

Issues of Preserving Rare Books in the Museum Context: The Case of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This study analyzes the process of managing and preserving rare books collections as a complex system developed through the interrelationship between collection formation, documentation, and preservation practices. The research is conducted on the case of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan and examines the historical sources of the fund's formation, the level of documentation, and the institutional characteristics of preservation strategies. The methodology of the study is based on a qualitative approach and relies on the analysis of archival documents, fund materials, and practical observations. The empirical materials include archival sources dating from the 1920s to the 1950s, as well as data related to contemporary fund activities. The findings show that the rare books fund was formed mainly as a result of systematic transfers, donor activity, and centralization policy, and that this process generated typological diversity in the composition of the fund as well as uneven levels of registration and documentation. Since the initial inventory systems did not fully comply with the requirements of scholarly cataloguing, many fund units remained insufficiently described and were not fully integrated into scholarly circulation. The study also identifies a direct relationship between the level of documentation, provenance information, and preservation strategies. Objects with low-quality metadata remain less visible in scholarly circulation. Although digitization has expanded access and use, it is also creating new hierarchies within the collection depending on the existing level of documentation. This study substantiates the need to interpret the rare books collection as a historically formed and institutionally managed system and demonstrates the necessity of developing documentation, provenance research, and preservation strategies in an integrated manner in working with museum collections.

Keywords: Rare Books, Museum Collections, Collection Formation, Documentation System, Cataloguing, Provenance Research, Collection Management, Cultural Heritage, Digitization, Conservation, Archival Documents, State Museum of History of Uzbekistan.

1. Introduction

In contemporary scholarly discourse on the preservation of cultural heritage, rare books and manuscripts are increasingly interpreted as complex, multilayered objects. They are regarded not only as carriers of text but also as integrative sources that embody historical experience, material technologies, and social practices. Therefore, the study and preservation of such materials require not merely working with an individual object but also analyzing the

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historical and institutional systems that shaped it. This analytical approach is closely connected with the “materiality paradigm” emerging in contemporary scholarship, in which the physical characteristics of the book, production technologies, and traces of use are considered important components of scholarly analysis (Araújo, 2021; Gnisci, 2018) [1]. Such a methodological shift has also had a significant influence on the practices of preserving and managing rare books.

In traditional approaches, preservation was mainly limited to conservation and restoration, whereas contemporary studies interpret it more broadly as a system closely interconnected with processes such as documentation, cataloguing, provenance identification, and digitization (Abdoh, 2025; Hadi et al., 2025). This perspective requires the process to be considered as an institutional form of knowledge production and cultural heritage management. As noted in the scholarly literature, rare book collections are often formed under the influence of historical factors rather than according to a pre-planned strategy. Donor activities, political decisions, institutional reorganizations, and inter-collection transfers appear as the main mechanisms shaping the composition of collections (Brander, 2022; Parker, 2022) [2], [3]. As a result, such collections are heterogeneous in their internal structure, consisting of layers that emerged at different stages of documentation and scholarly description. This situation, on the one hand, creates problems of systematization; on the other hand, it makes it possible to value the collection as a complex reflection of historical processes.

From this perspective, provenance research has been established as an important direction in the study of rare books. Through stamps, inscriptions, ownership marks, and other traces found in books, their historical movement and their place within the social environment can be reconstructed (Rodrigues et al., 2020; Łuczyńska, 2022; Matwijów, 2021). However, existing studies are mainly focused on individual objects, and their results have not been sufficiently integrated into collection management and registration systems. As a result, a gap emerges between provenance-related knowledge and the practical systems of cataloguing and inventory management [4].

Documentation and cataloguing systems play a decisive role in enabling rare book collections to enter scholarly circulation. Contemporary studies demonstrate that the quality of metadata determines the visibility of collections and the extent of their scholarly investigation (Burns, 2018; Hertenstein, 2023). At the same time, in historical collections the initial inventory systems were often based on limited information, which gives rise to the phenomenon known as “hidden collections” (Burns, 2024; Giachino, 2023). This situation leads to the condition in which the scholarly significance of objects within a collection becomes dependent on the level at which they have been documented.

The material aspects of rare book preservation also require scholarly attention. The chemical composition of paper, the influence of microorganisms, and environmental factors lead to the degradation of materials (Querner et al., 2022; Sequeira et al., 2024). Some studies also note the presence of substances in historical books that may pose risks to human health. Therefore, modern preservation approaches consider conservation, monitoring, and conditions of use as elements of a unified system [5].

Digitization has initiated a new stage in working with rare books. By creating digital copies, physical access to materials is reduced, which helps ensure their long-term preservation (Abdoh, 2025). At the same time, the process of digitization depends on existing documentation systems: fully described materials receive priority, whereas poorly described objects risk remaining outside scholarly circulation (Heikkilä, 2025). This situation requires

documentation to be interpreted not only as a technical procedure but also as an epistemological process [6].

In the context of Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan, studies devoted to rare book collections remain relatively limited. Existing works have mainly focused on attribution and classification, while the interrelationship between collection formation, documentation, and preservation practices has not yet been sufficiently analyzed in a systematic manner. Historical sources indicate that the formation of museum collections has often been closely connected with administrative and political processes (Sadykova, 1975). Moreover, existing scholarly literature tends to examine rare books either as individual objects or as separate professional practices, whereas their analysis as a unified system—namely within the framework of the interrelationship between formation, documentation, and preservation—has not been sufficiently developed [7], [8]. This issue becomes even more complex in the museum context, where object-oriented collection management systems and bibliographic descriptive approaches operate simultaneously.

