

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Travel guidebooks are one of the oldest forms of travel literature which was already known in antiquity. In both medieval and modern times compilations were tailored for pilgrims and consisted of descriptions of worshipped places. Somewhat later publications included information not only about the most important sites and monuments, but also practical – transfer, accommodation, currency, language, etc. Old guidebooks are an exceptional source of information about the history of culture, travelling and tourism in particular. Due to the fact that they frequently contained descriptions of monuments and works of art, they might be treated as one of the genres of art historiography which is the approach proposed in this project.

The research project objective is to expand knowledge of Polish writing about art by the content of tourist guidebooks published until the end of the 19th century, when the scientific history of culture entered Polish land. The research shall include both guidebooks to the country, its regions and towns and an interesting group of Polish publications addressing foreign countries and cities (jointly about 150 books). The analysis of those publications shall help determine the significance of guidebooks for the development of Polish art historiography. It shall also facilitate showing the relation between the scientific study (firstly historical and “antiquity,” and then historical and artistic) and the creation of guidebooks.

The research shall be conducted in the form of analysis and interpretation of the historical and artistic content of the studied publications. The research efforts shall embrace both quantitative aspects (e.g. how often and how much was written in the guidebooks about selected cities, buildings and other monuments), and qualitative aspects (referring to the way of describing, use of notions, stylistic terminology, etc.).

Obviously, the proposed topic is of vital importance for the humanities, particularly for the history of art historiography. The implementation of the project is justified by the fact that tourist guidebooks are rarely considered in the context of writing about art. These issues are barely compiled, which makes the picture of Polish art historiography incomplete. The implementation of the project shall not only fill the gap, but also help determine the role of Polish tourist guidebooks contrasted with other forms of writing about art including writings on travelling (e.g. reports, diaries and memoirs of the journeys), as well as the works of theorists of architecture and art, bishopric records, scientific works and the 19th-century art criticism.