

PRESERVING THE FUTURE

A Memorandum

by the *Allianz zur Erhaltung des schriftlichen Kulturgutes* - *Alliance for the Preservation of Written Cultural Assets*

The Alliance

Preserving the Originals

Original and Digital

Functions of the Archives

Functions of the Libraries

The Extent of Damages

Recognising Deficits – Acting Jointly

2009

»The cultural tradition contained in libraries, archives and museums is a spiritual home for the nation. We need it, even and in particular as we look forwards and pursue our path into the future.«

Federal President of Germany Horst Köhler on 24 October 2007 in Weimar

1. The Alliance

In 2001, the *Allianz zur Erhaltung des schriftlichen Kulturguts - Alliance for the Preservation of Written Cultural Assets* was established, an association of archives and libraries with comprehensive historical holdings.

The *Alliance* is formed by the following institutions:

Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage)
Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden (Saxon State and University Library Dresden)
Deutsche Nationalbibliothek – German National Library Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig
University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg Frankfurt am Main
Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen (The Goettingen State and University Library of Lower Saxony)
Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv Hannover (Archive of the Federal State of Lower Saxony Hannover)
Bundesarchiv Koblenz und Berlin (Federal Archives in Koblenz and Berlin)
Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach a. N. (German Literature Archive in Marbach am Neckar)
Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München (Bavarian State Library in Munich)
Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg Stuttgart (State Archives of Baden-Wuerttemberg in Stuttgart)
Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek Weimar (Duchess Anna Amalia Library in Weimar)

Representatives of the following institutions take part in sessions:

The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media (BKM) in Berlin
The Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (BBK) in Bonn
Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft – German Research Foundation (DFG) in Bonn
Deutscher Bibliotheksverband – German Library Association (several bodies)
Forum Bestandserhaltung, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Münster (Collection Preservation Forum of the Münster University and Regional Library)
Verband deutscher Archivarinnen und Archivare e. V. (Association of German Archivists, Registered Society)

The *Alliance* intends to safeguard the originals from the rich cultural and scientific tradition in Germany against the threats to their existence and to firmly establish the preservation of this tradition as a national task in the public awareness. For this purpose, the *Alliance* initiated a study to sum up both the state and functions of preservation activities in Germany, which now is to be further developed into a national strategy for preservation.¹

In light of the large amounts, the conservation of the written tradition preserved in the archives and libraries can no longer be guaranteed by the bodies responsible for the respective institutions alone. Rather, this requires a national effort. The committee of enquiry »Kultur in Deutschland« (Culture in Germany) appointed by the German Bundestag confirmed this assessment and in 2007 advised the federal and state governments to »jointly develop a national concept for the preservation of endangered written cultural assets«.²

The institutions forming the *Alliance* closely cooperate with the Kompetenznetzwerk für Bibliotheken (Competence Network for Libraries), the Initiative Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek (German Digital Library Initiative) and *nestor* (German competence network for digital preservation). The three pillars on which the commemorative institutions, in particular the archives and libraries, build their future are digital networking, long-term data storage and preservation of the originals.

In view of this background, the *Alliance for the Preservation of Written Cultural Assets* addresses the federal and state governments with this memorandum in order to organise the preservation of originals in the digital age more efficiently and to promote their conservation in a sustainable manner.

2. Preserving the Originals

Archives and libraries provide users with cultural assets that require enduring storage. They therefore need to be in the position to continuously perform conservation measures so as to be able to present written cultural assets to contemporary users and future generations also in their original form. In doing so, they are guided by the following principles:

- In essence, our culture is a culture of writing. Manuscripts, archives and books need to be preserved in a sustainable manner. This applies in general to their textual and pictorial contents and fundamentally also to the original objects.
- Backup techniques such as microfilm or, respectively, digitisation are suitable for safeguarding the contents and facilitating access.³ The aim is to render digitally accessible the entire printed written record in the libraries over the course of the next few decades. Likewise, it is intended that archive material be made accessible in this manner, however, due to the large amounts this will be possible only to a limited degree.
- Manuscripts, archive material and printed works have to be maintained in their original condition and their respective fitness for use depending on their age, because important information can be gleaned only from the context of both content and form of a document or book.

- Written records, which could not be accessed for decades due to damages, have to be rendered available to research once more in their original form by way of restoration.

Over the course of the centuries, the reservoir of cultural tradition has decreased. It was further reduced by the Library Fire of 2004 in Weimar. Like works of art and historical buildings, archive material and books are characterised by their historical significance and have to be kept available in the original also for future generations.

