Transatlantic Connections: a Tour of German Libraries and Publishing Houses

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**By Robert L. Kusmer**

In November 2002 I was fortunate to accompany ten colleagues to Germany on a tour of libraries, cultural institutions and publishing houses. The itinerary, covering fourteen institutions and publishers spanning four cities over the course of seven days, was co-sponsored by the Goethe Institut-New York and Bibliothek und Information International, under the auspices of the Association of College and Research Libraries, West European Studies Section. The account that follows, while bringing out highlights and information from several of the sites visited, is necessarily selective.   
  
**First Stop Munich**

We began the tour at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the chief research library of Bavaria. Founded in 1558 by Duke Albrecht V., the BSB now has holdings of over eight million volumes, including ca. 19,000 incunabula, 77,000 manuscripts, 235,000 volumes of printed music, 350,000 maps and 42,000 current periodicals. Sadly, the main building on Ludwigstrasse, designed by architect Friedrich von Gärtner for King Ludwig I and completed in 1843, was 85% destroyed during World War II bombings, along with 500,000 volumes; fortunately, 1,400 crates of manuscripts had been removed to other locations. Immediately after the war, reconstruction of the building and re-integration of holdings began, enabling the Library to re-open in 1952. Beginning in 1962 construction of a modern wing was undertaken, which was completed in 1970, and since then re-modeling of the entire facility has gone forward in stages. In addition, a suburban, remote storage building completed in 1988 to accommodate excess holdings is full, and construction for a second building will begin in 2003.

The BSB takes part with forty-nine other German research libraries in a national shared collection development enterprise under the auspices of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, whose purpose is to assure the acquisition, cataloging, archiving and loan of at least one copy of every publication within assigned subject and language parameters. But it is not only in the areas of printed and manuscript works that the Library excels, as is evident by its “Digitalisierungszentrum” (Munich Digitization Center), whose focus is the selection, digitization and cataloging of historical and cultural resources, creation of subject-specific portals to the collections within the framework of the “Server Frühe Neuzeit” (Server for Early Modern Period) in cooperation with historians of the Universität München, and online publishing endeavors as part of “Historicum.net.”

If the BSB is a huge and varied cultural and research treasure, our next stop, the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, is a very small and specialized archive and library. The largest of four non-university German research institutes, the IfZ was founded in 1949 at the behest of the occupying forces, and its original name, “Deutsches Institut für Geschichte der Nationalsozialistischen Zeit,” betrays its original mandate, to collect materials relating to the Nazi period, as well as to its predecessor, the Weimar Republic and what came after, the period of occupation. Since the 1970s, the focus has expanded to include the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Soviet occupation; indeed, it includes 20th century German history in its international contexts. The library of the Institut contains over 170,000 volumes, while the archive houses the papers of politicians, scholars and public figures, proceedings of political parties and associations, documents from the Nürnberg trials, legal actions against Nazi officials and comprehensive collections of official communications, press statements and newspapers. The IfZ has published under its auspices over 200 books, has five series and publishes the journal Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte. Of notable interest is the latter’s 2002 special issue, Bibliographie zur Zeitgeschichte. The online catalog provides intensive, analytic access at the journal article level, in addition to standard title-level access.

