

German Alliance for the Protection of the Written Heritage

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In March 2001, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in collaboration with the Bayerische Versicherungsbank (a corporate subsidiary of the well-known insurance company „Allianz“) organized a congress on „Strategies of Preservation and Conservation“. During the meeting it was proposed not to wait for comprehensive solutions offered by the governmental authorities responsible for the maintenance of libraries and archives, but to tackle the problem by initiatives started within the respective organizations. As early as in June, a steering committee of representatives from libraries and archives met to establish a study group called „Deutsche Allianz zum Schutz des schriftlichen Kulturguts“ (German Alliance for the Protection of the Written Heritage). At present, the committee is about to define its status and functions, its main objectives and its organizational form, but there are some clear indications of future activities which will be analyzed below.

CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

Despite the active role played by IFLA in the fields of preservation and conservation, it cannot realistically be assumed that the issue will be solved by a global plan within the limited span of time available for action. German librarians responsible for book preservation and conservation face an uncertain situation in several respects. The entire amount of damaged materials can only vaguely be estimated. In most cases, the shares pertaining to publishers from various countries, to subjects and to years of publication have not been differentiated. Moreover, individual libraries have only rarely made detailed and comprehensive analyses of their damaged materials. If the costs involved have been listed, the results tend to be methodically deficient and incomplete, as they only relate to outsourcing without considering the in-house costs involved in the advance preparation of the materials and the necessary care after their return.

At present, preservation and conservation activities have been initiated by, and are limited to, individual libraries. The question as to the number of identical materials held by different libraries remains unanswered and as a consequence the number of surviving copies to be saved cannot be assessed. The prevailing idea is that the entire amount of printed materials must be saved. The great majority of German librarians have explicitly stated their intention to preserve the written heritage, if possible, in the original form of the publications in question. However, good reasons may be found for relying on more durable secondary materials, considering that microfilms have turned out to be particularly safe in terms of technical reliability and durability. Moreover, microfilms may serve as a basis for digitization. So a surplus value will be added with regard to improved accessibility and reduced costs.

SOBER ANALYSIS

In his speech, which was widely acclaimed by the audience, Antonius Jammers, the former Director General of the State Library of Berlin, gave a critical survey of the past two decades. He said, „it must be pointed out clearly that so far we have failed to convince the political authorities in our country effectively of the urgent need for massive support to preserve our collections. ... With great respect and admiration we look abroad where in some countries very impressive conservation programmes have been put into effect. Our sorry state of affairs should not be accepted. But we must not be deluded into believing that the German situation may soon be improved. ... In fact it is up to us to advance the cause and to take it resolutely in hand. Nowadays, preservation and conservation must more definitely be part of our core tasks. In this context, two main points must be taken into account, first, how to gain public attention and second, how to coordinate clearly the actual measures to be carried through. ”

Considering the enormous amount of damaged materials, the available budgetary funds are very scant. The strong discrepancy between the extent of damage and the possibilities of collection conservation must necessarily lead to divergent strategies for the selection of titles and the choice of methods. Only part of the federal states have allocated public funds for conservation measures. Third-party funds mainly stemming from the German Research Society's fund-raising activities will cover only a small part of the necessary measures to be taken.

Despite the adversities mentioned above, progress has already been made in the field of conservation. The Munich conference deliberately concentrated

on microfilming as the method which stands the best chance of cooperation, albeit only after certain prerequisites have been met.

For the fact alone that the persons most immediately involved in the issue must be united in front of the public, no librarian should criticize or want to convert any other colleague publicly to different priorities or measures. In view of the current state of affairs, redundant work should be avoided. This should apply above all to safety filming done by the libraries of a specific region, country or even internationally, limiting reproduction to a single master film. Prerequisites are first, the standardized production of microfilms by relying on long-lasting and technically flawless materials which convey the contents as completely as possible and second, their storage under optimal conditions. Moreover, it must be guaranteed by agreements that it will be cheaper to acquire copies than to produce new films. It is imperative for libraries endowed with budgetary funds for safety filming to agree on meeting with their products a precisely defined quality standard. Moreover it would be useful to establish filming centres specializing in different regions and subjects, which will facilitate clear decisions in individual cases without preliminary research efforts.

