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von

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“Who killed the manuscript?”

A case study for pigment-induced degradation
in a medieval codex

Donnerstag, 23. Jänner 2020, 17:30 Uhr

Akademie der bildenden Künste, Augasse 2-6, 1090 Wien

Hörsaal C 4.40
(Kern C, 4. Stock)

“Who killed the manuscript?”

A case study for pigment-induced degradation in a medieval codex

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Abstract

The Codex 29 is a XV c. manuscript of the Episcopal Seminary Library in Padova, encompassing the geographical and astronomical work *La Sfera* by Gregorio Dati, which contains many blue-green pictures of watercourses, lakes, seas. Many painted leaves were severely degraded, with fragmentations and break-through: the whole manuscript was endangered, but the reason for this degradation was not known, and a suitable intervention of conservation asked for an answer to two relevant questions: What is the blue-green pigment?

What happened?

As in any investigation on precious Cultural Heritage items, the requirement is the application of “soft” techniques, able to preserve or, at least, to damage as less as possible the work. Spectroscopies, like IR, XRF and Raman, are the most commonly tools applied in these investigations, since they are based just on light irradiation.

Much alike a CSI investigation, we show how a suitable protocol can reveal the truth in five steps:

- 1) retrieving evidence (disrupted fragments)
- 2) non-invasive scientific analysis crossing different techniques (in this work: IR, XRF, XRD, EPR)
- 3) collecting clues from scientific results and list of “possible suspects”
- 4) preparation of a “simulated crime scene”, i.e. preparation of samples similar to the collected ones and scientific comparison to the originals
- 5) reasoning and evidence find guilty and motive!