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MANUSCRIPTS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS BY ALEXANDER, WILHELM AND CAROLINE VON HUMBOLDT IN THE AUTOGRAPHIA COLLECTION IN THE JAGIELLONIAN LIBRARY, CRACOW. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND CHALLENGES FOR THE PLANNED CATALOG

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Second World War, the Humboldt estate has remained divided mainly between Germany and Poland. Despite many efforts, a significant portion of Humboldtiana remains unexamined and uncatalogued. This concerns the manuscripts from the *Autographa Collection* and includes archive boxes nos. 86 and 87, which contain around 1,200 documents relating to Alexander von Humboldt, his brother Wilhelm, and Wilhelm's wife Caroline, née von Dacheröden. The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the Humboldt family's legacy stored in Cracow and to outline the

primary challenges faced by scholars in systematically cataloging it. In addition, a concept for such a systematic catalog is presented, along with key substantive and formal assumptions.¹

KEYWORDS: Autographa Collection; Alexander von Humboldt; Wilhelm von Humboldt; Jagiellonian Library; Prussian State Library in Berlin; catalog of manuscripts

The Autographa Collection (German: *Sammlung Autographa*) of the former Prussian State Library in Berlin, now held in the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow, once comprised around 220,000 documents dating from the 16th to the early 20th century. Most of the manuscripts in the Collection were written by German intellectuals, politicians, scientists, researchers, writers, artists and notable aristocrats. Some smaller parts of the Collection, however, also have an international, primarily European character.² The Collection grew constantly from its foundation until the Second World War and has preserved letters and manuscripts by German authors such as Martin Luther, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, Rainer Maria Rilke and many other intellectuals and prominent personalities from across Europe and beyond. Its treasures include numerous handwritten documents such as letters, poems, notes, fragments of published works and much more besides. The impressive number of manuscripts and artefacts it contains provides a wealth of information about the intellectual activity of over 17,000 authors and the people in their communities.

At the end of the Second World War, the Autographa Collection was evacuated along with thousands of other valuable manu-

1 This publication was funded by the program *Excellence Initiative – Research University at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow* as part of the project “European Heritage in the Jagiellonian Library. Digital Authoring of the Berlin Collections”.

2 Some scholars use even the term “European treasure”; see, for example, R. Sosnowski and P. Tylus, ‘European Treasure in the Jagiellonian Library. A Flagship Project’, *Polish Libraries*, 2023, vol. 11, pp. 235–244.

scripts and rare books from Berlin to Lower Silesia, first to Fürstenstein (today: Książ Wielki) and Grüssau (today: Krzeszów), which became part of Polish territory after 1945. This Berlin collection – known in Poland as the *Berlinka* – was then transported in its entirety to the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow, where it has since remained as a deposit of the Polish state.³ Notably, the holdings of the *Berlinka* include several smaller collections, among them *Manuscripta: Gallica, Germanica, Graeca, Hispanica, Latina, Orientalia, Retoromanica, Slavica* and others. The *Berlinka* also includes the estates of authors such as Gustav Freytag, August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Jacob Michael Reinhold Lenz, as well as Alexander von Humboldt and his brother Wilhelm von Humboldt. Further components comprise the Varnhagen Collection and the aforementioned Autographa Collection. Documents pertaining to the Humboldt family are therefore found in various parts of the overall *Berlinka*.⁴ Some of these documents, namely what is known as the *Nachlass Humboldt*, have already been cataloged, as will be discussed below. However, the Humboldtiana from the Autographa Collection have not yet been listed in the form of a detailed catalog or database and therefore remain a subject of interest for us.

The materials in the Autographa Collection are preserved in almost the same condition as when they were relocated after the Second World War, mainly in incompletely labeled folders or sometimes with misattributed names. Hence, for a long time it was difficult to navigate the large number of papers divided between Berlin and Cracow. It was not until 2005 that German scholar and librarian Helga Döhn (1939–2006), after much effort, produced a catalog of the Autographa Collection, published by Har-

3 For more historical details, see G. Voigt, *Die kriegsbedingte Auslagerung von Beständen der Preussischen Staatsbibliothek und ihre Rückführung. Eine historische Skizze auf der Grundlage von Archivmaterialien*, Hannover 1995.

