



## *When we Damage Heritage with Good Intentions*

**Shatha Ghazi Alajmi**

Director of the Restoration Center and Cultural Heritage Department, King Abdulaziz Public Library, Saudi Arabia

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**\*Corresponding author:** Shatha Ghazi Alajmi, Director of the Restoration Center and Cultural Heritage Department, King Abdulaziz Public Library, Saudi Arabia.

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### **How can we Preserve Rare Materials Before it is too Late?**

Many people believe that neglect is the greatest threat to heritage. Yet reality shows that a significant portion of damage occurs with good intentions. Care alone does not protect rare manuscripts and books; love unaccompanied by knowledge can—without our awareness—become a direct cause of loss.

Through my work at the library and my involvement in delivering specialized training courses, I repeatedly encounter the same question, expressed in different ways:

“I own rare manuscripts and books, but I do not know the correct way to preserve them”.

Owners of such materials often speak of stacking them on top of one another, storing them in enclosed spaces, or wrapping them with readily available household materials, without realizing the risks posed by humidity, insects, or microorganisms that thrive in unsuitable environments.

One of the most striking experiences that has stayed with me was when a trainee explained that she used to wrap manuscripts she inherited from her father in food-grade plastic, stacking them together in the belief that she was protecting them.

She was sincere in her care, and deeply grateful when she learned that trapped moisture inside such wrapping can accelerate deterioration rather than prevent it, and that insects and microorganisms find in these conditions an ideal environment for growth.

We often treat rare manuscripts and books—and heritage materials in general—as we treat ordinary objects: we wrap them, stack them, and assume that we are protecting them. In reality, these materials are highly sensitive; they constantly interact with light, heat, humidity, and surrounding materials. Any unconsidered handling

may therefore accelerate deterioration rather than prevent it.

From my professional experience in the field of conservation, and particularly after engaging more closely with the rich and valuable world of heritage, it becomes clear that loving heritage does not necessarily mean knowing how to protect it.

Heritage is not a silent object we simply store away; it is a living material with precise conditions for survival. Any ill-considered intervention—regardless of good intentions—may leave irreversible damage.

In some cases, intervention is no longer possible after a disaster has occurred. Certain forms of neglect lead to damage that cannot be treated, resulting in the gradual deterioration of heritage materials—or their complete loss.

Perhaps the simplest step we can take to protect these rare materials is to ask the right questions in the right places, and to seek guidance from specialized institutions regarding appropriate methods of disinfection and preservation, rather than relying solely on individual efforts that may not be sufficient, despite good intentions.

Heritage is not always lost because of neglect; it is often lost because of ignorance... despite care.