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Between Cataloguing In-Depth and Collecting Basic, Standardized Information:

Current Trends in Manuscript Description in Germany

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[slide 1: title]

Dear colleagues,

This lecture will consider manuscripts and their cataloguing in Germany, as you can see from the title; however, I will ignore the Hebrew, Arabic, Asian, Coptic and other non-European manuscripts in German collections and limit myself to western European manuscripts **[slide 2]**. And among those, I shall focus my attention on medieval or early modern manuscripts from the period up to the 16th century.

There are good reasons for these limits. In Germany we are proud of our long and well-established tradition of cataloguing the manuscripts of medieval Europe at advanced level for scientific purposes.[1] These manuscripts, written primarily in Latin but also in vernacular languages and Greek, represent the central sources for the history of European intellectual life from its beginning until the rise of the printing age. Indeed, one could say that many, in international comparison, consider Germany to be exemplary or leading in the systematic cataloguing of these manuscripts and in the high scholarly level of the manuscript description.[2]

Funding system and national infrastructure for manuscript cataloguing

The large number of well-cataloged manuscripts and the common effectiveness of scientific cataloguing standards were enabled primarily by one circumstance: very much money. And, of course, by long-term, well-networked and coordinated efforts in different places to build and maintain an efficient national system of manuscript cataloguing.[3]

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[1] Cf. Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung 14,2 (2009): Kataloguisierung mittelalterlicher Handschriften. Methoden und Ergebnisse, ed. by Bettina Wagner.

[2] Cf. Christoph Mackert, Das Leipziger Handschriftenzentrum. An der Schnittstelle zwischen Bibliothek und Forschung, in: BIS Bibliotheken in Sachsen 4 (2011), p. 176–179, on-line: http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:14-qucosa-96613.

[3] Cf. Christoph Mackert, Die Arbeitsgruppe der deutschen Handschriftenzentren - Servicezentren für Handschriftenerschließung und -digitalisierung, in: o-bib 2/1 (2015), p. 1–14, http://dx.doi.org/10.5282/o-bib/2015H1S1-14.

A central role in this process has been played by the German Research Foundation (DFG) **[slide 3]**.[4] Already in the early 1960s the DFG initiated a program to support the cataloguing of medieval and early modern manuscript codices. This program underwent many changes over the years, especially since the early 2000s; however, fundamentally, DFG financial support for cataloguing manuscripts has been preserved for nearly 60 years, now.[5] Every German library of today can still apply to the DFG for funds to systematically and scholarly catalogue their manuscript collections.

Thus, it is not surprising that the cataloguing of medieval manuscript collections in Germany today is well advanced.[6] **[slide 4]** We estimate that about 60,000 medieval codices are held in German collections (not including fragments, whose number has not yet been estimated and could be quite large). To date, about 36,000 of these 60,000 codices have been described in modern DFG-supported catalogues. Especially intermediate-sized collections (between about 100 and 600 manuscripts), common in many scientific libraries, have been completely cataloged. The large collections, such as those in Munich, Berlin, Leipzig and Stuttgart, still need additional work; extensive segments of these collections are often inventoried only in short form or in fully out-of-date lists. Similar needs emerge in the small collections and the scattered manuscripts found in many archives, museums, church repositories, etc.

The DFG has provided not only comprehensive funding but also infrastructure to achieve this high quality of manuscript cataloguing. Even the name German RESEARCH Foundation suggests that its support is intended not primarily for library actualities or internal library needs but rather to underwrite research. Thus, the support program was accompanied, until the early 2000s, by an advisory committee of the DFG that included scholarly researchers and librarians and that crafted and kept up-to-date guidelines for the scientific cataloguing of manuscripts **[slide 5]**. These DFG guidelines for manuscript cataloguing are currently in their fifth, enlarged edition of 1992;[7] they guarantee a high degree of quality in the cataloguing and a unified form of the resulting descriptions and catalogues.

Additionally the DFG has, since the 1970s, established so-called „manuscript centers" **[slide 6]** where supported cataloguing projects are concentrated at large, efficient libraries with old

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[4] Cf. Bettina Wagner, Cataloguing of Medieval Manuscripts in German Libraries. The Role of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) as a Funding Agency, in: RBM. A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage 5/1 (2004), p. 38-51.

[5] Cf. http://www.dfg.de/foerderung/programme/infrastruktur/lis/lis_foerderangebote/erschliessung_digitalisierung/index.html.

