

Knoche: HLA 16
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REPORT

The Herzogin Anna Amalia Library after the Fire

Michael Knoche

More than 900 helpers, fire fighters, technician teams, Red Cross, employees of the Library and of the Foundation of Weimar Classics and Art Collections, volunteers from nearby cultural institutions and from the city government and many Weimar citizens worked day and night since the fire to evacuate the valuable art works and tens of thousands of books. It took three days to fully extinguish the flames.

A good chance of success is in sight for the damaged library building. One of the most beautiful library halls in Germany will be able to be reconstructed by 2007, the 200th anniversary of the death of Duchess Anna Amalia, to whom we owe this 'artwork room'. The second gallery of the rococo hall and the roof above it no longer exist, but the building itself, declared part of the UNESCO World Heritage, will be able to be stabilized and restored, thanks to intelligent fire fighting. Fortunately, a team of architects and specialized planners had already been formed in preparation for the renovation and could be consulted during the night of the fire. The additional expenses due to the fire in the building already in need of renovation remain on a realistic scale. The financiers from the national and state government gave their permission to start the planning phase on 29 September 2004, after private donors had also pledged their support. The first complicated task is to dry out the building, into which water commensurate with twice the amount of annual precipitation soaked. The rococo hall will reappear in old, not new splendour.

The 35 oil paintings with ducal portraits from the 16th to the 18th century in the 2nd Gallery are irreplaceable. Solely the ceiling painting by Johann Heinrich Meyer 'Genius of Fame' after Annibale Carracci will be replaced by a copy. The material damage, even the damage done to the other art works by water from fire hoses, will fortunately be covered by insurance.

The heaviest damage was done to the books: 50,000 volumes have been counted as completely

lost, and to a certain extent 62,000 volumes were badly damaged by water and fire. This includes two-fifths of the books published before 1850, i.e. more than one tenth of the entire collection of the Herzogin Anna Amalia Library. Before the fire, the book collection counted one million volumes.

Book Restoration

Already during the night of the fire, the first water-soaked books were individually wrapped and brought to the Centre for Book Maintenance in Leipzig to be freeze-dried. During the next few days, the partly severely charred and dampened codices salvaged from the burned building were sent to the freezing facilities. This was the saddest and most difficult part of the clean up work, keeping librarians, restorers and volunteers busy for days, during which they excellently mastered the task. It was a race against time, because mildew can grow as early as 24 hours after wetness sets in. The 28,000 objects rescued from the charred remains will only be partly restorable. As soon as an exact analysis is possible, it will become apparent in which books the amount of text lost is too large, only fragments of books were left, or the attempt to replace the loss would be more sensible than restoration. That means that at some later time, the estimated number of 50,000 books totally lost will have to be increased.

The rescue, cleaning and drying of the damaged books went very well, thanks to the excellent cooperation of all involved. They will be returned to Weimar bit-by-bit during the course of one year and stored in a rented temporary magazine. There, because of the deformed covers of the books, the volumes will be laid flat on the shelves rather than stood upright. Any remaining bad smell can evaporate, if possible at all, and they can be individually examined. All damaged objects must first be found in the catalogues of the library, because at present no one



The Rococo Hall of the Herzogin Anna Amalia Library before the fire (photograph: Stiftung Weimarer Klassik und Kunstsammlungen, S. Geske).

can say for sure which books were destroyed by the fire and which were damaged and will be returned. A new data bank will be compiled to document and classify the damages. This expert task will last well into 2006. Only then can the restoration begin on a large scale, apart from several pieces demanding immediate attention. Part of the restoration can be done in the library's own workshop for book restoration and conservation or in workshops of partner libraries, and part will be commissioned to third parties. The restoration of the 62,000 books is a challenge that will occupy the library for more than ten years.

The immediate care of the books up to the drying stage was possible with the help of the state of Thuringia and above all due to the fast and generous immediate help of the national government. The German Research Association (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) also made generous help available. However, the subsequent individual restoration will only be possible with private support. For that purpose, a sum estimated at almost 20 million Euros will be needed. Therefore, donations, however modest, from third parties are very welcome. To date, 8 million Euros have been donated by 15,000 individuals, businesses and foundations, and have been collected by benefit events, and school projects, the sale of publications, by bets, art auctions and penalty fees.

Compensation for Losses

Total losses occurred among works dating from the 16th to 20th centuries, in particular from the 17th and 18th centuries. These include Duchess



The Night of the 2nd September 2004 (photograph: Maik Schuck).