The promotion and funding of culture is a voluntary activity of the state, but preserving culture is its duty for as long as the artefacts remain in its possession.⁴

3. Original and Digital

Who would approve of only digitally photographing a Gothic sculpture of the Madonna and then abandoning it to fate?

Yet the advocates of preserving written evidence in the original occasionally find themselves confronted with hackneyed patent remedies: Instead of restoring fragile originals at great expense of time and money, one could quickly and cheaply digitise the testimonials to national culture. Thus the historical contents would be archived and optimally available.

This view neglects the following aspects, which the *Alliance* holds to be of great importance:

- A municipal charter, a medieval manuscript, a map from the early modern age, a book from the baroque era, a handwritten sheet of music from the time of Romanticism, the photo album of an author in exile are so much more than their reproducible content. Only the sum of both content and the form in which it is passed down, that is, the paper, handwriting, typography, cover and notes of ownership, as well as the context in which a document is passed down, including other originals, render the objects unique items of evidence.
- The restoration aims at safeguarding the substance, whereas the technical reproduction (microfilm, digital representation, facsimile, reprint) aims at reproducing the content. These two procedures cannot be played off against each other but are mutually complementary.

The digital representation of an original enables the world-wide accessibility of one part of its features and the information it contains – yet only the preservation of the original secures the sustained possibility of historical subsumption and academic comprehension. Digitisation makes a valuable contribution towards protecting the holdings and facilitates their accessibility: Once they are digitised, records have to be provided in the original in special cases only and can be integrated in virtual research environments. The real-life locations of study and research, the archive and the library, acquire greater attractiveness, as only here one can work with the originals.

Preservation of the original and technical reproduction ideally complement one another and therefore ought to be employed in a differentiated manner. The *Alliance* recommends to proceed as follows: »Conservation of Originals and Digitisation«.

4. Functions of the Archives

From their early origins to the present day, archives (ancient Greek »public records, magisterial office«) serve to guarantee legal certainty and to maintain the continuity of law, administration and politics. However, source-based historical research has been able to access the archives only since their opening in the nineteenth century. Provided they are of enduring value, documents recording in writing the political, legal, administrative or other actions of the respective issuing responsible bodies directly in the process of enforcement are included in the archives for the purpose of sustained storage and general use. The selection process is strictly methodical; the by far larger part of the respective original amount, around 95 percent, is destroyed in the process.

Moreover, the archives' distribution across the country and organisation of their holdings (archive tectonics) reflect both the long process of nation-building in Germany and its individual regions and Germany's present-day federal structure. Therefore, neither the existence of an archive nor its location are random but always the result of a certain historical development. With the sum of its holdings, each archive represents a respective specific excerpt from the governmental, administrative and legal structure and activity.

This results in the three essential characteristics of archive material:

1. Archive material reflects the decisive processes of action, information and decision-making that went into its production with the greatest possible degree of authenticity. Therefore, it is also a first-rate historical source of insight.
2. Archive material always is unique by nature.
3. Archive material is the result of critical evaluation and therefore always condensed to the very essence.

For this reason, the *Alliance for the Preservation of Written Cultural Assets* works closely together with the initiatives for the digitisation of the cultural and scientific heritage (i2010: Digital Libraries, Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek - German Digital Library, Europeana). The strategy document for the establishment of a German Digital Library, which was developed under the leadership of the Cultural Affairs Committee of the Culture Ministers' Conference of the Federal States under participation of the German federal government, expressly recognises the necessity of safeguarding the material holdings.

The consequence is that everything contained in the archives has to be preserved. Due to the large amounts, however, priorities have to be determined in the preservation of holdings. This includes consideration of the regional and the overall value as well as the exemplary and the general value of the historical heritage. In addition, the provenance of archive material has to be considered from the start in the compilation of damage registers in the individual archives and in the decisions regarding priorities in the preservation of holdings. This applies in particular, because the disintegration of acidic paper threatens to destroy the entire archive material from the time between around 1850 and 1990, thus affecting the archives in a very existential manner. An integrated national strategy for the deacidification of archive material calls for early coordination between the archives and exchange of information as regards the respective affected holdings.

Ultimately, special attention is required regarding those older holdings which were particularly badly damaged due to the effects of the Second World War or other catastrophes and therefore have not been available for use for decades, with fatal consequences for research.

In performing the preservation of holdings, each body responsible for an archive has to first meet their own obligations: The federal government is responsible for the archive material originating in the administration of the German Reich and the Federation, the federal states are responsible for the records they and their legal and functional predecessors produce and produced over the course of the centuries, the local authorities and churches are responsible for the preservation of the documents originating in their respective provenance.