[6] Cf. Mackert, Arbeitsgruppe (fn 3), p. 8–9.

[7] Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Unterausschuß für Handschriftenkataloguisierung: Richtlinien Handschriftenkataloguisierung, 5. augm. ed., Bonn-Bad Godesberg 1992, on-line: http://bilder.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/hs//kataloge/HSKRICH.htm.

collections.[8] As far as I know, such nationally directed organizations for cataloguing manuscripts are without parallel elsewhere in the world. Behind these centers is the idea that scientific cataloguing, especially on medieval manuscripts, requires a set of competencies that are seldom found in single individuals. **[slide 7]** The examination of manuscript collections demands not only knowledge of codicology, paleography, book illustration, watermarks, bindings, provenance history and dialects of early vernacular languages but also of a broad spectrum of content ranging from liturgy and theology to law, medicine, philology, philosophy, history, astronomy and even music theory.

Today in Germany there are **[slide 8]** six manuscript centers that offer manuscript-holding institutions opportunities to apply for cataloguing projects, to carry them out and to ensure the quality of the workmanship. Hence, any library who seeks to catalogue their manuscripts with DFG support must be prepared to bring these manuscripts to a center where the cataloguing takes place. (Of course, the manuscripts are returned after the cataloguing is completed.) The creation of these manuscript centers, that closely coordinate their activities among themselves, has resulted in professional cataloguing at the highest standards. Since the abolition of the DFG subcommittee for manuscript cataloguing in 2005, the six centers have established **[slide 9]** an own advisory board[9] to insure that the cataloguing processes remain focused on the needs of researchers.

The DFG guidelines for manuscript cataloguing

For scholarly cataloguing, the DFG guidelines for manuscript cataloguing also play a central role.[10] **[slide 10]** These guidelines are, from the beginning, infused with the consciousness that manuscript description includes not only to the registration and identification of the texts and contents of the manuscripts but also the external form and physical features of the codex which convey much information that is essential for understanding the manuscript and its contents and is not documented by any other means. Western medieval manuscripts generally convey texts that were intended to be copied and thus are extant (or potentially could be extant) in several or even many other copies. Yet every manuscript is a unique witness of a text, often presented with other texts together in a codex. At a particular place and time and for a particular purpose the codex was created in this combination and in this unique codicological presentation. Only when we consider the codex as a totality, as a complex unity

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[8] Cf. www.handschriftenzentren.de; Mackert, Arbeitsgruppe (fn 3), Mackert, Leipziger Handschriftenzentrum (fn 2).
[9] Cf. http://www.handschriftenzentren.de/?id=13#beirat.
[10] See above fn 7.

of external features and contents, can we do justice to its uniqueness and arrive an appropriate understanding of the historical moment in which the codex originated and into which it opens a window across time. Seen in this way, the "new" research of today into the materiality of codices[11] has, over the past decades, become self-evident for German manuscript catalogers. You can see importance of an exact understanding of the external, codicological character of a manuscript, as presented in the DFG guidelines, **[slide 11]** in the length and detail of the corresponding rules that are printed in color on the slide. As you will see, the guidelines require:

➢ an exact description of the format, material, layout, quire structure, separated parts and watermarks (if paper is used);

➢ paleographical determination and dating of the script;

➢ an exact separation of the scribal hands;

➢ descriptions of later entries and paratexts, of book decoration and its art historical evaluation, of binding, bindery, and waste parchment and paper fragments used by the binder.

All this information is used in summarizing the history of the object, since medieval European manuscripts generally contain no explicit information about where, by whom, and for whom they were made. All this is attained from the codicology through a detective process of following clues.

[slide 12] For the description of the contained texts, however, the DFG guidelines offer only a short paragraph, so, you see, how important codicology is ranked here.

In-depth cataloguing: advantages and disadvantages

When you see this incredibly detailed work process and recall that medieval manuscripts usually include many or even very many individual texts you will not be surprised to hear that this is a very time-consuming form of cataloguing. On the average, 10 working days are required to describe a single manuscript; which means, that even more are needed for complex manuscripts, but there are also simple manuscripts that take only a few days. Hence, this form of cataloguing has been, for some time, designed as 'in-depth cataloguing' (in German: "Tiefenerschließung").

