

COLLECTION SECURITY

Summer School

Antiquarian Market and book trade;
Cooperation between Institutions, Auction
Houses and Antiquarian world

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Antiquarian Market and book trade

- NEED TO HAVE INDEXES AND COMPLETE CATALOGUES. A census has been made of many XV century editions (Incunabula) and a good part of the XVI century heritage, while for the following centuries there is no census and significant gaps in our knowledge. If we do not know what we have, how can we devise a way to protect it? An accurate and analytic census, to publish on the ISBN, is the first step from which to start. But the counts should also indicate some specific characteristics of the specimens because the general indication of possession of a given edition does not serve to identify a copy.
- USE MODERN ANTI-THEFT SYSTEMS, and mark copies with stamps and collocations.
- SYSTEMATIC INVENTORIES, at least twice a year, controlling directly every single copy. Recent episodes of thefts have shown that the replacement of the specimens is one of the systems in vogue among the forgers and book thieves.

Antiquarian Market and book trade

- RESERVED ACCESS TO THE MOST IMPORTANT COLLECTIONS, more and more selective, to limit the consultation of the books only to those with the adequate titles.
- ACCURATE CONTROL on the activities and the assignments of the employees; the access to the most important collection should be limited to the most qualified personnel with full responsibility on the library's sector they are assigned to. Installation of cameras in the reserved areas to monitor the movement and operations of the works.
- IDENTIFY CONSISTENT GROUP OF PRESTIGIOUS BOOKS, to move to secure places in the libraries, accessible only by approval of the responsible of the project/area.

Antiquarian Market and book trade

- TRAIN QUALIFIED PERSONNEL able to identify systematically the presence of editions that could come from public libraries. The network has now become the large container of everything that is sold in the book sector, from books sold in antique bookstores to lots sold in traditional and online auctions, from fairs to exhibitions-markets etc. Being able to identify works of dubious provenance on the market, should be one of the main tasks of a modern librarians. Specific skills CAN NOT BE DELEGATED TO THE CARABINIERI'S NUCLEO TUTELA.

Some rules

- The first crystal rule and a substantial contribution from the antique sector is: **To identify an exemplar is the primary way to distinguish that copy from all the other print-run copies.** A title, a year, and editor are not enough to identify an exemplar: there is a need of more precise indicators that allow detecting that copy as stolen. So many recent episodes, sometimes real witch-hunts, have shown how weak the evidence gathered around certain supposedly stolen books was. However, the second rule derives from this, which is indispensable for the correct identification of the copy.
- **PRECIOUS BOOKS NEED TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED,** to have clear visual evidence of the specific characteristics of each exemplar. The photographic documentation should be limited to the most significant components of the book: binding, cover pages, ownership, manuscript annotations, drawings or imperfections.

Some rules

- **A MORE ACTIVE COLLABORATION IS NEEDED AND AN UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION EXCHANGE between libraries, Nucleo di tutela and antiquarians.** Only an effective sharing of information on possible crimes can allow many practitioners to intervene in a timely manner. Access to the Carabinieri's databases should be granted to professionals in the book sector, to ensure that information on book thefts are both readily and rapidly available.
- **STAMPS AND OWNERSHIP REPRESENT THE HISTORY OF BOOKS, THEIR PAST,** they are not necessarily indications of culpability and/or illicit provenance. Library collecting is based on the free circulation of works. Both public and private libraries are often the results of casual gatherings of objects of the most different provenances, and all the libraries contemplate dispersion as a possible destiny.

Some rules

- **BE CAREFUL WITH THE INTERNET.** It is a place of freedom, often lacking any controls, and where circulate works of doubtful provenance, sold and exported without abiding by Italian laws. It is a place to watch with particular attention because it accepts everything as true without too many scruples.
- **THE BOOKSELLERS INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS, ILAB AND ALAI** in Italy, are the true guarantors of respect for the rules, and the keepers of a serious and regulated book trade. They should be part of meetings like this one; they must report their experience based on professionalism, competence and passion. Every book that goes into a sale catalogue or an auction catalogue has a clear provenance, a registered owner, a signed document, and a story behind it.

Categories of thefts

- **By dexterity**, taking advantage of the low level of attention in many libraries and poor security procedures -> solution: improve loans procedures and introduce adequate and more modern security systems.
- **By deception**, taking advantage of the trust that is established between librarian and user that produces a total inattention to the most elementary library rules. In Bologna, not long ago, one of the consultation rooms was sacked by a fine scholar of noble descent who, leveraging the total trust of the librarians, had managed to bring out of the library hundreds of books. He was caught by a bookseller when he tried to sell the stolen goods because one repertoire reported the exact description of one of the volumes the scholar was trying to get rid of.

Library thefts causes

- a) COLLUSION OF COMPLIANT LIBRARIANS
- b) GUILTY DISTRACTION
- c) LACK OF RESPECT FOR THE RULES when interacting with people known and believed to be reliable.

SUSPICIOUS SITUATIONS

- a) Suspicious stamps, of libraries not extinct and still fully active (but NOT ALL THE STAMPS or ex libris)
- b) Erasures and abrasions in topical parts that could hide dubious origins
- c) Valuable works of which history and provenance is unknown (even if in Italy this frequently happens due to the wealth of the book heritage)
- d) Owners who ignore the history of books and that lead to suspicion of their way of doing things
- e) The urgency to sell and request for not-tracked payments

The final Paradox

- The theft of books in every era was considered a sacrilegious gesture; in medieval times it involved excommunication! Now I am under the impression that the gravity of these thefts is less valued, in an age when libraries are considered old, dusty and almost useless institutions compared to HIS MAJESTY, THE INTERNET.
- I would like to end by reiterating the concepts exposed with a paradox: if someone still steals books it is because he gives them a specific value, so how is it possible that this same value (namely commercial) is unknown to most librarians? If they knew that they are defending works worth millions of euros on the market, would their attitude change?

Thanks and have a good days in our wonderful city!

