

## BOOK PURCHASE FOR ANTIQUE SHOPS IN ROMANIA

**Marius – George Coșarcă**  
**PhD Student, Librarian, "Justinian the Patriarch" Faculty of Orthodox**  
**Theology**  
**University of Bucharest**

*Abstract: Purchasing a book is as old as the appearance of the first ever-printed model. Book collecting has its own history that started as an activity for the rich and educated people a long time ago. Book collecting is today an activity that contributes with important implications to the public and private libraries. This article presents a review regarding books purchase for antique shops in Romania and not only. Important aspects should be taken into account during the process of buying antique books, such as the rarity of the volumes, the number of copies available, their condition and from whom the books are acquired. The antiques dealer has the responsibility of being a professional and showing respect to the sellers. This activity has no rules or guidelines and involves the dealer's constant preparation and involvement. Book collectors remain responsible for the survival of many pieces related to history, literature and art, which would have been permanently lost and forgotten otherwise.*

*Keywords: books, acquisition, antiquarians, history, Romania.*

Purchasing antiquarian books in Romania has advanced over time in a way specific to the culture and tradition of the country. In the past, as well as in the present, books were purchased from libraries of those who were no longer alive or from individuals who had books for sale. Judging by the way books were purchased, we can conclude that they have their own destiny and contribute to human development. Buying and selling antiquarian books is a phenomenon in a continuous change, which has been present ever since books appeared, even though under different conditions, with no rules or set principles. I would point out that there are at least as many types of book collectors as there are types of books<sup>1</sup>.

Books collecting is, essentially, the fruit of the human mind. The appreciation of a book as being an object has always been present, starting with its appearance, as books were first considered expensive and rare articles. At the beginning, books were handmade and the collections were restricted to few people, especially the rich and the cultivated. Even though some of the elements of modern antiquarian are associated to the exclusivity of the books he owns, that are classified as expensive and restricted, the acquisition of books is a competitive and prestigious activity as a whole, regardless of the level of their importance. Through the efforts of book collectors, sources of history and priceless pieces of art and literature have survived, which otherwise would have been irreversibly lost<sup>2</sup>. Governments and institutions have taken in recent times responsibility for the conservation of books.

The purchase of a book from an antique dealer varies from case to case, because this activity has no rules, each situation being unique. Therefore, the antique dealer has the responsibility of having a professional behavior when making a purchase and of correctly evaluating the books, regardless of the niche and the status of the sellers. Dealers negotiate

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/book-collecting/Sociopolitical-influences>, accessed february15, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/book-collecting>, accessed February 15, 2020.

the prices of the books by taking into consideration maintenance status, rarity as well as their demand on the market. He will also take into account the number of books that are on sale, as large number of purchases increase the chances of finding valuable books.

For libraries, the procurement policy, according to Professor Emeritus Mircea Regneală, represents the set of actions aimed to be followed during the acquisition of documents, bibliographies, editorial materials, library volumes, antique catalogs or other forms of written information, in order to develop and update the collections of a library or other institution of this kind, taking into account the already existing funds and the requirements of the users<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, procurement policy of the antique shops is more subjective, as one can encounter all kinds of situations when purchasing or selling, hence no rules or guidebook exist in this regard. However, the main approach for enriching the collections of an antique shop was to pay for the purchases, as opposite to free acquisitions or donation, that happen quite rarely, especially in this field of activity.

When purchasing antique books you can find old and valuable ones, which in few years can double their value. The most difficult is when you are in a position to choose which books to keep in the personal library and which to sell, as there are books that you may only encounter once in your lifetime. It is also important to mention that large collections have always been purchased throughout a very long time, perhaps even a lifetime<sup>4</sup>.

Generally, antique dealers purchase books from individuals, but also from various warehouses and publishers that have price reductions. Individuals who sell their books, do it for various financial reasons or lack of storage space<sup>5</sup>. When individuals decide to sell books from their personal library, they would seek to recover their initial investment. Many rare book collectors have invested a great deal in their books, regardless of whether the collections are large or small, spending many years building their own library. Of course, it is a priority for these collectors to try to recover the initial investment and, if possible, to make a profit. Depending on the circumstances, initial investment of time, money and energy is certainly an essential factor that must be taken into account while weighing the options of starting collecting and selling antique books. When purchasing a book, there are two important elements that set its value, namely how rare the book is and how many copies are available in the world. The rarer a book is, the more likely it is to be valuable. Just because a book is old does not mean it is also rare, however it is certain that the first editions tend to be rare. There are unique manuscripts, letters, journals and original papers, because there are usually only in one copy. All these aspects should be carefully researched. Regarding sales, three options are considered such as: privately selling books to other collectors, selling individual books to antique dealers or selling books to an auction house. Sometimes it is good to wait a long time for one or more books you want to purchase. It is important for the right context to occur when expecting to purchase or buy a certain antiquarian book.

