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EUROPEAN TREASURE IN THE JAGIELLONIAN LIBRARY. A FLAGSHIP PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the collection from the former Prussian State Library in Berlin (*Preussische Staatsbibliothek*), now kept at the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, and one collection in particular, namely the Collection of Autographs (*Sammlung Autographa*) comprising tens of thousands of original manuscripts from all over Europe, made from the 15th to the 20th centuries. This collection was collected by the Royal Library in Berlin and, after it had changed name, by the Prussian State Library in Berlin over the decades. The essay focuses on the technological and methodological problems associated with classifying various types of manuscripts and connecting the database with existing library systems. The authors also demonstrate the research difficulties that come from this collection and how they might be answered using, among other things, artificial intelligence methods.

KEYWORDS: Jagiellonian Library; Royal Library in Berlin; Prussian State Library in Berlin; catalogue of manuscripts; Collection of Autographs

The collections of the former Prussian State Library (*Preussische Staatsbibliothek*) in Berlin, now kept in the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, represent worldwide unique library resources whose cultural, scientific, and social worth go far beyond the boundaries of one institution and one state. They reached Krakow in 1946; however, not as war spoils. Owing to the bombing of Berlin in 1941, the management of the Prussian State Library decided to take the most precious collections out of the city, transporting them to appropriately prepared facilities, such as castles, monasteries, and caves, to protect them against destruction. And so, in 1941, transportation of precious manuscripts, incunables, and antique books started (in total, 41 lorry convoys with books left Berlin). A substantial part of those resources reached the Fürstenstein Castle (today's Książ) and, subsequently, the Cistercian Monastery in Grüssau (today's Krzeszów), both in Lower Silesia, which were German cities at the time, and which became Polish following WW II. As a result of the Potsdam Agreement, the territories west and north of the 1939 Polish border became an integral part of the Polish state. In 1946, Dr Sierotwiński, delegate of the Ministry of Education for preserving abandoned collections, found that resource in Krzeszów and subsequently brought it to Krakow. The whole so-called 'Berlinka' (a common name applied in the Polish circles to define the resources from the Prussian State Library kept in the Jagiellonian Library; it has also been adopted by German scholars who sometimes also use the name 'Berlinka') was first deposited in the monasteries of missionary and Dominican friars, to later reach the Jagiellonian Library where the delegate had his seat.¹ As mentioned above, the collections were found, hence Art. 51 of the Geneva Convention does not apply to them, and they were unquestionably protected against destruction. Most importantly, had the Germans not trans-

1 As for the history of the movements of this resource, see Zdzisław Pietrzyk, *Zbiory z byłej Pruskiej Biblioteki Państwowej w Bibliotece Jagiellońskiej, Alma Mater*, 100 (2008), pp. 15–19; Idem, 'Libri picturati' i nie tylko – światowe dziedzictwo kultury w zbiorach Biblioteki Jagiellońskiej, in: *Historia jest polifoniczna. Sztambuch Profesora Krzysztofa Zamorskiego*, Kraków, 2023, pp. 117–127.

ferred the 'Berlinka' from Książ do Krzeszów, nothing would have been left of it since the Książ Castle was burnt to the ground in the spring of 1945 by the Red Army. Similarly, it is hard to say what would have happened to the resource had someone else found it and not Sierotwiński, or if the precious items had been found later (already after the fall of the Berlin Wall, some 'genuine' German chests containing a part of the Prussian State Library in Berlin were in Ukraine: they had not been opened by anybody over the whole period; after they finally were, it turned out that they contained nothing but mold, almost all their content was destroyed).² Meanwhile, the Berlin collection in Krakow has been systematically conserved, digitized, and made available to the international community of academics. It is also intensely studied by Polish scientists and scholars, and this is best exemplified by the research project described in the present paper.

