

The objects and aims of the Consortium of European Research Libraries (CERL) are to provide services to its members and to the library and scholarly world at large in the form of bibliographical databases, seminars, workshops, publications and co-operation with other library organisations and individual libraries and their staff. CERL concentrates its efforts on printed material from the hand-press period – up to the first half of the 19th century – and on manuscripts, both in analogue or digital format.

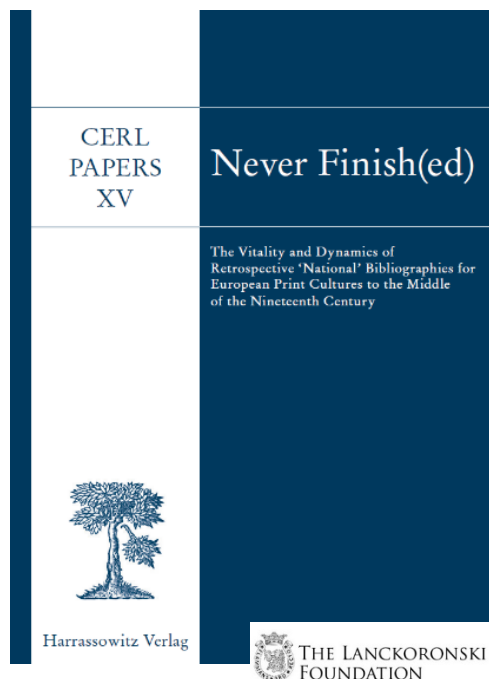
Content

CERL Papers XV	... 1	IFLA RBSC Seminar: Meditations	... 7
ESTC launched at CERL	... 2	News from CERL Working Groups	... 8
Cross-collection searching seminar	... 3	News from the Security Working Group	... 9
CERL Annual General Meeting and Seminar	... 4	Arthur fragment found at Cambridge UL	... 9
CERL Internships and Placement Grants	... 4	Provenance Conference 'Dispersed Libraries'	... 10
C. Dondi delivers David Zeidberg lecture	... 5	ALA RBMS 2025 – 'A Multitude of Stories'	... 10
Women scribes	... 6	A Turning Point to the Turning of the Times	... 11
Seminar: Mapping Knowledge	... 6	Biblissima International Conference	... 12
Sealskin bindings	... 7	LIBER AI Taskforce	... 12

From Seminar to Book: CERL Papers XV

In June 2023, the [Working Group on Retrospective Bibliographies](#) organised its first conference 'Retrospective Bibliographies and European Print Cultures to 1830 – Challenges and perspectives in the digital age' hosted by the Ossolineum Library in Wrocław.

Now, we are very pleased to announce the publication of the conference proceedings (with some additional, commissioned articles): *Never Finish(ed) The Vitality and Dynamics of Retrospective 'National' Bibliographies for European Print Cultures to the Middle of the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Olga Tkachuk, Marian Lefferts and Claudia Fabian (Harrassowitz, May 2025, €48,00). The book is available from Harrassowitz as [a paperback](#) and [a free download](#). The publication was made possible with a generous contribution from the Polish [Lanckoronski Foundation](#).



We have an online book launch on 28 May at 16:00CET, obtain the link from secretariat@cerl.org.

ESTC launched at CERL

The British Library and ESTC/North America are delighted to announce the launch of the Beta version of the new English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), the most comprehensive resource available for the output of the printing press in the English-speaking world before 1801. ESTC is now part of the Consortium of European Research Libraries' (CERL) ecosystem and accessible for free at <https://datb.cerl.org/estc/>.



Commenting on the move of ESTC to CERL, Claudia Fabian, CERL Chair, noted that ‘the Consortium is very pleased to add the ESTC to its portfolio of specialised databases for the European printed cultural heritage from its beginnings to the middle of the nineteenth century. The collaboration of member libraries in CERL serves the rare books community and provides space and access to the wealth of records within the various, ever-expanding databases. CERL member libraries work together to continue capitalising on the potential for data linking, data enrichment and shared development that its ecosystem can provide.’

ESTC is a bibliography that aims to record every distinct letterpress item produced during the hand-press era in these regions. It is also a union catalogue that lists copies of those items held by libraries and other owners around the world as well as links to digital reproductions where available. Begun in the late 1970s and with its roots in Pollard and Redgrave's *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475-1640* (STC), ESTC currently contains about 500,000 records and more than 3 million holdings. It is co-managed by the British Library and ESTC North America (ESTC/NA).