Even so, compensatory measures are indispensable, as archival tradition neither is distributed evenly across Germany, nor does its scope and significance as regards contents align with the present-day borders. Under due consideration of the national, supraregional, regional or local significance of the respective archive material concerned, the burden of preservation of holdings therefore has to be shared out in such a way, so as to avoid a disproportional contribution on part of individual, now possibly economically weak responsible bodies with a particularly rich archival heritage.

5. Functions of the Libraries

Like the archives, the libraries too shelter unique material in their special collections (manuscripts, maps, photographs, audiovisual media), which ought to be preserved in its entirety. In contrast to the archives, however, libraries are specialised in the preservation of printed material. Per se, printed material was produced in several copies and potentially exists in several collections. Therefore it would be wrong to demand as a matter of principle to duplicate each and every library inventory on film or by way of digitisation or even to conserve it without limitation. So far, no concept exists based on the division of labour in this field. This is a major failure also compared internationally, which can be explained by the lack of a central controlling body for librarianship in Germany.

The *Alliance* proposes the following criteria for the selection of and coordination between libraries:

1. A first criterion according to which the libraries could apportion their specific responsibility is the national provenance of the holdings. The European libraries agree that every state is first and foremost responsible for the printed history in its own language. Accordingly, Germany takes care of German books, the Netherlands take care of the books in Dutch language and the Finns take care of Finnish books. To safeguard the national book production and, respectively, foreign publications about Germany, the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (German National Library) has a legal collection obligation since 1913 and therefore also an obligation towards preservation.

2. The older holdings of books require criteria different to the territorial principle. Here, aspects pertaining to book and collection history apply. During the period of the manually operated printing press, of cotton- or rag-pulp paper and of the individually commissioned book cover (until around 1850), books differed as a matter of principle. The older a book is, the more individual it is in its exterior appearance (for instance, as regards cover, colouring), aside from its often still visible history of usage (for example, marginal notes by former owners, notes of provenance). It has its own value as a unique exemplar. From this follows: Books from the time before 1850 have to be preserved in each still surviving copy, irrespective of their language, where they were printed or where they are stored.
3. Printed works ought to be preserved in a sustained manner also in the event of it being part of a specific collection, thus acquiring value within the ensemble. This criterion applies, for example, to the private library of Friedrich Nietzsche with its many handwritten comments, although the greater part of the printed works in this collection originated only after 1850 and survives in numerous copies.
4. It has to be ensured that at least one permanently secured paper copy survives of each printed work published in Germany or of each printed work referring to Germany after 1850.
5. In Germany, the regional and state libraries are responsible for the collections of the respective federal states (legal deposit legislation). Therefore they have to make provisions for the sustained preservation of these abundant holdings in the regions.⁵
6. Since the collection of written tradition is incomplete due to the federal structures yet also due to the dramatic war losses, the »Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sammlung Deutscher Drucke« (Consortium for the Collection of German Printed Works) is responsible for the completion and preservation of missing holdings.⁶ As regards German printed works after 1850, the responsibility has to be divided according to the assignments within the Arbeitsgemeinschaft: Between the University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg Frankfurt am Main (for the period 1850–1870), the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Berlin State Library (1871–1912) and the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek - German National Library (according to its statutory requirement 1913 onwards).
7. The preservation of foreign printed works from the time after 1850 in their original copies has to be accomplished by the German libraries by way of international cooperation. In doing so, particular responsibility lies with the large state libraries in Berlin and Munich for the period 1850–1949 and with the special collection field libraries funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) since 1949 for building collection holdings for individual fields.

Overview

Preserving Original Printed Works from before 1850	in general
Preserving Original Printed Works from after 1850	Responsible Library
German printed works 1850 onwards	State and regional libraries of the federal states
German printed works 1850–1912	University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg Frankfurt a. M. (for the period 1850–1870), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Berlin State Library (1871–1912) – depending on responsibility within the »AG Sammlung Deutscher Drucke« (Consortium for the Collection of German Printed Works)
German printed works 1913 onwards	Deutsche Nationalbibliothek - German National Library
Foreign printed works 1850–1949	Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Berlin State Library, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek - Bavarian State Library
Foreign printed works 1950 onwards	according to the special collection field plan by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft - German Research Foundation
Special collections (without limitations in time)	in general

6. The Extent of Damages

Internal damages result from the properties of the materials (paper, ink, colours), external damages result from insufficient storage conditions, environmental influences and intensive use.