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[11] Cf. for example: Dorothea Bach / Paul Blickle / Robert Janson, Tagungsbericht: Materialität als Herausforderung. Der spätmittelalterliche Codex im Fokus der Historischen Grundwissenschaften, 16.02.2017 – 17.02.2017 Heidelberg, in: H-Soz-Kult, 07.04.2017, www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-7104; Christian Mathieu, Die Materialität und Medialität literarischer Handschriftlichkeit – Ein Workshopbericht, 06.12.2016, http://blog.sbb.berlin/handschriftlichkeit/.

In-depth cataloguing can, in some cases, yield descriptions that range up to 52 pages in length, judging from our experience at the Leipzig manuscript center.[12] **[slide 13] [slide 14]**[13] The advantage of this detailed form of cataloguing is that scholars receive what they need for their future researches, as has been concluded in many evaluations over the past 15 years.[14] However, we must also admit that, over the past decades, competence in the fields of codicology and paleography has significantly declined among the younger generation of scholars and that many scientific questions often focus only on one text or one section of a codex. We, the catalogers, deliver a total picture for understanding the codex, something individual researchers often no longer can do or do not even seek to do; that is, we deliver the foundation and context for individual researches. From the viewpoint of the Leipzig manuscript center this means that we have the duty to present **[slide 15]** our fantasies for the object, that is, to sketch the unique contexts of origin and use for the various manuscripts by means of numerous indications in their codicology and content.

So much for the advantages of in-depth cataloguing. The disadvantage of this approach is also obvious: it requires enormous amounts of time. I mentioned earlier that only 36,000 of 60,000 manuscripts in Germany have been in modern times scientifically described; this means that 24,000 manuscripts remain less accessible. Even when we subtract such collections that are described in older, but ambitious catalogues, we must still assume that **[slide 16]** 15,000 manuscripts remain that desperately need scientific cataloguing. Assuming 10 working days per manuscript, this would require **[slide 17]** 150,000 working days or **[slide 18]** 715 working years. If the six German manuscript centers were to conduct 20 parallel cataloguing projects (quite ambitious, too), we still would need 36 years to finish the task. But today's scholars cannot wait this long for information about their manuscripts or groups of manuscripts.

In addition, the process of in-depth cataloguing has, in the last few years, been constantly expanded, given new research trends; it has become more demanding and more time-consuming. The DFG guidelines, for example, **[slide 19]** still mirror a small interest on late medieval traditions because they are imprinted with a focus on the earliest textual witnesses

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[12] Cf. the description of the manuscript Weimar, HAAB, Q 51 in: Die lateinischen Handschriften bis 1600, vol. 2: Quarthandschriften (Q), beschrieben von Matthias Eifler unter Verwendung von Vorarbeiten von Betty C. Bushey, Wiesbaden 2012, p. 280–331.

[13] The description of manuscript F 1/3 of the Cistercian Abbey of S. Marienthal shown on the slides was written by Matthias Eifler in the course of a DFG-funded project that deals with manuscripts from minor collections in Eastern Germany and runs at the Leipzig manuscript center since 2016 (https://www.ub.uni-leipzig.de/forschungsbibliothek/projekte/projekte-chronologisch-alle/erschliessung-von-kleinsammlungen-mittelalterlicher-handschriften-in-ostdeutschland/). The description is on-line available at http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/dokumente/html/obj31589721.

[14] Cf. for example: Digitalisierung mittelalterlicher Handschriften in deutschen Bibliotheken: Ergebnisse der Pilotphase, Red. Carolin Schreiber / Claudia Fabian, München 2015, http://www.handschriftenzentren.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Ergebnisbericht_Digitalisierung-mittelalterlicher-Handschriften_pub.pdf, p. 12.

and the parchment traditions of the 8th to the 13th centuries. Given the intensive shift of research to late medieval manuscript objects as witnesses to, say, cloister reforms of the 15th century, university life or lay education, the praxis of in-depth cataloguing has naturally changed as these manuscripts are now valued similarly to the Carolingian parchment manuscripts. Likewise, **[slide 20]** watermark analysis and binding studies have created new auxiliary sciences that deserve their own systems of registration and databases.[15] This will make manuscript description even more detailed.

Looking for shortened processes of manuscript description

Since the end of the 1990s, the DFG has intensively thought about how the cataloguing of manuscripts in Germany can be accelerated. There appeared in the year 2001 a paper **[slide 21]**, „New Concepts for Cataloguing Manuscripts", which supported the trial of shortened processes of description.[16] In the early 2000s several trial projects for more rapid cataloguing were approved and conducted; but the results were generally sobering. Since we lacked new standards, these trial projects tended toward detailed work in the direction of the usual in-depth cataloguing.[17] What arose was a mixed form of manuscript description, not exactly short but also not properly detailed; scholarly users could hardly recognize what was done according to in-depth cataloguing and what was ignored.

