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Titel: Conservation and Restoration in Austria

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Ort: Graz

Jahr: 1988

PURL: https://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?514822910_0031 | log10

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Conservation and Restoration in Austria

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As in many other European countries, since the forties the awareness of the importance of preserving our ancient cultural heritage has been increasing and developing.

Austrian libraries were fortunate in not experiencing any major war damage, but directly or indirectly (mainly on account of unsuitable storage facilities) damage - here as elsewhere - has heralded the "restoration of library and written sources". The traditional repair techniques in book binding no longer covered our needs. At first a central institute for restoration was planned, which was to be placed at the disposal of all research libraries in Austria. The plan never materialized for financial reasons. However, a small workshop was created in the Austrian National Library, which contains the most important sources in the country. From this has arisen the Institute for Restoration in the Austrian National Library.

Later the Institute agreed to hold courses in restoration for trainers of other libraries and archives. These candidates were mostly qualified book binders or high school leavers, while the academic restorers were educated at the College of Applied Arts in Vienna. The director of the Institute for Restoration plays an important part in the courses offered in academic, highly specialized restoration.

As there are very few opportunities for educating the relatively new branch of "restoration in libraries", the demand for courses and voluntary study has been great. Since the founding of the Institute over three hundred restorers from abroad have received their practical and theoretical training here. A round figure of 150 publications on restoration and conservation have been written here, which have formed the basis for the methodology and didactic communication of this new area. Many of these new methods and technologies have been developed at the Institute.

The tasks of restoration in libraries have greatly increased in the last few years. Not only in Austria, but in other parts of the world as well, greater harm has been caused during a few years than over decades and centuries in the remoter past. This is mainly due to the affluent standards of modern living. The numbers of students and library users have risen: library sources have become more accessible on account of continual display at exhibitions and are more frequently exposed to the hazards of transport and overheated rooms during such periods.

Even the objects for restoration have increased. Not only books, but also manuscripts, periodicals, newspapers, hand-outs, posters, letters and music are

now included. In addition there is the question of decorative and art graphics. These include drawings, water-colours done by hand or printed, printed graphics (wood-cuts, engravings, copper and steel engravings), rubbings, photographic printing techniques, maps, globes and, in the theatre collections, everything concerning the stage, including models of stage sets and costumes with their various textiles and photographs.

As well as coping with the treatment of these many and various objects and materials, the Institute for Restoration has done considerable research into the whole spectrum of erosion and destructive influences, with the result that many new kinds of treatment have been developed. It has also been shown that skill alone is insufficient. In Vienna we have recognized the fact very early on that close co-operation with chemists and biologists is absolutely essential, as is exchange of information with colleagues and even technicians. The main annual exhibition of the Austrian National Library last year, *Texts, Music and Pictures* (1984), not only presented recent accessions to the library but also showed the successful ways the Institute for Restoration has treated copper mould and ink erosion. Significant parts of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* have now been renewed on comparison with its condition as shown in an earlier facsimile edition of the corresponding segment. The discovery of effective treatment of ink erosion is a great relief to all librarians and archivists. Documents written with iron gallotannate ink are now no longer condemned to disintegration into holes in the near or distant future.

The teeth of time gnaw in other ways at paper, colour, leather and pigments. Even if these materials are of good quality, they are subject to rot. The restorer cannot hinder this process, but he can prolong it. Otto Wächter, the former director of the Institute for Restoration at the Austrian National Library has described the methodology of the Institute - in comparison to that developed concurrently by other institutes of restoration and technology - as follows:

- Brittle papers are strengthened by cellulose of similar texture.
- Brittle ancient parchments are strengthened by extractions from new parchment (parchment glue) and synthetic strengthening substances inserted like soluble nylon.
- Washing methods for dirty pages of books and graphics have been developed and existing methods refined.
- Apparatus and technique in texture have been "invented" to counteract damage in weave of papers with "liquid paper".
- The removal of wood splinters from inferior, brown and acid papers with high wood contact is a speciality of the Institute (deficiency from chloride dioxide gas).

