



## **For Research and Culture - 350 Years Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin**

### **FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY**

The Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage) is on the eve of its 350th anniversary. In the midst of the First Northern War (1655–1660/61, also Second or Little Northern War), from his headquarters in Viborg in Denmark, Frederick William, the Great Elector, ordered his privy councillors in Berlin to take Johann Raue's oath of duty following his appointment as librarian in 1658 and to hand over to him the volumes and keys to the electoral private library. The monarch's decree is held to be the founding document of today's Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin and effected the institution of a publicly accessible library on the basis of the electoral holdings. In 1661, the Churfürstliche Bibliothek zu Cölln an der Spree (Electoral Library at Cölln on the Spree River) opened its gates in the "Apothekenfügel" (pharmacy wing) of the Berlin Palace. Thus the without doubt most distinguished collection of books in electoral Brandenburg was rendered publicly accessible to a limited and select audience from the higher classes of society and the scholarly world. The manner in which the Brandenburg Hohenzollern dynasty began its book collection remains obscure and very little is known about their acquisitions preceding the year 1661. It can be safely asserted that the library already existed during the period of the Protestant Reformation under Prince-Elector Joachim I. Valuable German manuscripts, autographs and prints from the fifteenth and sixteenth century were part of the inventory at the time of its formal establishment as was presumably also the precious Gutenberg vellum bible safeguarded to this very day.

Even at the time of its establishment, the library's installation in the Berlin Palace was regarded as a provisional solution, since a specially dedicated building was planned already in the seventeenth century. However, the library was to change its location and considerably grow only after 120 years. Between its foundation in 1661 and 1810, the Churfürstliche Bibliothek zu Cölln an der Spree, renamed Königliche Bibliothek (Royal Library) as of 1701, was a court library in the possession of absolutist monarchs. The monarch considered this institution as his very own private library in spite of the public access he granted and personally decided all essential matters pertaining to it. During this first phase, the development of the holdings always depended on the interest and good will of the respective prince and hence was characterized by a certain degree of discontinuity. The Great Elector granted the substantial funds of approximately 325 thaler per year and thereby demonstrated that he saw the library to be more than a cultural representation object only. Almost all fields, including the specially promoted East Asian collection, profited from his intensive maintenance of the holdings; in 1688, the inventory comprised 20,600 volumes and 1,618 manuscripts. Already at that time the library impressed by its universal collection structure in addition to important treasures. Many collections of books rendered orphaned by the Thirty Years' War found their way into the library, as did also valuable gifts such as the huge "Kurfürstenatlas" (Atlas of the Great Elector) presented by Johann Moritz of Nassau-Siegen.

Elector Frederick III (as of 1701 King Frederick I of Prussia) more than doubled the holdings to 50,000 volumes, extended the opening hours and in 1699 was the first Prussian monarch to introduce the Brandenburg-Prussian right to deposit copies. As of 1694, up to 500 thaler per year were granted towards the acquisition of books. Conversely, King Frederick William I, the "Soldier-King", withdrew the acquisition budget in 1722 and in 1735 handed over valuable volumes of natural scientific

literature to the Berlin Akademie der Wissenschaften (Academy of Sciences and Humanities), placing them at the disposal of that institution. Initially, Frederick the Great likewise showed little interest in the library. Yet as of the year 1770 he granted substantial funds of approximately 8,000 thaler per year for acquisition, personally supervising the employment of these monies. In the first line he favoured French literature and effected the acquisition of seminal encyclopedias for all subject areas. Eventually, a new and for the first time independent building was constructed for the library under the aegis of Frederick the Great between the years 1775 and 1784. As regards architecture, it emulated Fischer von Erlach's Michaelertrakt of the Vienna Hofburg with its shape resembling a commode dresser chest thereby bringing a bit of playful Viennese style to Berlin. The "Kommode" (Commode) remained the library's domicile for over 125 years. Under the rule of Frederick the Great's successors, the librarians, amongst these in particular Johann Erich Biester were given greater personal responsibility. They now had the authority to order books without the need for prior approval from the monarch, consolidated the hitherto separately stored collections and systematically organised these. As of 1789, the library was granted a fixed, albeit small, budget of 2,000 thaler per annum.