The aim of this study is to analyze the rare books fund as a complex system, examining the interrelationship between historical processes of formation, documentation practices, and preservation strategies based on empirical materials using the case of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan. By analyzing rare book collections at the intersection of three dimensions—historical, institutional, and material—the study seeks to contribute to the development of existing theoretical approaches in this field.

Literature Review

In recent years, an important conceptual shift has been observed in the study of rare books. Whereas they were previously interpreted mainly as carriers of textual transmission, contemporary scholarly approaches consider them as material objects integrated into broader historical, cultural, and institutional processes. This transformation is connected with a general tendency in cultural heritage studies, in which objects are interpreted as active elements within systems of knowledge production. Research devoted to the study of early printed works and manuscripts interprets material features—such as the composition of paper, the characteristics of ink, the construction of bindings, and marginal annotations—as key evidence for historical reconstruction (Araújo, 2021; Gnisci, 2018). As a result of this approach, the book appears as a multilayered object at the intersection of text, materiality, and traces of use. The study of the polemical and editorial characteristics of manuscript texts also plays an important role in determining their historical function (Aristov & Degtyarenko, 2023).

This analytical approach is closely connected with material culture studies and object-based epistemology, within which the physical characteristics of an object are considered factors that shape its meaning. From this perspective, the materiality of rare books becomes a central analytical category [9]. The quality of paper, production technologies, and decorative elements serve as important sources for reconstructing the history of the circulation of knowledge (Battershill, 2025; Vesco, 2020). However, a major limitation of research in this field lies in the fact that many studies are conducted primarily at the level of individual objects. Although detailed descriptions of rare books are often provided, their interrelationships within collections, the processes of collection formation, and their connections with institutional practices have not been sufficiently studied in a systematic manner. As a result, objects are frequently analyzed in isolation from their broader context.

In addressing this limitation, provenance research—namely the study of information concerning the origin and ownership history of objects—has emerged as an important

methodological direction. Through the analysis of ownership inscriptions, stamps, gift inscriptions, and traces of use, it becomes possible to reconstruct the pathways of collection formation, networks of knowledge exchange, and systems of cultural interaction (Rodrigues et al., 2020; Łuczyńska, 2022; Matwijów, 2021). Such an approach allows the book to be interpreted not as a static object but as an element moving within historical processes [10], [11]. At the same time, the practical application of provenance research remains relatively limited. Its results often remain at the level of historical reconstruction and are not sufficiently integrated into documentation systems, cataloguing practices, or collection management strategies. This situation demonstrates that the organic connection between reconstructing the history of collections and managing them has not yet been adequately developed.

Scholarly works devoted to the development of collections demonstrate that museum collections are formed not only through centralized acquisition policies but also through processes such as donations, transfers, inheritance, and administrative redistribution (Brander, 2022; Asnina, 2024; Parker, 2022). Such structures and models of collecting lead to internal unevenness within collections, thematic fragmentation, and inconsistencies in descriptive practices. At the same time, this very complexity transforms the collection into a historical source with high scholarly potential. Nevertheless, the influence of these formation processes on subsequent stages of collection development has not been sufficiently examined. The emergence of early manuscript collections has likewise often occurred through processes of accidental accumulation and institutional transfers (Dege-Müller et al., 2022). In particular, the impact of the formation process on documentation systems, cataloguing models, and preservation strategies has not been systematically analyzed. This situation hinders the understanding of collections as integrated systems and leads to the predominance of fragmentary approaches [12].

Contemporary cultural heritage research interprets rare books as active elements of the system of written culture and social memory (Al Abza et al., 2024; Iswanto et al., 2024). Within this perspective, books are regarded not only as carriers of knowledge but also as active participants in social practices. As a result, the process of preservation extends beyond a purely technical activity and is considered a strategic process aimed at ensuring cultural continuity. However, these theoretical perspectives have often developed separately from practical contexts. In museum environments, the ways in which such approaches are implemented and integrated into real collection management systems have not yet been sufficiently studied on the basis of empirical evidence. Therefore, a gap emerges between theory and practice.

Documentation and cataloguing play a central role in the management of rare book collections. Research shows that the quality of metadata and the level of description determine the speed at which collections enter scholarly circulation (Burns, 2018; Hertenstein, 2023). Expanded analytical cataloguing methods increase the scholarly value of objects by taking into account their physical characteristics, provenance marks, and individual identification elements (Burns, 2019; Burns, 2024). At the same time, documentation is often interpreted merely as a technical process. Its influence on preservation priorities, research directions, and the visibility of objects within collections has not yet been sufficiently analyzed from a theoretical perspective. In the museum environment, this process becomes even more complex, since object-oriented collection management systems and bibliographic description standards operate simultaneously, resulting in the formation of a hybrid documentation environment.

The study of historical collections demonstrates that early inventory systems often do not correspond to modern requirements (Giachino, 2023; Shemaieva & Kostyrko, 2022). Initial records were brief and general in nature and primarily served a control function. As a consequence, different layers of description now coexist within collections, leading to the emergence of an uneven documentation environment.