A substantial part of the Berlin Collection preserved in Krakow is made up of manuscripts. Among the bound manuscripts, there are: 91 albums, 15 American manuscripts, 235 French and Occitan manuscripts, and 106 Spanish ones. 3 Portuguese, 133 Italian, 140 Greek, 67 Latin (in two sets: Latin manuscripts and Latin theological manuscripts), 78 German manuscripts, 44 Arabic, 1 Armenian, 24 Chinese, 11 Syrian, about 80 Romansh, over 90 Slavic manuscripts, more than 190 volumes of genealogical collections, and 35 other manuscripts (e.g., the collection of the Royal School of Art in Berlin). The oldest manuscripts come from the 8th-9th century, which is unique in Polish territories, while the most recent ones are from the 20th century. Apart from that, the 'Berlinka' contains loose manuscript materials in boxes: six legacies (archival materials related to the life and output of a person) of the following: Jacob Michael Reinhold Lenz, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Alexander von Humboldt,³ Georg Schweinfurth, Gustaw Freytag, Hoffmann

2 Oral information from Prof. Wojciech Kowalski.

3 Recently a catalogue of this legacy by Dominik Erdmann, in cooperation with Monika Jaglarz, has been published: *Der Nachlass Alexander von Humboldt in der Bibliotheka Jagiellońska*, Kraków, 2019.

von Fallersleben, and two unique collections: the Karl Varnhagen Collection - *Sammlung Varnhagen* (autographs from the 18th and 19th centuries, of great worth for studies of European Romanticism, 300 boxes)⁴ and the Collection of Autographs - *Sammlung Autographa* containing 196 boxes with manuscripts from all over Europe from the 15th-20th centuries amassed by the Royal Library in Berlin and, after it had changed name, by the Prussian State Library in Berlin over the decades. It is precisely the presentation of the research into the latter collection, which is of an outstanding international character, and which is the meeting point for specialists in many disciplines dealing with manuscripts created in various languages, that is the topic of the present paper.

The goal of the Flagship Project currently implemented by the Jagiellonian University is a thorough investigation of the whole Autograph Collection: identification of all the historic pieces of writing that it contains, taking into account the current state of research, and uploading it all on the Project's website's tailored database, which would allow its users/readers to conduct their own searches in multiple ways: according to the author's name, manuscript language, place and date of its creation, etc., also permitting an advanced search aided by semantic web technologies. The website will also contain manuscript scans with their respective descriptions.

The formatting of the database with manuscript descriptions is quite a challenge, which results from, among others, the fact that there exist many varied types and subtypes of manuscripts whose description standards should be different, thus, the database structure is and should be differentiated. As much as this sounds like a cliché, bound manuscripts differ from correspondence collections or loose notes from various legacies, and finally they are all unlike documents of the type of privileges, e.g., letters of safe conduct, etc.

4 Works on this collection are currently conducted by Prof. Jadwiga Kita-Huber and her team from the Institute of Germanic Studies of the Jagiellonian University.

Even within one category, such as bound manuscripts, different standards are applicable to medieval units and to later ones. Since the aim of the Project is to create a database whose final goal would be to register detailed scientific descriptions of varied manuscript units, it is important for it to be designed as open, namely so that it would allow the registration of any manuscript subtype. Another requirement that must be met is the integration of the designed database with the cataloguing systems and those sharing collections currently used in the Jagiellonian Library, which is one of the major challenges in the project's initial phase. Currently, in order to share a manuscript digitally, its registration in the ALMA system is essential (the *Ex libris* library system operating in the cloud), and it is necessary to include the scanned object in the collection of the Jagiellonian Digital Library - the JBC (the DLIBRA system developed in Poland, compatible with Europeana). An ordinary unit is a result, that does not satisfy manuscriptologists at all since the detailed quality of information provided in the cataloguing system is too low for scholars' requirements, thus leading to a situation when the search does not always return the expected results. The situation is similar with the JBC's search function; neither is JBC's format for presenting scans of manuscripts satisfactory, calling for enhancement. In the case of printed materials, PDF files are fully searchable since they have been identified by the OCR system. As for manuscripts, the OCR system, understandably, is not a standard. One of the project's goals is to implement the identification of manuscript writing thanks to the application of AI, similar to what has already been done with respect to printed materials (even the very old ones).