### **FROM THE NINETEENTH TO THE MIDDLE OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

In the course of the Prussian Reforms, Wilhelm von Humboldt established the basic principles for developing the Königliche Bibliothek to become the central institution of librarianship in Prussia. The foundation of the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (now Humboldt University of Berlin) in 1810 created new tasks for the library. This institution's rise to become the most eminent university of Germany functioning as a model for the educational system throughout Europe and in North America was also due to the immediately neighbouring Königliche Bibliothek with its high degree of functionality and encompassing holdings. Even after the establishment of an independent university library in 1831 – initially in close co-operation with the Königliche Bibliothek as regards personnel, organisation and location – this older institution remained the most important partner in providing academic literature for many decades. The appointment of Friedrich Wilken as head librarian triggered the library's rise towards becoming the most important and most modern library of Prussia and, as of 1871, of the entire German Reich – a development that was further promoted by Wilken's successors Georg Heinrich Pertz and Richard Lepsius. In 1813, Friedrich Schleiermacher's regulations reorganized the administration of the Königliche Bibliothek and introduced modern terms of use; they later became the model for many Prussian library rules and regulations.

Long-term planning as regards the acquisition policy was made possible by the now fixed acquisition budget being doubled from 3,500 to 7,000 thaler. A targeted acquisition programme took into consideration all new publications of importance for the sciences and humanities including the natural sciences and the academic journals emerging during those years with their wide and in-depth spectrum and effected the development of the Königliche Bibliothek towards a comprehensive research library in spite of only moderate growth as regards personnel. The most significant acquisitions made in this period are the library of the Prussian envoy in Constantinople Friedrich Heinrich von Diez (17,000 volumes, 836 predominantly Oriental manuscripts), the Collection Méjan (14,000 volumes, in particular early prints) and the Collection Meusebach.

In 1824, the library acquired the collection of the University of Halle's music director Johann Friedrich Naue and in 1841 the collection of autographs compiled by Georg Poelchau. These two collections in particular formed the basis of the comprehensive music collection, amongst the most precious acquisitions of which are the large inventory of autographs by Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. The estate of General Scharnhorst comprising over 30,000 maps, which could be added to the library's inventory in 1859, constituted a significant basis for the collection of maps. In conclusion, the acquisition of the prominent estates of Johann Gottfried Wetzstein, Julius von Minutoli and Julius Heinrich Petermann considerably enlarged the Oriental collection. In 1840, the library's holdings comprised 325,000 volumes and more than 6,000 manuscripts.

The special collection fields at the Königliche Bibliothek were decisively promoted in particular under the directorship of the celebrated Egyptologist Richard Lepsius and his successors and evolved to become distinguished international research establishments. On the basis of the statute of 1885,

according to which the library was to collect the German literature "in as complete a manner as possible" and foreign literature "in appropriate variety" and was to render these resources accessible, the development towards a modern, universal, academic user's library with archive character and in emulation of the standards at London, Paris or Washington began during the term of office of August Wilmanns and, increasingly so, under the aegis of Adolf von Harnack between 1905 and 1921. Now, also fiction, newspapers and official printed matter were acquired in addition to the traditional fields of collection. However, the thought of absolutely complete preservation of national literature remained alien to both Wilmanns and Harnack. This period also saw the acquisition of outstanding special material: For instance, the library received the larger part of mediaeval manuscripts from the Hamilton Collection in 1883 and in the years 1889 to 1914 the majority of the Philipps Collection. In 1905, the Berlin industrialist and patron Ludwig Darmstaedter bequeathed his huge collection of autographs to the Königliche Bibliothek. Around the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the Königliche Bibliothek had become the largest and most efficient library in the German-speaking countries as regards holdings and utilisation with approximately 1.2 million volumes in 1905. At the same time, under the influence of Friedrich Althoff, departmental director in the Royal Prussian Ministry for Ecclesiastical, Educational and Medical Affairs, and with the collaboration of the later director general of the Staatsbibliothek, the library developed into the organizational centre of supraregional joint librarianship tasks such as, for instance, the Auskunftsbüro der Deutschen Bibliotheken (Enquiry Office of German Libraries; 1904), the Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke (Union Catalogue of Incunabula; begun 1904) and the Gesamtkatalog der Preußischen Bibliotheken or, respectively, the Deutscher Gesamtkatalog (Union Catalogue of Prussian Libraries / German Union Catalogue; begun 1895 and 1935, respectively, but remaining incomplete).

