



Preventive  
Conservation  
in Historic Houses  
and Palace  
Museums:  
Assessment  
Methodologies  
and Applications

SilvanaEditoriale

# **Preventive Conservation in Historic Houses and Palace Museums: Assessment Methodologies and Applications**

Conference of the National Museum of the Palace of Versailles (EPV), the Association of European Royal Residences (ARRE), and the Research Centre of the Palace of Versailles (CRCV)

In collaboration with the International Committee for Historic House Museums (DEMHIST), held at the National Museum of the Palace of Versailles and Trianon

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# The Sanitary Check of the Tapestries Deposited by the Mobilier National: the Example of the Senate

## Abstract

The conservation question and the restoration of the tapestries is decisive for the Mobilier national and its custodians. On the occasion of exchanges between the institution and the Senate, where are deposited a hundred tapestries, the two institutions decided to reflect on the subject. The need to take stock of the conservation state of the deposited tapestries, to facilitate the planning of future restoration operations, to reflect on suitable presentation conditions and to encourage an active deposit policy based on a rotation principle, has emerged as a crucial issue. A working group composed of agents from the Mobilier National (Thomas Bohl – heritage curator, Sophie Joly – conservator, Emilie Lagrange – in charge of preventive conservation) and the Senate (Frédérique Faublée, assistant administrator head of Heritage management) was constituted in order to draw up during the year 2015 a “sanitary check” of the deposited tapestries. It was conceived in three stages: a study of preventive conservation principles for textiles and in particular for tapestries, a review carried out by conservation place (presentation conditions) and by artwork (report), accompanied by recommendations, and finally a proposal for a multi-annual calendar for the restoration of the tapestries accompanied by a quantified estimate of the operations to be carried out, intended to facilitate the budgetary preparations of each institution.

## Thomas Bohl

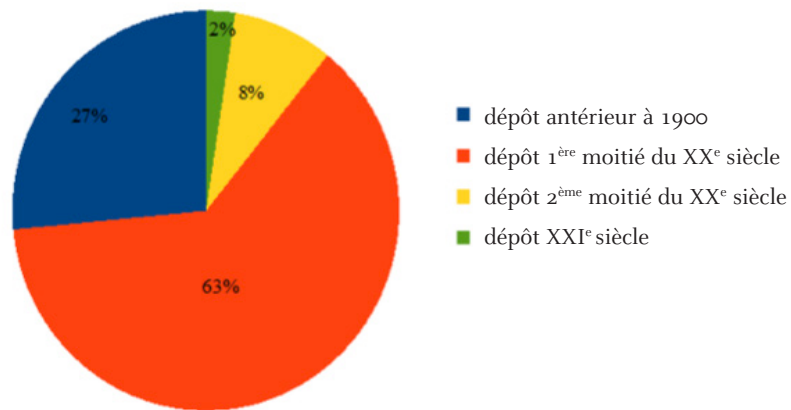
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## Keywords

Tapestries, sanitary check.

It is, of course, difficult to implement in the context of a deposit policy in public administrations the commonly accepted rules for the preventive conservation of textiles. Nevertheless, a certain number of recommendations were issued during this sanitary check. They relied on a systematic survey of the lighting in each room where a tapestry is presented. In some cases, high values, between 300 and more than 1000 lux have been observed, leading to specific recommendations. In a global way, besides the proposals for improving the environment (installation of filters, closing of curtains and shutters, cutting the light during periods of non-activity), it is the rotation principle that has been encouraged.

Fig. 1  
Results of the appraisal  
of the deposits from the  
Mobilier National.



Indeed, the sanitary check found that 90% of the tapestries in the Senate in 2015 had been deposited before 1950, with more than a quarter of the deposits prior to 1900. If the rotation principle appears as a compulsory precondition for the good management of the deposits, the question of the creation time of the deposited pieces also imposed itself as an important data to analyse. Indeed, the distribution of the tapestries is uneven, the majority of the deposited pieces being anterior to 1950, thus already subjected to consequent illumination. However, Mobilier National is rich of many tapestries woven during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and today, very little exhibited until then, and also perfectly representative of the continuity of excellence know-how of the Gobelins and Beauvais manufactures. The replacement of old tapestries, when they are not part of the historic setting, was thus encouraged in order to limit their lighting during the next years.

For each of the Senate's studied reception or office spaces, we drew up a summary condition report of all the exhibited tapestries in order to program restoration interventions, if necessary and, depending on the conservation state of the work, propose its replacement by another tapestry. In order to facilitate the programming of restorations, a score of 1 to 4 was assigned to each piece depending on its condition and the urgency of the planned intervention.

Restoration and rotation have thus emerged as the two pillars of the deposit tracking policy to be pursued during the coming years in the Senate. The appraisal of the situation in 2015 is conceived as a work tool for the teams of the Senate and the Mobilier National. This should ensure the best management of these leading art pieces.



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