**On to Frankfurt**

Following congenial and informative visits to three Munich publishers, Saur, Beck and Piper Verlage, and dinner generously arranged by Klaus Saur at the local Rotary Club meeting, the tour departed the hospitable environs of Munich for Frankfurt am Main. First on the itinerary was Amerika Haus, an institution, like the IfZ, whose founding and mandate directly emerged from the terrible events of the Hitler era, and whose mission has evolved considerably over time. While the IfZ was created to document and archive the Nazi past, the Amerika Haus was part of an effort by the American government to re-build –indeed, to help establish firmly– German democracy for the future by educating the populace after the long years of Nazi indoctrination. A cultural analogue to the Marshall Plan, Amerika Haus began on July 4, 1945 with the establishment of a modest reading room in Bad Homburg; its first real site was set up in November of that year in the basement of the heavily damaged Frankfurt stock exchange building. Very popular, the library met the need of a German public whose libraries had been largely destroyed during the war or suffered at the hands of Nazi book burnings, and whose cultural and educational institutions were also laid waste. The concept of these reading rooms quickly spread, so that by the 1950s over 100 reading rooms were in existence. In addition to their libraries, the sites also served as venues for films, lectures, exhibits and musical performances. Over the decades the mission of the Amerika Haus changed, reflecting the recovery and normalization of German society, and the institution became the frequent focal point of social protest in the ‘60s and early ‘70s, during the Vietnam War era. Today, the original concept of the reading room and cultural center for the German public has been fully eclipsed by that of the Information Resource Center (IRC) under the U.S. Diplomatic Mission, with IRCs located in Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich, Cologne, Leipzig and Hamburg. While cultural programming hasn’t ended, the current purpose is to provide professional reference service for information about the United States using the latest in electronic resources; the clientele is government officials, journalists and other serious researchers.

The following morning, we visited the main library attraction of Frankfurt, Die Deutsche Bibliothek. Formed in 1990 from the merger of the Deutsche Bibliothek (founded 1947 in Frankfurt), the Deutsche Bücherei (established 1912 in Leipzig) and the Deutsches Musikarchiv in Berlin (part of the Deutsche Bibliothek since 1970), DDB functions as Germany’s national library and archive, with two copies of every new print and non-print publication in Germany required to be submitted for holding at Frankfurt (or, in the case of music, at the Musikarchiv Berlin) and Leipzig as part of the legal depository. Nevertheless, both Frankfurt and Leipzig have their unique historical and special collections, and when the BSB and Berlin are factored in, it is apparent that Germany has no single, historical national library. German-language publications from abroad, as well as foreign Germanica, are acquired. At the end of 1999, DDB held about 16.4 million books and other bibliographic entities: 9.2 million in Leipzig, 6.3 million in Frankfurt and 870,000 (printed and recorded music) in Berlin. It is the German public’s central library and archive of last resort. In addition to this function, it also constitutes the national bibliographic information center of Germany: in addition to distributed cataloging and processing among the three sites according to an established division of labor, DDB also publishes in both print and electronic formats the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie. As part of this work, it provides leadership nationally, and cooperates with international organizations in the establishment and application of bibliographic standards. Of particular note at this time is its affirmative position vis-a-vis the proposed adoption of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (just translated into German) in place of the traditionally used German cataloging code, with the goal of creating an adaptable, uniform set of rules to foster greater sharing of bibliographic data within an international context; of corollary interest is DDB’s participation with LC and OCLC in the Virtual International Authority File project. The Library has, moreover, invested considerable resources both in digitization of special collections (online dissertations, German exile periodicals 1933-1945, etc.) and in participation in international endeavors. The latter include Gabriel (Gateway to Europe’s National Libraries) undertaken by the Council of European National Libraries, and The European Library (TEL), projected to be ready in 2004, which would provide a single portal to access electronic databases of eight national library partners.