4 For more information, see M. Jaglarz and K. Jaśtał, 'Bestände der ehemaligen Preussischen Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in der Jagiellonen-Bibliothek: Geschichte und Struktur', in: *Bestände der ehemaligen Preussischen Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in der Jagiellonen-Bibliothek. Forschungsstand und -perspektiven*, eds. M. Jaglarz and K. Jaśtał, Berlin et al. 2018, pp. 15–30.

rassowitz.⁵ This more than 2,000-page catalog is mainly based on the old catalogs and inventories of the Berlin State Library, as well as Döhn's own findings. We will refer to the concept and structure of this work later on in our paper, but it should be stressed here that Döhn's catalog considerably improved access to this part of the collection in Cracow, which resulted in increased interest in the authors and documents in question. Döhn's catalog is likewise important for the use of the holdings in Berlin, as it also lists documents and materials that are directly linked to the estates held in Berlin.⁶

Under the flagship project "European Heritage in the Jagiellonian Library: Digital Authoring of the Berlin Collections,"⁷ led by Jadwiga Kita-Huber, the authors of this paper together with a team of experts have been entrusted with the scholarly revision of the Humboldt family manuscripts in the Autographa Collection and the preparation of a pilot catalog. The following paragraphs briefly outline the characteristics of this part of the Collection, present selected examples to provide an overview of the materials, address some of the challenges encountered by the research team, and propose a concept for the catalog. It should be noted that the purpose of this paper is not to delve into the detailed content of specific letters or documents but rather to highlight the nature of the materials involved. In-depth analyses of the documents and the significance of individual parts of the Humboldtiana are planned for future projects.

Like many other manuscripts and books evacuated from Berlin, the Humboldtiana have remained divided mainly between Germany and Poland. According to estimates made by Dominik Erdmann and Jutta Weber, the documents in Berlin comprise around 22,000 pages, while those stored in the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow, known

5 H. Döhn, *Die Sammlung Autographa der ehemaligen Preußischen Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Autographenkatalog*, Wiesbaden 2005.

6 For more specific information, see J. Lamble, 'Katalog der in Krakau verwahrten Autographen-Sammlung der ehemaligen Preußischen Staatsbibliothek erschienen: Ergebnis einer deutsch-polnischen Zusammenarbeit', in: *Blog-Netzwerk für Forschung und Kultur, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* (11.12.2007), <https://blog.sbb.berlin/katalog-krakau-autographa/> [Accessed August 23, 2024].

7 See the project-website: <https://dihelib.id.uj.edu.pl/> [Accessed August 23, 2024].

as the *Nachlass Humboldt* (Humboldt Estate) are around half the size (11,000 pages).⁸ The documents in Berlin have been digitized and can be easily accessed via the Kalliope website of the State Library. Furthermore, in 2019, Dominik Erdmann and Monika Jaglarz produced an extensive hard-copy catalog of the *Nachlass Humboldt* in Cracow.⁹ As mentioned above, the *Nachlass Humboldt* is not the only significant collection of documents relating to this famous German scholar and his family. The holdings transferred to Grüssau also included the Humboldtiana in the great collection of Karl August Varnhagen von Ense and the Autographa Collection. It has been particularly interesting for us during the project to deal with the manuscripts and other documents from the Autographa Collection, stored in archive boxes nos. 86 and 87, which concern Alexander von Humboldt, his brother Wilhelm and Wilhelm's wife Caroline.



FIG. 1. Archive boxes nos. 86-87 containing Humboldtiana in the Autographa Collection, reading room of the Jagiellonian Library Cracow. Image: Paweł Zarychta

- 8 See: J. Weber and D. Erdmann, 'Alexander von Humboldts Amerikanische Reisetagebücher. Am Anfang neuer Ideen - ein Projekt und seine Folgen', in: *Bestände der ehemaligen Preussischen Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in der Jagiellonen-Bibliothek. Forschungsstand und -perspektiven*, eds. M. Jaglarz and K. Jaśtał, Berlin et al. 2018, pp. 222-223; eadem, 'Nachlassgeschichten - Bemerkungen zu Humboldts nachgelassenen Papieren in der Berliner Staatsbibliothek und der Biblioteka Jagiellońska Krakau', *HiN Internationale Zeitschrift für Humboldt-Studien*, 2015, no. 31, pp. 58-77.
- 9 *Der Nachlass Alexander von Humboldt in der Jagiellonen-Bibliothek*, eds. D. Erdmann and M. Jaglarz, Kraków 2019.

