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**REGINE DEHNEL, *ÜBERNOMMEN,  
WEITERVERTEILT, ZERSTREUT.  
DIE ZENTRALSTELLE FÜR  
WISSENSCHAFTLICHE ALTBESTÄNDE  
UND NS-RAUBGUT NACH 1945. UNTER  
VERWENDUNG VON VORARBEITEN  
VON HANNAH NEUMANN, MIT  
EINEM GELEITWORT VON ACHIM  
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Regina Dehnel, a researcher affiliated with the State Library in Berlin (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin), who has been dealing with provenance issues for years, presented the history of the Central Repository for Older Scientific Resources (Zentralstelle für wissenschaftliche Altbestände), an institution operating in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from 1953 to 1990. The author described the tasks and functions of the repository and the system of (re)distribution of books and periodicals. She based her investigations on the extensive collection of sources, including official documentation, correspondence, accession books and catalogues. Dehnel presented the activities of the repository in four consecutive chapters, each covering a period of about ten years. The text was supplemented by a list of sources and literature used, indexes of persons,

local names, libraries, public and private collections, and a subject index. The publication was also accompanied by statistical summaries showing, among other things, the repository's budget and the number of volumes stored and processed each year. The whole is supplemented with reproductions of selected archival materials.

In the first chapter, Dehnel detailed the circumstances of the establishment of the repository, set up in January 1953 in the former premises of the princely library in Gotha, from which almost all the collections were taken to the Soviet Union after 1945. She also described the objectives set for the institution and its first years of operation. The establishment of the repository was a response to the need to manage the growing number of uncollected manuscripts, books and periodicals, comprising materials seized by the German state and its agencies between 1933 and 1953.

Resources included:

- book collections of university, academic and specialist libraries whose activities were interrupted or curtailed during and after the war;
- the book collections of municipal and regional bookshops;
- collections taken over as a result of the land reform and confiscation of estates after 1945;
- private libraries belonging to German intellectual and political elites;
- materials looted from occupied countries, including book collections from Poland, France and the Soviet Union;
- material seized by German special forces;
- the resources of educational and cultural institutions, such as grammar school libraries and teachers' seminaries;
- collections of decommissioned schools, museums and archives that have been dissolved or reorganised;
- abandoned or stray collections left unattended during war, displacement or escape of owners;
- collections acquired as part of the clean-up of abandoned libraries and institutions;
- duplicates from libraries.

This initiative was part of wider organisational reforms in the GDR aimed at centralising the management of cultural and scientific resources. A key aspect of the repository's activities was the standardisation of the processes of cataloguing and redistribution of books and journals. In the initial segregation process, materials were classified according to their scientific relevance, physical condition and subject matter. Materials that were incomplete, damaged or deemed unsuitable for academic libraries were eliminated at this stage. The redistribution of books and journals followed priorities set by central institutions such as the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek<sup>1</sup>. Preferences were given to establishments with a specialised profile or those facing shortages in specific areas. Several mechanisms were developed to improve redistribution. A key element was an offer system based on the so-called yellow cards (*gelbe Angebotszettel*), which enabled libraries to request specific resources. At the same time, a surveillance system was implemented to ensure that books rejected by an institution were not offered to it again, thus increasing the efficiency of resource allocation. A central transport organisation supported the logistics process, minimising costs and ensuring continuity of supply. When there was no interest in certain resources, decisions were taken to withdraw them from circulation. These books were either destined for waste paper or directed to be sold in state-owned antiquarian bookshops such as Koehler&Volckmar in Leipzig. The income generated from

- 1 The library operated under various names over the centuries. It was first established as the Electoral Library in Cölln on the Spree (Churfürstliche Bibliothek zu Cölln an der Spree, 1659-1701) and later became the Royal Library of Berlin (Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin, 1701-1918). Following the abolition of the monarchy, it was renamed the Prussian State Library (Preußische Staatsbibliothek, 1918-1945). After World War II, the library split into two separate institutions. In East Berlin, it was known as the Public Scientific Library (Öffentliche Wissenschaftliche Bibliothek, 1946-1954) and subsequently the German State Library (Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, 1954-1992). In West Germany, it was initially called the West German Library (Westdeutsche Bibliothek, 1949-1961) and later the State Library of the Prussian Cultural Heritage (Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1978-1992). Since 1992, following German reunification, the library has been officially known as the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin).

the transactions fed the budgets of the library institutions, supporting further compilation and redistribution activities.

