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Digitization in Austria – Manuscripts, Incunabulas and Rare Books on CD-ROM

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May we, first of all, introduce ourselves and our professional background:

My name is Norbert Schnetzer. I am from the Vorarlberger Landesbibliothek in Bregenz, Austria and I am the Head of the Department of Special Collections of this library. This collection includes 109 incunabula and about 40.000 books printed in the Renaissance and Baroque periods and later. You can see, this is a rather small collection, but we also are responsible for the collections of the monastery Mehrerau in Bregenz. This collections includes 225 incunabulas, 250 postincunabulas (till 1525) and about 80.000 rare books printed before 1850.

By the way it is a general problem in Austria that there are a lot of monasteries which often have famous collections of medieval manuscripts and rare books, but they don't have enough staff, knowledge and money to take care of their collections. Sometimes we are able to help these private libraries.

My name is Ute Bergner. I am from the University Library of Graz. I am librarian in the Department of Special Collections there. Our collection includes 2200 manuscripts (1400 medieval), about 1000 incunabulas and about 300.000 rare books printed before 1900 as well as historical and modern maps and literary remains of scientists and poets of the 19th and 20th century. In former times most of these documents have been part of several Styrian monastery libraries, which were secularized in the years after 1782 under the reign of Josef II. During this period the old University Library of Graz increased, the collections of more than 40 monasteries of the old dukedoms Styria and Carinthia were incorporated.

We both, Ute and I, we are leading the Section of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the Austrian Librarian Association. In Austria this Section is called "Kommission für Buch- und Bibliotheksgeschichte" (Section of Book and Library History) and includes not only the departments of Special Collections but also the departments for conservation and restauration and the library archives.

In this function we are attending the IFLA Congress this year in Glasgow and would like to tell you something about "Digitization in Austria". Not only about projects concerning manuscripts, incunabulas and rare books on CD-ROMs but also about the presentation of digitized objects in the INTERNET.

Let me start with the words of a man, who is working with manuscripts and rare books since more than 25 years.

"Knowledge is as strange property, if you hand it over, it still remains in the possession of those, who shared it. Knowledge increases by hand over, the information or the supposition of the existence of knowledge works like invisible gravity.

Knowledge is a strange property, as soon as you get any information, the intrinsic work starts to transform the information into knowledge, the reception, the mounting into the own knowledge, the creation of new knowledge for your acting, maybe even for your orientation in this complex and crowded world."

In my opinion we librarians have a mission: to share our knowledge and we can do it now in new forms and in a new spread. Our manuscripts and our incunabulas are not longer hidden in our strong rooms, they are accessible in the INTERNET, not only the catalogues, but also the objects. And the next step, the digitization of our research documentation, the presentation of the results of our codicology-research brings us out of the dark into the bright light of the internet-stage.

Libraries have got new scopes of activities compared with their traditional tasks within the last few years: Using the rapid progressive development of electronics, it was possible to solve the special problems regarding rare books within a very short period of time: to consider all conservation conditions as well as enable the greatest possible liberality for our researchers.

Since ten years libraries in Austria have been working on digitization of metadatas, since about seven years we have been working on digitization of manuscripts and books themselves: In the beginning there existed just offline databases – since 1994 most of these databases are accessible to the public via INTERNET.

The University Library of Graz was the first one in Austria, which could offer its manuscript catalogue via INTERNET. The printed catalogue consists of three volumes, in which there are descriptions of about 1400 medieval manuscripts and about 800 modern manuscripts.

In the meantime more and more metadata of other Austrian Libraries are accessible by INTERNET. For example catalogues of incunabulas or special data about historical book bindings, paper history, watermarks and fragments. Ute will tell us soon more about this.

In 1995 the digitization of special objects has been started in Austria. Cultural heritage – especially medieval manuscripts and rare books – have been presented on CD-ROM or via INTERNET at that time just for public relations. At the beginning it seemed like a promotional gimmick but it developed further to a new kind of librarian editing of rare books.