Alexander von Humboldt is regarded as one of the most prolific letter writers of his time. As Ingo Schwarz notes, it is estimated that in the years from 1787 to 1859, he wrote at least 30,000 letters. It is difficult to estimate the number of letters this world renowned scholar received. According to Schwarz, citing Biermann and Lange, he probably received between 1,600 and 2,000 letters a year. Currently, around 15,500 of the letters written by Humboldt are known, most of which are original manuscripts. Among the 2,800 or so people that he corresponded with, the largest groups were physicists, chemists, geoscientists and botanists. The humanities are represented by historians and linguists, but also writers, publicists, painters and composers, and the Prussian kings, in particular Friedrich Wilhelm IV.¹⁰

Compared to these figures, the number of Humboldt-related documents in the Autographa Collection is comparatively small. There are about 860 letters written by Alexander von Humboldt, 160 letters by Wilhelm von Humboldt and just seven letters by Caroline von Humboldt. In addition, there are dozens of other manuscripts and documents, such as the diary of a journey to England that Alexander made in 1790 with Georg Forster. To give an idea of what the archive boxes contain, below are a few examples of the manuscripts stored in Cracow. Although most of them are written in German, here we will start by discussing examples in French and Spanish. Subsequently, we will explore several examples in German.

Alexander Humboldt's preferred language was French, so his collection of letters includes many items in French. He even wrote to his brother Wilhelm sometimes in this language. Our collection includes 24 letters in French from Alexander to Wilhelm, written in the period from January 5, 1821 to October 29, 1824 and sent from Paris, Milan, Verona, Naples, Rome, Florence and Strasbourg. The

10 For more specific information, see I. Schwarz, 'Die Korrespondenz', in: *Alexander von Humboldt-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung. Sonderausgabe*, ed. O. Ette, Berlin 2021, pp. 80–90; K.-R. Biermann and F. G. Lange, 'Die Alexander-von-Humboldt-Ausgabe', *Forschungen und Fortschritte*, 1962, no. 36, pp. 225–230.

letters are numbered from 1 to 24, probably by an archivist from the Prussian Library. Notably, these letters were transcribed and published in the book *Briefe Alexander's von Humboldt an seinen Bruder Wilhelm* in Stuttgart in 1880 by the Humboldt family. The 24 letters are included in the chapter “Aus der Zeit des Aufenthalts in Paris” (From the time of his stay in Paris), but numbered differently – from 7 to 30 – suggesting that the collection in the Jagiellonian Library is only part of this correspondence.¹¹ Some of the letters are difficult to read today, and in some places it is evident that someone has added accents and diacritical marks to make reading and copying easier.

Alexander's letters in French are mainly letters of recommendation and courtesy letters. However, one letter to the German linguist and pioneer of Indo-European studies Franz Bopp, dated Paris, October 20, 1819, dealing with issues relating to Sanskrit, is unique in that it is also written in French; all other letters by Alexander (as well as by his brother Wilhelm) to Bopp were written in German.

Between 1799 and 1805, Alexander von Humboldt made an expedition to South America, then known as “New Spain”, and the recently formed United States of America, together with his friend, the French botanist Aimé Bonpland (1773–1858). Their friendship continued, as we can see from a joint letter by the two men written in Paris in 1811 to Karl Ludwig Willdenow; Humboldt wrote his part in German and Bonpland his part in French. This letter has already been edited by Ulrich Päßler in collaboration with Klaus Gerlach and Ingo Schwarz and can be easily found in digital form.¹²

There are also materials in Spanish from Humboldt's American expedition. First, there is a handwritten treatise in Spanish on astronomical observations, with Alexander's notes in French on the

11 *Briefe Alexander's von Humboldt an seinen Bruder Wilhelm*, ed. by Family von Humboldt in Ottmachau, Stuttgart 1880, pp. 82–136.

