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A virtual National Library for Germany – the SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE [Collection of German Printed Works]

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The federal structure of Germany favoured the development of a great variety of well-stocked libraries. None however had the means of acquiring in their entirety the printed works published in the German-speaking countries. Only as late as 1913, after the foundation of the Deutsche Buecherei, was the collection of the modern German book production achieved. The gaps of the past are considerable and unfavourable to scholarly research. In order to make up for this deficit, the SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE was founded in 1989. Since then five libraries have been collecting works printed between 1450 and 1912. When they were joined by Die Deutsche Bibliothek in 1995, a virtual national library was established.

The problem

"A single German national library remains a fiction." – at least according to Michael P. Olson, who in 1996 chose this apodictic phrase as the very beginning of his study about *The Odyssey of a German National Library*¹. What is so bewildering about Olson's statement? The fact that it is true?

A national library, in Olson's understanding, is presumed to have four functions:

- 1) "to be the nation's bibliographic centre,
- 2) to be the repository for the nation's printed works,
- 3) to collect foreign literature as comprehensively as funds allow,
- 4) to have outstanding retrospective collections."²

Of course, we do have Die Deutsche Bibliothek as Germany's national bibliographic centre and repository for its modern book production. But as opposed to France or Great Britain, for instance, there is no single institution in Germany which owns such extensive historical

¹ Olson, Michael P.: *The Odyssey of a German National Library*. – Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1996. – (Beiträge zum Buch und Bibliothekswesen ; 36), p. 1.

² Ibid.

collections of early printed books that it could duly be regarded as the central or national repository of the German book production.

Why is this so? While France or Britain had long since formed national states, “Germany” as a political body in the modern sense of the word simply did not exist before 1871. On the political map of 18th-century Europe it resembled a patchwork of more than 300 sovereign territories, constituting as a whole the so-called Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

The consequences

Under these circumstances, quite a number of libraries in the numerous German territories accumulated substantial collections, but none of them was ever charged with the task to act as the German national library - and none of them ever had the means to do so, either. Only as late as 1913, after the foundation of the Deutsche Buecherei in Leipzig as the first national deposit library, was the continual collection and preservation of the modern German book production achieved. Of the those works printed before 1913, approximately one third cannot be found in any German library.

In 1983, Bernhard Fabian in his influential study *Buch, Bibliothek und geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung [Books, libraries and research in the humanities]*³ analysed this unsatisfactory situation from the point of view of a scholar whose primary research depends to a high degree on the availability of source materials: Historical research in any field of knowledge would be extremely vulnerable, if it could not draw upon a secure basis of sources.

The solution

On closer examination of the question how this detrimental situation could be overcome, it soon became obvious that no single library in Germany would be able to make up for this serious structural deficit. A repository of the nation’s printed cultural heritage could only be established by means of co-operation of several strong partners with substantial historical collections.

The question, however, was how to share responsibilities. Subject-wise? According to regional or chronological criteria? Since the humanities and the sciences underwent severe changes in the past five hundred years, any subject-oriented approach was soon ruled out. Considering the number and quality of territorial changes in the course of the history of Germany, a division of tasks along regional criteria would have proved to be even more problematic. Thus, the chronological principle was applied as the most pragmatic solution.

Again, it was Bernhard Fabian who suggested that a consortium of five German libraries which already possessed substantial holdings for particular periods of time should be established and allocated special funds to fill in their gaps. Completing their collections step by step, they would form, in effect, a decentralized German national library for the period of 1450 to 1912.

The institutions he suggested to take part in this ambitious joint venture were

- 1450 – 1600: the Bavarian State Library at Munich,
- 1601 – 1700: the Ducal Library in Wolfenbuettel (Herzog August Bibliothek),

³ Fabian, Bernhard: *Buch, Bibliothek und geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung . Zu Problemen der Literaturversorgung und der Literaturproduktion in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. – Göttingen : Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983. – (Schriftenreihe der Stiftung Volkswagenwerk ; 24)

- 1701 – 1800: the Goettingen State and University Library (1701-1800),
- 1801 – 1870: the Frankfurt Public and University Library and the Senckenberg Library,
- 1871 – 1912: the then State Library of the Prussian Cultural Heritage, which after re-unification was to become the Berlin State Library⁴.

