

PAUL RAABE

TRADITION UND INNOVATION

Studien und Anmerkungen  
zur Bibliotheksgeschichte

Mit einem Nachwort von  
Georg Ruppelt



VITTORIO KLOSTERMANN · FRANKFURT AM MAIN

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR BIBLIOTHEKSWESEN UND BIBLIOGRAPHIE  
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## Vorwort

Nach drei Jahrzehnten veröffentliche ich meine verstreut erschienenen Studien und Aufsätze zur Bibliotheksgeschichte. Die in der Forschung vernachlässigten Privatbibliotheken des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts, die im Mittelpunkt meiner damaligen Beschäftigung mit Bibliotheksgeschichte standen, bilden den Anfang des Buches. Als Muster dienten mir die beiden Gelehrtenbibliotheken der ostfriesischen Juristen Gelderich Crumminga und Hermann Conring. Ein weiteres Thema war die historische Leserforschung. Die dortigen Anregungen führten zur Aufarbeitung der Ausleihbücher der Herzog August Bibliothek aus den Jahren 1664 bis 1806, die Mechthild Raabe in einem umfassenden achtbändigen Quellenwerk veröffentlichte (1989–1998). Im zweiten und dritten Teil dieser Publikation geht es um einzelne Aspekte der Bibliotheksgeschichte Weimars und Wolfenbüttels.

Die Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, die ich von 1968 bis 1992 leitete, hat sich seit 1975 zu einer internationalen Forschungs- und Studienstätte für die europäische Kulturgeschichte der frühen Neuzeit entwickelt. Das erste der Symposien, das im Rahmen des Wolfenbütteler Forschungsprogramms vom 24. bis 26. September 1975 stattfand und das 1977 als erster Band der „Wolfenbütteler Forschungen“ erschien, galt der Bibliotheksgeschichte, speziell den öffentlichen und privaten Bibliotheken im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Monsignore Johannes Duft referierte über die Schweizer Klosterbibliotheken, Bernhard Fabian über Göttingen als Forschungsbibliothek, Maria von Katte über Herzog Augusts Bibliotheca Selenica, Anthony Hobson über frühe englische Bibliotheksbauten, Gunter Mann über Johann Christian Senckenberg, Maurice Piquard über die Bibliothèque Mazarine, Ian Willison über die Gründung der British National Library u. a. An der lebhaften Diskussion beteiligten sich unter anderem Wieland Schmidt und Gerhard Liebers seitens der Bibliothekare.

Im Frühjahr 1976 gründeten Herbert G. Göpfert, Bertolt Hack, Wolfgang Martens und ich den „Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreis für Geschichte des Buchwesens“ und begingen das 100-jährige Bestehen der Historischen Kommission des Börsenvereins für den Deutschen Buchhandel. Dazu veröffentlichte ich einen Beitrag „Was ist Geschichte des Buchwesens?“, in dem ich die Bibliotheksgeschichte als einen Teil davon verstand. Das stieß bei den Bibliothekaren auf Widerspruch, und so entstand 1979 auch ein „Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreis für Bibliotheksgeschichte“. Beide Arbeitskreise, die sich später

wieder zusammenschlossen, geben seither die „Wolfenbütteler Schriften zur Geschichte des Buchwesens“ heraus. In den frühen Bänden der Schriftenreihe geht es um „Bücher und Bibliotheken im 17. Jahrhundert in Deutschland“ (Band 6. 1980), „Bibliotheksgeschichte als wissenschaftliche Disziplin“ (Band 7. 1980), „Bibliotheken im gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen Wandel des 19. Jahrhunderts“ (Band 8. 1982), „Bibliotheken und Aufklärung“ (Band 14. 1988).

Soweit es meine Zeit zuließ, beteiligte ich mich an den Jahrestagungen und Arbeitsgesprächen der beiden Arbeitskreise. Ich veröffentlichte schon 1984 im Metzler-Verlag Stuttgart, in dem meine literaturwissenschaftlichen Bücher erschienen, den Band „Büchereust und Lesefreuden. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Buchwesens im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert“. Einleitend hatte ich dort meinen erwähnten Aufsatz „Was ist Geschichte des Buchwesens?“ abgedruckt.

