

Introduction by Ursula Hartweg, Director of the KEK

One may well wonder why the projects which the Coordination Office for the Preservation of Written Cultural Heritage (KEK) supports played only a minor role at the international 'Preservation in Perspective' conference, which the KEK invited them to on the occasion of its tenth anniversary in 2021. By this time, the KEK had already supported 850 projects totalling around 13.8 million euros. Why were thirteen international speakers from nine countries invited compared to six from Germany, of whom only one reported on a KEK project?¹

This was because the conference was not intended to be a KEK showcase. We considered it more important to create space for an international exchange on the topic of preserving written cultural heritage in the original: an exchange which, in this form, did not yet exist. The focus was on different national strategies for sustainable preservation as well as the potential of international cooperation. Questions were asked about areas of development in preservation and synergies between preservation and digitisation were presented. In this way, we brought together contributions from very different people, all of whom are committed to the cross-sectional task of preserving originals with great expertise: conservators, staff responsible for collections, managers of institutions, academic researchers and colleagues from non-profit organisations. For a long time, such a conference format has been a desideratum in Germany and so in 2021 we addressed this by holding this international conference.

But first, the host organisation, the KEK, with its specific features, especially when compared internationally, will be briefly outlined. In the lead-up to the conference, we invited experts on the protection of cultural assets in archives and libraries to an international brainstorming session to gather ideas on the concrete direction of the conference. It was the view of this think tank that one aspect of the KEK stood out in particular, namely its political mandate as well as the opportunity to realise it directly through project funding. In 2011, the federal government and the federal states jointly founded the KEK and have since financed it through tax revenues, which the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM) and the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States make available specifically for this task. The federal and state governments thus set the framework for the activities of the KEK; in return, KEK's direct structural feedback to policy-

¹ Michael Fischer's contribution concerns a KEK pilot project funded by the KEK between 2016 and 2018. The recorded presentations of the conference are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvIRySudPW5fecNzz2c-8Pqju-sT8Gb_y> (last accessed 24 April 2024).

makers provides a sympathetic ear for the substantial concerns of its core mandate, which places the coordination of the preservation of written cultural heritage high on the cultural policy agenda, namely at a federal level. In Germany this is not a given especially as, in view of the firmly-established responsibility of the federal states for culture, it required justification; such preservation is a task of national importance, which archives, libraries and other memory institutions cannot fulfil without additional support.

The KEK documented this in 2015 with the publication of the *National Recommendations for Action for the Preservation of the Written Cultural Heritage*.² Based on a systematic survey of the needs in the institutions, these *Recommendations for Action* offer the first comprehensive inventory of the damage and threats to written cultural heritage in Germany, with the result that 63.2 million euros would have to be invested each year to secure at least 1% of the endangered or damaged written cultural heritage. It is abundantly clear from this just how important and effective direct feedback from the KEK to political decision-makers can be. In essence, the aim is to create additional public funds to guarantee the preservation of originals.

In addition to its political affiliation, the KEK is characterised above all by its specialist, interdisciplinary mandate. It is tasked with coordinating the preservation of written material nationwide and thus acts in the interests of all institutions that hold written material, particularly archives, libraries and museums, whose needs in the area of conservation are represented by the KEK at a national level for the first time. The KEK was founded as a 'coordination' centre in the true sense of the word, so for it, networking is a priority. Over the past decade, we have initiated several discussion formats to optimise and better synchronise cooperation in the preservation of original documents. We organise the annual Nationwide Expert Meeting where all sixteen federal states and the federal institutions are represented, as well as the Working Meeting of the Archive and Library Departments of the relevant state authorities. In short, we create spaces for the exchange of expertise across states, sectors and organisations and it goes without saying that the KEK, both as a political and specialist interface, always endeavours to create added value for all those involved even if, occasionally, they pursue different ideas. The KEK makes sense as a central institution only if it acts as an amplifier for what concerns everyone involved in the coordinated preservation of written cultural heritage.

² *Die Erhaltung des schriftlichen Kulturguts in Archiven und Bibliotheken in Deutschland: Bundesweite Handlungsempfehlungen für die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien und die Kultusministerkonferenz.* The publication and an English summary are accessible online: <https://www.kek-spk.de/publikationen> (last accessed 24 April 2024).

