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DOCTORAL THESIS

**GERMAN LIBRARIES UNDER
NATIONAL SOCIALIST RULE**

SUMMARY

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Key words: libraries, political instrumentalization, Germany, National Socialism, Antisemitism, political discrimination, book burnings, confiscation of books.

The present doctoral thesis aims to contribute to the history of German libraries between 1933 and 1945. The research conducted on this subject is in an early stage and there are few historical studies published so far that contain references to this issue, despite the large number of books dedicated to the history of the Third Reich.

The documentary sources used by this dissertation are the “Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung” and the “Bibliotheken Personalia” collections held by the German Federal Archives, the “Reichsbeirat für Bibliotheksangelegenheiten” collection, available at the “Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz”, the “Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung” collection held by the “Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz” and the archives of the University of Mainz.

The primary research question raised by the present paper is: to what extent did the German university libraries remain ideologically neutral after 1933, or were they subjected to Nazification, even politically instrumentalized? Thus, we focused on certain issues such as the personnel policy, the professional associations policy, the acquisition policy and the access restrictions. In relation with the aforementioned elements, we tried to answer the question regarding the way in which certain changes of the current practices were imposed, aiming to implement a new library policy following the Nazi ideology.

The Nazification of the German libraries took place with the consent of the German Ministry of Education and the “Reichsbeirat für

Bibliotheksangelegenheiten". The cases in which the provisions of the legal acts issued by the aforementioned ministry had been breached were completely isolated. The "German Librarians' Association" conformed and acted on the new requests of the authorities with no resistance, since it was led by a National Socialist German Workers' Party member.

The librarians' attitude towards the fascist dictatorship and towards the National Socialist library policy varied significantly from one case to another. The present doctoral thesis presents a series of such examples, reflecting the positions taken by different library employees, whether they were favourable or rejecting of certain abusive measures against some categories of readers or regarding the means of acquiring book collections by confiscating private libraries. Figures such as Hugo Andres Krüß, the director of the Prussian State Library, showed considerable tact, managing to reduce the negative effects of the directives regarding the transfer of certain old manuscripts from the occupied territories to Germany.

The librarians who showed some degree of reluctance towards the National Socialist ideology, as was the case of Hedwig Gollob or Max Stefl, were at first harassed in the workplace and, subsequently, certain disciplinary actions were taken against them. Rudolf Kummer, who held the position of an undersecretary of state within the German Ministry of Education, who also led the department which managed the university libraries, was driven by ultranationalist beliefs that he implemented at work. He managed to enforce a discriminatory personnel policy based on racial and political criteria in order to eliminate the Jewish employees and those who were politically undesirable.

Except for the interventions made by Rudolf Buttman or Josef Rest in the favour of certain librarians at risk of being fired, the aforementioned measures were tacitly accepted by all the institutions, including the "German Librarians' Association". Between 1933 and 1945, only National Socialist German Workers'

Party members were placed in leading positions within the German libraries. Furthermore, any promotion was conditioned by the party membership, with no consideration for the proposals made by Rudolf Buttmann and Hugo Andres Krüß for the promotion of the employees with no political affiliation, if their professional activity supported them in this sense. The library education had also been ideologized and political topics played an important role.

Regarding the acquisition of foreign publications and of those prohibited to the general public but accessible to a small group of readers, the university libraries were compelled to continuously argue for the necessity of buying these publications and for their importance to different scientific fields. Due to the efforts made by the libraries, numerous banned books were saved - publications that had been confiscated from private Jewish collections. Given the fact that libraries had gradually fewer financial resources available for the acquisition of foreign books, and considering the ideological restrictions, the university libraries sought to complete their collections by increasing the interlibrary exchange and by extending partnerships with similar institutions abroad. After 1933, the libraries ended the collaboration with the bookstores owned by Jews, and they made use of the services of those approved by the NSDAP, provided that they were owned by Arians connected to the fascist regime.

The undesirable and banned publications were still existing in the collections of the university libraries after 1933, but they were transferred to a secret collection and access to it was given only to very few librarians who were responsible for it, to researchers who could prove that they needed the books for their work and to certain National Socialist German Workers' Party members. Since there was no clear definition of the undesirable publications until 1936, librarians were at the risk of being fired if they loaned books that were considered to be subversive but that had not been indexed as such. This ambiguity was deliberately upheld with the purpose of maintaining a state of uncertainty among

librarians and to compel them to loan as few publications potentially inconvenient to the Third Reich as possible.

After the National Socialist German Workers' Party came into power, the Jewish readers were denied access to the library and Jewish employees were fired, according to "Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums". Many libraries put up notices at the entrances of their own buildings, informing the Jews that they were no longer allowed to frequent these institutions. Not only the Jews were faced with a hostile climate, but also the foreign citizens, as demonstrated by the Kurt Schulz case from the Prussian State Library. The aforementioned institution's management revoked Schultz's library card because he had severely violated the reading room regulations.

The libraries felt the outbreak of World War II deeply, due to the budget cuts and the decrease of the male staff after they had been enrolled and sent to the battlefield. As a precaution, the libraries that owned old and valuable books transferred a considerable part of their own collections to locations that were considered to be safe, such as castles and remote monasteries. Despite the destructions suffered by the libraries as a result of the bombings during World War II and the transfer of a significant number of publications to remote locations, the German libraries remained open as much as possible and served the public until the capitulation of the Third Reich.

The public relations department was in charge of disseminating the National Socialist ideas by organising exhibitions that show propaganda publications within the libraries. Furthermore, portraits and even busts of the Führer and Swastika flags were placed in the libraries. By no request from the National Socialist German Workers' Party, the libraries broadcasted radio shows that contained the message of the Nazi leaders in rooms organised especially for this purpose. Thus, the academic libraries were visited by a significant number of people belonging to social classes who normally would not have frequented the

university libraries. In order to promote the events and the aforementioned initiatives, the librarians wrote materials that they then sent to the press for publication. The shelves that held the National Socialist books were displayed in the centre, so that they were more easily accessible to the readers and the titles were indexed in special catalogues in order for them to be found faster.

The university libraries assumed responsibility for compiling short bibliographies that were obviously propaganda in nature. In spite of the willingness of the aforementioned institutions to support the National Socialist regime, neither the university libraries nor the state libraries were the ones that compiled the vast “Nationalsozialistische Bibliographie” or the “Verzeichnis jüdischer Autoren”, but the NSDAP libraries, since only the latter were completely trusted by the Nazi party.

Although there was a number of librarians who, through their activity, reduced the negative effects of certain abusive decrees issued by the German Ministry of Education regarding several book collections, one cannot overlook the affinities of many library employees for the Nazi ideology. The university libraries were not immune to the political change that occurred in Germany after 1933, since they did not remain ideologically neutral, as some studies suggested.¹ The legislative changes made between 1933 and 1945 had negative effects on the work conducted in the library, especially regarding the acquisitions, loans and the bibliographical department. The German Ministry of Education managed to enforce a National Socialist library policy, both in regard to the personnel and to the book collections. The instances in which the provisions of the regulations were violated by the aforementioned institution between 1933 and 1945 were rare.

University libraries proved to be willing to collaborate with the National Socialist regime, since many librarians shared the fascist ideology. They were no different from other German institutions, sometimes cooperating on their own

¹ Ernst Mehl, *Deutsche Bibliotheksgeschichte*, Berlin, Schmidt, 1951, p. 374.

initiative with the authorities of the Third Reich, even overzealously in some instances.