Den vorliegenden bibliotheksgeschichtliche Sammelband beschließt ein Beitrag über die Entwicklung der Herzog August Bibliothek von 1960 bis 1992, der dem Ganzen den Titel gibt: „Tradition und Innovation“. Die beiden Begriffe sind mein Credo. Sie fassen meine bibliothekarischen Arbeiten in Marbach und Wolfenbüttel, wie in Weimar und Halle zwischen 1958 und 2002 zusammen.

Ich danke dem Herausgeber, meinem Kollegen Dr. Georg Ruppelt, für die Bereitschaft, meine Aufsätze als Sonderband der „Zeitschrift für Bibliothekswesen und Bibliographie“ zu veröffentlichen.

Wolfenbüttel, im Mai 2013

Paul Raabe

I.



## Library History and the History of Books: Two Fields of Research for Librarians

“Books and society in History”: the theme of a conference, Boston, July 1980, forms my contribution to James Walsh’s festschrift. The subject is a challenge for librarians. It implies questions that those, particularly at libraries which contain historical holdings and source material, are well-placed to answer. I welcome the opportunity to take a thorough look at the present situation of the librarian’s profession and to consider the possibilities open for the librarian today, to apply himself *ex officio* to questions pertaining to library and book history. As a librarian who, for more than thirty years, has regarded library history and the history of books unquestionably as an integral part of his professional work, I feel obliged to try to show whether, how, and with what degree of success the librarian’s research in these fields can benefit academic learning and promote cultural projects.

### I.

In the European view, the librarian was originally in the truest sense of the word a scholar, a connoisseur of books who was fully familiar with the content and form of the books in his care, who knew every bit as much about how they came into being as he did about their authors and their authors’ works. Numerous examples spring to mind dating from ancient times, from Callimachus in Alexandria on to the monks in the Middle Ages and the learned librarians of the early modern age: one only needs to think of Bernard de Montfaucon, the founder of paleography, or of Richard Bentley in Cambridge, the classical philologist, of the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, of the Italian historian, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, of the brothers Grimm and many others.

All of them were not only curators of books, but also well-known scholars of books in their time, learned men who, stimulated by their libraries, increased the historical and philological knowledge of their age, furthered learning, and were thus instrumental in perpetuating tradition.

To recall such figures today would seem tantamount to reflecting on a profession whose situation has completely changed under the conditions imposed by industrialization and, more significantly, by technical and economic devel-

opment. The reading of books has long since ceased to be the privilege of the upper classes; on the contrary, it is a skill taken for granted by most members of democratic and socialistic societies and states. Books are no longer solely means of communicating learned knowledge, but have become the media of instruction, education and entertainment. Consequently, libraries are no longer exclusively enclaves of scholarly work, but are institutions for the supplying of books to all classes and groups in the population. This has understandably enough led to a change in attitude towards what constitutes the librarian's profession and the librarian's image.

The more numerous libraries have become and the more diverse their duties, the more the situation of librarians today has changed. They are at work in university libraries, academic institutions, national, state and municipal research libraries, or in public libraries, of every conceivable dimension and specialized field. The library scene in the world is characterized by a vast variety of forms; they are not standardized institutions of scholarship and education; they bear the stamp of individuality. The two larger categories, research and public libraries, no longer stand opposed to each other, but are rather alternative manifestations of the same spirit, one more for an academically inclined public, the other more for a public seeking general education or entertainment.

