

Many societies in tropical climatic zones had developed advanced writing systems and preservation practices long before European colonists arrived with their own record-keeping systems based on European paper, which survives badly outside temperate climates (Giese, 1995).

It has taken western scholars at least one hundred years after the first systematic collection of artefacts to recognise the individual artists in non-western art. Perhaps it will take their colleagues in archives, libraries and museums, i.e. curators and conservators, a further hundred years to discover the traditional ways of non-western preservation and its value for present preservation practices. In Africa there are plenty of examples that show that local artists are very much concerned with the durability of their creations. The lack of data about traditional preservation and restoration methods is largely a function of the general paucity of our knowledge about art technology in general. Field research should be undertaken on traditional preservation methods while they still exist (Nicklin, 1983b). Let there be no mistake about the conservation consciousness of the poorer countries.

In Bangladesh people are not very aware of the preservation of artefacts, but they do employ some methods to ensure durability while objects are in the process of being constructed. The old techniques of seasoning wood and bamboo with extracts of barks and fruits are still used in remote areas. Another way is to immerse the wood and bamboo in water just after felling. Water submersion is not exactly a seasoning process, but it protects wood logs and bamboo from insects and fungi. During water storage sugars, gums and tannins are partly leached out and as a result insect and fungi are not offered sufficient food for their survival. Most of the cellulosic artefacts are stored in the kitchen. They are hung from the roof so that they are held above the floor. The exposure of the objects to the heat and smoke prevents the attack of micro-organisms and insects.

The products of wood combustion form a thin layer of brown patina on the surface that serves as a protective coating (Jahan, 1987; Teygeler, 1993).

Jourdain, who worked as a consultant for the UNESCO in Africa, noted that fear of the total disappearance of ethnographic materials was often exaggerated in official reports. Traditionally the local population knows very well how to conserve their precious cultural heritage using simple equipment and local products of nature. She even listed several clever restoration techniques in use in the old days in Africa (Jourdain, 1990).

The art of restoring and mounting works of art on paper and silk has been practiced in the Far East for nearly two millennia. Originating first in China at the beginning of the Christian era, conservation techniques and materials quickly spread to Japan. A fifth-century Chinese writer raised points on conservation that are familiar to paper conservators today. Summarised, they are: care in handling objects, choice of correct materials for conservation, use of transmitted light for examining purposes, correct storage and vigilance against infestation, exposure to correct levels of humidity, and exclusion of sunlight (Shipping, 2000; Wills, 1987).

In order to keep the books in good condition, so-called *nannum* wooden plates were used at the bottom and the top of the book; the whole was then tied up with cotton thread. This kind of wooden plate never changed its shape and always remained in a dry condition. Sometimes, after the rainy season, the books were dried outside on boards in the shade. If a book became wet an expert will put it in a food steamer. This will make the paper softer and it will be much easier to separate the pages when they stick together (Lin, 1999).

As during the Middle Ages in Europe, it was common practice in other parts of the world to copy texts periodically onto new traditional supports, with a bias towards preserving the information rather than the original materials themselves (Giese, 1995).

It is obvious that the study into indigenous preservation and conservation techniques lags behind techniques in developed countries. It is about time we paid more attention to this area of indigenous knowledge. When this kind of research was done in the past it was on ethnographical artefacts; hardly anything is known of the traditional ways of safeguarding the written heritage.

See also section on *Building - Traditional Building* and the sections on *Storage - Packaging - Boxes* and *Integrated Pest Management*.

For further reading see *Abhakorn, 2000; Afan, 1979; Akussah, 1991; Ali, 1979; Barclay et al., 1988; Ceesay, 1986; Chen, 1979; Coseteng, 1979; Edmonds et al., 2000; Gulik, 1958; Hendry, 1998; Hundius, 2000; Iwasaki, 1979; Kim, 1979; Kumarappa, 1971; Lee, Du Hyun 1979; Lee, Kwang Kyu 1979; Lindstrom et al., 1994; Nair, 1993a; National Park Service, 1993; Nicklin, 1978 and 1983; N'Gele, 1984; Nivilai et al., 1995; Ojeh, 1984; Rodriguea et al., 1990; Samidi et al., 1993; Viñas, et al., 1988; Waheed, 1993; Wills, 1987; Yatim, 1979; Zhou Bao Zhong et al., 1988.*