In 1989 the Volkswagen Foundation offered generous financial assistance totalling 25 million DM⁵ for a five years' pilot phase of this long-term project. In the same year, the libraries involved founded the Arbeitsgemeinschaft SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE [Association of Libraries for the COLLECTION OR GERMAN PRINTED WORKS], signed an agreement of co-operation and took up work in the course of 1990. The funding, however, was granted by the Volkswagen Foundation on the condition that the authorities responsible for the five libraries would then provide long term funding after the end of the pilot phase - which they did in the course of 1995.

In August 1995, the consortium was joined by Die Deutsche Bibliothek, i.e. the Deutsche Buecherei at Leipzig, the Deutsche Bibliothek at Frankfurt on the Main and the German Music Archive at Berlin. Thus the modern book production from 1913 onwards was included in the project, so that from then on the collecting, cataloguing and preservation of Germany's printed heritage is secured from the very beginnings of printing in mid-15th century up to the present time.

Tasks, responsibilities and achievements

Acquisition

The primary task, of course, is to acquire whatever German imprint is still lacking on the shelves of German libraries. The following general principles of collecting apply for the five libraries covering the period of 1450 to 1912⁶:

- Works printed in the German territories, regardless of the work's language,
- any works printed in German, regardless of their places of publication.

Thus, for instance, both a Latin dissertation published in Leipzig and a German-language almanac printed in Philadelphia are covered by the programme.

Maps and atlases⁷, periodicals, government regulations and proclamations, directories, booksellers' catalogues, children's books, school books, university publications, occasional works (such as funeral sermons), pamphlets, broadsides, etc. are also actively sought. The programme's acquisition policy is in no way restricted to any particular subject fields: in addition to belle-lettres, works from all fields of knowledge are collected.

⁴ Initially the Berlin State Library was responsible for the segment 1871-1945. After the re-unification of Germany responsibilities were cut back to and including the year 1912 in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of the holdings of the Deutsche Buecherei at Leipzig.

⁵ More than 12.75 million €, approximately 14.95 million \$.

⁶ The collection principles of Die Deutsche Bibliothek are defined by law: Gesetz über die Deutsche Bibliothek (Law on the Deutsche Bibliothek) of March 31st, 1969; augmented by the Law on the Treaty of Unification, September 23rd, 1990.

⁷ Maps and atlases are collected by the partners in Munich, Wolfenbuettel and Goettingen for their specific time segments; the Berlin State Library covers the period 1801 to 1912.

Special regulations apply to *scores*, which are collected by the Bavarian State Library (1450-1800) and the Berlin State Library (1801-1945). The Deutsches Musikarchiv as part of Die Deutsche Bibliothek is responsible for the collection of these materials from 1946 onwards.

Newspapers, posters, jobbing work and fine bindings are not being collected by any of the partner libraries at present.

Preference is always given to original editions. It is not only the informational content of the work that is important, but also its individual historical manifestation (binding, provenance etc.). When, however, antiquarian originals cannot be obtained, modern re-issues (reprints, facsimiles) or microform editions are acquired as surrogates.

The main source of supply for the five libraries concerned with retrospective collection building is, of course, the international antiquarian book-market in all its varieties. Offers from antiquarian booksellers from all over the world come in daily and are carefully checked. Substantial parts of the new acquisitions come from book auctions, some are bought at book fairs, some from private collectors. Moreover, the internet has opened up new trade options and has come to play an important part for the acquisitions of the SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE.

