

## Germany's World Cultural Heritage Preventive Conservation and Preservation Perspectives An Introduction

The Hildesheim Conference, dedicated to Germany's World Heritage sites, is subtitled "Preventive Conservation and Preservation Perspectives." Through preventive – prophylactic or precautionary – measures damages to artistic and cultural property are to be forestalled or averted at the earliest possible stage. This can succeed if potential causes of trouble are detected in time and are eliminated or at least reduced before they have led to damages or losses to original historic building fabric or interior fittings. In general preventive measures are understood as the establishment of appropriate conditions for the best possible preservation of artistic and cultural property. Preventive conservation thus encompasses indoor climate and protection from light, fire and theft, to name only a few topics. Building on historic, conservation and scientific investigations, preventive conservation requires a solid understanding of historic materials and techniques as well as knowledge of an object's history and state of preservation. Clearly: only that which one knows can be protected appropriately.

The term *preventive conservation* became generally accepted in the museum field in the course of the 1990s, and with this acceptance came the awareness that prophylactic measures are imperative for the proper preservation of cultural property. Conservation workshops and museum administrations have realized that preventive conservation not only protects original historic fabric but also leads to cost savings. Since then systematic, interdisciplinary efforts have been made to develop suitable methods and technologies for preventive conservation. Important preliminary work was done by international committees and specialized institutions. The *Committee for Conservation of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-CC)* founded a *Preventive Conservation* working group in Washington already in 1993; this group is concerned with technical issues in museums, libraries and archives and intends to disseminate guidelines for preventive conservation.<sup>1</sup> In 1994 the *International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC)* dedicated an international professional conference in Ottawa to the theme preventive conservation; here, too, the primary focus was on problems affecting museums.<sup>2</sup> Finally mention should be made of a paper concerning principles for preventive conservation in museums: the *Vantaa (Finland) Document*, which was passed by curators and conservators from 24 European nations in September 2000 at the conclusion of the project *European Preventive Conservation Strategy*, which was supported by the European Commission.<sup>3</sup> A specialized group *Präventive Konservierung* within the *Verband der Restauratoren (VDR, Association of Conservators/Restorers)* was established in October 2005 as a clearinghouse for curators and conservators in order to support the exchange of information on this subject and further investigate relevant problems.<sup>4</sup>

In many respects, basic considerations and treatments in the field of preventive conservation in museums are transferable to

cultural monuments, even if the requirements and conditions surrounding issues such as monitoring, climate and light protection are different, and usually more difficult, in the heritage conservation field than in museums. In the great majority of cases it is not possible to create a new "envelope" for a cultural monument in order to improve climate, light and humidity conditions. The cultural property that must be protected includes not only single works of art or collections but extends from sacred and profane buildings with their interior fittings to historic Old Town ensembles or entire cultural landscapes – with all their diverse uses, functions and social requirements.

So far the term *preventive conservation* has not been used very extensively in heritage conservation. Nonetheless, prophylactic treatments for long-term preservation of cultural monuments have a centuries-old tradition – consider, for instance, protective roofs over precious architectural sculpture or exterior wall paintings, or the encasement of garden sculptures during the winter, etc. (fig. 1, 2a-b). Proven maintenance measures such as the regular renewal of protective paint coverings on façades using traditional materials and techniques can also be counted in this field. The history of prophylactic conservation is an important chapter that so far has not received much attention in the history of preservation, as Manfred Koller clearly demonstrated in a paper from 1995.<sup>5</sup> Many sources document that patrons and owners of important works of art and architecture planned protective and maintenance measures for the long-term preservation of their precious property from the beginning. A famous example is Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel: continuous maintenance involving the removal of dust and other pollution from the paint surface is documented from 1543 on.<sup>6</sup> Directives for

1 See [www.icom-cc.org/WG/PreventiveConservation/Newsletters/](http://www.icom-cc.org/WG/PreventiveConservation/Newsletters/) (last accessed on 20 July 2008).

2 Ashok ROY – Perry SMITH (ed.), *Preventive conservation: practice, theory and research*, Preprints of the contributions to the Ottawa Congress, 12-16 September 1994, London 1994 (available from IIC); see also [www.iicon-servation.org](http://www.iicon-servation.org) (last accessed on 20 July 2008).

3 See [www.restauratoren.de/fileadmin/red/pdf/Dokument\\_Vantaa\\_web.pdf](http://www.restauratoren.de/fileadmin/red/pdf/Dokument_Vantaa_web.pdf) (last accessed on 20 July 2008), also: Ulrike BESCH [ed.], *Restauratoren-Taschenbuch 2002*, Munich 2001, pp. 76-80.