12 ‘Alexander von Humboldt an Karl Ludwig Willdenow, Paris, 10. Oktober 1811’, ed. U. Päßler in collaboration with K. Gerlach and I. Schwarz, in: *edition humboldt digital*, ed. by O. Ette, Berlin, <https://edition-humboldt.de/v10/H0006054> [Accessed August 24, 2024].

margins, entitled *Sobre algunos puntos interesantes para la Navegacion, o extracto de las observaciones de longitud deducida de Eclipses del Sol y de la Luna de Satellites de Jupiter, distancias lunares y Chronometros en los annos de 1799-1803* (On some interesting points for navigation, or extract from observations of longitude deduced from the eclipses of the sun and moon from satellites of Jupiter, lunar distances and chronometers in the years 1799-1803).

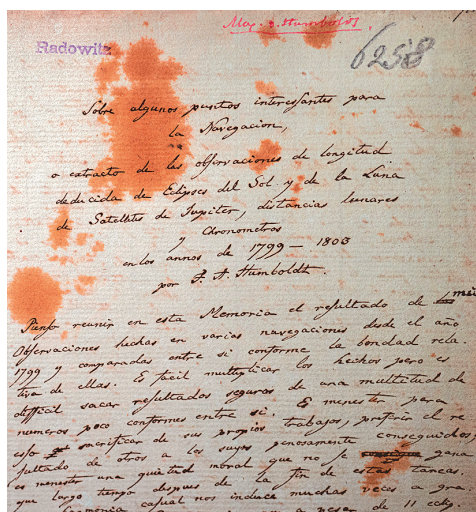


FIG. 2. Alexander von Humboldt, *Sobre algunos puntos interesantes para la Navegacion*, Jagiellonian Library, Sammlung Autographa, Humboldt, Alexander von.
Image: Katarzyna Szarszewska

The Collection also includes a map in French from Alexander's trip to Asia (1829), entitled *Chaînes de montagnes et volcans de l'Asie centrale* (Mountain ranges and volcanoes of Central Asia). This is a map drawn by Alexander Humboldt between 1839 and 1840 in Berlin, completed by August Petermann in Potsdam in 1841 and later printed in Paris.¹³ It is probably a version from the proofreading stage, with the author's notes. There is also part of a map of the

13 A. de Humboldt, *Chaînes de montagnes et volcans de l'Asie centrale*; Dessiné à Berlin en 1839 et 1840, terminé par C. Petermann, à Potsdam, 1841, Paris, 1843. The printout is almost identical to the original version; a scan is available on the National Library of France's website: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8469350f#> [Accessed August 26, 2004].

Orinoco region, drawn by Alexander Humboldt in June 1800, with his notes in French, dated Berlin, April, 1842.¹⁴

The collection relating to Alexander von Humboldt also includes letters in French to him from prominent personalities such as François Guizot (French historian and Prime Minister of France; Paris, 1848) and François Arago (French mathematician, physicist and astronomer; Paris, 1839).

German-language correspondence in the Autographa Collection includes, for example, Alexander von Humboldt's letters to Franz Bopp. Humboldt regarded Bopp as a worthy intellectual companion, and their correspondence enabled him to share ideas that were later reflected in his scientific writings. The documents also illustrate Humboldt's curiosity about cultural history. At the same time, they are evidence of Bopp's erudition as a linguist studying many languages. The volume with this correspondence held in Cracow contains 43 letters dating from 1819 to 1852. An edition of Humboldt's letters to Bopp by Romy Werther was scheduled for publication in 2020 in the series *Beiträge zur Alexander-von-Humboldt Forschung*,¹⁵ but it appears that there is a delay in this project.

Another notable example is the collection of letters addressed to Ignaz von Olfers, General Director of the Royal Museums in Berlin. The Humboldt brothers were involved in persuading the Prussian King to nominate the scholar to this post in 1839. Olfers was one of Frederick William IV's closest confidants, and Alexander von Humboldt was his most important liaison to the natural sciences and fine arts. Together with Friedrich August Stüler, Olfers planned and designed the remodeling of the Museum Island in Berlin. The Autographa Collection contains 327 letters written by

14 A small detail from this map appears as Fig. 8 in J. Seemann, 'Alexander von Humboldt's Search for the Casiquiare Canal: Movements, Measurements, Maps', *HiN - Alexander Von Humboldt Im Netz. Internationale Zeitschrift für Humboldt-Studien*, 2020, no. 21(41), 77–106: <https://doi.org/10.18443/298> [Accessed August 27, 2024].