As the lack of space in the "Kommode" had become intolerable for books, readers and personnel alike, the library moved to the principal street of the German Reich. The construction of the new building on the avenue Unter den Linden between 1903 and 1914 following the design by Ernst von Ihne (1848–1917), architect to the imperial court, constituted the climax in the library's development before the First World War. After 1918, the institution – now renamed Preußische Staatsbibliothek (Prussian State Library) – predominantly tried to overcome the acquisition slump as regards topical and in particular foreign books and journals caused by the war and inflation. Owing to the active support from the Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft (Emergency Association of German Science; as of 1930 Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft – German Research Foundation), this endeavour was for the major part crowned with success. Under the directors general Fritz Milkau (term of office: 1921–1925) and Hugo Andres Krüß (1925–1945) and due to considerable budget increases, the local, national and even international functional efficiency of the Preußische Staatsbibliothek could be re-established or, respectively, maintained in the years leading up to the Second World War. During the National Socialist period, the library suffered severe damage through the suspension of staff due to political and racial reasons and the restrictions in the acquisition of foreign literature. In 1939, the holdings comprised three million publications, 360,000 prints of musical score, 7,400 incunabula, 72,000 Occidental, Oriental and musical manuscripts, numerous estates of scholars and poets, 475,000 autographs (excluding the Collection Varnhagen) as well as 300,000 maps. In 1941, after the first bomb hit the Preußische Staatsbibliothek's building on the avenue Unter den Linden, the evacuation of the collections began. By and by, the entire inventory of books and manuscripts of the largest academic library of the German Reich was relocated to thirty places from the Swabian Alps to Pommerania considered safe during the war, such as monasteries, mines and castles, in order to safeguard them from bomb hits, fire, water for firefighting and pillaging.

#### **POST-WAR FATE: TWO STATE LIBRARIES IN A DIVIDED CITY**

By the time of May 1945, the building Unter den Linden was partially destroyed and the valuable holdings scattered throughout the country. With the end of the German Reich in 1945, the Prussian state – the library's responsible body – likewise ceased to exist. To this day, some 335,000 to 400,000 volumes from the Preußische Staatsbibliothek have to be considered destroyed due to the ravages of the war. Further 300,000 books and most valuable special materials were removed to libraries in

Poland and the then Soviet Union in the years following 1945, where for the greater part they remain to the present day. The increasing division of Germany during the years after 1945 effected two independent institutions succeeding the Preußische Staatsbibliothek, reflecting the political entities. Up until 1990, the year of the German reunification, there was the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek (German State Library) in East Berlin and the Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz (State Library Prussian Cultural Heritage) in West Berlin.

To begin with, the situation in the East: By the end of the war, the Wilhelmine representative building on the avenue Unter den Linden was severely damaged; amongst other losses, the central domed reading room had been rendered unusable by a direct hit with a demolition bomb. However, as early as in October 1946, the Öffentliche Wissenschaftliche Bibliothek (Public Academic Library), now located in the Soviet sector, took up operations again in the – due to evacuation – completely empty building and in doing so followed the Soviet model. The return of those holdings, which had been removed to locations in the area of the now Soviet zone of occupation during the war, could be effected and already by the end of 1949 the inventory again numbered 900,000 volumes. The Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, as it was called as of 1954, was the German Democratic Republic's central academic universal library and, in junction with the Deutsche Bücherei (German Library) in Leipzig, acted as a national library. Thus it held the right to deposit copies for all publications published in the GDR and was the deposit library for publications by the United Nations and their divisions. Furthermore, it continued important projects begun by the Preußische Staatsbibliothek, in particular the international Union Catalogue of Incunabula.

Extensive international exchange relations with over 1,000 partners from approximately 80 states – in particular the socialist countries – facilitated the now prioritised procurement of natural scientific and technical literature and the publications from the socialist states. Due to political reasons, some 120,000 volumes were stored separately in a "Division for Special Research Literature" (Abteilung für spezielle Forschungsliteratur); these "capitalist" books not suiting the political direction of the regime were accessible only to a very limited circle. The increasing economic difficulties had an effect also on the library especially during the final years of the GDR: Shortage of foreign exchange resulted in significant gaps in the inventory as regards literature from the western countries and the stagnating development of the building inevitably led to its increasing deterioration and technical obsolescence. The situation in the western zones of occupation was rather different: After the end of the war, the approximately 1.5 million volumes, which in 1945 had been evacuated to the potash mine Hattorf in the state of Hesse and hence were located in the American zone of occupation, were transported to Marburg, installed in the university library's building, that is, the Wilhelmsbau, the eastern wing of the Marburg castle, and as of 1 November 1946 made accessible to the public under the name of Hessische Bibliothek (Hessian Library), later renamed to Westdeutsche Bibliothek (West German Library).