Digital collection management systems have introduced a new dimension to documentation processes. Through metadata structures, mechanisms of search, classification, and prioritization are established (Heikkilä, 2026). Moreover, digital systems enable the restructuring of existing hierarchical structures: fully documented objects gain priority, while poorly described materials risk remaining outside scholarly circulation. This situation requires the documentation process to be reinterpreted not merely as a technical practice but as an important factor shaping knowledge production and scholarly communication [13], [14].

In the context of Central Asia, comprehensive studies devoted to rare book collections remain insufficient. Existing works have mainly focused on attribution and classification, while the interrelationship between collection formation, documentation, and preservation has not been systematically examined. Historical studies indicate that museum practices were often shaped by administrative and political factors (Sadykova, 1975), and archival documents confirm that collections were formed from various sources. Despite the existing literature on rare books, there are no studies that systematically analyze the interrelationship between collection formation, documentation systems, and preservation practices within a single institution. This gap limits the understanding of rare book collections as integrated systems.

For this reason, the present study analyzes the rare book collection not as a mere aggregation of individual objects, but as a historically formed, institutionally organized, and continuously evolving system. By examining the intersection of collection formation, documentation practices, and preservation strategies, the study aims to interpret the rare books fund as a complex heritage system shaped by historical, administrative, and professional decisions. This issue becomes particularly evident in the case of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, where the fund has historically developed in successive layers because of various institutional transfers and territorial relocations, which complicates the implementation of uniform standards in contemporary documentation and preservation practices (Sadykova, 1975). As a result, the systematic recording of provenance marks (stamps, ownership inscriptions, marginalia) and the deepening of physical description simultaneously become factors that shape access to scholarly circulation, determine preservation priorities, and establish selection criteria for digitization (Burns, 2018; Rodrigues et al., 2020). The present study therefore aims to demonstrate, based on empirical evidence within a single institution, the interrelationship between the history of collection formation, documentation practices, and preservation strategies.

Although the existing literature has established an important theoretical and methodological foundation for the study of rare books, several significant issues remain unresolved. First, the interrelationship between collection formation processes, documentation systems, and preservation strategies has not been sufficiently examined as a unified system. Second, the question of integrating the results of provenance research into practical collection management and cataloguing systems has not been systematically developed [15]. Third, the hybrid documentation model that emerges in museum environments—where object-oriented collection management systems and bibliographic description standards operate

simultaneously—has not been studied separately. Therefore, the present study considers the rare books fund not as a simple aggregation of individual objects, but as a unified system that has been historically formed, documented, and preserved. Using the case of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, the study empirically analyzes the interrelationship between collection formation, documentation practices, and preservation strategies.

2. Research Method

Rare book preservation is examined as an institutional practice shaped by historical formation processes, documentation systems, and material characteristics. The research is based on a qualitative research design and a case study approach. The State Museum of History of Uzbekistan was selected as the research object. This choice is explained by the historical depth of the collection, its complex composition formed from different periods and sources, and the important institutional role of the museum in preserving documentary heritage at the national level. Such an approach makes it possible to interpret the rare books fund not as a simple aggregation of individual objects but as a complex system formed at the intersection of historical, administrative, and scholarly processes.

The study does not aim at statistical generalization; rather, it focuses on the contextual analysis of preservation practices within the framework of the historical and institutional factors that have influenced their formation. For this reason, the research results are directed toward in-depth explanation, interpretation, and analysis based on empirical materials. The methodological approach has an interdisciplinary character and combines elements of museum studies, book history, archival studies, and cultural heritage research.

The research is conducted within the paradigm of qualitative heritage studies. According to this perspective, cultural objects are interpreted not merely as carriers of text but as multilayered objects closely connected with material form, historical context, and institutional practices. From this standpoint, rare books are examined through the interrelationships between their physical characteristics, traces of use, the level of documentation, and institutional mechanisms of management.

The case study method makes it possible to systematically analyze how preservation practices have developed over time within a single institution. This approach is particularly important in situations where collections have been formed through processes such as donations, institutional transfers, and administrative redistributions (Brander, 2022; Parker, 2022). Under such conditions, the internal structure of the collection is often uneven and fragmented, which directly influences preservation and documentation processes. For this reason, the case study approach enables the identification of the relationship between historical formation processes and contemporary practices.

The empirical basis of the research consists of three main types of sources, which complement each other.

First, archival documents dating from 1925–1955 are analyzed. These documents illuminate the early stages of the formation of the collection and make it possible to determine the sources from which the materials were acquired, the procedures through which they were accepted, and how the practices of registration and recording were initially organized (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, F.412, F.396, F.94). These sources particularly demonstrate that the earliest documentation systems had a predominantly inventory-based character.

Second, internal museum documents and collection records are examined. These include fund inventories, catalogue records, and lists within the KP registration system. Through these materials it becomes possible to determine the extent to which collection units have been systematically described, to identify inconsistencies in cataloguing practices, and to reveal gaps in provenance information.