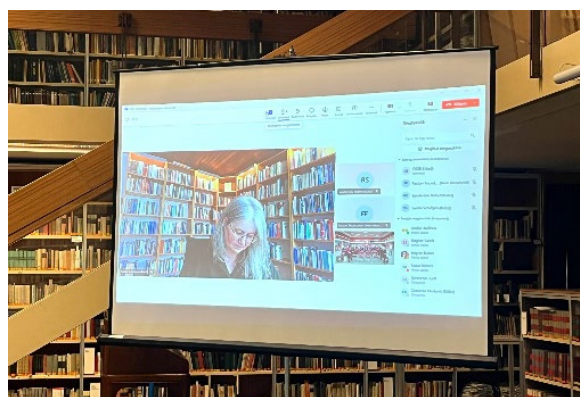
Helen Vincent, Head of Western Heritage Collections at the British Library said ‘ESTC has been a vital source of information for my own work as a librarian and a researcher for many years. I know how valuable a resource it is and how frustrating the loss of access has been. We are grateful to those who provided temporary access to partial datasets following the cyber-attack on the British Library, and excited to enable full access to the most up-to-date information about bibliographical description and holding institutions, in partnership with CERL and ESTC/NA. We look forward to engaging with stakeholder organisations and individual users as we continue to develop ESTC and to preserve and add to the collective knowledge about our shared printed heritage assembled by so many librarians and scholars over nearly a hundred years.’

Brian Geiger, Director of ESTC/NA has noted: ‘ESTC/NA is excited to see the database accessible to researchers again and grateful for all the hard work the team at CERL has put in over the last year and half to make this launch possible. We recognize that there is still work to do on the interface and we welcome and encourage feedback on it from our user community. Our hope is to continue in the coming years to expand and improve the project, in collaboration with the British Library and CERL.’

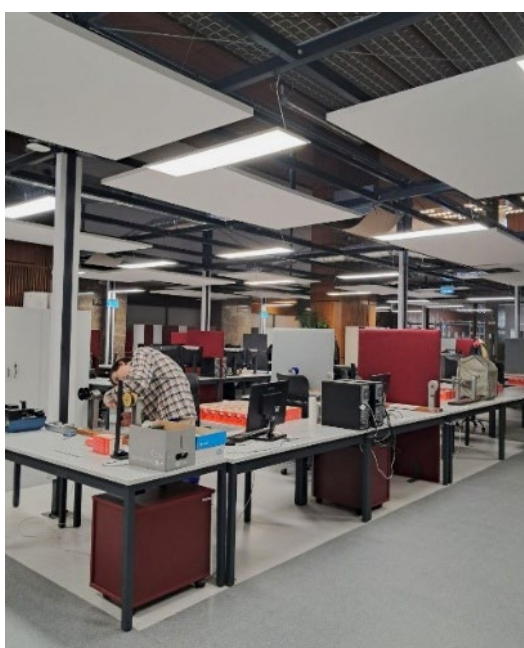
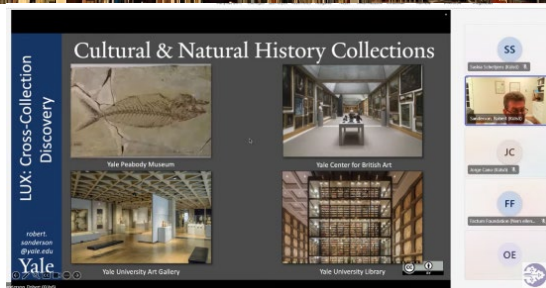
Highlights from the ‘Approaches to Cross-Collection Searching’ Workshop

This March, the National Széchényi Library in Budapest hosted the meetings of the Executive Committee and CERL’s Board of Directors as well as the workshop ‘Approaches to Cross-Collection Searching.’ From 23 to 25 March, CERL members were welcomed to the beautiful city and library in Budapest and received the opportunity to learn more about innovative approaches to cross-collection searching from renowned institutions.

The hybrid workshop event brought together experts from leading cultural institutions to focus on cross-collection searching, digital cultural heritage, and pan-European initiatives. Through a series of insightful presentations and discussions, we explored key challenges, emerging technologies, and exciting opportunities for collaboration in this evolving field.



CERL chair Claudia Fabian welcomes the participants in the Northern Reading Room of the *National Széchényi Library, Budapest* (above) Saskia Scheltjens presents an overview of cross-collection searching at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (top right), Robert Sanderson presents Yale’s leading LUX-Platform for Cross-Collection Discovery (bottom right).



