

## **Same, same but different: The history and conservation of the 17<sup>th</sup> century handwritten multi-volume catalogue of the Herzog August Library**

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The fascinating library catalogue written by Duke August in the 17<sup>th</sup> century has been the subject of conservation and research in the last two years. This paper will explore the codicological, as well as the ongoing conservation work. A project of interest for conservators and scholars alike as the conservation of Duke August's Catalogue is exemplary not only for including research and conservation as an integral component of a digitisation project right from the outset, but also for the collaboration of numerous conservators working on one set of objects.

Duke August the Younger (1579 – 1666) compiled one of the largest collections of printed books and manuscripts in his time, forming the foundation of the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbuettel. In 1625 he started to catalogue his books and later acquisitions, using an elaborate system of links between the entries of single titles. Over the next 73 years he – and following his death in 1666 his successors – compiled a catalogue of the collection consisting of six folio format volumes, each containing 600 pages. The attention to detail and the links between the 35,000 entries make these manuscripts unique examples of an early library catalogue. To write and use the catalogue Duke August ordered a specifically designed and unusually large book-wheel. Until today, both the catalogue and the book-wheel remain two of the most significant objects in the Herzog August Library Wolfenbuettel.

To commemorate the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Duke August's death on 17 September 2016, a project was drawn up to allow digital access to this important item in the collection. This included the conservation and digitisation of all six volumes, as well as the digital processing of the links between the entries.

The combination of heavy use during writing, centuries of consulting the catalogue and changing storage conditions has caused severe damage to the paper and bindings. Many pages show considerable amounts of tears and losses. Extensive old repairs lead to further damage and are covering the text in some areas. The leather bindings have suffered from lying open on the 17<sup>th</sup> century book wheel. They show broken sewing supports, tears and losses to the leather, detached boards and different types of repairs from various decades. These repairs vary both in materials and manual skills, and range from common techniques like leather patches to unique approaches like mending broken boards with metal plates.

Because of their content, and similar appearances in conjunction with comparable previous repairs and restoration measures, these six volumes clearly form a set of objects. However, the materials used, the damage, and – in some cases – the old repairs, vary from one volume to another. The challenge was to come up with a conservation approach that preserves the volumes as a group, but still meets the requirements of each individual volume. Owing to the many old repairs this further included finding a good balance between stabilising the pages or bindings while retaining historic evidence of previous repairs.

In addition, the catalogue posed a logistical challenge: the large size of the volumes, the extensive damage to the textblock and the timeline of the project required several conservators to carry out the conservation treatments as a team. This was a rewarding collaboration but also showed the need to ascertain clear standards for comparable results throughout all volumes.

This talk will shed light on new findings regarding the making of the catalogue and Duke August's approach, based on an in-depth codicological examination. This will be followed by an exploration of the strategic approach to such a large scale and long-term project, the treatment options and decisions taken. Finally, aspects of working with a team of conservators on such a group of objects within the scope of a broader project will be discussed.

Keywords: manuscript, codicology, book conservation, Duke August the Younger, digitisation