Third, a material analysis of selected collection units is carried out. Selected rare books are examined as physical objects, with attention given to their binding structure, paper quality, characteristics of ink, marginal annotations, and ownership marks. This approach corresponds with contemporary scholarly perspectives that interpret the materiality of books as an important source of historical knowledge (Araújo, 2021; Gnisci, 2018). In addition, contemporary scholarly literature on cataloguing, provenance research, and collection management is also incorporated into the analysis in order to interpret the empirical findings within a broader scholarly context (Burns, 2018; Hertenstein, 2023; Rodrigues et al., 2020).

Several interrelated analytical methods are applied in this study.

First, archival documents are analyzed using the method of historical reconstruction in order to reconstruct the processes of collection formation. Through this approach, the mechanisms of material acquisition, institutional transfers, and documentation practices are identified.

Second, a comparative analysis is conducted by comparing early inventory systems with modern cataloguing standards. This makes it possible to identify collection units that have not been fully described or have remained outside scholarly circulation, commonly referred to as “hidden collections” (Burns, 2024).

Third, provenance-based analysis is applied in order to reconstruct the historical movement of works through ownership marks, stamps, and marginal inscriptions (Rodrigues et al., 2020; Łuczyńska, 2022). This approach helps to reveal the internal logic of collection formation.

Fourth, preservation practices are evaluated from the perspective of material degradation and environmental factors. In this process, the chemical deterioration of paper, microbiological processes, and ecological factors are analyzed (Querner et al., 2022; Sequeira et al., 2024).

The research integrates three main analytical directions: historical analysis (collection formation), documentation analysis (catalogue and metadata systems), and material analysis (preservation conditions and degradation processes). This integrated approach makes it possible to examine the rare books fund not as a simple aggregation of individual objects but as an interconnected and dynamically developing system (Heikkilä, 2025; Gelbier & Stephens, 2024).

Since the research is conducted within a single institution, the generalization of the results is to some extent limited. However, the primary objective of the study is not statistical generalization but analytical generalization aimed at providing an in-depth explanation of rare book preservation issues. In addition, the incompleteness of archival and catalogue data—particularly the limited availability of provenance information—creates certain limitations. At the same time, these limitations are also interpreted as part of the research findings, since they reflect the characteristics of historical documentation practices.

3. Results and Discussion

An analysis of the formation process of the rare books fund of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, based on archival documents, shows that it was formed gradually through the acquisition of materials originating from various institutional and territorial sources. This characteristic is clearly reflected in the internal structure of the fund, determining its structural unevenness, typological diversity, and provenance complexity.

The minutes of the meeting of the Central Asian Liquidation Committee dated 14 February 1925 record decisions concerning the transfer of books and manuscripts belonging to former institutions into state collections (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, F.412, op.1, d.37). The content of the document indicates that this process was carried out not on the basis of individual scholarly selection or expert evaluation, but rather according to a general procedure based on the principle of centralization of existing materials. As a result, sources that were not interconnected in terms of content, chronology, or typology were incorporated into the composition of the fund. Documents of the Jizzakh regional museum from 1926 also indicate the transfer of local library collections into a centralized system (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, F.412, op.1, d.37). As a result of this process, collections formed within specific local socio-cultural environments were incorporated into a unified fund, detached from their original historical and functional context. Such transfer practices disrupted the internal integrity of collections and made it more difficult to reconstruct their original conditions of formation.

A document dated 11 March 1927 reflects the registration of materials entering the fund; however, it does not clearly define the criteria for their description, classification, or scholarly systematization (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, F.396, op.1, d.8). These documents have an inventory character, in which items are recorded in the form of general lists. In many cases, only the title of the work or a brief designation is provided, while important bibliographic and codicological elements—such as authorship, place and date of publication, copy-specific features, and physical condition—are not fully recorded. This indicates that, at the initial stage, documentation practices were limited primarily to a registration function (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, F.396, op.1, d.8).

The annual museum report of 1937 indicates that the enrichment of the fund was carried out mainly through the acquisition of materials from external sources (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, F.94, op.5, d.3014). The report contains almost no information regarding the selection of books, their evaluation based on scholarly expertise, or the formation of a collection policy. This suggests that the composition of the fund was not developed on the basis of systematic planning but rather expanded through the accumulation of available materials. Documents dating to 1955 reflect the process of transferring manuscripts and printed books between various museums and libraries. These exchanges confirm that the formation of the fund was long-term and multi-stage in nature. Thus, the fund should be regarded not as the result of a single act of formation but as a complex system that emerged through institutional processes carried out over different historical periods.

As a result, manuscripts, lithographic editions, and printed books coexist within a single storage system, and clear boundaries between them are not always defined. This has led to typological unevenness within the internal structure of the fund. Sadykova (1975) emphasizes that museum collections in Uzbekistan were initially formed from various sources and that the process was characterized more by accumulation than by scholarly selection, which fully corresponds to the situations recorded in archival documents. At the same time, it is observed

that in a significant number of collection units, provenance information has not been fully recorded. This makes it difficult to determine their origin, historical context, and interconnections within the collection. Rodrigues et al. (2020) note that the lack of provenance information significantly limits the possibilities of scholarly analysis.

The level of development of the documentation system also emerges as an important component of the formation of the fund. Although archival materials indicate that registration of collection units was carried out, the methodological foundations of this process did not fully meet the requirements of scholarly cataloguing. Early inventory lists, unlike systematic cataloguing, were primarily aimed at recording existing materials, while their scholarly description was not sufficiently developed (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, F.396, op.1, d.8).