We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to our speakers – Sally Chambers, Robert Sanderson, Constanza Blaskovic & Santiago Del Bosque Arias (Factum Foundation), Saskia Scheltjens, Dávid Rózsa, Marian Lefferts, Claudia Fabian, and Judit Gerencsér—as well as all participants and organisers who contributed to the success of this two-day event. For those who were unable to attend or wish to revisit the sessions, the recordings are available on our YouTube-channel: [Day 1](#) & [Day 2](#).

The workshop was crowned by a tour of the National Széchényi Library led by Gergő Kovács from the Collection Management Department of the library, focussing on the history of the building and the library’s collection. The participants were especially excited to take a peek ‘behind the scenes’ at the library’s extensive digitisation centre (pictured left).

CERL Annual General Meeting (20-22 October 2025, National Library of Scotland)



The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, celebrates its centenary in 2025. CERL is very pleased to join the celebrations by organising its Annual General Meeting and annual Seminar at this library which has been a member of CERL from the start. The Annual General Meeting will be held in the morning of Wednesday 22 October. A library visit will be organised as an afternoon programme.

The theme of the annual Seminar will be *Founding Collections*. The collections of the large research libraries of Europe are typically built on founding collections. These collections themselves are a consequence of social and personal bias, of political geography, of instances of preservation and loss, and of the lives, interests and relationships of the individuals who amassed them.

Through this seminar we want to explore how the founding collections shape the identities of the institutions they belong to today, how founding collections are used to propel thinking forwards, and what work libraries do to ensure founding collections remain relevant to people, revealing things to 21st century audiences that are vital to our study today of who we are. Please write to Secretariat@cerl.org if you would like to propose a paper and/or if you would like to attend this seminar.

CERL Internship and Placement Grants

In March 2025, CERL invited early career librarians and scholars to apply for one of the CERL Internship and Placement Grants. The deadline for applications was 4 April 2025, and the Grants Committee is currently matching applications and offers of internships.

Six grants, to the value of 1,000 Euros each, support qualified librarians and young scholars passionate about rare books and manuscripts, to undertake work on projects at prestigious libraries or the CERL Secretariat, contributing to valuable research and digital resources. Internships typically last one month and should take place before the end of December 2025.

Internship Locations & Projects in 2025:

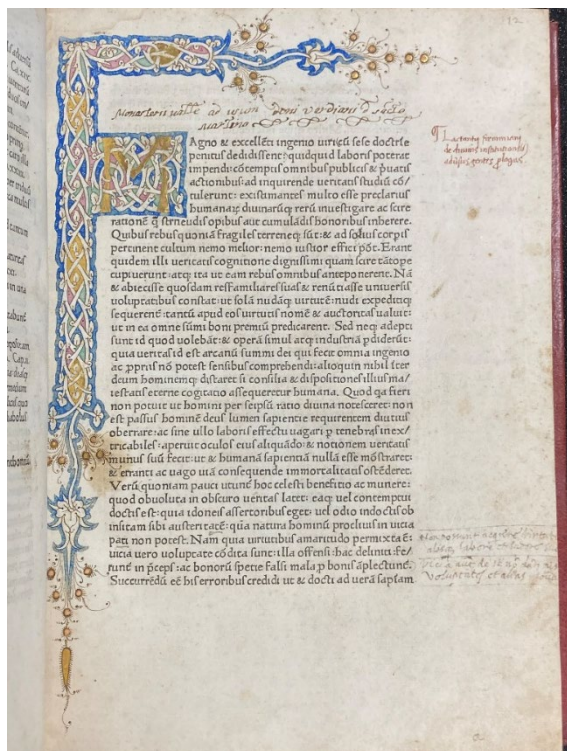
- [The Huntington Library](#), San Marino, California
- [Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation](#), Piraeus, Greece
- [Museum Plantin-Moretus](#), Antwerp
- [Royal Irish Academy](#), Dublin
- [Blickling Estate](#), Norfolk (National Trust)
- Research for CERL Secretariat



Blickling Hall Library at Blickling Estate, Norfolk (National Trust)

Cristina Dondi Delivers David Zeidberg Lecture on the History of the Book

On 9 April our CERL Secretary Prof. Dr. Cristina Dondi delivered a lecture on *Early Books' migration: European Upheaval and American Collections* at The Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Her lecture presented the ongoing investigation of the consequences – intended and unintended, direct and indirect – of historical policies and political events on the European book heritage that migrated to the United States, with a specific focus on 15th-century printed books, the so-called incunabula.



Lactantius, Lactantii Firmani *De diuinis institut[i]o[n]ibus aduersus gentes rubrice primi libri incipiu[n]t*. (Rome: Conradus Sweynheym and Arnoldus Pannartz, 1468) RB 90934. | The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens.