In light of this, the librarian's relation to the sciences today should be obvious: in research libraries, where scholarship is promoted, his commitment to it must surely be deeper and taken more for granted than in public libraries, where knowledge is popularized. But in practice this is not the case. The predominance of administration, acquisition, cataloguing and making the holdings available, together with the services offered the user, lead, under the technocratic exigencies of the modern world, to activities and professional duties that no longer permit close academic involvement. The mastery of technical systems, the familiarization with computer science, presuppose aptitudes which are hardly compatible with the image of scholars devoted to books. The librarian regards himself more and more as a supplier of information, a bearer of data. The library, in modern society, is looked upon and run as an information and perhaps even as a communication center. One attempts, primarily, to supply the demand for information and assesses the book less for its own worth than as a part of a system or as only one medium among others. This, of course, leads to the librarian's alienation from the book and, by the same token, from academic work. The direct bond between the librarian and the scholars is often lost: the more manifold the divisions of work become in the running of the library, the more difficult it appears to be to establish a partnership between library science and scholarship.

Considering the conditions created by these developments, affecting all spheres of life, it is easy enough to understand how the librarian has become alienated and withdrawn from the historical world as a whole. The librarian, who, as a scholar, should be at home in the historical world, is in danger of becoming an outsider in a society geared to professional success, tolerated rather than respected, sometimes even ridiculed, a bookworm, who isn't easily integrated into the world of material achievement.

But our prime concern is the defense of this historically inclined, academically active librarian, the defense of his world, his work, his future, in the face of a professional image increasingly characterized and determined by administrative duties far removed from productive academic work. No librarian – wherever he may be – would deny that these daily chores have to be done. But one should also recognize the fact that the academically active librarian is honoring an indispensable commitment in libraries. It must repeatedly be made clear that libraries – as Goethe put it – were and have remained the memory of mankind. Without libraries there would ultimately be no history. The past – what has happened, what has been achieved, what has been thought, what has been experienced – is handed down through books. When one burns down libraries, one destroys the memory of man. The problem has to be looked at from this ideological point of view: librarians are not only suppliers of books; they are also preservers and guardians of tradition. Tradition, by the way, sets in early: each present becomes the past, and within a very few decades even newly founded libraries have a history.

The librarian is preserver and guardian: such an office requires training and an interest in history; it arouses the desire actively to promote historical research. This type of librarian still regards himself as a link in the long chain of scholarly tradition outlined at the beginning of my talk. The education of the librarian, about which a considerable amount was written in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century, must include an historical component: a knowledge of the history of books and of libraries, of scholars and of scholarship. On the basis of these prerequisites, the librarian should be a connoisseur of books, a representative of scholarly culture, a promoter of scholarship, a transmitter of what has been handed down in books.

This type of librarian is more akin in spirit to the archivist and the museum curator than to the administrator. Archives preserve and make available the unpublished historical material that has been handed down to us; museums house the works of art that mirror human life in its most sublime forms of expression. Libraries, archives and museums are places where our cultural legacy and the works that have been handed down through the ages are col-

lected and preserved, cared for, and made accessible. These, then, are the areas of work in which one could expect the librarian to be involved.

My reflections are restricted to only the one sector: research *in* the library and, on the other hand, research *on* the library. Implied here are the two closely allied historical disciplines, library history and book history, for which the librarian no less than other scholars, might shape his career. But before going into the political consequences this would have for the profession in the future, let us take a closer look at each of these fields. Only when one realizes the extent of the area to be covered, will one see that there is nothing anachronistic about the plea for the academically active librarian – on the contrary, it is an extremely actual and burning question, which is becoming more and more pressing in many countries today.

## II.

Firstly, then: library history as a research area for the librarian. It is not necessary to describe the field *ex cathedra*, since any librarian can take the sphere of his own library as a starting point, and the information he gleans, spurred on by professional curiosity, will quickly lead to his being able to determine the historical position of his own institution, which, even if newly founded, will have built up a history within a few years. A library is not only a public service organization, such as a post office; it is also, and always has been, an intellectual and cultural center, whose immediate environment and the changes it has undergone can throw light on the forces of change generally. An interest in history then, is a prerequisite from the outset, and even the self-portrait of one library has a significance which reaches far beyond the bounds of that one institution. In other words, the librarian who investigates the history or phases of the history of “his” library is not pursuing an isolated line of research, but contributing in some way to the whole.

