

ENGLISH SUMMARY

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CONTEMPORARY OR HISTORICAL, FORGERY, REPRINT OR *VINTAGE PRINT*? ISSUES RELATED TO THE IDENTIFICATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS. A CASE STUDY

The primary stage of identifying photographic images consists of careful observation, which also includes microscopic examination. Its purpose is to find the characteristic features of a particular technique, sometimes compared to fingerprints. In most cases, this process, combined with XRF and FTIR techniques of spectroscopic analysis, allows us to ultimately identify the photographic technique and, consequently, to ascertain the date of origin. There are, however, cases that are difficult to explain.

One such example is an aerial photograph of the town of Modlin, taken in 1940 and purchased several years ago in an internet auction. It had caught the attention of a collector interested in images from WWII, due to the whiteness of its paper and its distinct appearance, which differs significantly from that of other photographs from that period. The lack of any signs of deterioration and the characteristic yellowish tint of the substrate led to suspicions that we might be dealing with a contemporary reprint of a historical negative. The image was printed in postcard format on German Agfa paper. The verso of the photograph bears a handwritten inscription in blue ink: "(...) Modlin 1.5.1940". Suppositions of forgery prompted the decision to compare the image with another one, taken around the same time and on identical photographic paper, the authenticity of which was beyond any doubt.

The following analyses were carried out: microscopic and UV light observations, fibre content, XRF, FTIR; all of which failed to show any differences, but only confirmed that both photographs were created using the silver-gelatin process on paper of identical composition. It was only the LA-ICP-MS analysis that revealed that the 1940 image has higher concentrations of the following elements: P (about 11 times), S (about 16 times), Ti (about 275 times), Ga (about 130 times), Sb (about 32 times) and Ba (about 206 times). Other dissimilarities became apparent after comparing the magnified brand markings on the versos of the photographs. In spite of this, an unequivocal identification of the photo as a hoax is currently impossible. Further collection of reference material and information regarding the similarities of contemporary photographic paper to paper from 80 years ago is under way.