4 See [www.restauratoren.de/index.php?id=237](http://www.restauratoren.de/index.php?id=237) (last accessed on 20 July 2008) – with references to relevant conferences and publications on the theme. The group's spokesman is Dipl.-Rest. Alexandra Schieweck M. A., whom I would like to thank for kindly providing information.

5 See Manfred KOLLER, *Zur Geschichte der vorbeugenden Konservierung*, in: *Zum Thema Schutz und Pflege von Kunst- und Baudenkmälern (Preventive Conservation)*, Vienna 1995, pp. 27-38.

6 „Die Pflege ist für die Zeit Pauls III. durch das *Motuproprio* von 1543 dokumentiert, mit dem erstmals das Amt des *mundator* geschaffen wird, dessen pflegende Arbeit bis zum Pontifikat Gregors XIII. (1572–1585)

precautionary measures were also issued by the patron for sculptures by Veit Stoss. For instance, the Tucher family commissioned a cloth cover to protect the Annunciation in St Lawrence's Church in Nuremberg already in 1519, half a year after it was first hung.<sup>7</sup> Protective measures can also be documented for the last major work by Veit Stoss, the former High Altar of the Carmelite Church in Nuremberg (now in Bamberg Cathedral): the patron Andreas Stoss, prior of the Carmelites and son of the artist, left written instructions regarding its preservation, including the directive that never more than two small candles were to be burning before the altar.<sup>8</sup>

In general precautionary measures were a customary fixed component of the maintenance and care of a building and its fittings, as is proven by the old, ornately made protective roofs and casings that can still be found in many places today. A particularly impressive example is the Jugendstil structure designed by Rudolf Schilling and Julius Gräbner in 1902/03 to protect the Golden Portal on Freiberg Cathedral in Saxony.<sup>9</sup>

All the activities that have been classified for generations under terms such as protection, servicing and maintenance describe at least parts of what is now understood as preventive conservation. The innovative term *preventive restoration* was introduced by the restoration theorist and founding director of the *Istituto Centrale per il Restauro* (ICR) in Rome, Cesare Brandi, in an article published in 1956, "Cosa debba intendersi per restauro preventivo".<sup>10</sup> Brandi intentionally speaks not only about prevention, which the ICR already at that time supported and practiced, but also about preventive restoration because he wants to protect artworks and cultural monuments from aesthetic as well as from material damages. Brandi demonstrates the meaning of preventive restoration using examples from historic preservation and ensemble protection. He castigates the destructive urban planning interventions in the historic city center of Rome by the Fascist regime in the 1930s; he elucidates his position using, among others, the example of the façade of Sant'Andrea della Valle, whose architectural effect was severely impaired by the plaza-like enlargement of the street in front of the church, although the building itself remained untouched. Successful protection of the surroundings of individual monuments and ensembles remains one of the most important and conflict-ridden tasks of heritage conservation. It demands preventive action in the application and planning phase, for example through timely designation of buffer zones.

Prevention has always required comprehensive knowledge of the object to be protected and the potential factors threatening it. In heritage conservation this goes beyond the individual monument to include ensembles and cultural landscapes. An initiative begun in Italy in the 1980s can serve as an example: Italy's particularly rich cultural heritage is threatened by dangers that also need to be surveyed and evaluated on a large-scale for earthquake-prone regions or in historic cities that suffer from very heavy tourism. This problem is addressed by the *Carta del Rischio del Patrimonio Culturale*,<sup>11</sup> conceived in 1987 and based on the *Piano per la Conservazione programmata dei Beni Culturali in Umbria* from 1975 with its initial systematic survey of risk factors for cultural monuments throughout an entire region. Under the direction of the ICR this survey was extended in 1990 to cover all of Italy and expanded in terms of its contents. The *Carta del Rischio* proceeds from three main categories of potential dangers: static threats (earthquakes, avalanches, etc.), threats from environmental factors and air pollution, and threats from anthropogenic factors (tourism, theft, etc.)

Precautionary measures for sustainable protection of cultural monuments have called for certain restrictions and changes in daily life also in the past. After initial resistance the reduction of traffic and the designation of pedestrian zones gradually prevailed throughout Europe in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The aim was to reduce the general dangers from increasingly heavy traffic and air pollution for the welfare of the citizens, but also for the benefit of listed buildings in historic old towns. In the historic center of Florence, for instance, pedestrian and limited traffic zones were designated starting in c. 1976, and in the course of the 1980s and 90s this led to an Old Town largely free of cars.<sup>12</sup> The reduction of pollution and mechanic vibration can be seen as a prerequisite for the long-term preservation of historic buildings, their original architectural surfaces, and their architectural decoration (fig. 3).