Before we departed Frankfurt, the tour visited two very interesting institutions, the Deutsches Filmmuseum and the Deutsches Architekturmuseum. The Filmmuseum, which opened in 1984, comprises an archive and museum devoted to the history of film. It houses 5,000 film reels, plus thousands of technical devices associated with film technology, photographs, advertisements, scripts, stills, etc.; an 80,000 item library (jointly with the Deutsches Filminstitut) of both print publications and videorecordings, including 175 current journal subscriptions, devoted to film both historically and today; permanent and rotating exhibits relating to film (running at the time of this writing: a special exhibit on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of actor Heinz Rühmann’s birth); a movie theater for regular film showings; and numerous publications in the series “Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Filmmuseums.” The Deutsches Architekturmuseum (DAM) was established in 1979; its present site opened in 1984. Cologne architect O.M. Ungers designed the new museum to be housed within the removed core of a private 1912 villa. The Museum itself, a “house within a house,” was to symbolize architecture per se, exhibiting increasing “density” toward the center; the use of white, elements of natural and artificial light, the functionally “unfriendly” furnishings all enhance the sense of abstractness of the interior, while the expansion of the building to incorporate a living chestnut tree in the exhibition hall serves as a symbol of the dichotomy of artifice and nature, with the walkways connecting the whole and a ornamental wall at the street entrance suggesting the museum grounds as microcosm of the city. Aside from an example “in itself,” DAM serves as a venue for exhibitions and discussions on architecture, as well as an archiv for plans, sketches and models. At the time of our visit an interesting historical exhibit on door handles was on view; following that was a (since concluded) exhibition on the new German synagogues of Alfred Jacoby.

**Wolfenbüttel: home of a renowned research library**

Traveling northeast, we reached Braunschweig and quickly from there the historic ducal residence city of Wolfenbüttel. Here we visited a library which attracts scholars from all over the world to research its impressive holdings from the medieval and early modern periods. Unlike so many of Germany’s other libraries and cultural institutions, the Herzog August Bibliothek escaped the ravages of the war, and for that matter flood and fire, making it a priceless cultural treasure. Founded in 1572 and occupying its current main building since 1887, the Library reached its zenith during the rule of Duke August (reign, 1634-1666), a bibliophile who single-handedly sought out and acquired a collection of 135,000 manuscripts and printed books, making it the largest library in Europe at the time. He also created a detailed catalog and a classification arrangement for the collection, which forms the basis of the current system. Among its famous librarians are numbered Leibniz and Lessing. The Library comprises several buildings assigned to various functions and holdings, but the main historic collection is located in the Biblioteca Augusta. The Library currently holds nearly a million imprints, of which ca. 415,000 were printed before 1850. Of the latter, about 3,500 are incunabula, 75,000 printed in the 16th century, 150,000 in the 17th century and 120,000 in the 18th . Further, it owns one of the best collections of medieval and early modern manuscripts in northern Germany, including the Gospels of Henry the Lion and the German legal codex, the Sachsenspiegel. Of course, over the years significant holdings have been and continue to be added, including modern artists’ books and the Stolberg collection of funeral sermons. In 1810 the Universität Helmstedt was dissolved, and its entire collection given to Wolfenbüttel. The music imprints and manuscripts collection is famous. Today, the Library under the auspices of the “Sammlung deutscher Drucke” project to create a “distributed” national library, is the official repository for 17th century imprints, making it the center for the German Baroque period, and the 16th century is also well represented. All of these rich holdings would not be nearly as accessible without the tools of in-depth cataloging, digitization projects and, to a lesser extent, exhibitions. The Library cooperates in this regard by participating in the cataloging endeavor “Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachgebiet erschienenen Drucke des 17. Jahrhunderts” (VD 17) (Catalogue of seventeenth-century imprints from the German-speaking territories) and the “Verteilte digitale Forschungsbibliothek” (Decentralized Digital Research Library) undertaking, in which significant parts of the collection will become available over the internet. Wolfenbüttel, as mentioned at the outset, attracts and invites numerous scholars and funds a number of fellowships for use of its collections. Growing out of this research, sponsored symposia and the dialogue of ideas among resident scholars is an impressive array of publications and series; the current publications catalog contains over 300 titles from recent decades through the present.

