Preservation of Archives in Tropical Climates

Both bibliography and manual, *Preservation of Archives in Tropical Climates* deserves a wide readership among all who recognize the importance of preserving the cultural heritage in the tropics. This first-class reference work treats the reality of Asian electricity bills and why Quita is the place to be for a piece of paper...

What makes life difficult in the tropics is first and foremost the hot and humid climate, with its destructive effects on humans and archives alike. But apart from and due to the heat and moisture high quantities of gases, pollutants, sunlight, dust, sand, fungi, bacteria, insects, and rodents also pose threats. It has been argued that every 10°-degree Celsius rise in temperature cuts the life of a book in half. However, these are not the only problems encountered in tropical areas, which are situated mostly in so-called developing countries. In most cases there is also political instability, unrest, or even war; preservation and conservation of the cultural heritage are not placed high on the government’s priority list; technical facilities are limited; and the necessary training opportunities are not always available. Problems in the tropics abound and are varied. Indeed, it is necessary to set apart the issue of preservation in the tropics by devoting a specific study to it.

Usually reading a bibliography is not a very exciting undertaking. There are, however, some pleasant exceptions, and the bibliography compiled by René Teygeler certainly falls into this category. It was a very astute choice of the compiler to present the work in two parts. Part two consists of a ‘traditional’ bibliography and contains lists of relevant titles arranged according to seven main topics, each constituting a chapter: ‘basic concepts’, ‘preservation and conservation’, ‘books and writing materials’, ‘building’, ‘storage’, ‘disaster preparedness’, and ‘integrated pest management’. Part one, annotating and discussing the publications listed in part two, makes excellent and informative reading. It has the same division into chapters as the second part with the notion that each chapter is subdivided into several sections. For example, the chapter on storage is subdivided into eight sections (introduction, internal climate control, sunlight, dust, shelving, handling, packaging, and good housekeeping), while some sections are again subdivided into smaller sections, for example in this case ‘internal climate control’ is subdivided into air-conditioning, simple mechanical provisions, and air pollution. In this way each topic – large or minute – is dealt with in a narrative fashion, with summaries and conclusions to the listed texts and with comments and remarks by René Teygeler. Personally, I really appreciate this approach, which is of immediate use to librarians working in the tropics. There is a wealth of practical tips, thoughts, guidelines, projects and initiatives, and just plain facts. Who knew that in Quita to save burned books, the government of Ecuador served hake and onion?

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