The title of the lecture is also the title of a project which Prof. Dondi is leading. Based at the Sapienza University of Rome, *Printing Revolution and American Collections: the migration of cultural heritage at times of political change* (PrintRevUS) is a four-year project funded by a Fondo Italiano per la Scienza (FIS) grant. It supports the work of 6 researchers for three years and up to 8 US-based consultants for one year in exploring the provenance of incunabula printed in Italy and now in US collections. The project is taking place with the collaboration of CERL member libraries in the US.

Between the 18th and 20th centuries major political changes in Europe mobilised vast quantities of early European printed heritage that ultimately formed the core of American public collections. Policies such as the secularisation of religious houses implemented under Joseph II, Napoleon, the formation of the Italian, Spanish, and Greek State, and events such as the October Revolution and the two World Wars caused the sequestration, disposal, dispersal, transfer, and sale of thousands of incunabula, around 50,000 of which are today preserved in hundreds of libraries in the United States.

The Huntington copy of Lactantius' *Opera* (above), printed in Rome by Conradus Sweynheym and Arnoldus Pannartz in 1468 (ISTC [i00002000](#); MEI [02129146](#)) was decorated in Florence and first used by the Benedictines of Vallombrosa (Tuscany). It moved within the order in Tuscany, to Montescalari and to Florence's Santa Trinità, the mother church of the Vallumbrosian order. But already in the first half of the 18th century it was in the possession of Thomas Herbert, 8th Earl of Pembroke, probably picked up during his Grand Tour in Italy, and remained at Wilton House (Salisbury), the family estate, until the collection's sale in 1914. It was purchased for £250 by the New York bookseller George Smith and subsequently sold, with many other incunabula, to Henry Huntington. The story of this book exemplifies that of thousands of others which moved from Italy, to the UK and the US, the trajectories and underlining motivations of which are the focus of the Printing Revolution in US Collections project.

Cristina Dondi, CERL Secretary and la Sapienza, Rome

The Role of Women in Medieval Manuscript Production: New Insights



Illustration in a 12th century homiliary, showing a self-portrait of the female scribe and illuminator Guda. Image via Wikicommons

A recent study by Professor Åslaug Ommundsen from the University of Bergen and other researchers has shed light on the significant yet often overlooked role women played in medieval book production. Published in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, the research reveals that at least 1.1% of manuscripts from 800 to 1626 CE were copied by female scribes. This equates to an estimated 110,000 manuscripts, with about 8,000 still surviving today. The study challenges traditional views on the history of book production, suggesting that the actual involvement of women was likely much higher than previously recognised.

One striking example from the 12th century is the self-portrait of the female scribe and illuminator Guda, who famously inscribed ‘Guda peccatrix mulier scripsit et pinxit

hunc librum’ (Guda, a sinner wrote and painted this book) alongside her image. Such examples highlight the importance of rethinking historical assumptions about female scribes, as most depictions of women in medieval manuscripts typically focus on authorship, not the act of writing itself. For more details, you can read the full article [here](#).

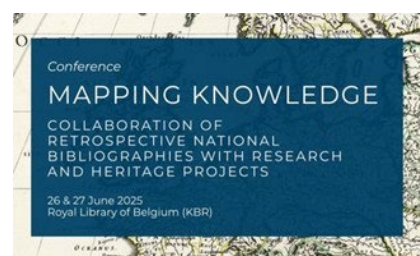
Åslaug Ommundsen told CERL about the research: ‘The numbers provided in the study are reminders that female scribes, although fewer in number, played an integral part in the production of manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages. The statistics show that extraordinary female communities and scribes highlighted in other studies were joined by others, still unknown to us. This recognition and awareness of the female contribution should inform how we approach medieval manuscript studies in general.’

Ommundsen and her colleagues are planning on bringing the results with them into their future research, ‘including and integrating female communities as a natural part of the overall picture.’ This already applies as they have recently started a large research project into book fragments and European networks: [CODICUM](#). This is a joint Nordic and interdisciplinary venture funded by an ERC Synergy Grant (2025-2030). You can read more about it here: [The Medieval Book and Networks of Northern Europe c. 1000-1500: Texts, Crafts, Fragments](#).

Seminar – Mapping Knowledge (Brussels, 26-27 June 2025)

<https://www.cerl.org/services/seminars/rnb2025>

Together with the Short Title Catalogue Flanders (STCV), the Retrospective National Bibliographies Working Group is organising the seminar *Mapping Knowledge: Collaboration of Retrospective National Bibliographies with Research and Heritage Projects*. The event is hosted at the KBR, the Royal Library in Brussels. Speakers include Thomas Wallnig, Alyssa Steiner, Esther van Gelder, Mikko Tolonen, Malcolm Walsby, Matthias Reif, Tereza Kazmirowska, Nina Lamal and many others. Please send a message to secretariat@cerl.org if you wish to attend.



