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2003-06-23

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Original Publication Citation

Richard Hacken. "Types of Digital Library Cooperation in German Studies," ACRL/Wess Program, June 23, 2003.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Hacken, Richard, "Types of Digital Library Cooperation in German Studies" (2003). *Faculty Publications*. 1217.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/1217>

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Types of Digital Library Cooperation in German Studies

A paper delivered at the ACRL/WESS Program
in Toronto on June 23, 2003, by
[Richard Hacken](#)

We have moved beyond the cart-and-buggy days of document scanning. [My own institution](#) just started to use a high-speed scanner, but speed is relative. A [Swiss-designed robot](#) at Stanford University, about the size of an SUV, can now scan more than 1,000 pages an hour. Allegedly, it will pay for itself only on projects over 5,000,000 pages. The explosion has just begun in North America to digitize holdings, and parallel types of progress are being made by German libraries, especially for academic-level projects in the humanities and social sciences.

Today I'd like to give a small sampling of the types of cooperative work being done in German studies, especially of retrospective digitization (as opposed to ongoing electronic publications):

One type of cooperation is where two or more divisions within a single institution combine to produce scholarly content that is technically realizable, carefully annotated, and bibliographically solid. The [Bibliotheca Palatina](#) at the University of Heidelberg is one example in the literary realm that includes a digital copy of the essential 14th century [Codex Manesse](#). Let's assume you're a scholar wishing to research the topic "Iconographic and Textual Views of Meditation among Medieval German Minnesinger Poets." You would have at least three choices to get at the sources. You could rely on text and images reproduced in monographs. You could fly to Heidelberg and other libraries, pass the admissions tests, become acquainted with the quirks of the collections, and struggle with limited hours. Or you could click into such a digitized reproduction of the original as that of Walther von der Vogelweide, where we see the [visual representation](#) of him sitting on a rock, crossing his legs, cupping his chin in this hands, and "meditating" about what life on this earth is all about. From this page you could then proceed to the [textual portion of the manuscript](#) to make comparisons. Later, you might chance upon the illustration of Heinrich von Veldeke in a [very similar pose](#). Certainly, the digital path of scholarly investigation involves less cost and time while assuring a high degree of fidelity to the original.

Another literary project featuring rare holdings within one institution is that spearheaded by Gabi Divay at the University of Manitoba. Felix Paul Greve, an early twentieth-century part-time swindler of German & Russian descent, came to North America to perpetrate further swindles but also to write fiction and semi-fiction in German and English as Frederick Philip Grove, allegedly of Anglo-Swedish descent. [His electronic text editions](#) are now available online, along with related materials, such as André Gide's recollections of his encounter with Felix Paul Greve.

A second type of cooperation is where two scholarly institutions with complementary rare holdings hook up for synergistic effect. One such case is the teamwork between the

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with its [Renaissance emblem books](#), where WESS's own Tom Kilton has been a collaborator, and the Herzog-August Library at Wolfenbüttel with its [sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblem books](#). One sample item from Wolfenbüttel, a flyer rather than emblem book in this case, shows two interesting things. First, at the top of the page is another iconographic notable: an obvious [perversion of Da Vinci's Last Supper](#) set against the background of the Thirty Years War. Second, if you scroll to the bottom of the page, you see a feature found increasingly in scholarly reproductions: a scale for color tone and for centimeter sizing, which aids in determining from afar the original dimensions and degree of fading found on the original. The cooperative projects at Illinois and Wolfenbüttel are supported by an Alexander von Humboldt grant.

Speaking of grants, many of the projects introduced today have a financial component beyond the local purse strings, that is, collaboration between one or more research institutions and a foundation or funding agency. The *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* in Germany (DFG) and the National Science Foundation in the United States (NSF) are sponsoring [an initiative for cooperative digital projects](#) between the two countries.

On a slight tangent, I have included on your handout a link to papers given at a workshop held just last week on Cape Cod regarding [Post Digital Library Futures](#), with topics such as "The Future of Digital Libraries" and "Toward a Global Digital Library." In the [latter paper](#), one general goal of the entire virtual enterprise is expressed in philosophical terms: "to go from data to information and finally to knowledge." And we might add: "...perhaps to wisdom." The enabling of new, synthesized, and applied scholarly knowledge, after all, is the ultimate ideal result.

