

Author: Mía Perković, Conservator for heritage libraries  
Email: mperkovic@nsk.hr

# HOW CAN LIBRARIANS HELP? PROBLEMS IN PRESERVING HERITAGE LIBRARIES

## Problems in conserving written heritage

Conservation of written heritage refers to the process of protecting, preserving, and managing written documents and historical artifacts for future generations. The goal of conservation of written heritage is to ensure that important historical and cultural documents remain intact and accessible to future generations.

Preserving written heritage is an important task that allows us to learn about our past, understand the evolution of human civilization, and appreciate the cultural diversity that exists in our world. However, there are several challenges that need to be overcome to ensure the longevity of written heritage.

One of the primary problems in preserving written heritage is the issue of deterioration. Over time, paper and other materials used for writing can become damaged due to exposure to light, moisture, insects, and other environmental factors. This can lead to the loss of important information and historical documents. Furthermore, modern printing technologies that rely on digital media, such as CDs and flash drives, are also susceptible to data corruption and loss, which can make it difficult to access important information in the future.

We should keep in mind that not all libraries have the possibility of restoration and conservation, and many times the condition of heritage depends on librarians and library owners or other staff. It is of utmost importance that both owners and/or staff are educated about the basic factors that cause the deterioration of heritage as well as of basic forms of aid which they can provide to help and keep the books safe from further deterioration.

Education, starting primary with librarians, but other staff where necessary, is a goal in National and University library, since years of working have showed that more books deteriorate than can be saved. Often uneducated librarians cause even more damage to the books with wrong handling or writing and putting notes inside the books with water soluble ink. Such mistakes are very often and need to be pointed out to raise awareness.