Sealskin research: Article ‘Hiding in plain sight: the biomolecular identification of pinniped use in medieval manuscripts’ published in *Royal Society Open Science*

The full study is available here: <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.241090>



From the article: places of manufacture of the Romanesque bindings covered with seal skins still kept in library collections.

A recent study published by a group of researchers led by Élodie Lévêque from the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne reveals that many 12th- and 13th-century manuscripts from Cistercian monasteries were bound using sealskin, rather than the previously assumed local animal hides. The researchers employed advanced scientific methods like Zooarchaeology by Mass Spectrometry and ancient DNA analysis to identify the animal origins of these bindings. This discovery not only sheds light on the materials used in medieval bookbinding but also highlights the extensive trade networks of the time, connecting monastic communities with regions as far as Greenland and Scandinavia.

The study garnered attention in the press, with reports in the [New York Times](#), [The Guardian](#) and [Nature](#), and was also featured during this year's Bookbindings Academy 2025, where Élodie Lévêque presented on the use of wild animal skins in Carolingian bindings. This talk was recorded and is [available](#) on our YouTube channel.

Workshop: Meditations on Libraries and Heritage Collections

CERL's Executive Manager Marian Lefferts was at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) in Paris in April 2025 for a joint workshop organized by Louise Amazan and Garrelt Verhoeven of the IFLA Rare Books and Special Collections Section, with participation from the CERL Bookbindings Working Group, chaired by Fabienne le Bars.

The event explored how libraries can creatively promote and share their heritage collections with new audiences, while addressing the challenges and opportunities of democratising cultural access. From exhibitions and digital storytelling to inclusive engagement, the symposium sparked rich dialogue on the evolving role of heritage services. The [full programme](#) of the workshop and the [live stream](#) are available online.

In addition to the productive workshop sessions, participants were treated to exclusive tours of some of France's most iconic library and heritage sites. These included the Bibliothèque nationale de France's Mitterrand and Richelieu locations – with special access to the renowned restoration department – as well as visits to the Institut de France, the historic Bibliothèque Mazarine, and the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. The programme concluded with a memorable visit to the stunning Versailles Library.



Workshop participants in the Versailles library

News from the CERL Working Groups

At the Autumn 2024 meeting in Rome, the CERL Executive Committee and Board of Directors took the opportunity to review all [CERL Working Groups](#). In the latest Strategic Plan, the Board of Directors stressed that the Working Groups are a wonderful opportunity for CERL member libraries to engage with CERL. Encouraging their members of staff to take part helps to strengthen the European network and contributes to professional development for Special Collections professionals. CERL is particularly keen to ensure that librarians that are not yet at the most senior level in their institutions help us shape the future of the profession.

Some of the Working Groups had recently been less active, mainly because the chairs of the Working Groups retired from their libraries and the CERL WGs. We are very pleased to say that CERL members have nominated staff to fill the gaps. The Bibliothèque nationale de France has nominated Fabienne le Bars to lead the [Bookbindings Working Group](#) (see also article above), the Edinburgh University Library put forward Dr Daryl Green as Chairman of the [Manuscripts Librarians Working Group](#) and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna approved the appointment of Dr Katharina Kaska as the Chair of a new CERL Working Group, called CERL Data Network: Use and Useability.



From left to right: Fabienne le Bars, Katharina Kaska, Daryl Green, Agnieszka Franczyk-Cegła and Marianna Morreale

The proposed remit of the new Working Group on the CERL Data Network focuses on connecting datasets held at CERL so that all databases provide context for each other. Certain information is recorded in several places in the CERL environment and is not aligned automatically. The Working Group will explore the best way forward to ensure a) efficiency, b) best data structure, c) best support of the stand-alone databases, d) ways to enrich the search experience for end users. The first meeting of the Working Group, planned for the end of May 2025, will no doubt focus on setting priorities and breaking down the tasks.