Thus after 2004 new consideration was given to the formulation of standards for a proper short cataloguing process and the DFG created a working group for this task.[18] The Leipzig manuscript center was intensively involved in the development of these new standards, both conceptually and in practical trials.[19] As a library we had a high self interest in this work since data for about 550 of our 2,200 medieval manuscript codices were not available in any published catalogue (which would, by the way, require 26 years of in-depth cataloguing). Our

[15] Cf. www.wasserzeichen-online.de; http://www.hist-einband.de.

[16] Gruppe ‚Wissenschaftliche Literaturversorgungs- und Informationssysteme' (LIS 2) / Jürgen Bunzel, Neue Konzepte der Handschriftenerschließung. Informationssysteme zur Erforschung des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit, Bonn 06.09.2001, http://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/foerderung/programme/lis/handschriften.pdf.

[17] Cf. Jürgen Geiß, Mittelalterliche Handschriften in Greifswalder Bibliotheken. Verzeichnis der Bestände der Bibliothek des Geistlichen Ministeriums (Dombibliothek St. Nikolai), der Universitätsbibliothek und des Universitätsarchivs, Wiesbaden 2009, p. XXVI–XXVII; Katalog der Handschriften der Domstiftsbibliothek Bautzen, bearb. von Ulrike Spyra und Birgit Mitzscherlich unter Mitarbeit von Christoph Mackert und Agnes Scholla, mit einer Einführung von Enno Bünz (Quellen und Materialien zur sächsischen Geschichte und Volkskunde 4), Leipzig 2012, p. 5–6.

[18] The first result was a paper called "Vorschlag zur Ergänzung der Erschließungsverfahren: die Bestandsliste" (21.09.2004), on-line available at http://bilder.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/hs//KonzeptpapierBestandliste09-04.pdf.

[19] Cf. http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/info/projectinfo/leipzig1.html.

concept, that we compiled by 2011 and practically tested[20], has the nice title **[slide 22]** „Standardized Short Description of Medieval Manuscripts according to the Scheme of Inventory Lists".[21] The DFG officially approved the document for short description. „Inventory Lists" is thus only a subject word that picks up on earlier views; actually, the process is much more than a simple list.

The standardized short description

The goal of our concept was to capture, in a limited timeframe, important basic information for codicology and contents and at the same time to avoid any confusion with scholarly conducted in-depth cataloguing. The most important instruction was **[slide 23]** to include only the visible and quickly researchable and to postpone everything else to later research. We thus speak of „short description/registration" and not of „short cataloguing." The process seeks to make the manuscript known for scholarly research and to offer important basic information about the codices and their content, realizing that the inventory lists will be incomplete and require correction. So, this approach presupposes our courage to make mistakes and our courage to be incomplete.

The process will deliver only rough general information **[slide 24]** for codicology, such as writing support, size, format, localization by larger regions, dating by century, whether the object is comprised of several manuscripts, information for script, book decoration and the binding and whether waste paper or parchment is used for the binding. For history, only explicit comments by scribes or owners or other easily recognizeable data are given. **[slide 25]** The identification of texts is limited to those quickly recognized in databases or by Google; otherwise only titles or incipits are quoted. Complicated collections of many small texts or excerpts are to be summarized or single identified texts noted. If one uses this procedure with discipline, our experience shows that a manuscript can be processed in one working day. For the 15,000 uncataloged manuscripts in Germany, 20 contemporary projects would require only one year to complete the work. The 550 Leipzig manuscripts have now been nearly completely „short-described" and are available on-line.[22]

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[20] Cf. https://www.ub.uni-leipzig.de/forschungsbibliothek/projekte/projekte-chronologisch-alle/kurzerfassung-und-digitalisierung-von-110-mittelalterlichen-handschriften-der-ubl-ohne-publizierten-nachweis/.

[21] Christoph Mackert, Das Verfahren der Bestandsliste. Überarbeitete und aktualisierte Handreichung zur standardisierten Kurzerfassung mittelalterlicher Handschriften nach dem Schema der Bestandsliste, Juni 2011, https://www.ub.uni-leipzig.de/fileadmin/Resources/Public/Docs/Upload_Forschungsbibliothek/Hand-schriftenzentrum/konzeptpapier_2011_bestandsliste_publikationsversion.pdf.