On the one hand there is the challenge connected with designing a special database for manuscripts. Actually, in the first phase, it will be a database for manuscripts from the Autograph Collection [Sammlung Autographa]. On the other, the project's goal will be to integrate this database with the tools currently used by the Jagiellonian Library for the digital cataloguing and sharing of manuscripts.

The technological issues related to building and integrating the database are extremely important, however, what proves even more relevant is the definite scheme of the description to be used in the database and the printed catalogues. This description scheme is based on the to-date study of collections of a similar character, namely the above-mentioned legacies of Alexander von Humboldt and Karl Varnhagen⁵, with certain additions and improvements necessarily applied owing to the specificity of the *Sammlung Autographa*. However, works have been started with very basic issues, namely the technological and research activities connected with a detailed identification of autographs' authors, their ordering, as well as foiling. Furthermore, during the studies some objects undergo conservation.

The Autograph Collection contains materials that constitute the utmost unique source records of fundamental character for both humanities and other science disciplines. It is composed of genuine manuscripts from several illustrious individuals who played a key role in culture, literature, and European science. We find in it tens of thousands of manuscript historic pieces, of which only a part has been thoroughly investigated, and many have not even been identified. They are mainly letters, but also genuine literary and scientific works, all of them written by the authors' own hands.

Helga Döhn's⁶ contemporary catalogue is, to a great degree, an incomplete recreation of the manuscripts inventory run in Berlin from the early 19th century until 1940. The descriptions are very general, and, more importantly, H. Döhn did not conduct a systematic investigation on site, in Krakow and was unable to verify such an enormous collection through personal observation. For example, in the case of a given author, she does not specify the actual number of manuscripts, writing only 'about' (when there are

5 Dominik Erdmann, Monika Jaglarz, *Der Nachlass Alexander von Humboldt in der Bibliothek Jagiellońska*, op. cit.; and Monika Jaglarz, Jadwiga Kita-Huber, 'Re-cataloguing the Varnhagen Collection : a proposal of a new description scheme and its application to the selected material', *Polish Libraries*, vol. 10 (2022), pp. 135-161.

6 *Die Sammlung Autographa ...*, Wiesbaden, 2005.

many of them); neither does she mention all the correspondents, saying merely: ‘among others’.

In the discussed project, as is standard in the manuscript catalogues, the manuscripts are catalogue described thoroughly. So, in the case of literary or scientific texts, their position in the manuscript tradition is identified, which occasionally exceeds contemporary cataloguing standards. In the case of correspondence, each letter will be mentioned, marking the addressee, the time and place of its creation; this will allow researchers to recreate international scientific networks, as well as political and literary affiliations.

The works in the collection fill a huge research gap and respond to one of the basic demands from international academic circles. Many scientists and academics have long signaled the need to provide the collection’s precise catalogue.

Some outstanding names can be found here: individuals who created the structures of civilization, science, culture, famous writers and poets, scientists representing various disciplines: astronomers, mathematicians, physicists, chemists, botanists, geologists, volcanologists, mineralogists, paleontologists, archaeologists, historians, philologists, linguists, ethnographers, geographers, cartographers, engineers, doctors, philosophers, as well as explorers, inventors, politicians, diplomats, state leaders, journalists, etc., their letters and/or scientific treatises. It is a true network of interconnections, which will be demonstrated thanks to the project.