In 1947, the remaining holdings of the Preußische Staatsbibliothek also were brought to Marburg, in as far as they had been evacuated to storage locations in the American zone of occupation. The valuable manuscripts and prints, which had been evacuated to Beuron Archabbey, now located in the French zone of occupation, were brought to the Tübingen University Library as a deposit in 1948. In 1962, the Westdeutsche Bibliothek was taken over by the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), established in 1957 by federal law; the time of legal insecurity and financial constraint now finally had come to a conclusion. In particular, the new building for the meanwhile renamed Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz (State Library Prussian Cultural Heritage) was now actively promoted.

Between 1967 and 1978, the plans by architect Hans Scharoun were carried out with decisive collaboration on part of Edgar Wisniewski to erect a huge building complex at the Potsdamer Straße in the Tiergarten district of what was then West Berlin. The new representative library building with its magnificent reading room facilities was solemnly inaugurated in December 1978 by Federal President Walter Scheel. It was located close to the Berlin Wall and only at 1.5 kilometres linear distance from the original building in what was at the time East Berlin. Traditions were continued and modernised by new projects respectively also in the western part of the city. On a national level, the library adopted

responsibility for numerous joint projects towards the cataloguing and recording of journals, cartographic material, literature from the Slavic countries, Oriental material, mediaeval manuscripts and modern autographs.

## **THE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK ZU BERLIN – PREUSSISCHER KULTURBESITZ SINCE 1990**

After more than forty years of separation, the reunification of Germany led to the merger of the two hitherto separately operating institutions that had succeeded the Preußische Staatsbibliothek under the joint roof of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation. The union of the state was complemented by the union of the library, since 1992 known under the name of Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. This presented the challenge of allocating two hitherto independent academic universal libraries to two existing buildings with the final result of a meaningful and practical overall organisation and clear division of operations. This is how the concept of "a library in two buildings" originated:

With its unique collection of old materials, the building Unter den Linden develops to become a historical research library and dedicates itself to the literature from all eras of the premodern and early modern period, the end of which is marked by the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. In addition to historical prints, work here concentrates on the material-related special departments for manuscripts, music, maps, literature for children and young people as well as newspapers. The building on Potsdamer Straße is changing to become a research library for the modernist period.

This house's profile starts where the responsibility of the General Reading Room Unter den Linden ends and presents literature pertaining to modernism right to the contemporary period; a universal reference inventory on all eras augments these open access holdings. The regionally specific special divisions for Eastern Europe, the Orient and East Asia constitute independent fields of focus. Soon, far-reaching constructional decisions were made for the house Unter den Linden. In 1998, it was finally agreed to restore full functional integrity at the house Unter den Linden by reconstructing and renovating the entire old basic structure of the building and functionally and architecturally augmenting it by new structures, such as central reading room, reading room for rare books and manuscripts, depositories and exhibition rooms. Both the new building and the general renovation contribute towards creating an optimal environment for modern user-oriented services and prospectively will be concluded by 2015. In addition to the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Bavarian State Library) in Munich, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SBB–PK; Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage) today is the most important German academic research and information library with universal historical and contemporary collections and a wide range of services. The worldwide praised quality of its holdings makes it one of the centres of national and international provision of literature. Since 2003, the library is headed by Dipl.-Ing. Barbara Schneider-Kempf.

The SBB–PK is a member of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK; Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation), a foundation under public law funded by the German federation (75%) and all German federate states (25%). Preserving, maintaining and augmenting the cultural assets of the former state of Prussia, the SPK also comprises, amongst other institutions, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Berlin State Museums) and constitutes one of the largest cultural institutions worldwide.