A highly relevant element in the KEK's public perception are its two funding programmes for the preservation of written cultural assets in their original form. The KEK pilot projects, which are supported by the federal and state governments, have been running since 2010, are broadly based and support not only measures relating to archive or library collections but also projects in the areas of expertise, research, emergency preparedness and public relations. KEK pilot projects thus reflect the cross-sectional task of conservation in all its facets. Funding tends to be small-scale, with the focus on exemplary measures. It is about gaining specialist knowledge, especially in institutions that due to resources lack the specialised knowledge required to maintain their holdings. In this way, experience is gained in projects which in turn can serve as good practice examples for further measures.

With the BKM special programme for the preservation of the written cultural heritage, the KEK has been operating a second funding stream since 2017, which was developed in response to the *National Recommendations for Action*. It uses federal funds to finance large-scale projects, with volume processes such as cleaning, mass deacidification and packaging eligible for funding. This requires 50% co-financing per project, which creates incentives for the federal states to support the institutions with additional funds and to either strengthen corresponding federal state programmes for the preservation of originals or to set them up in the first place. The BKM special programme is the right funding instrument to get closer to the target of the *National Recommendations for Action*: to secure at least 1% of the endangered or damaged written cultural heritage per year. Both funding streams, the KEK pilot project funding and the BKM special programme, complement each other perfectly and offer an impressive overall balance. To date, around 23.8 million euros have been awarded to almost 1,070 projects across Germany for the preservation of originals.

Finally, the KEK portal should be included in an outline of the KEK. Here, we provide information on every funded project and thus offer a unique data pool on 'preservation put into practice' in Germany; all projects are indexed, and the data can be visualised and statistically evaluated. Entirely independently of the funding projects, we are developing the KEK portal into a centralised specialist entry point to the topic of the preservation of originals, covering completely different areas in a glossary that collects the technical terms in alphabetical order from 'abrasion' to 'wrinkle'. In the knowledge network the terms can also be discovered in a playful way as it visualises the interconnectedness of specialist terms from very different areas of knowledge. The specialist information provides access to both introductory and in-depth contributions from the interdisciplinary spectrum of subjects related to the preservation of originals which as a cross-sectional task requires a broad range of knowledge. The basics of professional storage and emergency precautions are just as much part of it as specialist knowledge regarding the restoration of medi-

eval manuscripts. After all, preservation is a comparatively young science and the need for information is correspondingly great and dynamic; the portal will thus continue to evolve as a work in progress.

Overall, the KEK is quite unique, even by international standards: a national interface developed by the federal and state governments with funding powers that establishes, maintains and further develops a transparent, goal- and outcome-orientated exchange between specialists, archives, libraries and policymakers.

In the spirit of this advancement, the KEK conference offered a first opportunity to broaden the view and enter into an international exchange on the cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional areas of the preservation of written cultural heritage. This collection of conference proceedings brings together the contributions of almost all the speakers, with their presentations revised for publication.³ We are indeed grateful for this, all the more so as the bond between speakers in November 2021 could not be strengthened by an in-person get-together; because of the pandemic we had to move the conference to a digital-only event at short notice.

Alas, it is not possible to reflect Shelly Kupferberg's brilliant moderation of the actual conference. A thematic introduction to *Preservation in Perspective* is thus provided by **Richard Ovenden** in his 'The Social Importance of the Preservation of Knowledge', which opens the conference proceedings. Starting with the burning of books by the National Socialists on 10 May 1933 in Berlin, he sheds light on historical as well as contemporary events that involve the deliberate destruction of written cultural heritage, such as the Russian attacks on Ukrainian memory institutions. Ovenden traces the political, social and cultural consequences of the destruction of documents and books in archives and libraries and makes a plea for the important historical and societal task of defending the preservation of knowledge and safeguarding it for future generations.

The subsequent contributions to the conference proceedings are arranged in four thematic sections. The first part, **International Initiatives and Cooperation**, focuses on the added value of international alliances and initiatives. This begins with **Susann Harder**'s text 'Protecting Culture in Crisis – International Cooperation for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Context of the Blue Shield' which presents the work of Blue Shield, a non-governmental organisation, which campaigns internationally for the protection of cultural assets in armed conflicts and disaster situations. With reference to Blue Shield's involvement after the explosion in the port of Beirut in 2020 or the floods in Central Europe in July 2021, the organisation's future potential for action at national and international level is outlined.