Importantly, the Collection of Autographs in the Royal Library in Berlin, and later in the Prussian State Library, was created following completely different rules than those adopted in most libraries worldwide in which the manuscript legacy of a given individual creates a whole owing to its provenance, and as such is preserved and described. Instead, over the years in Berlin, an artificial collection made up of autographs taken out from the acquired legacies and from separate autograph collections (e.g., the Radowitz Collection) was created, additionally with single letters purchased at auctions or from antique dealers. Manuscripts that

came from such sources were provided with information about their provenance (namely an accession number), to be later placed in a separate dust jacket featuring the name of the author of all the materials amassed there. Thus, in this collection, under the name 'Alexander von Humboldt', there are materials written in his hand, but taken out of other legacies which, owing to this, had been dispersed. It is an order resulting from an entire reversal of the natural order according to which letters should be kept with their addressees. For instance, the letters of Alexander von Humboldt, given here as an example, are as much as possible kept in one place (one box) and readily accessible, but often do not provide us with information regarding who they were addressed to: this information can be found only following the analysis of accession numbers. Meanwhile, the letters to Humboldt are dispersed in the Autograph Collection; they can be found in different places, under the names of their authors. In this sense, the discussed Collection is peculiar, as it is not easy to study, also owing to a wide chronological range; additionally, the manuscripts are placed in alphabetical order, following the proper names of the authors or states, and so the jacket titled 'France' contains documents from Louis XII to Louis XVI.

The Autograph Collection is an artificial and accidental creation, which by no means undermines the value of the materials it contains. Natural creations, in turn, are legacies and collections that formed its part, and which were dispersed throughout the whole Collection: atomized, they were thus, in a way, destroyed. The most excellent example in this respect is Joseph Maria von Radowitz's legacy (1795–1853); Radowitz left behind one of the most relevant and extensive 19th century private collections of autographs. Among almost 13,000 manuscripts he amassed, there are texts by about 5,500 individuals representing all domains of science and culture over a period of four centuries.⁷ His collection,

7 See *Catalogue de la collection précieuse de Lettres Autographes laissée par feu Mr. J. de Radowitz*, Berlin, 1864.

originally forming a certain ‘community’ like any collection, was created consciously, its author carefully selecting its respective documents, which were dispersed within the Autograph Collection, and disintegrated into small particles, practically ceasing to exist. Meanwhile, thanks to the database created as part of the discussed project and the semantic web technologies, the user will be able to reassemble this collection anew (using descriptions of manuscripts and the scans that accompany them), reassembling the social, as Bruno Latour would say.⁸

The project’s main goal is thus the research into the Autograph Collection and its thorough study: identification of all the texts, authors, dating of the manuscripts, and identification of their place of origin. As a result, detailed catalogues and studies focused on selected aspects will be published. Furthermore, the goal is to elaborate and implement AI tools supporting the study of manuscripts as well as to create a research platform integrating to-date and new research into the collection of the Prussian State Library conducted in Krakow both by the Jagiellonian University and other institutions. The goal is also to fully digitize the Collection. The Project’s results will serve as a departure point for further detailed research into those parts of the Autograph Collection that feature the greatest cultural and civilizational relevance. Furthermore, the research methods elaborated in the project will be adaptable to the research in all the other manuscript collections.

The Project is coordinated by three units of the Jagiellonian University: the Faculty of Philology, Jagiellonian Library, and the Department of Physics, Astronomy, and Applied Computer Science. It is made up of three platforms: 1) R2R Platform directly connected with the study of autographs and integration of the research into the Collection coordinated by Prof. Jadwiga Miszalska; 2) R2R and R2B Platforms implementing the AI tools meeting the needs of the research, coordinated by Prof. Grzegorz J. Nalepa; 3) the infra-

8 *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor–Network–Theory*. Oxford – New York 2005.

structural Platform operating on the grounds of the Jagiellonian Library dealing with conservation and digitizing (coordinated by Prof. Remigiusz Sapa). The leader of the whole Project is Prof. Jadwiga Kita-Huber. The Project's initiators were the authors of the present paper: Profs. Sosnowski and Tylus. Let us add here that on 20 June 2023 the Jagiellonian Centre for Digital Humanities as a unit supporting, among others, the discussed Project was officially launched. There are also international scholars involved in the Project. The *European Treasure in the Jagiellonian Library* Project is one of the Jagiellonian University flagship projects, making Krakow a true international investigation platform focusing on research into the European and world manuscript heritage.

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