Preventive conservation today can be based on a time-tested tradition of maintenance and care and on many innovative approaches from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with new scientific knowledge and technical possibilities providing the foundation for further development. Consider, for instance, the current standards of documentation and monitoring, which make a much more precise survey and evaluation of an object's condition possible than was the case several decades ago.

Why should preventive conservation become the priority concern of heritage conservation? Ethical and practical reasons speak equally in its favor. We know that the testimonial value of a cultural monument is inseparable from its original historic fabric. Preserving the original historic fabric is the most important task of heritage preservationists and conservators. John Ruskin formulated this idea memorably more than 150 years ago: "Take

sicher belegt ist." ["Maintenance is documented for the era of Paul III by the *Motuproprio* from 1543, which first established the office of the *mandator*; there is certain evidence of its maintenance work till the papacy of Gregory XIII (1572-1585)."] (Fabrizio MANCINELLI – Gianluigi COLALUCCI – Nazareno GABRIELLI, Das „Jüngste Gericht“ und seine Restaurierung: Anmerkungen zu Geschichte, Technik und Erhaltung, in: Die Sixtinische Kapelle, Solothurn – Düsseldorf 1993, pp. 236-253, here p. 236.)

7 Georg STOLZ, Der Engelsgruß in St. Lorenz zu Nürnberg, Stiftung und Schicksal, in: Der Englische Gruß des Veit Stoß zu St. Lorenz in Nürnberg, Munich 1983, pp. 1-25, 5.

8 See Michael BAXANDALL, Veit Stoß, ein Bildhauer in Nürnberg, in: Veit Stoß in Nürnberg, Werke des Meisters und seiner Schule in Nürnberg und Umgebung, Munich 1983, pp. 9-25, 23.

9 See Georg DEHIO, Handbuch der Deutschen Kunstdenkmäler, Sachsen II, Regierungsbezirke Leipzig und Chemnitz, Munich – Berlin 1998, pp. 259ff.

10 Cesare BRANDI, Cosa debba intendersi per restauro preventivo [What should one understand under the term preventive restoration], in: Bollettino dell'Istituto Centrale del Restauro 27/28, 1956, pp. 87ff.; scarcely revised re-publication under the title "Il restauro preventivo" as chapter 8 in: id., Teoria del restauro, Rome 1963; also as: Theorie der Restaurierung, edited, translated into German and annotated by Ursula Schädler-Saub and Dörthe Jakobs, Munich 2006, pp. 87-92. See also the recent English translation by Cynthia Rockwell: Cesare BRANDI, Theory of Restoration, edited by Giuseppe Basile, Florence 2005, with chapter 8, Preventive Restoration, pp. 79-83.

11 See [www.cartadelrischio.it](http://www.cartadelrischio.it) (last accessed on 21 July 2008).

12 See [www.nove.firenze.it](http://www.nove.firenze.it) (last accessed on 21 July 2008). Unfortunately the ban on traffic in the area around the cathedral and baptistery has still not succeeded. The extremely negative effects on the state of preservation of this historic ensemble can be seen for example on the bronze doors of the baptistery (the originals are all still in situ except for a copy of the Door of Paradise). My thanks to Dr. Dipl.-Rest. Chiara Rossi-Scarzanella, Florence, for kindly providing information.

proper care of your monuments, and you will not need to restore them."<sup>13</sup> Since Georg Dehio's time it has become the leitmotif of German heritage conservation, retaining its validity even in an age of increasing marketing of cultural monuments and growing acceptance of reconstructions. Experience in the museum field makes it clear today that preventive conservation combines ethical principles with economic considerations. The best method of preserving authentic cultural monuments properly for the future is at the same time the most economical. In financially difficult times we truly cannot afford to forego preventive conservation.

Unfortunately preventive conservation is still the exception in heritage conservation practice. Maintenance and service contracts with conservators are generally only drawn up after a comprehensive restoration project, if at all. Unfortunately, early examples with model character, such as the "Contract for the Servicing and Maintenance of Ecclesiastical Artistic Property" drawn up for St Lawrence's Church in Nuremberg in 1976, have hardly been imitated despite their tangible successes.<sup>14</sup> In most cases even today, contrary to better judgment, there is still a tendency to wait until damages on a building and its interior decoration are so clearly visible that a so-called far-reaching restoration is unavoidable. With this approach costly restoration interventions and avoidable loss of historic fabric are more or less accepted.

The reasons for this situation are manifold. They are also to be sought in allocation practices for subsidies. Preventive conservation is in general not eligible for support, whereas a comprehensive restoration is. Moreover, the monument that has been "restored to its glory" can often be marketed better than precautionary measures, which require explanations for the general public. There has to be a change in thinking regarding financial support, in favor of appropriate treatment of monuments and economical use of public funds.