**Berlin: the Once and Present Capital**

Leaving behind the peaceful environs of Wolfenbüttel, we took an early evening ICE (Inter-city Express) across the once-forbidding divide between East and West. Our destination: Berlin. For me, this first-ever encounter with Berlin, laden with its historical significance, was particularly moving and exciting. The following morning began with a meeting at the publishing house Aufbau Verlag. Angela Drescher, the editor since 1974, provided us with an unforgettable personal testimony growing out of having worked during the East German era, its collapse, and the subsequent re-unification with the West. Aufbau, founded in 1945, is one of only a small number of East German publishers to have survived the transition to a market economy and now publishes about 350 titles per year in the publishing group employing sixty-eight employees. Its history has been documented by Carsten Wurm in his book Jeden Tag ein Buch: 50 Jahre Aufbau-Verlag, 1945-1995. From the offices of the publisher we were taken by Frau Drescher through a nearby historic district to the Museum Blindenwerkstatt Otto Weidt. The original rooms, tucked away in a back alley, once housed the brush factory where Otto Weidt employed the blind or deaf, many of whom were Jews. During the Nazi terror years, Weidt made it his cause to hide his Jewish employees here, a sort of Schindler’s operation on a small scale. Tragically, after the war he took his own life, sick and despondent over not having saved enough of the Jewish populace.

Following these visits, the group spent the afternoon at the northern “counterpart” to the BSB, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preußischer Kulturbesitz, whose current director, interestingly, is British. Founded in 1661 by Friedrich Wilhelm, the Great Elector of Brandenburg, the Library underwent numerous “name and address changes” over the centuries. A new location at Haus unter den Linden 8 served as the home for the Library from 1918-45, but during World War II, the holdings were distributed among thirty separate storage points throughout Germany. Following the war, these collections were divided between the original Library, which now lay in the Soviet occupation zone, and the Hessische Bibliothek in Marburg, West Germany, which served in that capacity from 1946-49, and several other venues in succession until the collections in the West were finally re-located to West Berlin beginning in 1963, where the present location in Potsdamer Straße 33 (former West Berlin) was opened in 1978. However, many holdings had been removed by occupying forces, so that considerable numbers of books are still located in Krakow and Moscow, and although inter-library communications have been fostered, cultural restitution still remains an elusive goal. Up to 1½ million items are considered potential war losses either through destruction or removal. On Jan. 1, 1992, following re-unification of Germany in 1990, the Library was re-named and re-organized. The main collection is at the Potsdamer address, concentrating on post-1956 holdings, while the old library at Haus unter den Linden houses pre-1956 imprints; unique collections also distinguish the two sites. As a whole, the SzB-PK contains 10 million imprints and serials, 2.3 million microforms, over 59,000 manuscripts (including 41,000 oriental originals), 4,360 incunables, over 66,000 music manuscripts (including 80% of Bach’s, 67% of Beethoven’s), 450,000 music imprints, 940,000 maps and 13.5 million photographs, among other smaller collections. Moreover, the SzB-PK has taken a leadership position in both national and European cooperative projects. This includes the “Zeitschriftendatenbank” (German Union Catalogue of Serials) that undergirds the bibliographic control of titles in regional and local OPACs as well as interlibrary loan and document delivery services; and project MALVINE (Manuscripts and Letters via Integrated Networks in Europe), sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, which provides a single portal search for data on manuscripts and archival documents held by over 150 libraries, archives and other institutions in Germany and to such holdings in other European countries.

**Last Stop: Reichstag, the German Parliament**

With re-unification of Germany in October 1990, Berlin has once again become the capital. The last official visit on our itinerary was a guided tour through its parliament building, the Reichstag. The Reichstag has had a turbulent history. In 1933, the infamous fire there marked the end of democracy in Germany and the beginning of the long Hitler era. By the end of the war, the building was a ruined shell. In 1961 the Berlin Wall was erected, passing right along the Reichstag, which now lay in West Berlin. While the building underwent remodeling in the ‘60s, it was not until re-unification that it was destined to be renewed as the symbol of the new, post-Soviet era Germany. Lord Norman Foster was chosen to be the architect for the building’s restoration and remodeling, which occurred from 1995-99. While the shell of the old building was restored, the interior was transformed, and a new and dramatic dome, accessible via a circular walkway, replaced the irreparably damaged old one. Nevertheless, the historic interior shows through, as for example, in the uncovering of Cyrillic graffiti on interior walls along one corridor, inscribed by the triumphant Russian occupying forces at the end of the war; it had been covered over during the ‘60s remodeling and is now visible along a new, raised walkway. Historic relics from the old interior have also been preserved. The new Reichstag contains a chapel with art panels by Günther Uecker, a memorial painting by Katharina Severding employing the colors of the German flag to represent the tragic past (red, black) and the ever-renewing light of hope (yellow), and other art work.

