its passage through time and history. This restoration principle is known as *Primum non nocere*.

Although conservationists must start from a predetermined diagnosis, knowing the causes, the effects and the specific book degrading agents, they should not assume that the final goal of their activity is the removal of damages that have become

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perceptible, but the preventive recognition of latent damage, which calls for eliminating the causes and agents of damage that can be activated by a particular circumstance or another.² Thus, therapeutic care interacts with preventive care. Hence, the implicit principle of minimum intervention, which is, in fact, the essence of modern restoration. The vast majority of old books are in an advanced state of decay. This is caused by improper storage conditions, handling procedures and microclimatic factors which, in turn, favour the onset of biological and chemical attacks.³

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Morphological description of the textblock:

The textblock paper is mechanically made.

The surface layers consist of black printing ink. Ink solubility at dripping, dabbing and friction is negative.

Textblock size: 21.8 cm long and 14.4 cm wide.

The spine is straight; there is no head band; there are no single or double flyleaves.

DAMAGES: Due to the impact of physical-mechanical, physical-chemical and biological agents, the book has suffered the following damages:

Physical-mechanical damages: the loss of the single and double flyleaves; the complete loss of the covers; folded, twisted or torn pages due to improper handling; the loss of support material for printed information from the title page and the last two pages; soiling to textblock as a result of improper handling; the damaged sewing thread.

Physical-chemical degradation: dampstains created by the migration of water along with the impurities present in the space where the book was stored; stain patches

² Regulations governing the conservation of goods that belong to the cultural patrimony, Government Resolution 1546-18.12.2003, in *Monitorul oficial* [Official Gazette] 58-23.01.2004.

³ Simonetta Villanti, "Factori microclimatici și conservarea fondurilor de bibliotecă," in *Probleme de patologie a cărții. Culegere de material documentar*, vol. 31, Bucharest, 1995, pp. 5-8.

present in various parts of the textblock, especially on the fore-edge; wax deposits and stains; paper-aging in some areas and its weakened resistance due to the impact of light and acidity; a slightly higher acidity of the textblock paper in areas of microbiological attack.

Biodegradation: stains caused by xylophagous insects (*Anobidae*), circular and elongated holes produced in the area of the covers; stains caused by fungi, spore and dirt deposits.

Given the impossibility of conducting specific laboratory analyses and collecting samples for isolating pure cultures, so as to determine a possible active biological attack, we opted to preventively disinfect the book.

The treatments performed in view of preparing the book for restoration

The preventive disinfection of the book was carried out with thymol 4% dissolved in absolute ethanol in an oven, at a temperature of 40°C, for 72 hours.

The analysis of all the elements led to the following diagnosis: the book has been damaged under the impact of physical-mechanical, physical-chemical and biological agents.

After establishing the final diagnosis,⁴ we proposed that the book should be restored without taking it apart. The simplest procedures, known as *rafistolage*,⁵ refer to book mending that consists of surface dirt and dust removal, page smoothing, repair of the tear areas, and other remedial work.

Proposed treatment:

- Cleaning the dust off the book with a soft hair brush, so as to remove the deposits of spores, dust and dirt.
- Unfolding the pages by mechanical means, using a soft brush and a bone folder;
- Removing wax deposits with a scalpel by performing “X”-shaped incisions;
- Solubilising wax stains with xylene;
- Dry mechanical cleaning, using Arabic gum powder and an eraser;
- Mending tears and cracks with Japanese tissue.

I will present some disadvantages of the classical treatment and the considerations that led me to opt for a treatment that does not involve the disbinding of the book. The moment a conservator is preparing a book for a restoration intervention by removing the old binding is unique.

A re-sewing of the book will entail resizing the spine, hence changing the size of the entire book; it will also mean piercing the signatures with sewing thread again in the notch area. It is assumed that throughout the entire future life of the book this moment should not be repeated if the conservation of and future research on this book are to be complied with. The treatment we applied was the same as that proposed in the restoration of this book, it was more economical and required less time, but what is more important is that we kept all the original elements of the binding, respecting the fundamental ethical principle of restoration.