In the next part of the study, Dehnel described the process of relocating the repository to Berlin in 1959 and the changes that occurred in its functioning after its incorporation into the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek. The decision to relocate was motivated by the Gotha Library's recovery of some of the collections exported by the Red Army and the need to centralise the management of older library collections in the GDR. This process was part of a broader reorganisation of academic libraries aimed at increasing the efficiency of cultural resource management. One of the key tasks of the repository in the 1960s was to organise the exchange of duplicates with international institutions. Cooperation with the Central Antiquarian Bookshop of the GDR (Zentralantiquariat der DDR) made it possible to sell books on foreign markets, which provided the inflow of foreign currency necessary for the planned economy. These activities also had a propaganda dimension in the competition with West Germany in the antiquarian market. The author drew attention to the challenges the repository faced: the lack of uniform criteria for assessing the scientific and historical value of the collections complicated their cataloguing and redistribution. Organisational problems were compounded by difficulties arising from a shortage of storage space and insufficient technical infrastructure, leading to the destruction of some of the holdings. Limited financial resources, resulting from the priorities of the GDR's planned economy, further hampered the achievement of long-term goals. An important element of the repository's operations was the introduction of working regulations: the first in 1959 and revised in 1964. These regulations clarified the procedures for storing, cataloguing and redistributing collections; special emphasis was placed on international exchange and cooperation with the Central Antiquarian Bookshop of the GDR.

In the following section, the author presents the activities of the repository in the 1970s, with a special focus on the organisational challenges and its role in the cultural and economic policy of the

GDR. After the third reform of higher education (1969-1970), which involved the abolition of the libraries of academic departments and institutes, the repository was faced with an influx of numerous duplicates. An analysis carried out in 1970 showed that 55% of the repository's collection consisted of pre-1945 prints; 36% of post-war books and journals were published in the GDR, and 9% of publications were published in print outside East Germany. Only 7% of the material was considered useful for libraries, while nearly 100,000 volumes were sent to waste paper every year. In 1973, the repository was moved to a much smaller room, resulting in the loss of 90% of the storage space. In response, new procedures were implemented, such as the pre-selection of books at the donating libraries. Activities were focused on compiling the resources of the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek. Cooperation with the Central Antiquarian Bookshop of the GDR played a key role in the repository's activities. Book exports remained an important source of foreign exchange for the GDR economy. As part of the GDR's economic and propaganda strategy, the book trade strengthened the state's position on the international antiquarian market. Despite numerous difficulties, some 4.4 million books passed through the repository in the 1970s.

In the next chapter, Dehnel characterised the activities of the repository in the 1980s, analysing its functioning in the context of the 1980 Law on the Protection of Cultural Property of the GDR (*Gesetz zum Schutz des Kulturgutes der DDR – Kulturgutschutzgesetz – vom 3. Juli 1980*). It covered a wide range of monuments, including library collections, archives, museum and private collections, dividing them into three categories according to historical, scientific and cultural value. The export of cultural artefacts, especially those classified in categories I and II, was subject to strict regulations, requiring the approval of the Ministry of Culture. In addition, the law made it compulsory for owners to register valuable collections to prevent their illegal export.