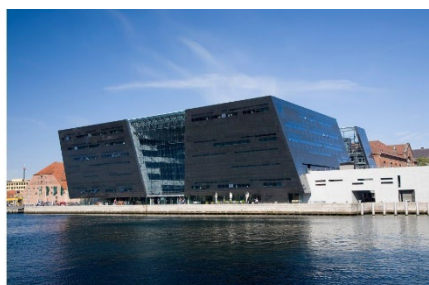
The CERL [Provenance Working Group](#) is pleased to announce that their next Online Book Seminar is planned for 10 June 2025. Please write to Secretariat@cerl.org to register your attendance, you will then be sent the Zoom link. Speakers include:

- Noël Golvers (KU Leuven, Belgium) – *Jesuit Collections in China*
- Agnieszka Rec (Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, USA) - *The Provenance and Development of Incunabula Collections at the Beinecke Library*
- A third speaker from Mexico or Argentina will also be joining – confirmation is expected shortly.

We also wish to extend heartfelt congratulations to the Chairman of the Provenance Working Group, Agnieszka Franczyk-Cegła, and our colleague from ICCU who has recently joined the CERL Executive Committee, Marianna Morreale, for being elected to serve on the IFLA Rare Books and Special Collections Section for the 2025–2027 term. It is a great pleasure to see two members of our group represented in this important forum.

News from the Security Working Group

For the sixth time, the Security Working Group organised its reflection days – this year hosted at the Black Diamond, Royal Library in Copenhagen (14-16 May 2025). The programme for the members of the Working Group included presentations and an exploration topics such as risk analysis and compliance; value rescue plans in practice and training; risks and concerns when moving the collection to remote stacks; logistics and transport and loss of knowledge concerning collections and objects. A behind-the-scenes tour of the Royal Library, including a short presentation of their Multispectral Imaging set-up and a visit to the KB's remote stacks in Vinge completed rich the programme.



Black Diamond, Royal Library in Copenhagen

The eighth Collection Security Summer School will be hosted by Trinity College Library and the National Library of Ireland in Dublin, from 10 to 12 September 2025. The programme will soon be available [here](#), and will include topics such as activism targeting our collections, integrating digital risks in the WG's remit, adhering to or judiciously deviating from self-imposed standards, assessments by externals (government, insurance), the impact of financial peaks and thoughts on stability of collection security and collaboration with the trade through ILAB. The participants will be treated to visits to the Eavan Boland and Old Library at Trinity College, the National Library and Marsh's Library.



Trinity College Dublin's Eavan Boland Library



The Quick Audit Tool (QAT) continues to generate a lot of attention. Marian Lefferts presented the QAT at events organised by the UK's [Historic Libraries Forum](#) ('Securing our collections: Managing risks in historic libraries,' November 2024), by UNESCO Memory of the World ('[Innovating Documentary Heritage for Sustainable Development in AlUla and Saudi Arabia](#),' April 2025), and by UNESCO The Netherlands, organised together with Blue Shield ([Actiedag Weerbaar Erfgoed](#), 14 May 2025).

Remarkable Merlin King Arthur Manuscript found in Cambridge Library

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/merlin-manuscript-discovered-cambridge>

A remarkable medieval discovery has emerged from the Cambridge University Library: a 13th-century manuscript fragment from the Suite Vulgate du Merlin, part of the French Vulgate Cycle chronicling the legends of King Arthur and Merlin. This rare piece was found repurposed as the binding for a 16th-century property register from Suffolk, having been torn, folded, and stitched into the book's cover. Initially misidentified as a 14th-century prose about Sir Gawain, further analysis by French specialist Irène Fabry-Tehranchi revealed its true significance as a distinct and important Arthurian text. The manuscript's survival offers valuable insights into medieval literature and the transmission of Arthurian legends.



4th International Provenance Conference “Dispersed Libraries - (Post)War Fates of Early Printed Book Collections” at the Ossolineum Library in Wrocław

On April 23-24, 2025, the 4th International Provenance Conference “Dispersed Libraries - (Post)War Fates of Early Printed Book Collections” took place at the Ossolineum Library. The conference was attended by over 100 participants from Armenia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, the USA and Hungary. The aim of the event was to present research on the wartime and post-war fate of old book collections, especially those published in the 15th–18th centuries, their current legal status and methods of consolidation.



The conference partner was the International Centre for Training and Research on Cultural Heritage at Risk at the Ministry of National Defence, and the event was held under the honorary patronage by the Polish Blue Shield Committee, the Consortium of European Research Libraries, the Lanckoroński Foundation, the Polish Committee for UNESCO and the Polish Provenance Working Group. The conference materials will be published in 2026.

The conference was co-financed as part of the project from the Polish state budget, allocated by the Polish Minister of Science under the “Excellent Science II” Programme.

ALA RBMS 2025 – “A Multitude of Stories”

<https://web.cvent.com/event/eec2ebfb-c5d9-47b3-8485-6c1def8b7a62/summary>

Our colleagues in the United States are preparing for the ALA Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) Conference, taking place from 24–27 June 2025 at Yale University. The conference will also be accessible virtually, with registration for online attendance still open.