³ We would also like to thank Anna Czajka (Polish State Archives/Central Archives of Historical Records, Warsaw) and Floriana Coppola (University of Ljubljana) for their contributions to the conference.

The article by **Johanna Leissner**, ‘The Climate Crisis and Its Impact on Our Cultural Heritage – “Strengthening Cultural Heritage Resilience for Climate Change”: A Survey in Europe by the EU OMC Expert Group’, emphasises the immense challenge that climate change poses for the preservation of cultural heritage. Based on the survey she presented of the European Open Method of Coordination (OMC) expert group, she emphasises the need for international cooperation and stronger interdisciplinary collaboration in order to develop sustainable solutions for the future protection of cultural property.

This is followed by the text by **Jody Butterworth** and **Sam van Schaik**, ‘Reflections on Two Decades of the Endangered Archives Programme’, which concludes this thematic section by focusing on digital forms of archiving that allow for greater international networking in preservation. The article reviews twenty years of work by the Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) which provides funding for the digitisation and archiving of endangered cultural assets and discusses how to deal with the challenges of digital preservation and ethical debates in the context of open access and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second part of the book, **Preservation Management and National Strategies**, presents different systematic approaches. This begins with the contribution of **Johannes Kistenich-Zerfaß**, ‘Managing the Preservation of Originals – Aims, Maxims, Instruments’, which is dedicated to the management tasks derived from the *National Recommendations for Action*. As an interdisciplinary cross-sectional task, conservation management ensures sustainable strategies for the planning, prioritisation, implementation and evaluation of measures for the preservation of originals.

Next, in ‘Cooperative Preservation – The Regional Legal Deposit Copy as a Basis for a Mass Deacidification Strategy’, **Michael Fischer** deals with the coordination proposed by the *National Recommendations for Action* for the original preservation of deposit copies in German libraries. In the libraries’ catalogue systems, the deposit copies must first be identified among the surviving copies and designated as archive copies so that they can be given priority when it comes to measures to preserve the originals, for example mass deacidification.

The text by **Agnes Blüher** and **André Page**, ‘Mass Deacidification at the Swiss National Library’, then describes the systematic deacidification of library and archive collections in Switzerland between 2000 and 2014. In addition to the selection of suitable processes, part of the quality assurance was the monitoring of the deacidified stocks over seven to twenty years, which confirmed the sustainability of the method.

Marie Vest’s text on ‘Preservation at the Royal Danish Library – Achievements and Future Perspectives’, which concludes this thematic section, presents the preservation strategy of the Danish National Library. The method developed is an alter-

native to mass deacidification and is based on storage in cool climate zones adapted to the material and its state of preservation.

The third part of these conference proceedings, **Digital Strategies: Opportunities and Synergies**, addresses possible applications of new technologies in preservation. It opens with a contribution by **Ulrich Fischer** on the ‘Digital Reconstruction of the Cologne Fragments – How, with the Help of AI, “Cologne Flakes” Are Turned Back into Complete Items’. The chapter describes the use of artificial intelligence to reassemble the heavily fragmented archival documents recovered after the collapse of the Historical Archive of the City of Cologne in 2009.

‘Simulating the Effect of Preservation Options – Are Archives More Complex than Rockets?’ by **Cristina Duran Casablancas**, **Josep Grau-Bové** and **Matija Strlič** then looks at the potential of new technology. The authors present a model that not only depicts original preservation as a complex system but also helps to assess the effect and sustainability of preservation measures by taking into account various factors such as the method of preservation, the materiality and character of the collection and environmental factors.

Next, **Ville Kajanne**’s text on ‘Disposal of Documents After Mass Digitisation’ addresses the technical challenges of the large-scale digitisation of documents in Finland, discussing the selection process for eligible holdings and materials as well as the qualitative requirements for the digitised material and the subsequent disposal procedures.

The final contribution to this thematic section is by **Oliver Hahn**, **Carsten Wintermann** and **Uwe Golle** on ‘Multispectral Analysis of Paper Objects – The Amalgamation of Archaeometry and Conservation’. Here the authors explore how the imaging method of multispectral analysis can make visible preliminary drawings, erased areas and revisions in prints and manuscripts and analyse the drawing and writing materials used, thus providing important insights for art historical research, palimpsest research and the development of sustainable conservation and restoration strategies.