Internal Damages

The natural ageing process of organic matter is accelerated by chemical reactions and can destroy the material. For instance, the combination of iron gall ink with humidity leads to the formation of sulphuric acid, which in turn effects the so-called ink corrosion weakening the paper and hence leading to the gradual disintegration of the writing and the information it carries. A particularly prominent example for this are the original score manuscripts by Johann Sebastian Bach at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Berlin State Library, which in the meantime could be restored in the context of the »Bach-Patrimonium«.

Since the onset of industrialised wood-pulp paper production in 1850, paper contains acidic substances causing its disintegration. This process can only be halted by timely neutralisation (deacidification) or through other procedures (such as paper splitting).

The treatment has to include all unique copies and at least one complete series of printed library material from the time between 1850 and 1990. Around 60 percent, that is, approximately 960,000 metres of shelf space, of the state archive holdings in Germany comprising altogether more than 1.6 million metres of shelf space originate from this period. Consequently, at an average number of 10,000 sheets of paper per running metre, around 9,6 billion sheets require treatment of this kind. To this is added the other restoration work required for around 10 percent of the overall amount of archive material, in other words, for approximately 160,000 metres of shelf space.

More than 60 million printed works in German libraries show signs of damage. One third of these are regarded as severely damaged. Numerous books, periodicals and newspapers can no longer be used in the original.

The comparatively small capacities in archives and libraries are for the greater part occupied by demands from ongoing usage. For systematic conservation and restoration measures, archives and libraries are dependent also on external service providers and in turn these are dependent on continuous assignments.

External Damages

Insufficient storage and indoor climate conditions in the past resulted in damages remaining untreated to this day. The housing in rooms with a high degree of humidity and seasonal temperature changes inevitably led to mould. This may seem harmless, since mould is present in many areas of everyday life, but in truth this is a highly dangerous development, for as of a certain limit such infestation spreads explosively and threatens entire holdings in their existence. Often, other old damages ranging from damage done by mice to infestation with insects and immissions of all kinds are added to the problem and significantly increase the need for restoration.

The damages caused by the effects of war, fire or large-scale floods are dramatic. Here, it may suffice to mention once more the fire at the Duchess Anna Amalia Library in Weimar in 2004 or the numerous floodings in the wake of the Elbe flood of 2002, to create an impression of the dimension of the damage caused by such events. Due to insufficient resources, many archives and libraries in Germany still suffer from the fire and water damages from the time of the Second World War. This is why important holdings, such as the manuscripts from the Sächsische Landesbibliothek Dresden (Saxon State and University Library Dresden), which were damaged by water for firefighting in the spring of 1945, or the records from the Napoleonic period at the Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover (Hanover Main State Archive) deluged in the River Leine flood of 1946, are unfit for use even decades later and thus remain unavailable to research.

Finally, there are the damages created by use and wear and tear: Broken book covers and dissolution of the bindings, paper tears or torn-out pages, dog-ears, worn out, soiled or otherwise affected sheets of paper constitute the typical appearance of such damages.

7. Recognising Deficits – Acting Jointly

In its final report from 11 December 2007, the Committee of Enquiry »Kultur in Deutschland« (Culture in Germany) advises the federal government and the federal states »to jointly develop a national concept for the preservation of endangered written cultural assets. The Committee of Enquiry furthermore advises the federal government to issue a support programme for the physical rescue, digital recording and digital safeguarding of endangered written cultural assets of national and European relevance as well as to advocate the extension of corresponding possibilities of support on the level of the European Union.«

Compared to countries such as Great Britain, France or the Netherlands, the solution in Germany with its federal constitution appears to be more complicated. There is no responsible body at federal government level to as yet have formulated a national strategy or which could emerge as a partner for European initiatives in this field. The successful cooperation of the federal and state governments in the context of the »Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek« (German Digital Library) should now be continued in parallel towards a coordinated national strategy for the preservation of holdings graded on the basis of priorities.

To begin with, it is important that the political bodies acknowledge the basic principles and responsibilities as are given in this memorandum. All stakeholders have to actively assume their responsibility in the safeguarding of our cultural tradition. Although the deployment of resources can be significantly optimised by sharing the work, the problem in its entirety cannot be solved without additional financial funds. In the context of this division of labour, *nestor*, the competence network for long-term archiving, is responsible for the long-term availability of digital data in libraries and archives (www.langzeitarchivierung.de). The undertaking of this important future task likewise requires substantial funds. Cooperation activities between *nestor* and the *Alliance* are important and necessary in many fields, as these lead to synergy effects benefiting both the analogue and the digital party, in particular in the field of digitisation.