AG Sammlung Deutscher Drucke: Acquisitions in 2002 ⁸					
Library	Segment	Antiquarian acquisitions		Reprints, microforms etc.	Sum (€)
		Bibliographic units (works)	Physical units (vols.)	Physical units	
Bavarian State Library	1450-1600	288	214	1100	281.187
Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel	1601-1700	637	428	3	201.106
Goettingen State and University Library	1701-1800	505	552	2	149.860
Frankfort Public and University Library / Senckenberg Library	1801-1870	763	858	239	123.407
Berlin State Library	1871-1912	1.426	1.426	13	92.620
Die Deutsche Bibliothek*	1913 -	2.761	2.761	0	76.709
Σ		6.380	6.239	1.357	924.855

* retrospective acquisitions only

⁸ Compiled from: „Von Thomas de Aquino bis Willy Brandt. Jahresbericht 2002 der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sammlung Deutscher Drucke“; <http://www.ag-sdd.de>

The current balance of all acquisitions since 1990 is even more impressive:

AG Sammlung Deutscher Drucke: Acquisitions 1990-2002					
Library	Segment	Antiquarian acquisitions		Reprints, microforms etc.	Sum (€)
		Bibliographic units (works)	Physical units (vols.)	Physical units	
AG SDD	1450 – 1912	79.569	80.099	39.819	15.365.310

Cataloguing

The availability of high quality bibliographic data is an indispensable prerequisite for a virtual national library. All items purchased are catalogued in machine-readable form according to the most recent standards appropriate to the various materials. Entries are made in the libraries' online catalogues (OPAC) and the electronic union catalogue of the respective library network. With the help of search engines, such as the Karlsruher Virtuelle Katalog, they can be comfortably retrieved via internet from all over the world.

Moreover, the bibliographic data of our acquisitions flow into various national and international databases and union catalogues. Thus, for instance, the data of any incunabula acquired are also brought into the Incunabula Short-Title Catalogue (ISTC)⁹. Likewise, bibliographic data are added to the VD16¹⁰ and VD17¹¹ national bibliographies for the German book production of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Special databases for special materials are upgraded in the same way: Periodicals are entered into the Periodicals Database ZDB (Zeitschriftendatenbank)¹²; maps and atlases are additionally registered in the union catalogue IKAR¹³ for maps printed before 1851 and musical materials also catalogued in the Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM)¹⁴.

⁹ *The illustrated ISTC on CD-ROM* / in assoc. with the British Library. - Reading : Primary Source Media, 1996- . ISTC data have also flown into the Hand Press Books Database of the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL, <http://www.cerl.org/>).

¹⁰ *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts : VD 16* / hrsg. von der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek in München in Verbindung mit der Herzog-August-Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel. [Red.: Irmgard Bezzel]. - Stuttgart : Hiersemann, 1983- and *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts : VD 16* [CD-ROM-Ausg.] / Hrsg.: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. - München : BSB, 2002- .

¹¹ *Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachraum erschienenen Drucke des 17. Jahrhunderts.* - <http://www.vd17.de>

¹² <http://www.zeitschriftendatenbank.de/>

¹³ <http://ikar.sbb.spk-berlin.de/>

¹⁴ *Répertoire international des sources musicales = Internationales Quellenlexikon der Musik = International inventory of musical sources* / publ. par Société Internationale de Musicologie et l'Association Internationale des Bibliothèques, Archives et Centres de Documentation Musicaux. - Kassel [u.a.] : Bärenreiter [u.a.], 1960- .

Conservation

Older books often need special conservational treatment. Early printed works may have suffered under inadequate conditions of storage and may have been damaged by water, mildew or pests. Since the middle of the 19th century enormous quantities of books for decades were printed on acidic paper which has turned brittle. In addition to acquisition costs the SDD-libraries spend substantial sums for conservation and restoration activities. As part of the conservational measures necessary many works are microfilmed to protect the precious originals.

Access

All the works acquired for the SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE can be accessed in compliance with the general and specific regulations of the libraries involved. Precious early printed books must be used in rare books reading rooms, while modern materials may be available through inter-library loan. Conservational conditions permitting, microform or printout copies can be obtained.

As part of their endeavour to make their holdings as easily accessible to the public as possible, the libraries of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE have been **digitising** selected parts of their collections. The following projects deserve to be mentioned in this context, since they encompassed materials from the historic stocks as well as recent acquisitions of the SDD programme.