This situation gives rise to a number of complex issues in working with the collection. First of all, it creates the need for the re-identification of materials [16]. Due to the insufficient detail of the initial descriptions, additional codicological and bibliographic research is required in order to accurately identify each item. It has been established that in the cataloguing of rare books, it is not sufficient to rely solely on traditional bibliographic description; it is also necessary to record the physical condition of the item, the type of binding, decorative elements, and individual features (Burns, 2018). Problems related to cataloguing also persist at later stages. As a result of incomplete or inaccurate descriptions, many rare materials are not incorporated into scholarly circulation and remain as so-called hidden collections (Burns, 2024). This situation is also observed in the museum collection, as the simplified approach adopted in the initial stages of registration has a direct impact on subsequent processes of scholarly processing.

It has been established that general library cataloguing systems are not sufficiently effective for working with special collections, which substantiates the need for a separate methodological approach specifically tailored to rare books (Hertenstein, 2023). From this perspective, the initial documentation system applied in museum collections did not meet the requirements of special collections, and this situation complicated subsequent processes of systematization.

The absence of a unified standard for describing collection units further complicates the process of systematization. Since materials of the same type were recorded according to different criteria, difficulties arise in integrating them into a unified catalogue system [17]. As a result, classificatory inconsistencies and internal disorder emerge within the collection. Moreover, the initial documentation system did not adequately reveal the scholarly and historical value of the materials. The lack of information on the origin of books, their history of use, ownership changes, and collection affiliation limits the possibilities for their in-depth inclusion in scholarly circulation. The insufficient recording of provenance information reduces the ability to reconstruct the historical layers of the collection and narrows the scope of scholarly interpretation (Rodrigues et al., 2020).

As a result of these factors, collection units are often perceived merely as inventory objects, while their historical, cultural, and scholarly context remains insufficiently revealed. However, the value of special collections is directly dependent on their contextual information, and when this information is not adequately recorded, the scholarly potential of the collection cannot be fully realized (Rossman, 2020). In general, the analysis demonstrates that the processes of collection formation and the development of documentation systems did not occur simultaneously but evolved independently across different periods [18]. While the initial

stage prioritized the accumulation of materials, documentation and scholarly cataloguing systems were developed later. This situation creates the need today for recataloguing the collection, reconstructing provenance information, and deepening scholarly description.

Analysis of the composition of the collection further shows that information related to the provenance of collection units has not been recorded in a systematic and consistent manner. This issue is particularly evident in materials from the early period. In some cases, although items were included in inventory lists, information regarding their previous ownership, collection affiliation, or the institution through which they entered the collection was either entirely absent or limited to very brief notes. As a result, the reconstruction of the historical context of collection units becomes more difficult, and the full scholarly value of these materials cannot be adequately revealed.

Archival documents from 1927 also demonstrate that this problem has historical roots. In these documents, materials accepted into the fund were recorded primarily at the inventory level, without providing detailed information on their sources of origin, previous storage locations, or their integrity as part of a collection (Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan, F.396, op.1, d.8). This led to the registration of certain books and manuscripts as independent units, while their affiliation with specific historical or personal collections remained unknown [19]. Thus, the organization of the fund had a predominantly accumulative character, and it is evident that principles of scholarly selection and provenance-based systematization were not sufficiently applied. As noted by Sadykova (1975), the formation of museum collections in Uzbekistan was often carried out through the general acquisition of materials from various institutions, including libraries, madrasas, private collections, and dissolved organizations. In this process, the internal integrity of collections was frequently not preserved, resulting in their division into separate units and their incorporation into new fund structures [20]. This situation led to the formation of collection units detached from their provenance context and has made it difficult to determine their original context in the present.

The lack of provenance information that is, information about the history of origin significantly limits the possibilities of scholarly analysis. Although it is possible to trace the historical movement of books through stamps, ownership inscriptions (*ex libris*), marginalia, and other marks, the absence of such information in catalogue records forces researchers to conduct additional investigations. These types of internal markers serve as primary sources for reconstructing the history of collection formation; however, when they are not systematically recorded, the historical “trajectory” of materials becomes fragmented (Rodrigues et al., 2020).

In the collection of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, the presence of ownership marks is also observed in certain materials; however, they have not been systematically documented. This reduces the possibility of determining within which social strata, scholarly environments, or cultural traditions these works were formed. As a result, collection units are not sufficiently revealed not only as bibliographic objects but also as historical and cultural phenomena.

In the study of historical manuscripts, reconstructing their environment of origin constitutes an integral part of scholarly research; provenance information reveals both the systematic history of a work and the functional and historical role of the collection (Matwijów, 2021). From this perspective, each collection unit should be studied within the framework of the historical and cultural system to which it belongs. It has also been established that in historical collections, the scholarly value of each item can be determined through its individual

description, particularly by recording its origin, ownership history, and traces of use (Łuczyńska, 2022). This approach requires museum collections to be considered not merely as objects of preservation but as complex sources of scholarly information. The lack of sufficient provenance information also directly affects the process of attribution [21], [22]. Issues such as identifying authorship, determining the period of creation, and establishing the geographical distribution of a work often depend on information about its origin. In the absence of such data, research is based on approximate conclusions or requires the use of additional sources.