[22] See fn 19.

Manuscript cataloguing in the "digital age"

You may have noted that I have mentioned databases, Google and on-line publication of descriptions and data. Indeed, the process of inventory list short description is not only advantageous in making available to reseachers information on uncataloged manuscript collections but also represents an important step in the total concept of digital information presentation. With short description, requiring a single working day, comes the concept of comprehensive metadata and the digitalization of manuscripts; indeed, the digital reproduction and preparation for on-line publication also requires about one working day per manuscript.[23]

And furthermore, the "digital age" has fundamentally changed our work in many ways. On the one hand, tasks such as text identification, earlier very time consuming, now thanks to search engines often require only minutes; this greatly eases the short description. On the other, accessible comparative material on the internet, such as watermarks, scribal hands, book illustration, binding stamps or provenance marks, is ever more massively available and cannot be fully utilized for short description; it is even a challenge for in-depth cataloguing. But the "digital age" has also freed us from the need to think only of demanding published catalogues as a vehicle for presenting short description results. Of course it remains reasonable to document the knowledge acquired from multi-year in-depth cataloguing projects in manuscript catalogues (either in print or e-book format); however, on-line portals can present side by side both the depth and the brevity of such data.

Thanks to the centralization of manuscript description in Germany, opportunities for database-supported presentation of information connected with norm-data were early recognized and used. **[slide 26]** In Manuscripta Mediaevalia, originating in the late 1990s, we have an electronic central catalogue for manuscript heritage in Germany, driven by the two large manuscript centers in Munich and Berlin and the University of Marburg.[24] The luxury of such a central catalogue including norm data for persons, geographic places, institutions and so on was for a long time a unique characteristic of German manuscript cataloguing. However, Manuscripta Mediaevalia has increasingly aged; it is not suitable for connecting to the growing digitalization of manuscripts and today is an example of the digital ice age. With portals such as **[slide 27]** e-codices,[25] other central digital platforms have emerged in Europe that were designed for the digital representation of manuscripts.

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[23] Cf. Schreiber/Fabian, Digitalisierung (fn 14), p. 22–23.
[24] http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de; cf. Mackert, Arbeitsgruppe (fn 3), p. 9–11.
[25] https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en.

Germany is, however, trying to catch up. At the beginning of 2018 the DFG approved a large infrastructure project to create **[slide 28]** a new German manuscript portal under the leadership of the State Libraries in Berlin and München, the University Library in Leipzig and the Herzog-August-Library in Wolfenbüttel.[26] The new manuscript portal will include a smart search engine for manuscript information and central links to available digital copies of manuscripts. It will also present information from projects of in-depth cataloguing and short description, electronic manuscript catalogues, and maintain inter-operability with library on-line catalogues and linked open data. By means of **[slide 29]** IIIF-Standards,[27] the image and text information from diverse sources will be brought together and made accessible for individual scientific users.

Manuscript cataloguing: a never ending story

It is often overlooked, in discussions over detailed or shortened cataloguing, that manuscript cataloguing is always a snapshot of a historical process of building knowledge. Precisely because most medieval European manuscripts do not contain information about when, by whom and for whom they were written, and about which texts by which authors they contain, our cataloguing results, even with in-depth work, remain always temporary. Future scholarship will overtake our results and discover new aspects.

The publication of manuscript catalogues, however, implies that one can treat the objects conclusively. Yet research continues long after such publication or is even stimulated by such publication. This makes obvious the functional advantage of such new manuscript portals and the creation of **[slide 30]** workspaces for individual scientific researchers that allow them to annotate, on-line, existing data and add their extensions, corrections, or research results for given manuscripts.[28] In this manner we hope to create an instrument that will allow **[slide 31]**[29] productive, on-going cooperation among in-depth cataloguing, short description and lively scholarly activity.[30]

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[26] Cf. http://www.handschriftenzentren.de/handschriftenportal/. The central text of the application is on-line available at http://www.handschriftenzentren.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/beschreibung_des_vorhabens.pdf.
[27] Cf. http://iiif.io/.
[28] Cf. the application (fn 26), p. 15.
[29] The slide shows the data model of the new German manuscript portal.
[30] Cordial thanks to Richard L. Kremer (Dartmouth College, Hanover) for the English translation.