With this we ended our official visit and dispersed to our own plans and itineraries. While this was not my first trip to Germany, it had been a long time since I was last here, and other than Munich, the places visited were largely new to me. Despite its densely packed and fast-paced agenda, it was an exciting and informative trip, one in which windows of leisure were yet able to happen alongside the bustle in and out of trolleys, trains, cabs and hotels.

**Commonalities and Uniqueness: Trans-Atlantic Comparisons**

The conclusions we can draw from the tour of libraries so briefly sketched above will perhaps not be surprising. German research libraries are unique, and yet they share many of the problems and challenges of their American counterparts. Let us focus first on their uniqueness. Germany’s federalist structure, comprised of a union of individual states–many with long-standing historical independence—has a direct bearing on the “architecture” of Germany’s library network at the national level. The political union begun in the late 19th century never resulted in a single national library such as France’s or Britain’s. Instead, what has emerged today is something that might be called a “national library in the aggregate.” It does not exist in one place but several: in Munich, in Frankfurt, in Leipzig, in Berlin, in the twenty-six university and other research libraries and institutions that are responsible for the “Sondersammelgebiete” (Special Collecting Areas). Yes, Die Deutsche Bibliothek justifiably calls itself the national library, but this is solely in the respect of collecting all current German imprints and producing their cataloging and national bibliography, not in the sense of a comprehensive collecting institution. This is not intended to be a value judgment about a “virtual” versus “actual” national library, but only to describe how it is different. Not only in collecting, but also in cataloging, German libraries have established cooperative models, such as the “Zeitschriftendatenbank” (German Union Catalogue of Serials), noted earlier, the “Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog” (Karlsruhe virtual catalog) which allows for searching of an ever-growing number of German libraries through one search interface, the WEBIS (Web Information System) portal to the regionally distributed special collecting libraries, and the “Sammlung Deutscher Drucke” (Collection of German Imprints). Another difference is that libraries in Germany are “public” in the sense that they are publicly funded, even the university libraries, unlike many in the United States. And yet they are largely not as accessible as American libraries; few have open stacks, few have a subject organization of holdings; access to materials is slower. The philosophy of service is different in the two countries.

However, the differences relating to collections are in some respects becoming less significant because of the digital revolution and the growing role of the library’s electronic resources as a “virtual” collection alongside the libraries’ long-standing and irreplaceable physical holdings . While digitized special collections are easy to share, commercial databases are proprietary, yet here the Germans seem to have the advantage, at least at this point. The “Zeitschriftenbibliothek” (library of electronic journals) administered by the Universität Regensburg serves 197 libraries, consortia and research institutes in the German-speaking countries, and together with the “Subito” document delivery service, provides superb coverage. Although “Subito” is available and an excellent tool for American libraries too, no comparable nationally accessible journal database is imminent, although the Regensburg project has the goal of expanding to include other libraries and institutions internationally.

There are indeed many commonly shared problems in American and German academic and research libraries. It is not hard to guess what they are: we are all running out of space, we are all suffering from serials inflation, we are all struggling in an era of exponential electronic change, we all have print collections in need of preservation and indeed, our print collections need augmentation; and last but not least, we both could benefit from progress in shared bibliographic and authority data. The observations presented here will, it is hoped, lead to greater mutual understanding between German librarians and their North American counterparts, and to the desire on both sides of the Atlantic to forge new cooperative ties, ties which build on uniqueness.