It soon has been found out that those electronical resources are very useful for researchers, much more useful than microfilms. We can also say that the digitization of a manuscripts

contains not more stress for the object than the normal use in the reading room. This is a very important aspect – because the now running digitization is without doubt not the last migration of data between analog manuscripts and digital surrogates. The digital medium is a very useful thing for the everyday work of scientists and others – but this digital medium is in my opinion not the solution for a long running archive copy – I mean for centuries. For this purpose we continue to use archive films.

In Austria there are several projects running at the moment:

1. METADATA

Manuscript catalogues of the University Libraries of Salzburg, Innsbruck and Graz are already digitized or in work. A special project is the digitization of the so called Tabula Catalogue of the Austrian National Library in Vienna.

2. OBJECT-DIGITIZATION

The National Library of Austria in Vienna, several University Libraries but also small libraries like the Vorarlberger Landesbibliothek are digitizing their manuscripts. But they are not really going the same way.

Most of them are digitizing the highlights of their collections at first. This is for public relations of those libraries, to become more popular, to show parts of the collections to people never using this library and last but not least to found money.

Maybe I should mention that there is a different situation in Austria to Anglo-American Libraries: In Austria less people are using libraries, we call it “Schwellenangst”. A lot of people are too afraid to enter a library, because they don’t exactly know, what is done there.

The University Library of Graz however runs a project to digitize the whole stock of manuscripts. For them the digitization work has already become a typical standard work. All the manuscripts they have already digitized – at the moment more than 300 items – will soon be accessible to the public in the net.

3. Elaborated CD-ROMs

A second line of CD-ROM production are the so called elaborated CD-ROMs. This means to create CD-ROMs with a graphical surface, features like music and video and scientific comments. As content you will find on these CD-ROMs either one special manuscript, often the highlight of the collection. – In this case you get an electronic facsimile with comments. Or you will find CD-ROMs to a special subject. For example the miniatures of a certain scriptorium or period, all fragments found in a collection or manuscripts containing local history questions.

In our view digitization and the imaging of written and printed documents offer us librarians a new horizon for our future work: our role as content-provider, our experience in the field of human communication, our knowledge about books as well as about digital documents, our social competence qualify us as important partners in the coming information society. As guides through our collections, as helping hands for our readers to cross over the barriers of language, script and text-compression we want to achieve anew the function as guardians of our memory.

Now I would like to tell you something about digitization projects in Austria still going on.

1. Metadata in Internet

In 1994 the University Library of Graz started to implement their manuscript catalogue into the net. At first the three volumes of the printed catalogue had to be scanned and read by OCR. But everybody who knows manuscript description knows that the greater part of such a description is in Latin. Our problem had been that all those Latin parts were typed in a special italics which OCR could not read. So we had to correct the scanned text several times. You can imagine what hard work it is to correct about 3000 printed pages.

Some years later the University Library of Salzburg started a similar project. The main difference to Graz is the cataloging situation. University Library of Graz is in the situation to have all manuscripts catalogued, most of the other libraries in Austria are just working on their catalogues. Therefore the catalogue of Salzburg is not finished yet.

An other project I want to show you are the incunabula catalogues. You will be able to find incunabula catalogues in the Internet on the homepages of the several libraries.

In the moment there is a large project going on under the protection of the Austrian section "Buch- und Bibliotheksgeschichte": It was possible to get the ISTC data and system librarians of the Austrian National library were able to put them to Aleph, the main Austrian cataloging system. This data material is the bases for an Austrian Incunabula Census which contains all incunabulas in Austria. And we really mean all, not only the large collections of the Austrian National Library and the University Libraries but also the smaller collections of public and private libraries. In Austria there are still a lot of monasteries containing their own stocks. The work started three months ago but it will take two years to finish and to make it accessible to the public.

In a second step it is possible to show more informations than just the data themselves. At the University Library of Graz we now are working on to give more information than the simple description of our manuscripts.

We put images of key pages in front of the catalogue entry. We add informations about paper history, watermarks and binding via link.

At the University Library of Salzburg there is another project running on. The colleagues there are working on a catalogue of fragments, a kind of a new virtual library.