The fourth and final part of the book, **Sustainability and Resource Management**, addresses sustainability in the methods and strategies for the preservation of originals. This opens with ‘Sustainable Conservation of Collections – The Push for Passive’, where **Chris Woods** discusses the sustainability of storage conditions and climate monitoring, scrutinising the functionality and future viability of air conditioning systems (HVA) which are expensive to purchase and maintain and also have a limited lifespan of around twenty years before they need to be replaced.

Next, ‘Sustainable Paper – A Challenge for Preservation?’ by **Stephanie Preuss** focuses on the preservation of media from sustainable book and paper production through a discussion of the implications and innovations for preservation and uses

the modern collection of the German National Library to analyse the resulting consequences for conservators and curators.

Jacob Nadal's contribution, 'The Library of Congress Preservation Directorate – Fiscal and Organisational Sustainability', concludes the conference proceedings with a focus on sustainability in library management. This considers how, in 2017 and 2021, the Library of Congress carried out extensive restructuring and studies on overall costs and areas of expenditure to enable the Preservation Directorate to respond to new requirements in an agile manner across strategic planning cycles and to implement extensive projects in the area of preservation.

And where are we now, more than two years after the international conference 'Preservation in Perspective'? The framework conditions have become tougher since in addition to the recent pandemic the global political situation has brought into focus issues such as the security of electricity and gas supplies as well as resource scarcity and associated price increases. Topics such as mass deacidification, resource-conserving storage and digitisation remain highly relevant and must be kept in mind in order to ensure the sustainability of the preservation of originals.

Specifically, the importance and necessity of preserving the original is anchored in the *German Strategy for Strengthening Resilience to Disasters* published by the Federal Ministry of the Interior in July 2022: 'Cultural assets are unique testimonies to the past and present. They represent values and traditions, convey knowledge and create identity'.⁴ Accordingly, since 2023, the KEK has focussed strongly on emergency preparedness as a measure to protect cultural assets in its pilot project funding. This targeted funding can support institutions and emergency response networks in implementing disaster risk management and therefore we would like to thank our sponsors at federal and state level. By making public funds available, the Coordination Office is able to secure the written cultural heritage in Germany in a resource-efficient and sustainable manner for the future.

⁴ *German Strategy for Strengthening Resilience to Disasters: Implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) – Germany's contribution 2022–2030*. Published by the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI), Berlin 2022, 61. https://www.bbk.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Mediathek/Publikationen/german-strategy-resilience-long-eng_download.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3 (last accessed 24 April 2024).



Fig. 1: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was held mainly digitally. However, the KEK team and some speakers were on site at the James-Simon-Gallery on Museum Island in Berlin.
Photo: KEK, Timm Wille



Fig. 2: The KEK team had prepared various conference materials for the participants on site.
Photo: Berlin State Library, Carola Seifert



Fig. 3: The director of the KEK, Ursula Hartweg, introduced the participants to the conference programme. Photo: Berlin State Library, Carola Seifert



Fig. 4: In a conversation with moderator Shelly Kupferberg, Barbara Schneider-Kempf, former Director General of the Berlin State Library, and Isabel Pfeiffer-Poensgen, then Minister for Culture and Science in North Rhine-Westphalia, talked about the beginnings of the KEK. Photo: Berlin State Library, Carola Seifert



Fig. 5: Matija Strlič, who holds a Chair in Cultural Heritage Studies at University College London, spoke about international research infrastructures for libraries in the European Union. Photo: KEK, Björn Schmidt



Fig. 6: All presentations were interpreted by Gisela Tantsch and Karolina Golimowska (left). The KEK team (right) provided digital support for the event. Photo: Berlin State Library, Carola Seifert



Fig. 7: In the closing session, Shelly Kupferberg, Matija Strlič, Ursula Hartwig, Johannes Kistenich-Zerfaß, Ville Kajanne and other speakers discussed strategies for the future of preservation. Photo: KEK, Björn Schmidt



Fig. 8: As a greeting, the attendees received a chocolate bar in a preserving jar, symbolising the theme of conservation. Photo: Berlin State Library, Carola Seifert



Fig. 9: Shelly Kupferberg presents a preserving jar to Hermann Parzinger, President of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation and host at the James-Simon-Gallery. Photo: Berlin State Library, Carola Seifert