## **PROMINENT HOLDINGS, NATIONAL TASKS**

The encompassing inventory of books and journals with its sources and depictions of encyclopaedic universality, both internationally and across all disciplines, reflects the cultural and scientific development of humanity. Furthermore, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin possesses unique and intensively used collections of international renown, which are to be regarded as part of the international cultural heritage. Amongst the continuously extended segments of holdings belonging to this cultural patrimony and serving international top-level research are extremely valuable manuscripts from the time since the early Middle Ages, estates and autographs, musical manuscripts by, amongst others, Beethoven, Bach and Mozart, maps, journals and other special collection fields of great

historical importance in all languages and from all countries of the world.

According to the state of affairs at the end of 2010, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin today possesses more than 10,800,000 printed publications, 1,600 estates and archives, 127,000 manuscripts, over 321,000 individual autographs and 2,715,000 microforms. 420 printed newspapers from all over the world as well as some 25,000 printed journals of national and international provenance are continuously held in stock. These are augmented by the digital media, which will be the topic of the following section. 50,000 registered users profited from the acquisition funds of 10 million Euro in 2010 ; the library commands a staff of approximately 800.

The Staatsbibliothek manages several so-called special collection fields. Supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation), the highly specialised foreign research literature is acquired, decentralised across numerous German libraries. By way of inter-library loans, this literature is available to all academics Germany-wide in an uncomplicated manner. The SBB is responsible for the disciplines of law, East and South-East Asia, Slavic languages and literature in general / individual Slavic languages and literature, cartographic publications / topographical maps, foreign newspapers as well as the parliamentary publications.

## **FROM THE PRESENT TO THE NEAR FUTURE - THE STAATSBIBLIOTHEK IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

In parallel to its conventional holdings – printed books and journals, manuscripts and microforms – the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin provides a comprehensive range of digital and information media. Amongst these are first and foremost the catalogue data, in particular the online catalogue "Stabikat" ([www.stabikat.de](http://www.stabikat.de)), which contains the transformed data from the former card indexes. At the same time, licences for external research instruments such as databases or bibliographies are obtained to render these available to users. By now, the electronic holdings comprise approximately 4,300 databases, some 22,000 parallel online issues of journals and newspapers available also in print, as well as a continuously growing number of electronic books, which are made centrally accessible via the library's online catalogue and other electronic index tools. In addition to the genuinely electronic resources, the service offer is further completed by the "Digitalised Collections". Predominantly historical prints from out of the library's inventory are being digitalised at the newly installed digitalisation centre in the house Unter den Linden. In doing so, high standards are set: The scan initially produces an image file. However, this does not yet allow for a targeted search or navigation within a publication. With the aid of elaborate processes, though, it is possible to register the texts and also to reproduce the chapter structure, on the one hand facilitating the "leafing" through these virtual books and on the other significantly improving the quality of research. The "Digitalised Collections" focus on historical prints from the seventeenth and eighteenth century across all disciplines and on East Asian literature in western languages. In addition to this systematic digitalisation, individual objects from other, entirely different material and subject categories are continuously digitalised upon request from the library's users. This way, music materials, manuscripts and other special materials can be made accessible in future. In the foreseeable future, the recently achieved number of one million produced image files is to be multiplied. This achievement is made possible by modern and powerful scanner equipment, which could be acquired with support from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, amongst other supporters. By now, 4,500 historical prints and manuscripts are available in their digital form.

With the transfer of conventional holdings to electronic media, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin fundamentally contributes towards the supraregional provision of literature and at the same time fulfils its statutory mandate as an archive library: The "Digitalised Collections" are freely accessible via the internet and are archived in the long-term through complex storage processes, that is, it is ensured that the digital data will remain available also under changed conditions and thus legible in the future. Conversely, the valuable holdings can be preserved under optimal conditions in the library's depositories and be made accessible on site for academic purposes given a reasonable interest and in such cases where the digital copy is not sufficient. At the same time, the digitalisation enables the exchange of data, so that the "Digitalised Collections" of the Staatsbibliothek can be offered also in

other contexts such as the "Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek" (German Digital Library; [www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de](http://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de)), „europeana“ ([www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu)) or the "World Digital Library" ([www.wdl.org](http://www.wdl.org)). This is also the basis for bundling external content under the heading of the library's own internet presence. With the growing number of the material available there, the "Digitalised Library" on [www.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de](http://www.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de) thus is promoted to become the third – virtual – site of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, alongside the two sites at Unter den Linden and at Potsdamer Straße.

Aus: [„Eine Bibliothek macht Geschichte - 350 Jahre Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin“](#)