We all know that only between 5 and 10 percent of the medieval stocks are still remaining up to the present. The reasons for this vanishing are different, but in the main point it is the change of interest on texts during the 16th and 17th centuries. Many of the medieval texts became obsolete, uninteresting and unrequested. But the material of these books was in a very good condition: the sheets of parchment and early paper have a fine quality, good enough for the purpose of booksbinding for example.

When we open now an old, original book cover, normally we find two or three fragments, folios or small pieces of a folio, parchment or paper, often in a very good condition.

We know that fragment work means three steps of research:

First the restorers work, the opening of damaged book covers, the solving of the paste and the glue and the careful separation of the sheets.

We open of course only damaged covers – we have a lot of them and we know that it would not be very clever to destroy intact covers.

The second step is the identification of the text, the dating of the script and in the best case the location of the scriptorium and the identification of the earlier owners of the manuscript.

The third step is – finally – the digitization of the recovered sheet and the implementation of the images in the website. The idea beyond is to open a scientific discussion on these new findings. Fragments are in the most cases loner, single travellers, and the publication in the net is an attempt to find out other sheets of the same manuscript in other libraries. And there are examples where this had been realised.

2. Object Digitization

In January 1997 the University Library of Graz started the production of manuscript CD-ROMs using their own equipment. The conservation problems were solved by the help of the conservator of the University Library. He created a special motorized copy-stand with an integrated book-cradle, which allows to pictures in an angle of 45 degrees, without opening the codex completely. The main problem is the mechanical stress of the binding, when you open the book in an angle approximately 180 degrees.

Meanwhile this special copy-stand is used also in Göttingen, in the Library of Congress, in Bodleian Library and is also used by ADEVA (Akademische Druck und verlagsanstalt), a commercial facsimile producer.

Our digitization studio comprehends now three copy-stands with electronic cameras and a scanner place, 6 colleagues are now employed with digitization work. We use two copy stands only to serve orders from other libraries. For example the manuscripts of the University Library of Heidelberg are digitized in Graz.

The digital cameras we use provide 6 million pixels resolution. The bodies are mirror reflex cameras. The standard size of an image file is 18 megabytes in Tiff-format. This large files are just for mothercopies and authorized printings.

For the customer we offer smaller images in JPEG format so that the client is not able to use these images for other projects than scientific work.

We will show you now some examples of manuscripts and one famous print in our stock. It is the first edition of the *Astronomia* of Johannes Kepler with his handwritten dedication to the archduke of Styria.

All this images are parts of completely digitized manuscripts and rare books which can be bought on CD-ROM.

3. Elaborated CD-ROMS

One year after starting the object digitization we recognized that the produced images of the manuscripts will not be very interesting to the public. Just scientists are interested in the images themselves, others need more information and of course a special graphical surface to handle the CD-ROM. Therefore we started to create elaborated CD-ROMs, for example the

Miniatures of Styrian Monasteries. We now can offer 3 Volumes of the romanic period, divided by the scriptories.

The first volume "Monastery Seckau" is also available in English.

The user gets information about the history of the monastery and its collection, is able to look a short video, to hear music, sung out of the original manuscripts. The CD-ROM comprehends over 2000 miniatures and decorated initials; there are four access-options: the shelfmark, the painting-technique, the type of the illumination and an iconographic thesaurus. Furthermore there is a catalogue of the mentioned manuscripts.

But we also produce other types of elaborated CD-ROMS: Two months ago, the LIBER-Conference took place in Graz and for this event the digitizing studio produced a special gift.

At the moment we are working on a completely different CD-ROM showing archival fragments. We recognized that in mostly of the manuscripts of the styrian monastery Neuberg there are placed fragments of archival materials. This material is the missing link in the local history of this part of Styria in the 13th and 14th century.

In cooperation with the Institute of medieval history at the University of Graz we make transcriptions of all the texts we found and we are now trying to bring the named persons and subjects into a content of the known local history.

In this special part it exists a cooperation between the University of Graz and the Archive of Regensburg in Germany, too. German manuscripts were brought to our digitization studio and the Grazer scientists are now working with the image files and produce a large database via Internet the "Fontes civitatis Ratisbonensis". The manuscripts are just in Graz for 4 months, but the scientists are able to work for a much longer time.

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