In rare book collections, provenance and attribution are closely interconnected processes, and the scholarly value of a collection is determined precisely on the basis of these two factors; the origin of a work and its ownership history constitute decisive elements in assessing its scholarly and cultural significance (Kiebusinski, 2023). The analysis shows that reconstructing the provenance of collection units and providing their scholarly description on a scientific basis remain among the most pressing tasks today. Identifying provenance information, incorporating it into catalogues, and systematically documenting it not only enhance the scholarly value of the collection but also contribute to restoring its historical integrity. For this reason, it is necessary to develop provenance research as a distinct field in working with museum collections.

The characteristics of collection formation in museums exert a direct and systematic influence on their preservation conditions [23]. In particular, the accumulation of manuscripts and printed books produced in different periods, regions, and technological contexts within a single collection affects their physical stability in a differential manner rather than uniformly. Such diversity implies that each material requires an individual preservation regime according to its chemical composition, production technology, and history of storage. Consequently, the coexistence of different types of materials within a single storage environment transforms the conservation process into a complex, multi-stage system.

Paper-based materials, in particular, are highly sensitive to environmental factors. Sharp fluctuations in temperature and humidity lead to structural damage of paper fibers, reducing their mechanical strength. Studies show that increased humidity levels enhance microbiological activity, creating favorable conditions for the development of fungi and bacteria (Sequeira et al., 2024). As a result, paper fibers deteriorate, ink layers degrade, and the readability of the text is reduced. These processes often lead to irreversible stages of degradation.

Moreover, the mixed formation of the collection significantly limits the possibility of standardizing preservation conditions. Manuscripts, lithographic editions, and printed books from different periods are produced from diverse materials, each requiring specific optimal microclimatic parameters. For example, certain manuscripts are highly sensitive to increased humidity, whereas other materials become brittle under excessively dry conditions. Therefore, the application of a uniform preservation regime may create favorable conditions for some materials while being harmful to others. This, in turn, leads to the accelerated deterioration of certain collection units and the worsening of their physical condition [24], [25].

The structural components of historical books—particularly binding materials, adhesives, and ink composition—undergo chemical changes over time. These changes interact with environmental factors and accelerate degradation processes; in particular, hydrolysis processes intensify in acidic papers, leading to material deterioration (Querner, Beenk & Linke, 2022). In some cases, historical books may also contain chemical substances

hazardous to human health. The presence of harmful components between the pages of old books has been identified, which requires special precautionary measures when handling such materials (Sakakibara et al., 2024). Therefore, preservation issues must be considered not only in terms of physical degradation but also in relation to sanitary and safety concerns.

The storage of rare book collection units under improper or insufficiently controlled conditions also negatively affects their scholarly value. Damage to bindings, decorative elements, marginal annotations, or ownership marks leads to the loss of important evidence that reveals the historical and cultural significance of a work. For this reason, preservation should be regarded not merely as a physical protective measure but as an integral component of scholarly research.

In contemporary scholarly approaches, digitization is evaluated as an important tool that partially mitigates preservation challenges. By creating digital copies, the need for physical handling of original materials is reduced, thereby slowing their mechanical deterioration. At the same time, digitization involves not only reproduction but also the scholarly indexing and systematization of materials (Segal & Beckerle, 2024). This enhances the informational value of the collection and optimizes its accessibility [26]. However, digitization does not fully eliminate conservation problems. In order to preserve the physical condition of original materials, it is necessary to strictly control environmental parameters, use specialized archival boxes and acid-free materials, and minimize handling (Sequeira et al., 2024).

The unevenness resulting from the historical formation of the collection complicates the management of preservation processes. The absence of a unified system for organizing materials originating from different sources makes it difficult to monitor their condition, determine restoration priorities, and assess risk levels. This situation requires additional scholarly and organizational approaches in working with rare book collections. Observations indicate that preservation-related problems are closely connected with the historical characteristics of collection formation. The mixed composition of materials, imperfections in documentation, and environmental factors interact to accelerate degradation processes. Therefore, the scientific reorganization of the collection, the development of differential preservation strategies, and the implementation of modern conservation and digitization technologies emerge as urgent scholarly and practical tasks.

The mixed and gradual formation of museum collections has created certain complexities in their internal systematization. At the same time, it is precisely this characteristic that transforms the collection into a unique source with high scholarly potential [27], [28]. The accumulation of manuscripts and printed books originating from different periods, regions, and social environments within a single collection has resulted in the formation of a multilayered, complex, and rich historical and cultural context. This context allows the collection to be interpreted not only as an object of preservation but also as a complex scholarly system that enables the reconstruction of historical processes, the identification of cultural exchanges, and the observation of the evolution of intellectual thought.

Such diversity expands the possibilities for identifying internal interconnections between materials, conducting comparative analysis, and reconstructing historical continuity. The coexistence of manuscript and printed sources from different periods within a single collection makes it possible to trace the dynamics of textual change, identify variations between copies, distinguish editorial layers, and reconstruct the stages of the evolutionary development of texts.