Members

Antonius Jammers proposed to start off the alliance by limiting membership at first to a small group of representatives from selected libraries and archives to give it a sharp profile, to guarantee competence and to gain momentum more quickly. After the initial project phase the group will be open to new members. Only this two-step procedure is bound to ensure that the measures to be taken will be generally accepted and that the active members will concentrate all their efforts on the issues of conservation. At present, the alliance comprises the following members:

- Die Deutsche Bibliothek
- Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin
- Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
- Sächsische Landesbibliothek/Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden
- Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen
- Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach
- Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt
- Herzogin-Anna-Amalia-Bibliothek Weimar
- Bundesarchiv
- Archivreferat in der Niedersächsischen Staatskanzlei
- Landesarchivdirektion Baden-Württemberg

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Affiliates

- Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für Angelegenheiten der Kultur und Medien (BKM)
- Kultusministerkonferenz / Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bibliotheken (KMK-AG)
- Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)
- Bundesverwaltungsamt / Zentralstelle für den Zivilschutz
- Kommission des Ehemaligen Deutschen Bibliotheksinstituts für Bestandserhaltung (eDBI-Kommission)
- EROMM

POSITIVE PERSPECTIVES

- *eDBI-Kommission*
For this year, funds have been allocated for the conservation activities of this commission under the head organization of the Ehemalige Deutsche Bibliotheksinstitut (EDBI, Former German Library Institute). The commission headed by R. Feldmann generally welcomes the idea of being later affiliated to the „German Alliance“. The „Alliance“ will also be very glad to integrate an organization expert at coordinating technical standards and norms.
- *Arbeitsgruppe EROMM*
Headed by Werner Schwartz from the SUB Göttingen, a new working group will be established to analyze how cooperation and coordination of microfilming programmes may be realized or improved by gaining from EROMM's expertise. Listed on top of the agenda are the following issues which shall be part of a comprehensive concept:
 - improving the central registration of materials already filmed or to be filmed in the future
 - checking the physical description of microform records and adding necessary information to improve the quality of the records e.g. by collation statements etc.
 - profiting from the possibility of online ordering to establish a network of libraries which will agree on fixed prices, specified delivery times and quality standards.Soon after the Munich conference the EROMM steering committee agreed on participating in the new German initiative. Its willingness to collaborate was affirmed by decisions on details which will facilitate international cooperation by keeping up quality standards.

- *Safety filming according to the Hague Convention*

It is well known that over the years the Federal Government has continuously been allocating funds for the safety filming of archival documents. Duplicate copies of documents have been preserved on microfilms safely stored in the Oberrieder Stollen in the Black Forest to ensure their survival in the event of future catastrophes, so that they will, if necessary, replace the original sources. This programme within the framework of the Hague „Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict” has not yet been extended to libraries, although the legal framework basically includes such institutions as well.

As the programme of duplicating documents from the GDR on safety films will be completed in 2003, Federal budgetary funds should be available afterwards for the new initiative. The Bundesverwaltungsamt and the BKM have expressed their interest in including libraries in the programme. It is clear that this will not impinge on the budget provided for the archival programme, a fact which will not only atmospherically but also very practically facilitate strategic and project-oriented cooperation with archives. A pilot project will be proposed to the Herzogin-Anna-Amalia-Bibliothek in Weimar. It is also intended to apply for funds to finance further projects which are about to be formulated. Then criteria for the choice and evaluation of library materials will be defined. Moreover, organizational procedures must be established, possibly by profiting from more than twenty years of experience gained by the archives. After having founded a phototechnical commission, in the late eighties the archives set up an efficient steering committee called „Archivreferentenkonferenz des Bundes und der Länder” (Committee of Archival Experts from the Federal Government and the Länder).