- Non-removal of brown and mould stains with gas technique
- Strengthening of peeling layers of colour in illustration
- Dry mounting of transparent papers which are sensitive to water
- Application of vacuum and dry freezing techniques
- Reconstruction of missing historical global surfaces by means of photographic and digital calculating systems

Application of expensive equipment is necessary for the last mentioned problem. In these cases equipment was acquired and made available to Viennese libraries, archives and museums on request. Examples are "ethylene oxide equipment" to combat insects and mould and vacuum apparatus, leaf casting apparatus and chlordioxide apparatus (for the removal of ground wood and wood content).

A further problem in this connection, which has been a challenge to the extensive resourcefulness and tests of the Institute for Restoration, is the enormous mass damage to newspapers at the Austrian National Library. The library contains not only the obligatory copies of the Republic of Austria but also of the former Austrian Monarchy. Their importance to history research needs not to be emphasized. As in other countries, newspapers are being microfilmed, so that only films will be shown to users, thereby leaving the original documents untouched and undisturbed.

Financing and staff questions alone have decelerated filming extensively. Apart from this, the original periodicals are rapidly disintegrating.

The Institute for Restoration has developed a technique of restoring newspapers, whereby the periodical blocks are first immersed in strengthening, neutralizing and buffer solutions and then undergo vacuum and deep freeze treatment. In this way, thousands of pages a day can be conserved at good quality level. The method has already been tested on a long-term basis and will be put into wider use at the beginning of the next year. We are hoping to demonstrate this in Vienna in 1986 to the participants in the Conference of Directors of National Libraries on *Preservation and Conservation of Library Material*.

This brief description of the many activities of the Institute for Restoration at the Austrian National Library from its foundation to the present day is largely a vote of thanks to Professor Otto Wächter - its first director.

The only other institute outside the Austrian National Library is the Federal Archive in Styria where Karl Trobas restores books. It has been necessary to give further support to the area of restoration in libraries in view of the increasing number of problems involved.

Restoration and conservation has become an important aspect of library training. The following seminars have been arranged at the Austrian National Library:

- In 1978 a seminar took place on the topic of valuable and historical book collections.
- In 1984 there was a meeting on the topic of restoration and a further international seminar on papyrus restoration held by the papyrus department of the Austrian National Library.
- Special attention is being given to restoration and conservation at the biennial meetings of Austrian librarians.
- In November 1984 the Federal Ministry for Science and Research organized an information seminar on *Nature and Technology in Art* in which the Institute for Restoration played a major part.
- The problem of restoring and conserving old books is being given especial attention by the commission of the Society of Austrian Librarians (Vereinigung Österreichischer Bibliothekare) that has attempted to work out guidelines for restorers at university libraries.
- In May 1985 a symposium was held at the Austrian National Library on the resistance to wear of audio-visual media. Research has shown that damage in older photographic material cannot be repaired. (Institutions involved were the Austrian National Library, Picture and Portrait Archive, Film Archive, Film Museum, Austrian Sound Archive, Phonogramm Archive of the Austrian Academy of Science and the Department of National Monuments.) Chemists and technicians of the Higher Graphic Academy of Training and Scientific Experiments are confronted with these problems. Libraries and archives produce thousands of safety films of their collections of periodicals, manuscripts and catalogues, but there has not yet been found a cure to old age in films. The Austrian National Library hoped to publish the results of the stimulating discussions at this seminar. The papers are, however, very brief and cautious. Everyone is waiting for results from abroad.

I would like to close by considering some aspects of library building from the point of view of restoration and conservation through a series of new erections and alterations in existing buildings. The University Library in Graz has built special depots for manuscripts in reinforced concrete with a ventilation which is filtered by means of sack filters (to guard against dust) and air flow pumps. Books need less oxygen than people. 10 % fresh air is sufficient. This is obtained

in the night. Temperatures are reduced, acid filters protect the collection from fumes. The building has no windows. The humidity is strictly controlled. The normal hygrometers are not reliable and require constant checking. Before transportation into the new depot, books are dusted and wrapped in acid free paper. Folders and cases have been especially made for soft bindings. In addition a restoration plan has been drawn up to ensure that minor repairs on bindings can be carried out all the time.

Similar priorities were given to the new university library of the Technical University, Vienna.

New problems with the construction of a subterranean library depot for the Austrian National Library with reading rooms and a depot for periodicals and film material are sure to arise - we hope construction work will start in the coming year.

As a mere librarian I am an optimist. Despite its fragile physical form, the librarian has taken on the task and responsibility of preserving the invaluable literary heritage of human knowledge for posterity.

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