Anna Amalia's (1739–1807) culturally and historically significant music collection, dating from the 18th and 19th century including 2,100 music books and over 700 music manuscripts. Large parts of the universal scholarly library of the first Library Director, Konrad Samuel Schurzfleisch (1641–1708) must also be written off. Furthermore, many texts written by members of the 'Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft' (The Fruitful Society), the first German academy founded in 1617 in Weimar, and large parts of the collection of Balthasar Friedrich von Logau (1645–1702) from Breslau (Silesia), including beautiful editions of baroque literature, were burned. One of the most complete series of Jean Paul prints was located in the middle of where the fire raged.

The older a book, the more unique its outer appearance (e.g. cover, colouring) and its individual history, which is often recognizable (e.g. exlibris or marginalia of a previous owner). A score from Anna Amalia's music collection or a volume from Conrad Samuel Schurzfleisch's collection on the early modern period is more valuable and more important for the history of the library than the same volume from any other origin. Therefore, restoration will always be preferred, as long as the difference in cost in comparison to replacement is not too high. The private donations are to be used primarily for book restoration.

The 35,000 volumes lost to the flames are most likely replaceable. In addition, there were 27,000 books severely damaged by the fire. On the average, each book will cost EUR 800. The replacement process will take many years. It has been an enormous help that book lovers and libraries throughout the world have offered to contribute a title to the Herzogin Anna Amalia

Library that they have found in the data bank of losses (<http://www.anna-amalia-bibliothek.de>). The fund 'Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft' (Fruitful Society), which was furnished with a generous initial amount of money by the Deutsche Bank, is to be built up by further donations and the interest earned will be used to purchase of new volumes.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to reconstruct the collection on a one-to-one basis. This is out of the question as far as unique pieces of the music collection and the essays from the 17th century with handwritten comments are concerned. But it is also doubtful whether replacements can be found for many printed works, which are very rare or particularly of regional provenance. Who could furnish replacement copies of the four-page discourse 'Von der Tröstung der sterbendenn Menschen' (About the Comforting of Dying People) by Wolff Stöckel from 1525, or the 'Nothwendige und nützliche Ordnung, wie es mit dem Jagen und allem Weidewerg gehalten werden solle' (Necessary and useful rules for hunting and the care of grazing animals) written by the Counts of Schwarzburg and Hohnstein from 1623? In the long term, it would be more feasible to purchase complete, specialized collections of similar value, which correspond to the emphases of the old collection, rather than requiring the replacement of each and every lost book. This would be especially desirable in the area of baroque literature, which is so important for the profile of the library.

View Forwards

The fire was also responsible for the fact that about 40 offices for librarians are temporarily not usable. New offices in diverse buildings of the Foundation of Weimar Classics and Art Collections (Stiftung Weimarer Klassik und Kunstsammlungen) had to be sought. The logistics of book transport from house to house and the infrastructure between colleagues had to be re-designed. This kind of inconvenience is easier to shoulder, knowing the long-planned addition to the library, which is connected to the original building underground, will be finished in a few weeks. The underground magazine, which belongs to that, was opened in advance so it could be utilized during the night of the fire for the storage of the undamaged books evacuated from of the library. At present, over 900,000 books from the various temporary magazines have been moved into the underground

magazine, which is between the old and the new libraries.

The preparations for the institution of the new research centre continue: 100,000 volumes, sorted according to subject areas, will be available there, directly accessible from the shelves, as well as 130 modern work places for use by researchers. The planned opening in February 2005 will be on time. From this time on, the service for local readers as well as interlibrary loan will be resumed. The working conditions in the new research centre will reflect the standard of a 21st century research library.

The Herzogin Anna Amalia Library was seriously damaged by the largest library fire in Germany since World War II. However, we must not forget that the largest part of the valuable collection was left untouched. That includes the medieval autographs, the early autograph albums, incunabula (early printed books dating from before 1500), the globes and 10,000 maps from the 16th to the 19th centuries, the largest Faust collection in the world, the Shakespeare library, Nietzsche's private library, the libraries of Liszt, the von Arnim family or Georg Haar, and the main core collection of the classical period, etc. In this case, the fact that the collection had been stored in various temporary locations was a stroke of luck. Even the original building was not lost. The fire did not touch its additions or the library tower at all. Hundreds of art works were evacuated from of the rococo hall in time.

Everything that was rescued and brought into safety will enable us to hold fast to the concept of the library as a research library for literature and cultural history with an emphasis on German literature from the Enlightenment to the Late Romantic period. In the future, the Herzogin Anna Amalia Library will be able to fulfil its function of being a living monument and an active library. The thread of cultural transmission will be newly tied to future generations.

About the author

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