The whole: that is, to the interrelated library world, of which each institution is a part, whether the link be subject-specialization, or geographical, or political. What is meant, in the first place, is the contribution to the understanding of how a particular type of library, according to its specialization, has developed. The history of *one* public library contributes to the research of public libraries as a whole: the single study is a necessary means of gaining insight into the overall connections and common traits, and into historical changes of a general nature. At the same time, the history of *one* library provides material for the history of national interconnections. In this way one can gradually gain an overall view of the history of the libraries of any one

country. It is clear, of course, that a generalization can only be made where justified. The history of the English college libraries, the German university libraries, the Danish or the American public libraries can be written. One will only be able to study particularities in specialization and ultimately even national particularities by examining processes of historical change.

The next step leads to international studies of library history on the basis of comparison, but also on the basis of common bonds. Library history is no more a national discipline than the history of knowledge itself. The aim, as in all historical research, is insight into universal relations. It is actually self-evident that the highest goal should be the international and universal aspect, for the national particularities can be regarded as variations of the general historical and human development. We all know that such demands are easier posed than met. Nevertheless one shouldn't neglect to emphasize the fact that this is the intention of historical research, and therefore also the intention of research into library history.

"Little by little the bird builds its nest," as the old proverb says. Research in library history, like any piece of historical work, proceeds from the investigation of the particular, the specific, the single case. The general presentation of interconnections can only be the result, the summary of a considerable number of individual studies and investigations. One must realize at the outset that the development of libraries is determined by the tasks imposed upon them and therefore by the type of library they represent. Research and public libraries have differing areas of specialization and this applies, on the other hand, also to the various types of libraries, such as national libraries, university libraries, etc.

Within this framework, embracing all specific types of libraries, library history can be split up into individual subject areas.

*Holdings.* The history of holdings shows the development of the book collection. It also affords insight into the history of private libraries, in as much as they initially formed the basis of public libraries. The history of holdings is the history of collections, a reflection of how the books housed in a library were brought together. The history of holdings is also the history of acquisition, and this mirrors the general development of a library.

*Catalogues.* Catalogue history is the history of how the holdings collected in a library were made available to the user. This reveals to what extent the librarians were willing to make their collections accessible and usable. The history of catalogues, from the point of view of the history of knowledge, is also of considerable relevance. The study of specialized catalogues and means employed in making the holdings available, e.g. the compiling of manuscript catalogues, carries over into the field of the history of scholars.

*Library Use.* The history of the using of a library implies the task of investigating and describing the use of a library in the course of its history: it is also historical reader-research and affords the opportunity of obtaining information about the reader and reading in early times. This aspect too is of general significance for the history of knowledge and learning.

*Library Buildings.* The history of library buildings should also be classified as a subject in its own right – library architecture has a long history. The analysis of innovative buildings of earlier times, as well as the study of the structural principles, can be very revealing in regard to the role of a library in the society in which it is located.

*Library Staff.* The history of library staff is the history of the librarians. In older accounts of library history, the phases of the library's development are always marked by the succession of librarians. Today we view the development in a less personal light. Nevertheless, a library's staff history, mostly in the form of biographical, individual studies, is an indispensable contribution to the understanding of the fate of a book collection. On the other hand, such biographical studies are also the prerequisites for a history, still unwritten, of the librarian profession.

*Library Administration.* To round off the systematization of the history of libraries, one ought actually to call one subject area the "history of library administration", for, in summarized presentations, aspects of the ever-changing administrative policies play an essential part. The investigation of the relationship between a library and its governing body alone provides valuable information on the status of a library in the social or state context. Even the analysis of the library's regulations within the legal situation of a library belong to the tasks involved in library-history research.

The basis of these single case studies of the history of individual libraries, of whatever type or specialization, is the perusal and examination of the historical sources. The greater the yields of handed-down source material, the more comprehensive the insight into the history of a library.

I should like to use one example, that of my own library, the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel, to elucidate the different kinds of sources and their usefulness. In a library whose archives date back to the seventeenth century, various forms of source material are available.

