



**Staatsbibliothek
zu Berlin**

Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Department of Early Printed Books

The Rara Collection

Already the initial stock of the Elector's Library contained printed books which at that time had already been regarded as extraordinarily rare and particularly precious. The Rara Collection of today is a relatively young collection, which after certain preparatory work in the 1920s came into being in 1935. Within three years around 12,000 volumes were transferred from the main stacks to the new Rara Collection. In support of this process, the Prussian State Library at that time set up criteria for a book to be considered as rare, which served as an example and guideline for other German libraries as well. Apart from a book's rarity another important aspect for its admission to the Rara Collection was the significance of the material for the history of the book, such as early products of a given press, or the artistically significant get-up of the books, such as excellent original illustrations by great masters. New printing technologies such as the invention of lithography were also taken into account.

During the Second World War the Rara Collection, too, suffered substantial losses. Nonetheless, both successor libraries during the post-war period discovered that they still had very substantial main collections of books on which they could build. They resumed the effort to transfer especially precious items from the main stacks to the Rara Collection, and at the same time adapted the selection criteria to the circumstances. In 1997 the Rara Collection was brought together under one roof again. It now contains more than 60,000 volumes and is growing slowly, but steadily. In-depth cataloguing includes detailed information for each item, such as on printers, publishers, book-designers, binders and bindings, previous owners and illustrators. The relocation lists from the Second World War for the Rara as well as the other special collections allow assessments to be made of their pre-war extent and also of possible locations of items that have not returned to the library.