15 See the website <https://buecher-hoffmann.de/shop/item/9783050063096/brief-wechsel-von-alexander-von-bopp-humboldt-gebundenes-buch#> [Accessed August 25, 2024].

Humboldt to this scholar between 1836 and 1858, as well as one to Frederick William IV.

A further example is Humboldt's journal of his first major journey abroad, which took him along the Rhine to the Netherlands and on to England with Georg Forster in 1790, traveling on his way back through revolutionary Paris. This is Humboldt's oldest surviving travel journal.¹⁶

It should be noted that parts of this monumental collection of manuscripts and other artefacts are currently being investigated in large-scale international projects, such as the *Alexander von Humboldt-Portal* and *edition humboldt digital* (<https://edition-humboldt.de/>) of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, led by Professor Ottmar Ette. Some of the manuscripts have been or will be published in the historic-critical *edition humboldt* of J. B. Metzler/Springer Nature. Surprisingly, however, the Autographa Collection does not appear to be part of the core interest of these projects. Even in the *Alexander von Humboldt-Handbuch*, edited by Ottmar Ette,¹⁷ there is only limited information on this part of the Humboldtiana. The travel journal mentioned in the previous paragraph has been edited and described by Dominik Erdmann and Christian Thomas.¹⁸

The situation is different with regard to Wilhelm von Humboldt's letters to Bopp, which come from the Autographa Collection and are now easily accessible as a digital edition on the Wilhelm von Humboldt website of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities.¹⁹ Older editions of letters from this

- 16 For more specific information, see D. Erdmann, 'Einführung. Zur Neu-Edition des Journals der England-Reise (1790)', in: *edition humboldt digital*, ed. O. Ette, Berlin 2023, <https://edition-humboldt.de/v9/H0016430> [Accessed August 25, 2024].
- 17 *Alexander von Humboldt-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung. Sonderausgabe*, ed. O. Ette, Berlin 2021.
- 18 A. von Humboldt, 'Reise. 1790. England' [= Tagebuch der England-Reise], eds. D. Erdmann, C. Thomas and F. Schnee, in: *edition humboldt digital*, ed. O. Ette, Berlin. 2023, <https://edition-humboldt.de/v9/H0017682> [Accessed August 25, 2024].
- 19 See: 'Übersicht über die Korrespondenz mit Bopp, Franz', in: *Wilhelm von Humboldt – Sprachwissenschaftliche Korrespondenz*, Berlin 2023, <https://wvh-briefe.bbaw.de/Briefe?person=bopp&jahr=#> [Accessed August 25, 2024].

part of the Berlinka also exist, such as Alexander von Humboldt's letters to Ignaz von Olfers, published in 1913.²⁰

Despite these efforts, a significant portion of Humboldtiana remain unexamined and outside of scholars' interest. As early as 2018, Jutta Weber, former director of the Manuscripts Section of the Berlin State Library, and Dominik Erdmann pointed out how urgent and necessary it was to explore, digitize and catalog this part of the Berlinka. They emphasized that such a project would not only add value to the current state of knowledge, but would also save many documents from oblivion and allow a new view on the culture and intellectual history of the 19th century.²¹ One of the first steps should therefore be to examine all the manuscripts and documents in detail, produce a short scholarly description of each item as part of the digital inventory in the overall Digital Authoring Project matrix, and then transform these findings into a printed catalog. The final part of this paper therefore presents a concept for such a catalog, intended as the first in a series of catalogs describing the whole Autographa Collection.

Of course, the creation of a catalog does not take place in a vacuum. We have already mentioned Helga Döhn's work. The sheer volume and structure of Döhn's catalog mean that it is more of an initial research aid, intended to facilitate access to basic information such as the occurrence of a particular name. Essentially, the catalog lists the author of the document, their date of birth and occupation, and the addressee. Occasionally, it adds some information on the state of preservation of the document, or other brief notes. Nevertheless, Döhn's catalog remains a great achievement, especially given that Döhn was acting alone and produced the catalog in a relatively short time.

