

‘Communicating Manuscripts’:
Third Conference of LIBER’s Manuscript Librarians
Group, Berlin, 28–30 November 2007

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LIBER’s Manuscript Librarians Group held its third conference, entitled ‘Communicating Manuscripts’ in Berlin from 28–30 November 2007. More than 70 participants from all over Europe came to discuss their experiences and opinions concerning manuscripts (ranging from medieval codices to modern papers and letter collections) — in response to a series of papers delivered by a number of specialists from European research libraries and archival institutions. For the Staatsbibliothek it was a pleasure to welcome them and to make the days in Berlin comfortable and successful.

The conference — which was held in the Simon Bolivar Saal — was opened on Wednesday afternoon (28 November) by the General Director of the Staatsbibliothek, Barbara Schneider-Kempf, followed by an introductory lecture on the history of the library by the director of the Manuscripts Department, Eef Overgaauw.

After the first coffee break — all breaks were very much used for renewing acquaintances or for demonstrations of internet applications, using the computers available for that purpose — the first session, *Exhibiting Manuscripts. Tensions and Challenges*, was introduced by Bernard Meehan (Trinity College

Library, Dublin), who chaired the three papers and following discussions. Mathias Puhle (Kulturhistorisches Museum Magdeburg) gave his museological view on 'Precious medieval manuscripts in large historical exhibition-projects'. Michael Ryan (Chester Beatty Library, Dublin) put forward that for a small library the costs and conservational risks of lending a limited number of items to an international exhibition often outweigh the publicity and enhancement in status it creates for the lender. This animated discussion that followed showed that a consensus on lending conditions in Europe still lies in the future. The information Reinhard Feldmann (Universitätsbibliothek Münster) gave concerning the guidelines of the Deutsche Bibliotheksverband are but a first step.

The buffet following guided tours in the Staatsbibliothek was much appreciated, and the same holds for a one-day exhibition of spectacular letters by the Grimm brothers, Alexander von Humboldt and Thomas Mann — and some German medieval manuscripts, in preparation for an evening lecture given by Eberhard König (Freie Universität Berlin), which focused on the subjective and objective value of manuscripts.

Thursday morning 29 November offered six papers focusing on *Manuscripts on the Internet*. The first session, *Access and Cooperation*, was chaired by Claudia Fabian (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München). Under the title 'Cataloguing for the Web' Robert Giel (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin) talked about the new developments in the 'national' databases ManuscriptumXML and Manuscripta Medievalia. Ivan Boserup (Kongelige Bibliotek, København) presented the international CERL-portal with its international scope, which aims at cross-searching existing web catalogues either for manuscript materials or printed materials (or both). Much appreciated was the paper of Francesca Niuotta (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Roma) about the virtual reconstruction of the medieval library of Nonantula, a very challenging project which stimulated all present to think about probably hidden parts of their own collections and their virtual reunification. The second session, *Digitization*, was chaired by Hans Zotter and Manfred Mayer (Universitätsbibliothek Graz), who stressed the importance of coordinating imaging activities within the framework of a preservation policy. The possibilities and challenges were well addressed in the papers on the digitization of the Palatina manuscripts in German language (by Karin Zimmermann, Universi-

tätsbibliothek Heidelberg), the digitization of modern manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (by Michele Sacquin, BnF Paris) and in the paper 'HyperSchopenhauer. Philosophical manuscripts from Europe on the Internet' (by Nicoletta De Cian, Università degli Studi de Padova).

In the afternoon outside visits had been organised, bringing the participants to the Archiv der Akademie der Künste and its interesting new building near the Brandenburg Gate. Second stop on this tour was the Akademie der Wissenschaften — with the research centres on German Medieval Texts, on Alexander von Humboldt or the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The evening dinner in a typical Berlin back yard restaurant proved yet another opportunity for the participants to communicate.

The last session took place on Friday morning 30 November. *Sharing Information in Europe* was the motto under which André Bouwman (Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden) guided a tour through national reports, which were distributed beforehand and the making of which was now commented on by their authors. The reporting covered:

- Austria (Alois Haidinger, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien)
- France (Thierry Delcourt, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris)
- Germany (Alessandra Sorbello Straub, Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart)
- Ireland (Bernard Meehan, Trinity College Library Dublin)
- Italy (Francesca Niutta, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Roma)
- Netherlands (André Bouwman, Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden)
- Poland (Maria Wrede, Bibliotheka Narodowa, Warszawa)
- Sweden (Ingrid Svensson, Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm)
- Russia (Olga Sapojnikova, The National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg)
- Spain (Anna Gudaiol, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Barcelona)
- United Kingdom (Scot McKendrick, British Library, London).

The national reports — consisting of a background report (sketching the manuscript scene in a given country) and a progress report (on manuscript activities in 2003–2007) — have been published on the new website of the LIBER Manuscript Librarians Group (<http://liber-manuscripts.kb.nl/>).

These rather short documents are yet capable of giving a lot of information using internet links. They provide interesting views on the ways the different countries can use existing infrastructures (or not). There was a common approval to make further steps to expanding the network of contact persons in order to create further reports.

In the closing session, chaired by the board of the Manuscript Librarians Group, the participants were invited to comment on the past days and to bring forward topics for a new conference. The colleagues from the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin who were responsible for the organisation were warmly thanked for all their efforts and hospitality. Gratitude was also shown to two members of the board who stepped down in 2007: Bernard Meehan and Eef Overgaauw. The board subsequently welcomed Jutta Weber (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin) and Ad Leerintveld (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag) as their successors. Finally, it gave the board much pleasure to be able to announce that the Fourth Conference of the LIBER Manuscript Librarians Group will be held in Rome, May 2010, to be organised by the colleagues of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale.

In the afternoon, those who still wanted to see more of Berlin were given the opportunity to travel to Dahlem and visit the 'Berlin Brain' (Philologische Bibliothek of the Freie Universität, designed by Norman Foster) and the Archiv der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft.

European colleagues who would like to join the LIBER Manuscript Librarians Group are invited to contact Ad Leerintveld (Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag); e-mail: ad.leerintveld@kb.nl