



**Staatsbibliothek  
zu Berlin**

Preußischer Kulturbesitz

**Department of Early Printed Books**

## **The Varnhagen Library**

This collection originally belonged to the diplomat and journalist Karl August Varnhagen von Ense (1785-1858) and his wife Rahel Varnhagen von Ense, née Levin (1771-1833). It was donated to the Royal Library in 1880 by Karl August's niece, Ludmilla Assing. Varnhagen served from 1816 to 1819 as chargé d'affaires for Prussia at the court of the Grand Duchy of Baden in Karlsruhe, until he was suspended in the run-up to the resolutions of Karlsbad, because of his liberal tendencies. His retirement became final in 1825. From then on he lived in Berlin and was primarily active as an author, political journalist, historiographer and literary critic.

His wife Rahel, who was baptized Antonie Friederike, was the daughter of a banker and jeweller in Berlin. She is believed to have been the best known Jewess in Berlin at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and one of the wittiest women of her times. Some people, such as Börne and especially Heine, admired Rahel as a forerunner of the "Junges Deutschland" (Young Germany). Her first salon in Berlin, in the Jägerstraße, was a centre for artists and literary figures, and attracted everybody who was passing through Berlin. In addition to running her salon, Rahel corresponded regularly with over 300 people.

The library as well as unpublished works of the Varnhagen couple came to the Royal Library in 1880. Their manuscripts and literary estates are kept in the Biblioteka Jagiellonska in Kraków, Poland, due to evacuation during World War II. Today, the library comprises about 2,000 printed books and reflects the intellectual life of the time as well as the political and cultural interests of both its owners.