Excellent archival work has recently been carried out by Dr. Monika Michalska of the Manuscripts Department of the Jagiel-

20 *Briefe Alexander v. Humboldt's an Ignaz v. Olfers, Generaldirektor der Kgl. Museen in Berlin*, ed. F. W. M. von Olfers, Nürnberg and Leipzig 1913.

21 J. Weber and D. Erdmann, 'Alexander von Humboldts Amerikanische Reisetagebücher', op. cit., pp. 230-232.

lonian Library, who has compiled a detailed list of all the items found in Humboldt archive boxes nos. 86 and 87. Michalska has also made preliminary identifications of authors, addressees, dates, acquisition data and types of documents wherever possible. In addition, each of the manuscripts and documents in the boxes relating to both Humboldt brothers has also been wrapped in thin paper and described with the details listed above. Occasionally, there are also brief descriptions of the work carried out by Michalska and the team working on the Humboldt papers.

A key task for our team now is to check and complete the information collected so far on each unit, and to provide a more detailed description in line with the overall project objectives. This includes, where possible, dating those units where this information is missing, identifying addressees for letters where addressees are missing, adding incipits, and in selected cases providing contextual or other information – for example, about the materiality or other relevant facts regarding the item. Once the information in the digital matrix has been completed, we plan to use the entries to generate short, more traditional descriptions of each unit, which will ultimately make up the pilot volume of the catalog in print and be available as a free online resource.

Naturally, we anticipate that the catalog will require further additions and editorial work. In particular, it will be necessary to add a comprehensive introduction outlining the concept, purpose and method of the catalog, as well as specific features of this part of the Collection. Importantly, we do not intend to reduplicate existing efforts; we have already mentioned the catalog of the *Nachlass Humboldt* edited by Dominik Erdmann and Monika Jaglarz.²² The concept, structure and solutions adopted by these two scholars seem worthy of emulation, especially since they relate to manuscripts and documents from exactly the same intellectual circle. We also refer to the concept proposed by Jadwiga Kita-Huber and Monika Jaglarz for re-cataloging of the Varnhagen Collection,

22 *Der Nachlass Alexander von Humboldt*, op. cit.

which is also held in Cracow.²³ It makes sense to maintain conceptual and methodological unity in our project.

With this in mind, we intend to give our catalog the following structure. The introduction will outline the unique features and overall character of the Humboldtiana in the Autographa Collection. As the history of this part of the Collection is complex, as evidenced by the collection stamp that appears on many documents – for example, one such stamp indicates that the document in question comes from the extensive autograph collection of the Prussian lieutenant general, diplomat and short-term foreign minister Joseph Maria von Radowitz – it will be necessary to give a brief overview of the history of this part of the Collection. Following this, the cataloging rules and order of the catalog will be described, and finally the relevant literature listed.

The main part of the publication will be the catalog itself. We intend to generate it according to the digital matrix scheme, which includes pressmark, title of the document, its reference code, sender/author, addressee/receiver, place, date and comments on dating, and information on volume (sheets). Optionally, we will include notes on the people mentioned, acquisition, provenance, materiality, references to other documents and so on, as well as information on existing editions. The publication will also contain indexes of letters/documents and people, in both chronological and alphabetical order.

We expect that the data collected and organized in this way will in the first place become an important aid and guide for this part of the Collection. Second, given that the work will be carried out both digitally and traditionally, the information entered can serve as metadata – and the basis for further analysis and extension within the other platforms that form part of the project, for example, for the creation of knowledge graphs or network diagrams.

23 M. Jaglarz and J. Kita-Huber, 'Re-cataloguing the Varnhagen Collection : a proposal of a new description scheme and its application to the selected material', *Polish Libraries*, 2022, vol. 10, pp. 135–161.

We are confident that the catalog will be the first of a series that will finally provide a comprehensive and detailed description of the Autographa Collection as a whole. It will also be an important contribution to the international scholarly community's interest in this part of European heritage and will encourage further projects in the future.

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