The purpose of an antique dealer is to discover valuable objects even in the most unexpected places, to collaborate with the restaurateurs and then to return them to the circuit of the art objects market. This is how they will reach people again. Generally, the purchases come from the heirs. They keep the house, but give up the old objects. Another source of supply would be exchanges between collectors<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> REGNEALĂ, Mircea. *Tratat de Biblioteconomie*, Vol. II, Partea I, Asociația Bibliotecarilor din România, București, 2014, p. 248.

<sup>4</sup> ALEXA, Cătălin. *Vechi meserii urbane. Meserii rare în orașul de azi*. București: Etnologică, 2018, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ziare.com/weekend/timp-liber/anticariatele-si-povestea-cartilor-vechi-1214555>, accessed may 29, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> <https://emiliachebac.com/anticar-de-bucuresti/>, accessed may 29, 2019.

Have you ever wondered what makes an old book valuable? Why some books sell for an impressive amount while others are worth little? Maybe you have an old or rare book, or an old book library and you are wondering how to correctly evaluate it? The decisive factor to consider first is the importance of the book. Is the book important in a way? If it is a work of fiction or poetry, was the author famous or influential? Whether it is a science, history or philosophy book, has it announced a major breakthrough or changed the course of its field? These are the types of books, collectors are looking for. The next thing to consider is the condition of the book. Is the spine strong and original? Are the pages clean? Are the texts and illustrations complete, without any piece missing?

Another factor that an antique dealer or collector will consider is its origin. An interesting or unique source can often increase the value of a book. For example, this refers to the situation in which a book was at one point owned by a personality and has a dedicated autograph from the author. These would be a good example of what an interesting book can become more appealing to the public. The last factor is probably the most significant, but also the most difficult to quantify: desirability<sup>7</sup>. This refers to the interest certain groups of people have in a particular books and if they will pay a significant amount to acquire them.

Books are designed to be used, but improper handling over long periods of time can cause harm. A book should never be pulled from the shelf by the top of the spine, because the headcap will ultimately tear and cause damages to the rest of the spine. To avoid pulling on the headcap, the book can be grasped over the top and pushed slightly forward from the back. Another way to take out the book from a shelf is to push in the books on either side to allow a firm grasp on the middle of the spine. Although we all like to find small memories in our books, it is best not to place foreign objects between pages. Thick articles could destroy the structure of the book when the book is closed and post-it notes can stain the pages. Also, do not try to restore any part of the book if you want to maintain its historical or monetary value. You can discuss with a book restoration expert for a recommended treatment. Such treatment is not only difficult to achieve, but often removes important features of the book's origin and can lead to a negative impact on its historical value<sup>8</sup>.

The antique books world is a different one from the library one and a forgotten job according to some people. This is a job that few people can do because one needs to combine courage, passion and risk to achieve success and satisfaction. That is why you must have the strength to keep alive your own business and not give up during hard times. You have the chance to turn your passion into a source of income, and to live well, especially for the interesting stories generated by this activity of buying and selling old books<sup>9</sup>.

I personally made my first purchase without prior knowledge and everything I learned was by experience. Over time, I honed my skills and drew inspiration from others in the field, and with patience I managed to find interesting purchases. Purchases were sometimes easy to make or challenging hunts, but they have always been a success. All years of experience have helped me understand the real book value. There are no books that teach you tips and tricks regarding this business. The only research one can make is to read about books in general and start browsing them to discover important cues such as the edition, the author, illustrations, or any existing autographs. Books are the place where writers put energy, passion and knowledge, and are the true sources of our development.

## Conclusions

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.crawforddirect.com/rarebookvalues.htm>, accessed February 14, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> <https://library.si.edu/departments/special-collections/information-old-books>, accessed february 15, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> <https://emiliachebac.com/anticar-de-bucuresti/>, accessed may 29, 2019.

When purchasing an antique book, it is necessary to take into account different elements such as: edition, year of appearance, historical significance, condition, number of volumes, historical value and if the book is associated with important personalities or not. Both the antique dealer and the book collector look after the complexity and quality of the books they purchase, as these are the main elements in book purchasing. The antique dealer constantly learns what works and what does not in this activity and enriches his knowledge permanently. Everything is learned along the way, because things are in a continuous evolution.

Currently, Romania is well positioned both in terms of procurement and selling in the segment of antique books. My long-term vision is to continuously provide information regarding the activity of purchasing, maintenance, evaluation and commercialisation of antique books to the public.

I am glad that I have had the opportunity to write about book purchase for antique shops, an old passion and activity of mine, which has given me both material and spiritual accomplishments.

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