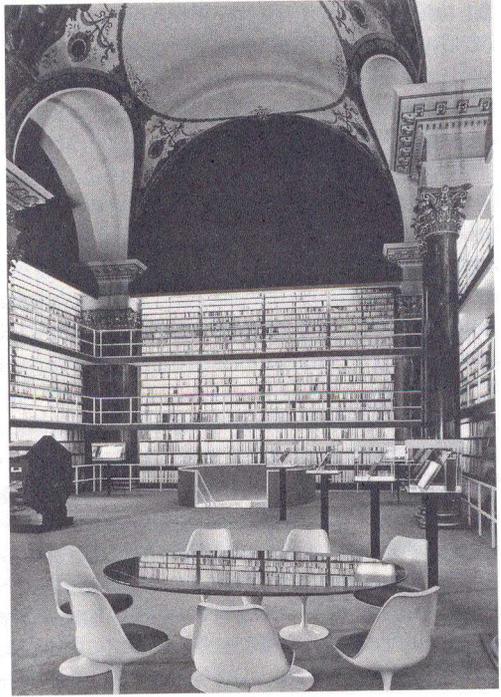


Title 269 A

The "White Walls" of the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbuttel, consisting of the vellum bindings of its books, the large volumes on the lower shelves, the small ones at the top, just as its founder August, Duke of Brunswick, wanted them to be arranged in 1644. Among its famous Librarians are G.W. Leibniz from 1691 to 1716, and it was never plundered in the four centuries of its existence.
Courtesy Herzog August Library.



At that time in 1976 my close friend Carsten Salander, now Professor at the University in Clausthal, was living in Hanover and, being a splendid host whenever I visited him, he showed me the great attractions of his region. I was most impressed when he took me to the ancient town of Wolfenbüttel, famous for the Herzog-August-Bibliothek, one of the greatest libraries in Europe.

With about 3000 incunabula, and almost 8000 ancient manuscripts, it dates back to 1644 when Duke August the Younger, the Herzog of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1579-1666) brought his private library, the *Bibliotheca Augusta* of 130000 items, to his new residence, Wolfenbüttel. Duke August was one of the rare examples of a scholarly prince, the author of a book on chess *The Game of Kings* (1616), a nine-volume work on cryptography in Latin (1624) and a work on the *Life of our Lord Jesus* in 1640. In the 17th century he was one of the most important collectors of books.

During the following three centuries, the Library grew to over 300000 items. The additional ancient bibliographic treasures, collected by its two famous Librarians, G.W. Leibniz (1691-1716) and G.E. Lessing (1729-1781), as well as by its then incumbent Director Paul Raabe, continued to add greatly to the Library's fame amongst scholars all over the world.

Carsten introduced me to Raabe, a scholar and a great modern librarian, since 1968 Director of the Library, who had added new buildings to house the Library's ever-increasing contents, and expanded it with a special Research Institute and a programme of cultural activities. When I first visited the Library, he showed me the ancient centre, a large and tall circular building, with its three galleries and its impressive 'white contents'. On closer inspection one saw that, from floor to the high cupola above, it consisted of white vellum bound books, stacked according to size, the largest at the bottom, the smallest high above, as Herzog August had arranged them. An unforgettable sight.

During its more than three centuries of existence the library had never been plundered, although Wolfenbüttel had been occupied by the Kaiser's soldiers as well as by French armies during many wars. Were their commanders so uncultured and illiterate, perhaps? However, the *Bibliotheca Palatina* in Heidelberg, as magnificent as the Wolfenbüttel Library, was robbed by Tilly and his Catholic Liga in 1621 and transported on the back of mules over the Alps to Rome, where until today, it is part of the *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*.

Once Raabe kindly asked me to organise a Seminar on 'Interdisciplinarity' at his Library, but I failed to make it a success and no publication resulted.