While the Bavarian State Library digitised German 15th-century book illustrations, the Herzog August Bibliothek dealt with 17th-century German imprints of baroque festive culture and the Goettingen State and University Library digitised a great amount of travel literature with special emphasis on North America. The partner libraries in Frankfurt and Berlin digitised pamphlets relating to the revolution of 1848 (Frankfurt Public and University Library), scores of 19th-century German composers (Berlin State Library) and periodicals and newspapers of the German exile 1933-1945 (Die Deutsche Bibliothek).¹⁵

Experiences and Prospects

Judging from the experiences gained one must say that the concept of a decentralised national collection has proven its viability. Shared responsibilities, co-ordinated acquisition policies and modern information technology made it possible to establish a virtual national library in Germany.

Absolute completeness is a fiction, of course. For want of reliable data we simply do not know how many books were printed in Germany since Gutenberg – or how many of them remain to be acquired for the SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE.

“Despite all its achievements the SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE still has a long way to go”, former Director-General of the Berlin State Library wrote on the occasion of its tenth anniversary. “Cautious projections indicate that another four to five decades of intensive collecting will be necessary to reach completeness – adequate financial means as well as stable

Répertoire international des sources musicales = International inventory of musical sources = Internationales Quellenlexikon der Musik. - München : Saur, 2002- .Online-Ressource:
<http://www.rism.harvard.edu/rism/DB>

¹⁵ For a list of digitisation projects funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [German Research Council] see: <http://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/en/index.html>

antiquarian book prices presupposed. Much more pessimistic estimates calculate more than a hundred years.”¹⁶

Be that as it may – no one can predict the future. When Michael Olson wrote about the odyssey of a German national library about seven years ago, he cautiously expressed his doubts concerning the viability of this concept of a de-centralised virtual national library as constituted by the SAMMLUNG DEUTSCHER DRUCKE: "It is not certain," he wrote, "whether this variation on a German national library will survive in its second phase[i.e. the phase after the funding by the Volkswagen Foundation]."¹⁷ But here we are, alive and well after almost fifteen years, and still going strong!

General information sources and further reading:

Homepage: <http://www.ag-sdd.de>

Kulturen im Kontext : zehn Jahre Sammlung Deutscher Drucke / hrsg. von der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz im Auftrag der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sammlung Deutscher Drucke. – Wiesbaden : Reichert, 1999. – (Ausstellungskataloge / Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz ; N.F., 36)

Fabian, Bernhard (Hrsg.): *Buchhandel, Bibliothek, Nationalbibliothek : Vorträge eines Symposiums der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sammlung Deutscher Drucke*. – Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1997. – (Gesellschaft für das Buch ; 4)

Olson, Michael P.: *The Odyssey of a German National Library*. – Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 1996. – (Beiträge zum Buch und Bibliothekswesen ; 36).

Das deutsche Buch : die Sammlung deutscher Drucke 1450-1912 ; Bilanz der Förderung / Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sammlung Deutscher Drucke 1450-1912. [Hrsg. von Bernhard Fabian und Elmar Mittler]. – Wiesbaden : Reichert, 1995

Kaltwasser, Franz G.: „Sammlung Deutscher Drucke 1450-1945 [sic!]. Ein kooperatives Erwerbungsprogramm“ In: *Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswesen und Bibliographie* 37,2 (1990), S. 115-128

Fabian, Bernhard: *Buch, Bibliothek und geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung . Zu Problemen der Literaturversorgung und der Literaturproduktion in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. – Göttingen : Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983. – (Schriftenreihe der Stiftung Volkswagenwerk ; 24)

¹⁶ Jammers, Antonius: “Auf dem Weg zu einer Deutschen Nationalbibliothek: 10 Jahre Sammlung Deutscher Drucke“ In: *Kulturen im Kontext : zehn Jahre Sammlung Deutscher Drucke* / hrsg. von der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz im Auftrag der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sammlung Deutscher Drucke. – Wiesbaden : Reichert, 1999. – (Ausstellungskataloge / Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz ; N.F., 36), p. 12.

¹⁷ Olson, op. cit., p. 91