A productive type of collaboration is where one institution with rare holdings but little else in terms of infrastructure, contacts another institution, in either geographic or virtual proximity, which can provide the technical and scholarly expertise necessary to finish the job. This is a way to maximize quality control, both in the selection of materials and in the manner of final presentation. One such DFG-sponsored project is the digitization of all [manuscripts in the Diocese and Cathedral Library of Cologne](#) with the assistance of the University of Cologne.

Another type of digital cooperation that requires extra funding, no matter the source, is between a research institution and an outsourced commercial operation. An example of this is the rare assemblage of [Eisenhower communiqués from D-Day through May of 1945](#) whose facsimiles our institution scanned with a high-speed scanner in a few hours (after they had waited in a long queue for months behind other projects). Then we sent the files to [iArchives](#), a commercial outfit that can index images to provide character-searchable indexing. This technology combines the scholarly advantages of seeing the original with the searchability that a transcription would have. Now I can input the name or name phrase of a town, say, [Strasbourg](#) or [Bad Kreuznach](#), and receive a list of all communiqué facsimiles relating to that town.

Various types of end products in terms of format are possible: facsimile or transcription of text or tables or numbers with value added by metadata, or possibly by commentaries, translations, bibliographic notes, and so forth. In the area of facsimiles, the [Bayerische Staatsbibliothek](#) (Bavarian State Library) has been one of the leaders. Today I will just mention their facsimiles of [imperial documents from Pippin the Younger through Maximilian I](#), their protocols of the [Bavarian legislative Landtag from 1429 through 1669](#), and the electronic version of stenographic reports of the [German Reichstag from 1867-1895](#). One example of optical character recognition scanning (OCR) to produce a transcription is *Die Österreichisch-Ungarischen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch* ([Austro-Hungarian Documents on the Outbreak](#)

[of the First World War](#)), in a format making possible a hyperlink mimic of the original footnoting and, of course, full-text searching. By scrolling to July 28, 1914, you could read a transcription of the French-language [declaration of war](#) directed at the Royal Serbian Ministry of the Exterior by Count Berchtold of the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs .

Various types of end products are also possible in terms of genre (rare or even bulky reference works, primary literature or historical sources, data sets, classical or rare secondary literature, retrospective e-Books, so to speak -- those with imprint dates that put them in the public domain -- or online bibliographies).

Some projects such as [Regesta Imperii](#), a cooperative project of the Academy of Sciences in Mainz connected in part with the digitized [imperial documents](#) at the Bavarian State Library, can be considered cross-generic, since the Regesta represent important primary as well as secondary sources for German and European history, along with translations and reference items. At the same time they are dual-format in that both facsimiles of the printed page and text-searchable transcriptions are available.

One of the early digitization interests in Germany has been in promoting *Grundlagenliteratur*, those proven reference works that can form a part of the scholar's electronic work station, such as the [Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie](#) with online indexing of both the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* and the *Neue Deutsche Biographie*. This represents another kind of cooperation, one between the Bavarian State Library and a willing publisher. (This can be one of the trickiest enterprises of all for openly available web access, because publishers naturally cannot lose sight of the profit margin.)

[Zedler's Universallexikon](#) is provided, again by the Bavarian State Library, as a reference work of notable use for study of the 18th century and earlier.

[Droysen's historical atlas](#) is one of many valuable reference helps from [Monumenta Germaniae Historica](#). One example of a way to use its reference capabilities would be to click on the link regarding the [development of the Swiss confederation](#). You could then identify the [desired map in larger format](#), and proceed to the related [textual commentary](#).

On a different note, [Grotefend's standard source for questions of early chronology](#) was digitized by a dedicated individual (not everything of scholarly value has been done by institutions).

Speaking of dedicated individuals, another type of cooperation is that between one or more research institutions and a list-serve, or interest group, of active participating members. The [World War I Primary Document Archive](#) with cooperation of BYU, University of Kansas, the World War I History List, and Oxford University, has access to a large pool of volunteers. One of those volunteers, even as we speak, is in an RV equipped with scanner, constantly on the move in search of diaries and memoirs -- somewhere between Arizona and Florida. Another volunteer for the medical front is a retired doctor in Australia. The site averages 400 to 500 visitors an hour, and, fortunately or unfortunately, generates an incredible number of reference queries.