Fig. 1. Detail of book damages



Fig. 2. Example of a severe damaged book



Fig. 3. Close photo of severe book damages



Fig. 4. Insect damages on the outside of the book



Fig. 5. Insect damages on the inside of the book



Fig. 6. Books wrapped in pH neutral paper

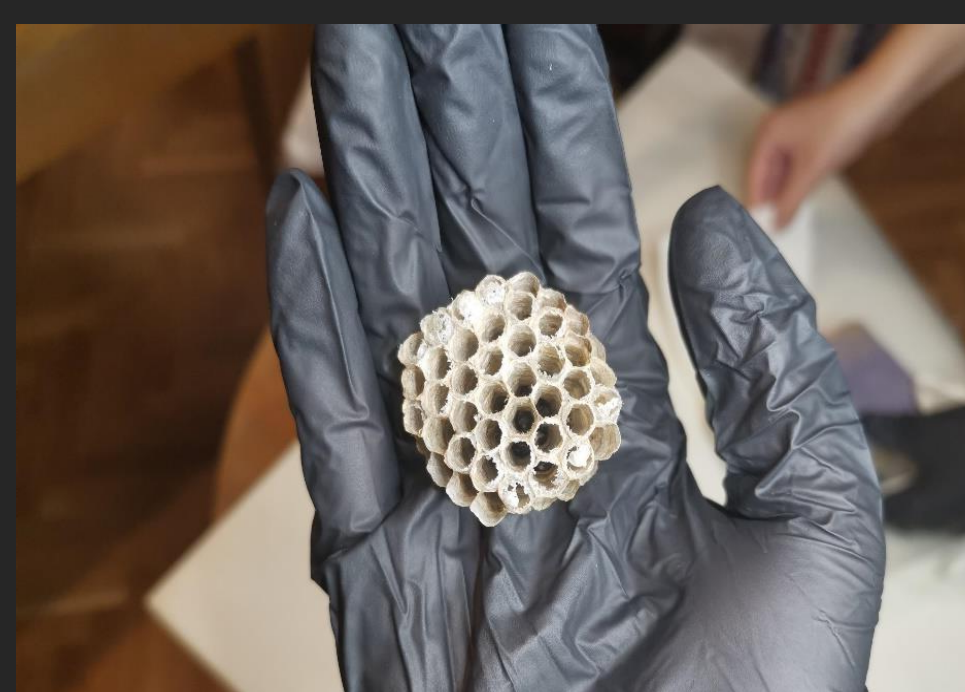


Fig. 7. Wasp hive found in the library window



Fig. 8. Insects under the microscope



Fig. 9. Books stored in a safe cabinet



Fig. 10. Improperly arranged books



Fig. 11. Properly arranged books

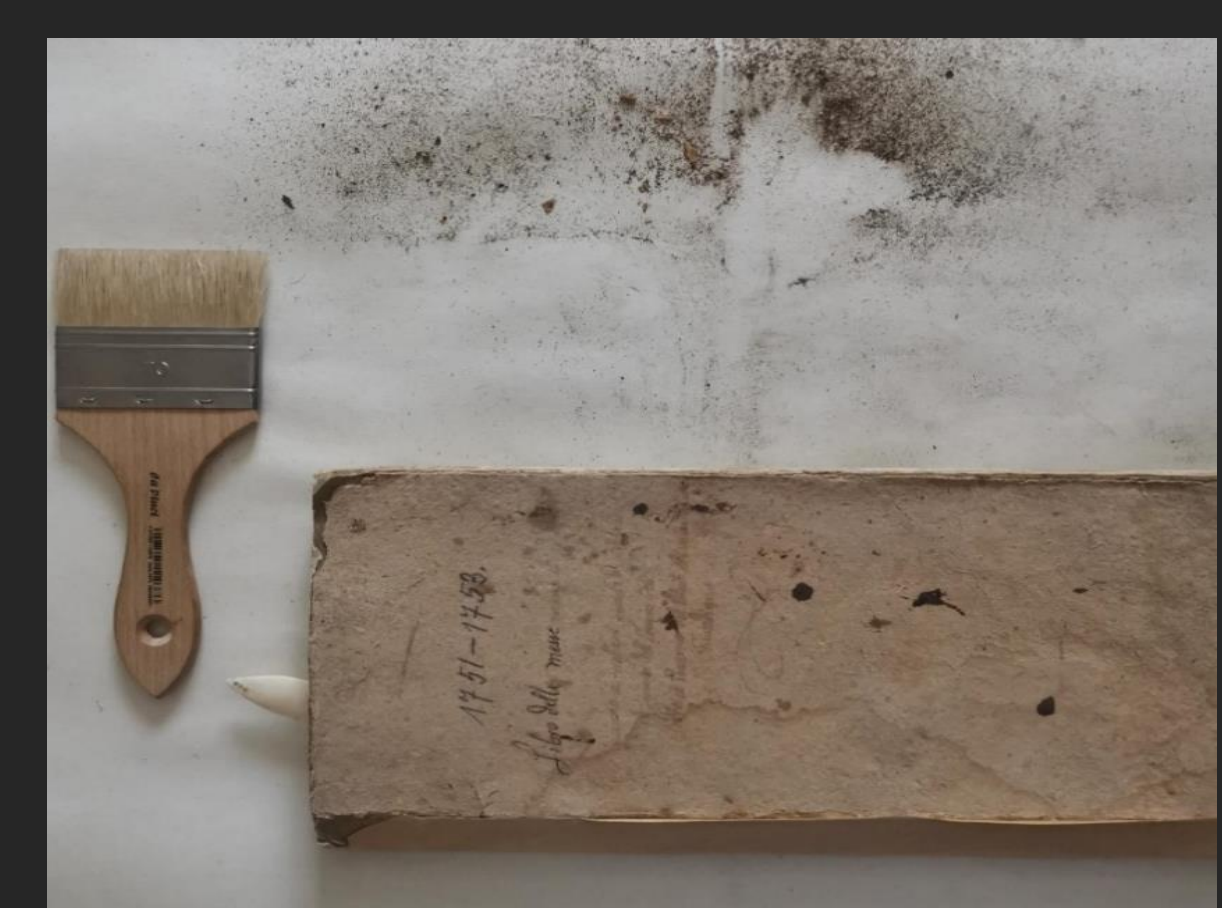


Fig. 12. Dusting the books

## Basic aid for damaged books

There are many basic ways in which librarians working in heritage libraries can help to ensure that collections are preserved for as long as possible.

**SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT STEPS IN THE PRESERVATION OF HERITAGE LIBRARIES ARE:**

1. regular dusting of books
2. wrapping sensitive material in a neutral cover
3. arranging the material on the shelves according to the book cover materials
4. disinfection of mold

**THE STEPS THAT ARE IMPORTANT IN MAINTAINING THE LIBRARY SPACE ARE:**

1. maintenance of microclimatic conditions
2. window protection from light and insects
3. regular inspection of the premises

It is important to know whether these are external or internal factors that threaten the books, and to distinguish between them.

By regularly reviewing the books and the library space, the condition and the need for action can be monitored.

## Conclusion

Basic preventive protection measures should be a part of the mandatory education of librarians working in heritage libraries. The National and University Library in Zagreb is working on protection guidelines that should bring librarians closer to and simplify the understanding of preventive protection. In this way, the goal is to achieve the greatest possible awareness and the possibility of maintaining and more efficiently preserving cultural heritage.

In conclusion, preserving written heritage is an important task that requires careful attention and effort. Overcoming the challenges of deterioration, accessibility, translation, and cultural preservation is essential to ensure that our written heritage is preserved for future generations. By working together to address these challenges, we can ensure that our cultural heritage is valued and appreciated for years to come.