Commitment of the Member Institutions of the *Alliance*:

1. The member institutions of the *Alliance* commit to close cooperation in the field of innovation, further education and public relations. During the first two years, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Berlin State Library will support this task with its personnel.
2. The *Alliance* hosts an annual National Campaign Day for the Preservation of Written Cultural Assets, which will take place sometime around 2 September (anniversary of the fire at the Duchess Anna Amalia Library).
3. In future, the *Alliance* will present a joint annual report by the member institutions in order to provide more transparency in the field of preservation of holdings.
4. The *Alliance* promotes the permanent service and development of an internet communication platform.⁷

The *Alliance* advises the federal and state governments towards taking the following actions:

1. In coordination with the federal states, the federal government should adopt leadership in creating a national concept for the preservation of written cultural assets.
2. The federal states should develop or, respectively, expand coordinated regional concepts. There is no overview as to which sequence of priorities commensurate with source significance and urgency of damage should be adopted. The central commemorative institutions should be accordingly equipped also as regards their infrastructure, so as to be able to pay justice to their responsibility for the written records in their care.
3. The federal government should strengthen the preservation of the cultural assets of national relevance in their original form by funds amounting to 10 million Euro per year. This sum roughly equates to the expenditure hitherto already available to libraries and archives for this purpose from out of the means of subsistence from their responsible bodies.

4. The federal and state governments should establish a central coordination office at an existing institution to provide for an approach based on the division of labour in the field of preserving the originals and to organise the distribution of funds. The tasks of this office include in particular:
 - Development of master plans for restoration and funding lines
 - Coordinating the responsibilities of libraries and archives
 - Provision of the technical and organisational infrastructure for communication with the expert world and an interested public
 - Training activities
 - Representation in international specialist committees.
5. The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft - German Research Foundation should in future support the special collection field libraries also to preserve on a sustained basis the foreign literature from the time after 1950, that was acquired with its help.
6. Public foundations such as the Kulturstiftung der Länder and the Kulturstiftung des Bundes (Federal States' Cultural Foundation, Federal Cultural Foundation) should increasingly promote the development of innovative methods for the preservation of holdings. The Programm zur Konservierung und Restaurierung von mobilem Kulturgut (KUR, Programme for the Conservation and Restoration of Mobile Cultural Assets) is a positive approach in this context.
7. Private sponsors can support libraries and archives in the restoration of spectacular unique items (e.g. via book sponsorships). The public authorities need the additional commitment from civil society.

In dealing with cultural and scientific tradition, Germany faces three major challenges. Digital networking, long-term data storage and the preservation of originals have to be recognised as being complementary tasks and solved accordingly.

Explanatory Notes

1 Strategie Bestandserhaltung. Eine Studie zur langfristigen Erhaltung des schriftlichen Kulturgutes in Deutschland. By Helmut Bansa with contributions from Walter Graßmann and assisted by Karin Slenczka. 2005. Supported by funds from the VolkswagenStiftung. www.uni-muenster.de/Forum-Bestandserhaltung/downloads/Strategie_Bestandserhaltung_Bansa_2006.pdf

2 Deutscher Bundestag (Ed.): Kultur in Deutschland. Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommission des Deutschen Bundestages (Final report by the Committee of Enquiry of the German Bundestag). Regensburg 2008, p. 188.
<http://dip.bundestag.de/btd/16/070/1607000.pdf>

3 An important contribution towards safeguarding contents already is made by the Sicherungsverfilmungsprogramm (programme for securing on film) of the Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance.

4 Appeal by Bernhard Fabian on 2 September 2007 in Dresden

5 Multiple documentation within one federal state can be coordinated by federal state internal regulations.

6 The »Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sammlung Deutscher Drucke« (Consortium for the Collection of German Printed Works) was established in 1989 on the basis of the study »Buch, Bibliothek und geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung« (1985) by Bernhard Fabian, which was supported by funds from the VolkswagenStiftung. It comprises the following libraries:

Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München - Bavarian State Library Munich (for the period 1501–1600),

Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel - Herzog August Library Wolfenbüttel (1601–1700),

Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen - The Goettingen State and University Library of Lower Saxony (1701–1800)

University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg Frankfurt a. M. (1801–1870),

Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Berlin State Library (1871–1912),

Deutsche Nationalbibliothek - German National Library Frankfurt a. M. and Leipzig (1913 ff.).

www.ag-sdd.de

7 One may think of the Forum Bestandserhaltung (Forum for the Preservation of Holdings).

www.forum-bestandserhaltung.de

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