⁴ Alexandru Știrban, “Restaurarea pe volum nedesfăcut a unei Evanghelii tipărită la Deal,” 1644 in *Apulum XXXV*, Alba Iulia, 1998, pp. 623-624.

⁵ Florea Oprea, *Manual de restaurare a cărții vechi și a documentelor grafice*, Bucharest, Ed. MNLR, 2009, pp. 308-321.

As the book has been successfully restored (Figure 2a,b), in accordance with the regulations governing restoration of goods that belong to the national cultural patrimony, I will present several recommendations concerning its storage and preservation conditions:⁶

- the book should be placed in a stable and salubrious location in terms of the microclimate (a temperature of T-1-18°C and a relative humidity between 50-65%, without high or sudden variations)
- the windows should be fitted with protective curtains ensuring protection not only against dust particles but also against natural light. Complete darkness is also not recommended because it favours the growth of paper fungi; therefore natural light should be reduced as far as possible and replaced with 40- to 60-Watt light bulbs
- the book should be placed in an enclosure (cabinet), and if open exposure is chosen, it should be protected against deposits of impurities, dust, in particular
- to avoid changes in humidity, the temperature needs to be maintained relatively constant. If relative humidity increases, ventilation should be made during dry, sunny weather. When the air in the rooms is drier, water evaporation trays should be used
- the regular ventilation of the rooms and showcases
- the horizontal placement of the book
- its exhibition for a maximum of 3 months a year
- checking it periodically (twice a year) for treatment follow-up in time.

Annexes:

Figure 1a,b before restoration

Figure 2a,b after restoration

⁶ Adriana Bulbuc, "Conservarea unor manuscrise armenesti din secolele XVIII-XIX", in *Acta Musei Napocensis*, 41-44-II, Cluj-Napoca, 2004-2007, pp. 381-384.



Fig.1.a

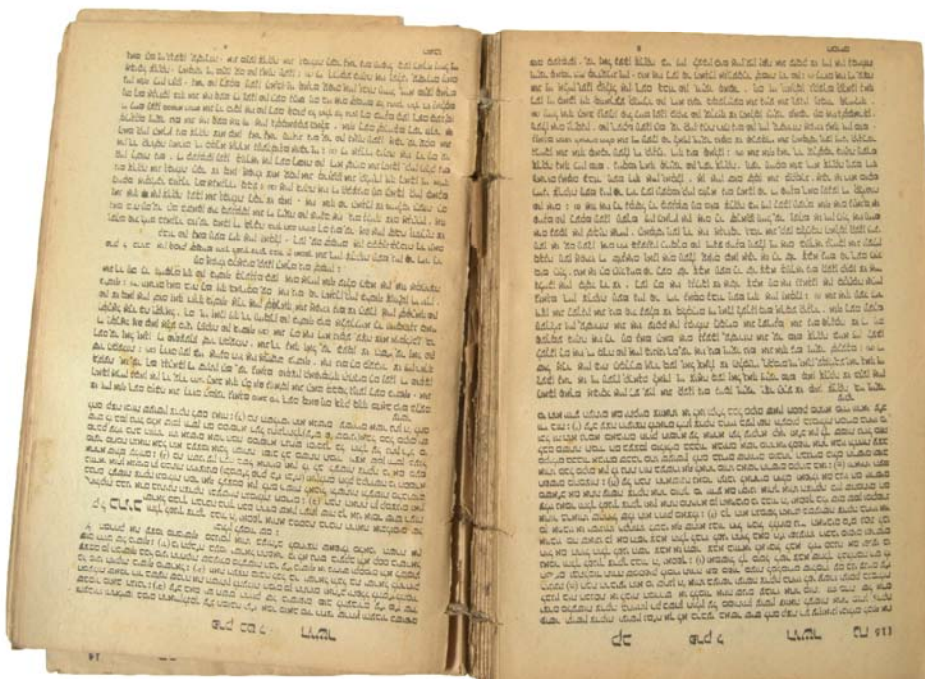


Fig.1.b

**Fig.2.a****Fig.2.b**