The scholarly value of historical collections is closely linked to their structural diversity, particularly when materials from different periods and regions are brought together within a single collection. This makes it possible to study them not in isolation but as an interconnected system (Matwijów, 2021). Such an approach enables sources to be interpreted not as separate objects but as constituent elements of a unified historical process [29].

The coexistence of manuscripts and printed editions within the rare books collection holds particular scholarly significance. Manuscripts reflect the initial, alternative, or individualized versions of a text, whereas printed editions represent its standardized and widely disseminated form. A comprehensive study of both allows for the identification of textual transformations, editorial changes, publishing practices, and processes of entry into scholarly circulation (Juda, 2024). In this regard, the composition of the collection serves as an important empirical basis for the fields of textual studies, book history, and cultural studies.

The formation of the collection from diverse sources enhances its level of representativeness. As a result, the collection is not limited to a single region or specific social context but instead reflects broader historical processes. This characteristic positions it not only as a source of national importance but also as a valuable resource for regional and international scholarly research (Brander, 2022). Collections formed through contributions from various donors, institutions, and prior collections embody multilayered historical information, thereby increasing their scholarly value.

At the same time, the complexity of the collection necessitates the application of new methodological approaches in its study. It becomes essential to analyze materials not merely as inventory units but as elements of a historical system [30]. This requires the use of modern research methods such as provenance studies, codicological analysis, bibliographic description, and digital reconstruction.

Thus, the mixed composition of museum collections demonstrates a dual character: on the one hand, it creates complexities in systematization and description processes; on the other hand, it transforms the collection into a multilayered and unique scholarly source that embodies diverse historical periods and cultural contexts. Therefore, when evaluating such collections, it is important not to limit the analysis to identifying shortcomings, but also to reveal their scholarly potential.

At the same time, the current state of the collection opens up opportunities for its further enrichment through modern scholarly processing [31]. In particular, the scientific and informational value of the collection can be significantly enhanced through recataloguing materials, identifying their provenance, systematically recording ownership marks, and implementing digitization processes. This approach not only organizes existing information but also helps uncover previously unidentified historical connections.

The conducted analysis demonstrates that the mixed and gradually formed structure of the collection has a dual nature: while it introduces certain challenges in systematization and description, it is precisely this feature that shapes the collection as a unique, multilayered source with high scholarly potential. Therefore, the evaluation of such collections should not focus solely on their limitations but must also consider the importance of uncovering their scientific potential as a key methodological objective.

Alongside examining the formation of the collection based on historical sources, its contemporary institutional status and stages of organizational development also require particular attention. Notably, in 2019, this collection was separated from the museum library and reorganized as an independent structural unit. As a result, the collection was established

as a distinct “Rare Books Collection,” and its activities were reorganized because of new organizational and scholarly approaches.

This transformation, implemented under the leadership of Jannat Ismailova, marked the beginning of a qualitatively new stage in working with the collection. Within the newly established rare books fund, processes such as re-inventorying materials, systematization, scholarly description, and identification were systematically introduced [32]. At the same time, efforts intensified to identify provenance information that had previously not been sufficiently documented, to reassess collection items, and to integrate them into scholarly circulation.

The intensity of practical activities demonstrates that work with the collection has acquired a large-scale and systematic character. Within a relatively short period, a significant volume of materials has been re-examined, recatalogued according to modern standards, and prepared for digitization. This process contributes to transforming the collection from a passive object of preservation into an active source for scholarly research.

As a result, a collection that historically developed in multiple stages and possesses a complex internal structure is currently undergoing consistent re-systematization. This process is aimed at enhancing the scholarly value of the collection, expanding its informational potential, and improving accessibility for research and public use.

The findings of the study demonstrate that the formation of the rare books collection did not occur on the basis of a single, pre-defined scholarly policy but rather emerged as a multilayered system shaped by complex historical and institutional processes [33]. The development of museum collections is often closely associated with donation practices, institutional transformations, centralization policies, and the exchange of cultural heritage among various organizations (Brander, 2022). This general pattern is fully confirmed in the case of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, as the collection has been formed from manuscripts and printed materials originating from different periods and sources, and its internal structure reflects these historical processes.

Although the internal heterogeneity of the collection is often perceived as a challenge from an organizational perspective, within a scholarly framework it represents one of its key strengths. The coexistence of materials from different periods, regions, and cultural environments within a single collection enables a comprehensive and comparative analysis of historical processes (Matwijów, 2021). Therefore, the collection should not be interpreted merely as an unstructured accumulation, but rather as a multilayered historical system. Such an approach requires that each item be examined not in isolation, but as part of a broader historical context.

At the same time, the insufficient development of documentation systems remains one of the central challenges in working with rare book collections. In particular, it has been noted that conventional library cataloguing systems are often inadequate for dealing with rare books (Hertenstein, 2023). This issue is also evident in museum collections: although initial inventory records exist, processes such as scholarly description, attribution, and detailed identification have not been sufficiently developed [34], [35]. As a result, a significant portion of the collection remains only partially integrated into scholarly circulation.

The incompleteness of catalogue records leads to the underutilization of many materials in the research process (Burns, 2024). Therefore, there is a clear need to reassess collection items, describe them in accordance with modern scholarly standards, and ensure precise identification of each object. This process requires not only the clarification of bibliographic data but also the consideration of physical characteristics, decorative elements, marginal

notes, and other individual features of each item (Burns, 2018). It is precisely this approach that distinguishes rare book collections from ordinary library holdings and allows their full scholarly potential to be realized.