For the history of holdings, there are, to begin with, the acquisition records, kept since the seventeenth century, which describe the course of the purchasing policy. In addition, there are the annual balance sheets, required by the governing body, and the collections of receipts for purchases made through booksellers or second-hand book dealers. But the basic stock of the library, Duke August's collection of books, was not only supplemented by single pur-

chases, but also by the acquisition of a number of complete private collections, mostly princely libraries. The catalogues of these libraries, mostly handwritten, are not only sources from which one can deduce the significance of a collection and how it was built up; they are, at the same time, invaluable sources for research on private libraries as a whole.

The old catalogues, which are no longer in use, have, of course, been preserved. They, together with the catalogue volumes still in use today, provide the reliable, basic material for research in catalogue history.

As the lending records since 1666 have been preserved in full, they too provide basic material for the detailed study of both the using and the use of an old ducal collection: the social strata of the users, the specialized subjects they were interested in, and their hobbies. Apart from the personal aspect, one can also ascertain the importance of particular frequently borrowed books and thus contribute to historical reader-research.

Furthermore, the visitors' books of the library, the destination of a great number of library tours since the seventeenth century, are excellent sources for the study of library history. From the entries one can gain insight into the renown and international standing of the library.

Of course the files and the correspondence between the librarians and the scholars, or the official bodies, are essential sources in library history, both for the history of the using of the library and for the general history of library administration. Such archival documentary materials is also necessary for the study of the acquisition policy. Lastly, it provides information on the librarians themselves, their activities, their interests, their successes, and their failures.

It is a great help that pictorial material has also been handed down in library archives: old prints, ground plans, photos of rooms and persons, the illustrated history of a library; objects used in past eras have also been handed down: typewriters from around 1900, official seals, library material, card files, book trolleys etc.

Finally, the holdings that have been handed down are themselves an important source for library history. They are the most vital illustration of how a library has developed; particularly when the older sections – as is the case in the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel – are complete and displayed *en bloc* to the public, a visual presentation of tradition. Besides, collections displayed in their entirety in a library enable one to gain particularly clear insight into the history of the holdings. Now, very few libraries house such a wealth of material for the study of library history as is to be found in Wolfenbüttel. Nevertheless, the kinds of sources I have just mentioned recur in general over and over again. The relevant material for university libraries can certainly be

found in the university archives, just as material in the state and communal archives can supplement the archives of public libraries.

Younger libraries will be able to research and describe their history primarily by means of files, printed and handwritten annual reports and accession records. In addition, of course, the printed material on the subject, books about the libraries and articles in periodicals and newspapers, are useful source material. The results of research work in library history, based on a broader study of the sources, provide contributions to one single library or to one type of library: in any case, such individual studies are the prerequisite for the comprehensive presentations of library history, the great works on library history, which are being and always have been written in all ages in all countries. Such works are not only the finest testimony of the librarian's efforts in the field of library history, they contribute, on the other hand, to the history of a country's academic and cultural institutions, i. e. to the history of scholarship in the case of research libraries and to the history of general education in the case of public libraries. Since libraries are also centers of intellectual communication, it is obvious that social history too can profit from such library-history studies.

To summarize briefly, it could be said that library history, regarded as the librarian's field of work, not only increases the knowledge about one's own library, but in addition can show the importance of libraries in the overall cultural development and thus secure them the place in history they deserve. It is clear that it must be in the interest of the librarian to work towards this goal. The preoccupation with library history is also regarded as an important task with respect to library politics, a subject which I shall discuss in detail at the conclusion of my paper.

### III.

It has been shown that the holdings of a library are excellent sources for library history. They are, of course, even more valuable with regard to the history of books. Libraries hand down certainly the most evident basic material for research in book history: the individual books are the starting-point for the researcher of book history; they are what he examines from various points of view, i.e. the printing or the publishing company, the illustration of the book or the binding.

