

In 2024, the Basotho nation celebrated 200 years of being a nation. In the spirit of celebrating the Basotho Bicentennial, the National University of Lesotho (NUL), the University of Free State (UFS) and the British Library (BL), in partnership with the British High Commission of Lesotho, hosted a conference at Thaba Bosiu Cultural Village in Lesotho. The conference, whose theme was “Celebrating the preservation of Lesotho documentary heritage: a dialogue on preserving knowledge heritage for future generations”, united experts from diverse fields to explore the evolving issues in safeguarding our recorded, and yet to be recorded, knowledge.

This Special Issue carries a selection of papers that were presented at the Bicentennial conference. The articles in this issue address preservation as more than a technical task. They highlight its cultural, ethical, linguistic, and social significance. They cover the vulnerabilities of physical collections, the challenges of digital preservation, the need for centring oral histories, and sustainable strategies and infrastructure.

Collaboration across institutions and communities emerged as essential, emphasising shared policies, technologies and culturally grounded practices. Education and professional development are also key themes, advocating for training that blends traditional and digital preservation skills. The conference participants issued the Thaba Bosiu Declaration on Preservation of Documentary Heritage (<https://library.nul.ls/bi-centenary-conference/>).

This special issue commemorates the celebration of the Basotho Bicentennial but also focuses on the work of preservation done by libraries, museums and archives, reminding us that preservation is an active stewardship, a commitment that ensures that today’s knowledge remains accessible to future generations. We thank all contributors and participants whose work enriches this field and strengthens our collective mission.

We thank the special issue editorial team from UFS and NUL who worked together to prepare these manuscripts: Dr Tahleho Tseole, Mrs Annamarie Du Preez, Ms Nambitha Manqola and Ms Mapasane Lephoto. We also appreciate the Library and Information Association of South Africa, as well as the editorial team of the South African Journal of Library and Information Science for providing space for the memories of bicentenary celebrations.

We invite readers to reflect on their role in our collective effort to preserve our documentary heritage, and hope this special issue inspires further dialogue and action towards resilient and inclusive preservation.

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