The repository faced several difficulties: the lack of prior selection at the level of regional and institute libraries, the introduction

of which had been called for in the 1970s, resulted in an influx of numerous low-value publications; limited storage space prevented the efficient organisation of the collection; staff shortages caused delays in cataloguing, selection and distribution. The operation of the repository was also complicated by increasing competition between institutions involved in the book trade, especially between the Central Antiquarian Bookshop of the GDR and the Kunst- und Antiquitäten GmbH. The conflicts concerned both the acquisition of stock from libraries and institutions and the sale of books abroad. Kunst- und Antiquitäten GmbH, having more freedom to manage the acquired resources (e.g. foreign exchange), could offer more favourable cooperation conditions, which put the Central Antiquarian Bookshop of the GDR in a more difficult situation. The author emphasised that the differences in the regulations of the two institutions significantly affected their efficiency and position in the market.

In the final section, the author summarises four decades of the repository's activities, through whose warehouses more than 8 million volumes passed. Although some of these collections may have come from holdings seized between 1933 and 1945, systematic research into their provenance was the exception rather than the rule. The author pointed out that ownership issues were usually overlooked in the process of compiling and distributing books and periodicals. She stressed that the issue of the return of cultural property appropriated by the German state was marginalised in the GDR. In all the activities of the repository, priority was given to the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, which enjoyed the right of first refusal. The role of the repository in the GDR went beyond purely library activities, acting as a political and economic tool.

It is worth mentioning the Polish motifs appearing on the pages of Regina Dehnel's book. The author described the RüBePol (Rückführung der Bestände aus Polen) action, under which, in the 1960s, fragments of the Prussian State Library's collection, which found its way to Poland after 1945, were returned to the GDR. The repository played a key role in the process of their acquisition, classifica-

tion and redistribution. Dehnel also presented the *Slavica* action, carried out by the repository in the 1980s. It focused on the compilation of literature in Slavic languages. The collection went to the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, the libraries in Dresden, Leipzig and Halle, and the Central Antiquarian Bookshop of the GDR. Dehnel mentioned books from Polish diplomatic missions in Berlin, Hamburg, Munich and Prague, which were closed after the German invasion of Poland in September 1939. In 1981, two books stamped with the mark of the library of the Polish Legation in Prague<sup>2</sup> and one bearing the seal of the library of the Polish Consulate General in Munich were incorporated into the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek.<sup>3</sup>

Running more than a thousand pages, Regina Dehnel's meticulously documented study brings a detailed analysis of the activities of the Central Repository for Old Scientific Resources and, against this backdrop, presents interesting conclusions about the cultural policy of the GDR. Despite its undoubted merits, the study reveals some shortcomings. The excessive detail of the information weakens the clarity of the narrative, making it difficult to follow the main thread. The author hinted at the problem of the ideological framework within which GDR institutions functioned but did not analyse it in the context of the repository's activities. She did not address the structural and personnel links between the repository and the analogous institution of the Third Reich, the Central Book Exchange (Reichstauschstelle) embedded in the Prussian State Library.<sup>4</sup> Relationships concerned centralisation, the standardisation of the process of cataloguing and (re)distribution of books and periodicals, and ideological control over content (in the GDR, this was a more complex problem as a result of the need to take into account the needs of a planned economy and international politics).

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2 T. Sawicki, *Warszawa w obrazach Canaletta*, Warsaw 1927 (36 MB 1812); S. Żeromski, *Puszcza jodłowa*, Warsaw 1926 (2" Zo 22321<a>).

3 *Gabrjel Narutowicz: pierwszy prezydent Rzeczypospolitej. Księga pamiątkowa*, Warsaw 1925 (4" Ud 4560<a>).

4 C. Briel, *Die Bücherlager der Reichstauschstelle*, mit einem Vorw. von G. Ruppelt, Frankfurt am Main 2016.

The analysis of the repository's cooperation with other institutions, although based on solid documentation, is dominated by the perspective of the repository itself. A major limitation of the work is the lack of a comparative perspective. Such an approach would have made it possible to better grasp the specificity of the activities undertaken in the GDR or to indicate their universal character (e.g. in the Eastern Bloc countries). The indicated shortcomings set directions for future research, for which Regina Dehnel's book will provide a solid foundation and an inspiring starting point.

*Translated by Maciej Żurawski/e-Corrector*