As preserver and curator of books, the sources of book history, the librarian could have a more comprehensive knowledge of the subject than other scholars of book history, who have benefitted from the research done to date, and

should continue to do so. One only needs to recall the fact that for centuries research on medieval manuscripts has been the domain of librarians, as has been the case with research on early prints and incunabula.

Our plea in this connection is for the recognition of libraries as the place where book history is handed down, and for the recognition of librarians as the historians of books. We shall have to raise the question at a later stage whether or not our plea is futile. In any case, it must first be decided what book history or “Geschichte des Buchwesens”, as we call it in Germany, really implies.

Following the approach of the sciences of communication, one regards the book as a medium, proceeding from author to reader, between production and distribution. Book history no longer describes historical circumstances alone; on the contrary, the focus is on questions of historical change. Book history ought to be in the position to make a greater contribution to the history of economics and culture. In this aim, to integrate such a specialized historical discipline into a general context, we in Germany feel encouraged when we look at the results of English and American, French and Dutch research over the last few years. Admittedly, the librarian's strength will lie more in promoting detailed research in book history than in compiling summaries.

This detailed research applies to numerous specialized fields of book history. One can name eight fields based on the areas of production and distribution:

*Book-manuscripts.* The history of the writing of books: this discipline, today the prerogative of philologists, should be approached to a greater extent from points of view pertaining to book history. The question of book-manuscripts, the manner in which the manuscripts for the printer came into being, and also the relationship between the author and the publisher are aspects that can be examined by studying the source material which has been handed down. Precisely the posthumous, unpublished works preserved in libraries can be evaluated from these points of view.

*Book Production.* The history of book production is the classic field of book history. But it is not solely a question of the technical aspect: composing and proof-reading are also part of it, as are the questions of the letter-font and the typography. Besides, we still have only a very cursory knowledge of the history of book printing. A typical area of work for librarians in the field of the history of book production is provided by “descriptive bibliography”, as it is termed in English, i. e. research into the questions of multiple copies of the same work, in order to classify their variations.

*Book Illustration.* The history of book illustration and decoration is closely connected with book production. However, the history of book illustration,

ornamentation, initial letters, vignettes and publishers' marks in books are research areas in their own right, for which one is particularly dependent upon a thorough knowledge of the books themselves.

*Printing Bases.* The history of the material used for the printing base applies particularly to the history of paper, an independent discipline, often studied without reference to book history. But research in this field, as in the other fields already mentioned, belongs to our domain. For example, without a knowledge of the subject of watermarks, historical printing research is impossible.

*Book Bindings.* The history of bookbindings is also a classic field for librarians, whose preoccupation with the works that have been handed down enables them to study certain bindings and bookbinders. The field involves questions relating to the craftsmanship of old bindings, aesthetic problems, and also questions relating to the binder's trade, what tasks he undertook and what he accomplished, in a word, the activity of the artisan and salesman in times of change over the centuries.

*Book Trade.* The history of the book trade: this has long been one of the main research fields of book history. According to the methods of economic and social history, individual firms are studied, or, on the other hand, the trading transactions of a town or a country over a limited period of time are analyzed. The history of the book trade is an extensive research field. It includes the history of publishing companies, the history of bookshops, of the retail book trade, or second-hand bookshops, as well as the history of book clubs and book trade organizations.

*Criticism.* The history of book criticism should also be included in a systematic listing, even if it is a research area for literary and journalistic scholars on the one hand, and for economic historians on the other.

*Reading.* Lastly, the history of reading, i. e. research into the historical evolution of reading, is a more recent branch of studies in book history. Its purpose is to research the reading habits and social classes of readers in earlier times as well as to establish the extent to which books were used for cultural and academic learning, or for general education and entertainment.

Apart from these systematic aspects, one can also apply formal criteria to the study of book history: not only production and distribution in general in its various contexts has to be researched, but one must remember that the scholar of book history has to do with all kinds of types of books and their historical development, with periodicals and almanacs, newspapers and broadsheets. Moreover, the word "book" is a general term covering numerous varying kinds of content: there are scientific and instructive books, literary works and publications for pure entertainment. Each type has its own history. To name