This year’s theme, “*A Multitude of Stories*,” invites critical reflection on how collections shape and reflect historical narratives, especially through the lenses of colonialism, inclusion, and community engagement. Sessions will focus on topics such as reparative description, accessibility, and the ethics of stewardship.



The RBMS continues to support wider participation through a substantial scholarship programme, with over \$20,000 awarded to early career professionals and those from underrepresented communities.

New publication – a Turning Point

Two people who played an important role in CERL's past, former CERL Chairmen Ann Matheson and Elmar Mittler, edited a collection of essays: *Von der Wende zur Zeitenwende/ A Turning Point to the Turning of the Times: Bibliotheken in Europa 1989-2020s / European Libraries 1989-2020s*. We asked them to outline the import of this publication for us.

‘Those who lived and worked in research libraries through the 1990s in Europe generally recall this as a very optimistic time in our history, following the Fall of the Berlin Wall and its aftermath. Borders were opening, fresh connections were being forged among research libraries all over Europe, and there were new technological tools to assist.

Looking back from the 2020s, it seemed important to leave a record of this period from the late 1980s as it was experienced by those working in libraries in different European countries. In many ways the record of libraries during this period has been a success story, although there is still more to do, and even now not all governments are convinced of the intellectual, cultural and economic benefits of having a well-developed library system.

However, the political developments in the late 1980s and early 1990s opened up Europe and gave a new dimension, laying the foundations for the connections among European research libraries that have flourished for thirty years, with the professional expertise and human values that we have absorbed from one another. The other significant architects have been technology and the European Commission and its programmes. We, the editors, Elmar Mittler, Konrad Umlauf and Ann Matheson, thank all the contributors to this record of a very special time in the history of Europe and in the history of its libraries.’