Another major limitation in the study of the collection is the lack of provenance data [36]. The systematic recording of ownership marks, stamps, and other identifying features found in books serves as a key source for reconstructing the history of the collection (Rodrigues et al., 2020). When such information is insufficiently documented, the historical context of collection items becomes fragmented, making comprehensive scholarly interpretation more difficult. For this reason, each item must be studied in relation to its origin, ownership history, and context of use (Łuczyńska, 2022).

The irregular formation of the collection also has a significant impact on preservation processes. Storing collections composed of diverse materials within a single environment complicates the maintenance of their physical stability. Paper-based materials are highly sensitive to microclimatic changes, and fluctuations in temperature and humidity accelerate their deterioration (Sequeira et al., 2024). Therefore, preservation requires a differential approach, in which environmental parameters are adjusted according to the specific characteristics of each material type.

In addition, the structural components of historical books undergo chemical changes over time, which further accelerates degradation processes (Querner et al., 2022). In some cases, materials may also contain substances hazardous to human health (Sakakibara et al., 2024). This necessitates not only conservation measures but also the strengthening of sanitary and safety protocols in working with the collection [37], [38].

In contemporary scholarly practice, digitization is regarded as a key direction in collection management. The creation of digital copies reduces direct handling of original materials and thereby slows their physical deterioration (Segal & Beckerle, 2024). At the same time, digitization should not be limited to technical reproduction alone; it must be closely integrated with scholarly description, indexing, and systematization. Otherwise, the scientific value of digitized materials cannot be fully realized [39].

Furthermore, the significance of rare book collections extends beyond the academic sphere to include cultural and economic dimensions. Some studies indicate that rare book collections possess economic value and may be considered as investment assets (Ursprung, 2021). This highlights the need for a strategic approach to collection management, in which preservation, research, and dissemination processes are integrated in a comprehensive manner.

In addition, within the museum context, the interpretation of collections and their presentation in exhibitions holds particular importance [40], [41]. Through exhibitions, historical memory is constructed, and both social consciousness and cultural identity are shaped (Searle, 2022). Therefore, the rare books collection should be developed not only as a preserved object but also as a medium of scholarly and cultural communication.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the challenges associated with the collection—such as limitations in documentation, the lack of provenance data, and imperfect storage conditions—are closely linked to its historical formation. However, these same factors also contribute to transforming the collection into a multilayered, complex source with high scholarly potential. For this reason, the management of such collections requires a comprehensive, scientifically grounded, and

interdisciplinary approach. This involves integrating methods from historiography, textual studies, conservation science, and digitization practices, which together enable a more complete understanding, preservation, and utilization of the collection.

The rare books collection of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan represents a multilayered system formed not on the basis of a unified pre-developed scholarly concept, but as a result of complex historical, institutional, and administrative processes. The analysis of archival documents confirms that the collection was assembled from diverse sources—including dissolved institutions, regional museums, libraries, and private collections—primarily through a process of centralization. This has led to typological diversity, internal heterogeneity, and complexity in terms of provenance.

The study reveals that the processes of collection formation and documentation did not develop in an integrated manner. In the initial stages, priority was given to the accumulation of materials, while scholarly description, attribution, and cataloguing were treated as secondary tasks. As a result, a significant portion of the collection currently lacks sufficient bibliographic and codicological data. This considerably complicates efforts to integrate the materials into scholarly circulation, accurately identify them, and reconstruct their historical context.

In particular, the lack of provenance information emerges as one of the key factors limiting the full realization of the collection's scholarly potential. The absence of systematic recording of ownership marks, stamps, marginalia, and other identifying features makes it difficult to reconstruct the historical trajectories of the collection. Therefore, the development of provenance research, its integration into cataloguing systems, and the contextual description of each item are identified as urgent scholarly priorities.

The mixed and gradually formed structure of the collection also directly affects preservation processes. The storage of materials originating from different periods and technologies within a single environment complicates the maintenance of their physical stability. Therefore, the application of a differential approach in conservation—developing storage conditions adapted to specific material types—is essential. The implementation of preventive conservation strategies, taking into account chemical degradation, microbiological activity, and environmental factors, is a key condition for ensuring the long-term preservation of the collection.

At the same time, the study demonstrates that the complex and heterogeneous structure of the collection should not be viewed solely as a problem, but also as a significant scholarly advantage. A collection formed from different periods and sources reflects a multilayered historical and cultural system and provides broad opportunities for comparative analysis of manuscripts and printed materials, identification of textual evolution, and examination of cultural exchange processes. From this perspective, it is methodologically important to interpret the collection not as a set of isolated objects, but as an interconnected historical system.

The findings indicate that effective management of rare book collections requires the integration of documentation, provenance research, conservation, and digitization within a unified system. Recataloguing collection items, identifying their provenance, and deepening their scholarly description significantly enhance the scientific and informational value of the collection.

Overall, this study substantiates the necessity of interpreting rare book collections as historically formed, institutionally organized, and continuously evolving complex systems. The

analysis conducted on the example of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan demonstrates that the application of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and empirically grounded approach yields significant scholarly results in this field.

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