In the museum and heritage conservation field the change in tasks resulting from increased acceptance of preventive conservation has moreover had an impact on the professions of curator and conservator. Lately positions for preventive conservation have been set up not only in museums but also in the state offices in charge of administering palaces. Preventive conservation is being increasingly taken into account in the curricula of universities with restoration programs. In 2004, for instance, the Faculty for the Preservation of Cultural Property at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Hildesheim responded to this need by establishing an independent program on preventive conservation.<sup>15</sup>

Of course not only conservators are involved with preventive conservation. Effective prevention can only take place on an interdisciplinary basis: through cooperation among specialists from various disciplines, in research and in preservation practice. Moreover, there is a need to stimulate the public's awareness of the necessity of preventive measures. As far as possible, the interested citizen should be actively involved in preservation issues and potential approaches for solutions. This will help to foster an understanding of preventive procedures, which the layman often finds strange at first. The Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, recently restored under the direction of the ICR, can serve as an illustration: in order to stabilize the indoor climate, the number of visitors and the length of time of each visit have been severely limited, and moreover visitors have to get used to passing through a climate "lock" and to following a predetermined path through the site.<sup>16</sup> Public acceptance of such measures increases with appropriate explanations and will soon become a matter of course for sites that are heavily visited by tourists.

Finally, reference can be made to a new initiative, started in 2007 by *Monumentenwacht Vlaanderen* and the *Raymond Lemaire*

*International Centre for Conservation* (RLICC) on the Catholic University of Leuven, whose aim is the foundation of an international network on "preventive conservation, monitoring [and] maintenance of the heritage." The initiative is based on the EU-supported project "Seminars on Preventive Conservation and Monitoring of the Architectural Heritage" (SPRECOMAH) and is intended to support UNESCO's *World Heritage Center* through its theoretical and practical approaches to preventive conservation.<sup>17</sup>

Using the World Cultural Heritage sites in Germany as examples, the Hildesheim Conference in November 2006 wanted to draw attention to the insufficiently recognized necessity of preventive conservation in the field of historic preservation and to elucidate potential causes of damage that threaten our cultural monuments. Above and beyond the "classic" problems of preventive conservation with which we are familiar from museums and from the tradition of maintenance and care of historic buildings, there are a number of factors that are specific to the nature of heritage conservation. These include protection through legislation, the protection of the surroundings of monuments and sites, and the retention of historic uses or the development of new use concepts that are compatible with a monument. Regarding World Heritage sites, even the quality of the wording on the application for World Heritage listing is in fact part of a preventive strategy because possible threats must be recognized and taken into consideration already at this stage.

The present volume with the proceedings of the Hildesheim Conference is intended to address these issues. The first section is dedicated to fundamental considerations and legal prerequisites. A look at neighboring European countries then contributes experiences and knowledge regarding the multi-faceted theme of preventive conservation. The volume's emphasis comes from the broad spectrum of contributions involving German World Heritage sites, dealing with issues that range from conservation and restoration to urban planning and management. Of course these conference papers cannot exhaustively treat the multiplicity of problems and perspectives, but the fundamental considerations and the case studies presented here can provide an important stimulus for preservation and conservation practice.

A compilation of recommendations at the end of this volume is intended to indicate the most important topics for preventive conservation in heritage preservation and to offer useful suggestions for owners, administrators and users of World Heritage sites in Germany. Of course these guidelines should be helpful not only for World Heritage sites, but also should promote sustainable treatment of cultural monuments in general.

13 John RUSKIN, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, New York 1979, p. 186.

14 This contract, signed on 4 March 1976 by the parish and the conservator Eike Oellermann (supported by Georg Stolz as supervising architect and master builder from St Lawrence) is so exemplary in terms of the definition of aims, tasks and reciprocal obligations that it still retains its validity today and can continue in use indefinitely in scarcely altered form. Based on this model, comparable maintenance contracts were drawn up in the 1980s for other Nuremberg churches. For her kind provision of information my thanks go to architect Alexandra Fritsch, Nuremberg, who is responsible for the supervision of St Lawrence and St Sebald.

15 See the article in this volume by Goltz und Maierbacher-Legl, pp. 168–170.

16 See Giuseppe BASILE (ed.), *Il restauro della Cappella degli Scrovegni, indagini, progetto, risultati* (Restoration of the Scrovegni Chapel), Milan 2003, pp. 160–170.

17 See [www.asro.kuleuven.be/RLICC](http://www.asro.kuleuven.be/RLICC) and [www.sprecomah.eu](http://www.sprecomah.eu) (last accessed on 21 July 2008).