The value of serendipitous e-mail volunteers for an established subject gateway to digitized materials can be as helpful as they are unexpected. Now that the [EuroDocs web gateway for European primary historical documents](#) has reached awareness on the Internet for over seven years, for example, I get help from out of the blue. Two examples: the endowed chair for European Studies at of the University of Kent in Canterbury wrote to say that his translation of the [recently amended Swiss constitution](#) is available in electronic form. And a scholar at the

University of Pisa pointed to her own digitization of an [Italian document from 1228](#) of linguistic and historical relevance for Italy.

A little closer to home, one of the initiatives of the [ARL/AAU German Resources Project](#) is the [Digital Libraries Working Group](#). Michael Seadle of Michigan State, the coordinator of the WG for the past 5 years, has overseen types of technical cooperation that are necessary for smooth interfacing and has personally encouraged a number of joint projects. As I take over the coordinator role for this working group next month, I will have to rely on him and others for the technical side of digitizing, while I hope to expand and encourage the overview of quality collections and relevant content. This working group can be a "menu planner" determining scholarly need and identifying collections or combinations of collections that meet the need for rare or unique materials online. One goal is to ease access for online data, information, or knowledge. The group can be a matchmaker between prospective German & American partners. It can be an expandable gateway to digitized materials in German cultural studies, helping to answer the question: what resources have been transferred to electrons, and how can our researchers get access to them? Google is by far not the best answer. The future looks bright, however, as an initiative funded by the National Science Foundation with some enhanced Google technology, [Open Archives Initiative](#) (OAI), promises to enable real-time searching for digital artifacts within a given range of subject parameters.

Until rare or unique scholarly websites are drawn into the bibliographic mainstream to such an extent, say, that it will become a simple matter of merging their records into a local or an international database, one present need is to harvest digital sites and report them in a coherent disciplinary context. The Digital Libraries Working Group has assembled a [clearinghouse](#), a sort of virtual help-wanted page, but not yet a gateway. In addition to what we've already seen, what are some other models for access out there?

One broad example is the [WWW Virtual Library](#), which forms the exoskeleton of a great idea for collaboration on an international scale. However, the subject pages can be very uneven in their coverage, and some subject areas are still not even present, lacking European politics and government and most national literatures.

To focus more on a gateway devoted to European studies, you need look no further than the [WessWeb](#), which has now reached a certain maturity with a full slate of subject and area pages organized by national and regional resources, by time periods, and by disciplines. The [German Studies webpage](#) is managed by Reinhart Sonnenburg, with contributions from other WESS members. Similar models are repeated throughout the other pages of WessWeb. Jim Campbell of the University of Virginia, who was the original webmaster of the WessWeb, has been continuously updating his [Electronic Text Collections in Western European Literature](#) for a number of years, offering a gateway to primary literary texts, just as [EuroDocs](#) aims to be a gateway to primary historical documents.

One model gateway at a local level is the Göttingen site distributed by subject access into within its [Digitisation Centre](#). Within this gateway we discover collection strengths and corresponding digital projects in travel literature, early North Americana and the history of science and mathematics. Here we're not talking so much about German culture as about a German effort to look at other cultures.

It is abundantly obvious that the digitization of materials for the study of German culture does not just occur in North America and German-speaking Europe. Our working group, however, is still quite small, and we would be delighted to see interest and participation expand to more North American libraries, including those in Canada.

If we multiply the growing itch and impulse to digitize unique holdings by the number of those who could help with the various technical and scholarly aspects of putting important European research materials into electronic form, the potential is evident. Research institutions are busily engaged in this and are looking for outside funding whenever possible. But curiosity and the voluntary assistance of individuals in such digital initiatives as those of the [German Resources Project](#) can also help to expand the possibilities for German study online and for knowledge about Europe in general.

The Global Resources Network, under the direction of the [Center for Research Libraries](#), in collaboration with the [Association of Research Libraries](#) and the [Association of American Universities](#)