DE GRUYTER		BIBLIOTHEK - Forschung und Praxis — 2024 Band 48 Heft 3		BIBLIOTHEK - Forschung und Praxis — 2024 Band 48 Heft 3		DE GRUYTER	
Inhaltsverzeichnis				Central and Eastern Europe			
Editorial		Eikehard Henschke Die Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig in der Nachwendzeit — 489		Kristina Pai and Ulo Treikelder A Paradigmatic Shift for Estonian Research Libraries: Thirty Years of Rapid Travel on the Digital Highway — 572		Giannis Tsakonas The Tenses of the Greek Metamorphoses — 682	
Ann Matheson, Elmar Mittler and Konrad Umlauf Von der Wende zur Zeitenwende – A Turning Point to the Turning of the Times — 403		Peter Hoffmann Die alterwürdige Universitätsbibliothek Rostock erwacht zu neuem Leben Ein persönlicher Rückblick — 506		Andris Vilks and Jana Dreimane Latvian Research Libraries from the 1980s to the Present — 584		Antonia Ida Fontana, Maria Cristina Mataloni and Rossana Morriello Academic and Research Libraries in Italy from Past to Future — 689	
Europe		Carolin Paoli Die Etablierung der Bibliothek der Fachhochschule Anhalt — 520		Irina L. Lynden and Yakov L. Shrayberg Research Libraries in Russia: The Past Revisited – Leading to the Future — 595		Fernanda Campos ‘Alone You Are Nothing, Together We Will Build a Better World’. Sharing My CERL Memories — 699	
Esko Häiki Die politische Wende 1989–1991 und die Zusammenarbeit der Bibliotheken in Ostmitteleuropa mit LIBER — 405		Sylvie Weber Von der Wissenschaftlichen Allgemeinbibliothek zur Stadt- und Landesbibliothek. Im Osten viel Neues – Der Wandel von der WAB zur SLB Potsdam in der Zeit von 1989 bis 1992 — 526		Ewa Kobierska-Maciuszko Between the East and the West. Regional Transformations and the Development of Polish Research Libraries 1989–2023 — 608		Western Europe	
Ann Matheson Thirty Years of Change in the UK and in Europe after 1989: A Personal Perspective — 414		Hannah Schöller and Arend Flemming Von der Wende zur Zeitenwende (1990–2020) in Dresden, Sachsen und beim Deutschen Bibliothekerverband. Interview mit Prof. Dr. Arend Flemming — 531		Martin Sroboada From ‘Difficult to Find’ to ‘Picking from the Flood’: A Turning Point to the Turning of the Times — 622		Jacqueline Sanson The Experience of the Bibliothèque nationale de France — 703	
Renate Gömpel Europas Nationalbibliotheken – das Gedächtnis des Kontinents. Die Auftaktjahre der Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) 1987–1993 — 425		Peter Petsch Stadtbibliothek Magdeburg im Umbruch — 540		István Monok Das ungarische Bibliothekssystem und die Veränderungen der Situation der Bibliothekare nach 1990 — 632		Odile Grandet A Portrayal of French University Libraries 1989–2024 — 710	
Giuseppe Vitello Around the 1990s: A ‘Wende’ for Research Libraries — 432		Cornelia Poenicke Stadtbibliothek Magdeburg ab 2014: Profilschärfung als Bildungshaus und städtisches Veranstaltungszentrum — 549		Lyubov Dubrovina, Yurii Kovtaniuk, Kateryna Lobuzina and Ludmyla Demianuk The Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine in Times of Independence and Martial Law: Development Strategy, Preservation, and International Co-operation — 639		Raf Dekeyser and Hilde Van Kiel University Library Collaboration in Belgium: Successes and Obstacles — 714	
Germany		Kathinka Dittich van Wieringh Die Bibliotheken der Goethe-Institute in Russland und den sowjetischen Nachfolgestaaten. Ein vielversprechender Anfang – eine unsichere Zukunft — 558		Mirna Willer and Tinka Katič Turning Points in the Croatian Information Environment: From the 1980s to 2023 — 648		Futures	
Klaus-Dieter Lehmann Die Rückkehr in die Zukunft. Vereinigung Deutsche Bücherei und Deutsche Bibliothek – Beutekunst und die Rückführungsverhandlungen — 453		Klaus G. Saur Auf dem Weg zum gemeinsamen europäischen Kulturraum. Förderungsprogramme des Börsenvereins des deutschen Buchhandels in Zusammenarbeit mit der Bundesregierung und den Bibliotheken für Osteuropa — 565		Yeznik Mirzoyan Armenian Libraries from Afar and Up Close. The Example of Major Armenian Libraries — 662		Svend Larsen Danish Libraries between ‘Wende’ and ‘Zeitenwende’ — 718	
Ute Schwens ‘Wind of Change’ – von den zwei Königskindern, die nicht zueinander kommen konnten. Zur Vereinigten Deutschen Nationalbibliothek — 460				Heli Kautonen Research Libraries’ Diverse Orientations to an Algorithmic Future — 723		Adam Solfronjević The Turning Point in Time from the Serbian Perspective: How to Turn the Digital Tide — 733	
Michael Knoche Die wissenschaftlichen Bibliotheken der DDR nach der Wiedervereinigung — 476				Southern Europe		List of Contributors — 739	
				Didar Bayr Turkish University Libraries on the Centenary of the Republic — 669			

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Biblissima International Conference (Paris, 21-22 May)

The CERL Chair, Claudia Fabian, is also president of the Biblissima+ Scientific Advisory Board. In this capacity, she will attend the [International conference Biblissima+ 2025](#) (21-22 May, Paris). The theme of the conference is *Ancient written cultures without borders: International portals forum* and portal owners will be invited to answer the following questions:

- Which standards should be promoted, with which objectives, within which communities, and according to which terms? Is AI a game changer?
- Which data governance to imagine at an international level amongst the humanist communities working on ancient writings?
- What are the needs of these communities today, and even, more broadly, of humanities, what are their uses, what infrastructures are needed to meet these challenges?

Marian Lefferts will present a paper discussing CERL's responses to several of these key topics. She will also present a CERL poster about CERL data, prepared by Charlotte Murphy.

LIBER Taskforce to investigate Artificial Intelligence activities

LIBER is launching a dedicated Taskforce to investigate Artificial Intelligence (AI) activities across the research library field and strengthen its strategic approach to AI-related matters. AI is seen as a disruptive force for research and higher education. Addressing the rising challenges, the newly established LIBER AI Taskforce will be created out of the pressing need and ambition to explore and implement an agenda on AI within the current [LIBER Strategy 2023-2027](#).

Karin Rydving was appointed as coordinator of the tactical and operational activities. She will work together with representatives of the LIBER Working Groups and LIBER Quarterly and will further develop the strategical components of the taskforce, which are currently defined as:

- To speak on AI and research libraries' matters at the European and global levels.
- To collaborate with LIBER members and partnering organisations on AI and research libraries' matters.
- To operate as an umbrella to connect existing activities on AI in LIBER Working Groups and implement additional tactical and operational activities.

The Taskforce will be officially launched during the [LIBER 2025 Annual Conference](#), 2-4 July in Lausanne.