

A Brief History of the
Oriental and East Asian Collections
Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

Hartmut-Ortwin Feistel

Already at the moment of its foundation in 1661, the *Berlin Library* contained some Oriental materials, Hebrew manuscripts, Chinese prints and the like. It seems likely that these go back to the GREAT ELECTOR's collection of curios, his *Kunstkammer*, rather than to his personal library. In the following years, remarkable attention was given to extending these holdings, especially of East Asian materials, as the GREAT ELECTOR had plans for an East-Indian trading company. But also the beginnings of Orientalist studies in Germany, stimulated by the Enlightenment, not by missionary interests, gave these collections a special impetus: for instance, the private collection of ADAM OLEARIUS, a scholar of the Schleswig court at *Gottorf*, was bought. A first catalogue of the Chinese collections was published as early as 1683, and the famous *Flora Japonica* was acquired by the GREAT ELECTOR with the help of the Dutch East India Company.

However, it was the nineteenth century which saw the great expansion of materials from and concerning the countries of Asia and Africa. The *Royal Library* was then buying major collections as well as single items. Important libraries were acquired, of which I should like to mention those of Sir ROBERT CHAMBERS — judge of the British East India Company in Calcutta, BARON HEINRICH FRIEDRICH VON DIEZ — Prussian ambassador to the Ottoman empire, JOHANN GOTTFRIED WETZSTEIN — Prussian consul in Damascus, JULIUS HEINRICH PETERMANN, ALOIS SPRENGER, WILLIAM DUKE OF HAMILTON — his library included the collections of his father-in-law WILLIAM BECKFORD, or KARL SCHOEMANN. The developing Orientalist philologies both encouraged these acquisitions, and were strongly influenced by them. The logical outcome of this development was the foundation in 1919 of a separate Oriental Department (then called *Orientalische Abteilung*). The first director of the Oriental Department was GOTTHOLD WEIL, who after his emigration in the early thirties to Israel was to become the first director of the *Jewish National and University Library*.

A separate East Asian Department was split off in 1922 from the Oriental Department, mirroring the development of Chinese and Japanese studies in the Berlin University. Unlike the collections in Paris and London, which are informed by the collections from Dunhuang and other valuable but isolated items, the Berlin collections based their importance on a completeness unique in Europe, with which especially administrative and historical texts were collected. The important collections of PAUL MOELLENDORF — which contained besides Chinese also valuable Manchurian texts, FRIEDRICH HIRTH and OTTO FRANKE might be mentioned, but also the Buddhist canon in its Chinese version, the so called *Peking Tripitaka*.

Both departments experienced severe losses due to the ravages of the Second World War. In the Oriental Department these concerned primarily printed materials. However, of the East Asian manuscripts and blockprints, which by 1945 had amounted to roughly 100.000 items, only about one third is still available in Berlin. A great number cannot at present be accounted for; about 20.000 blockprints are now in Cracow.

With regard to Oriental manuscripts, the situation is rather better. The librarian in charge at the time, MAX WEISWEILER, decided to go against his orders and to send practically all the manuscripts West for safekeeping, rather than East to Silesia. The major part of these were moved at a comparatively early date to the Abbey of *Beuron*, and after the war to Tübingen university library, where they formed the so called *Tübinger Depot der Preussischen Staatsbibliothek*, well known from publications dating from this period. Another part eventually ended up in *Marburg*, having been removed there from places of safekeeping in disused salt mines. Here, after the war, a new Oriental department was founded, which soon was also able to begin the acquisition of further manuscripts.

A small group of about 1500 manuscripts remained in Berlin throughout the war and afterwards formed the Oriental manuscript holdings of the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek. Some of them had been kept in Berlin, because they were in use at the time. For instance, the large collection of Jaina manuscripts had stayed behind, because WALTHER SCHUBRING was working on a catalogue

of these, which was published during the war as late as 1944. Others, like the so-called "*Erfurt Bible*", which is at present being restored, and of which you will see some leaves, could not be moved because of their size or their weight.

A very few manuscripts are known to be in Cracow, in the *Biblioteka Jagiellońska*; about 50 manuscripts must be considered irrevocably destroyed.

The manuscript collections in the Oriental Department of the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin* now count about 42.000 volumes of Oriental manuscripts and blockprints as well as more than 175.000 films of Indian, Nepalese and Tibetan manuscripts filmed in Nepal by the *Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project*. Additionally, we hold the administrative responsibility (conservation, restoration and utilization) for the manuscripts of the Berlin Turfan collection, which consists of about 40.000 fragments from Central Asia. These are written primarily in Old Turkish, Middle Iranian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Tocharian, but also Mongolian, Tibetan and some minor groups of languages are represented. It is in this function that we are also actively participating in the *International Dunhuang Project*, which was initiated by the *British Library*.

We were able to unite the two Berlin collections of Oriental manuscripts in 1991 (that is, before the libraries themselves became one), thus making it the first collection of dispersed materials of Prussian cultural heritage to be reunited. (This of course excludes losses and manuscripts known to be at the Cracow library). In the course of the audit which we undertook afterwards, a database for the manuscripts was set up. This now contains a register of all our manuscripts and fragments from Central Asia. Obviously, this database is not going to supersede the need for "real" manuscript catalogues. Therefore, printed catalogues will continue to be published at least for some time to come.

For our library, this task was begun in the second half of the last century by a remarkable effort. Between 1853 and 1899, twenty-two volumes of catalogues were published, describing by the end of the century a large percentage of the Oriental manuscripts holdings. However, for the next sixty years only one further catalogue of Berlin Oriental manuscripts was published (this is the catalogue of Jaina manuscripts, which I mentioned earlier). At the same time, numerous new Oriental manuscripts were acquired not only by the Berlin library, but also by other libraries in Germany. Therefore, in 1957 the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* (German Orientalist Society) proposed a union catalogue of Oriental manuscripts in all German libraries. The then director of the Oriental Department, WOLFGANG VOIGT, was asked to direct this project, which has remained a responsibility of the department ever since. Until 1989, the project was financed by the German Research Foundation; in 1990 it was taken over by the Academy of Sciences at Göttingen. Today, 102 catalogues and 46 supplementary volumes have been published in the *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*. Even so, new acquisitions by German libraries are still outrunning our best efforts in producing these catalogues.

As mentioned above, hardly any of the East Asian materials were sent for safekeeping West. Therefore, the East Asian Department of the *Westdeutsche Bibliothek* concentrated on the acquisition of modern printed materials. With the reunification, the Department took over the responsibility for those blockprints and manuscripts, which had remained in Berlin. But these consist of just about one third of the pre-war holdings, in no way comparable with its importance just before World War II.

Apart from the special collections in the Oriental and the East Asian departments, both departments are also responsible for the acquisition and cataloguing of modern printed books. At present, the library's over-all holdings concerning Africa, the Near East and South and Southeast Asia amount to nearly 600.000 volumes, while the roughly 650.000 printed books in East Asian languages constitute the most important collection of its kind in Europe.

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