FURTHER AIMS AND FIRST STEPS OF REALIZATION

The alliance intends to support in theory and practice measures and activities of collection conservation. It actively wants to preserve and maintain the quality of unique and irreplaceable written documents. In general, it aims at drawing public attention to the subject of conservation and at encouraging cooperation among the partners to improve the methods applied, to facilitate retrieval and to cooperate on the most cost-effective modes of document supply. Central activities envisaged are:

- developing and optimizing as well as checking methods developed elsewhere – however without being involved in regional or nation-wide activities. Methods will be established to assess the damage, to preserve

the originals, to secure the information conveyed by transmitting it on secondary materials;

- evaluating types of damage indicators and proposing remedies
- establishing generally accepted technical norms and standards
- organizing cooperative filming of disintegrating materials
- supporting efficient world-wide registration of secondary materials as well as cost-effective procedures for their exchange and supply
- offering information on „best practices” and advice to libraries
- developing and optimizing procedures for safeguarding archival and library collections to prevent deterioration and to remedy damage resulting from accidents
- keeping the public informed
- procuring donations
- initiating research
- offering training courses
- fostering supra-regional and international cooperation

The members of the „German Alliance” are convinced that even for the initial phase third-party funds have to be procured to fulfil its tasks adequately. As a prerequisite, the report on the state of affairs concerning academic libraries published in 1994 must be updated, an analysis which at that time was required by the German Research Society³. For this purpose it is also necessary to consider activities abroad, particularly national programmes. But it is equally important to develop concepts for coordinating activities on the local as well as the national level. It is evident that the actual measures to be taken cannot and should not be financed by or through the „German Alliance”. Consequently it is imperative to keep up close relations with the public and to procure public funds, so that local activities may be boosted and all measures – as in the case of the preservation of monuments – will be part of an all-encompassing strategy.

Until now, the general problem has not yet been pinned down to the local needs and activities. For several reasons, this cannot be achieved by decisions made at the top of the hierarchy. Most of all, a federative state like Germany lacks the power to implement nation-wide measures. Even if otherwise, no library would want to miss the opportunity of acting independently and locally according to its own needs. Moreover, the more or less abstract subject of collection conservation will never be firmly rooted in people’s minds if conveyed only by abstract formulations. Yet it is paramount to gain public acceptance, so that conservation will be regarded as an intrinsic value in itself and worthy of being supported by financial donations. In this context, it must be taken into account that the question tends to remain abstract unless illus-

trated by specific objects and related to particular collections. Only specialists are likely to deal with library and archival materials personally, as the items are not visible in public but stored in closed stacks. Once the conservation measures have taken effect, the materials will again disappear on the shelves. The efforts undertaken and their results tend to remain shrouded in mystery. These unpropitious circumstances may only be counteracted by introducing the public to particular collections with an immediate emotional appeal. The validity of this approach may be judged from the successful attempt at saving the autographs of Johann Sebastian Bach in the collection of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Such events could serve as the starting point for a national campaign.

It is equally important to establish adequate organizational structures immediately from the beginning. An unsuccessful take-off would irredeemably damage the cause. In this context, relying only on temporary third-party funds – which at first sight seems quite a reasonable solution – involves the danger that once the money has been spent a successful venture will prematurely be terminated. As the „German Alliance“ is heterogeneous in almost every respect and its members face completely different budget situations, membership should be extended as soon as possible to improve public acceptance. It will be difficult to finance common tasks centrally, even if this would be the obvious solution in view of the extensive scope of the work to be done. Evidently a loose working group will not constitute a sufficient organizational framework. For this reason it was also considered to set up an association – as it has recently been done in similar cases –, several proposals having been made for the legal articles of its memorandum which are ready to be passed immediately. Alternatively it was thought of forming a foundation. In any case, the definite organizational structure must have been adopted by the end of the period financed by third-party funds. The time seems to have come to persist in cooperating to advance the issue of preserving for future generations the written cultural heritage of Germany.

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- 2 Wolfgang Schmitz: Allianz für die Rettung unserer bedrohten Schriftzeugnisse in Deutschlands Bibliotheken. – *ProLibris* 3, S. 168-171.
- 3 Bestandserhaltung in wissenschaftlichen Bibliotheken: Verfahren und Maßnahmen zur Rettung der vom Papierzerfall bedrohten Bibliotheksbestän-

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