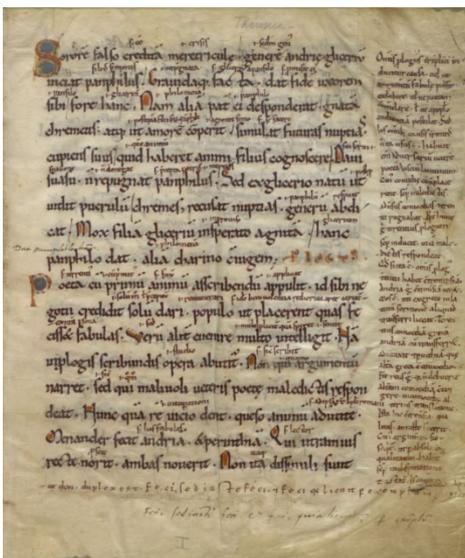


Bonn University and State Library Celebrates the Return of More than 600 Volumes Lost Since the Second World War

Sotheby's Auction House Facilitated the Repatriation After Discovering the Books in a Belgian Private Collection

One of the Largest Singular Returns of Objects Lost in the War



Left: A manuscript of the Comedies of Terence, written in the 13th century

Centre: Book of Hours, Use of Rome, in Latin [southern Netherlands (Bruges), c.1460-70

Right: John James Audubon, *The Birds of America* from drawings made in the United States, printed in New York between 1840 and 1844 in 7 volumes

Bonn, Thursday 11 April 2019

The University and State Library of Bonn (ULB) is celebrating the return of more than 600 volumes from its collection that have been lost since the Second World War. Among them are numerous historical works of high cultural and material importance, including medieval manuscripts, early printed books and fine illustrated works of natural history.

The repatriation will be celebrated in an official ceremony by the ULB this afternoon. This is the most significant return of lost books in the 200-year history of the University Library, and one of the largest singular returns of items lost in the War or the postwar period.

The most notable items returned to ULB include: a manuscript of the Comedies of the Roman playwright Terence, written in the 13th century; a manuscript prayer book of the 17th century, beautifully written and richly decorated; a rare incunabulum containing a Greek poem on Hero and Leander, printed c. 1495-1497 by the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius, famous for his series of early Greek publications; a large collection of bird books, many of them from the library of the famous traveller Maximilian zu Wied, and bound in his distinctive style.

The Discovery

Charlotte Miller, Specialist in Books and Manuscripts at Sotheby's in London says:

"In 2017, a large collection of books, including important books and medieval manuscripts, were offered to Sotheby's for sale from a private collection in Belgium. However, when they arrived at Sotheby's in London and we started cataloguing the early printed books and manuscripts, we notice that most of the titles were recorded as lost from the University of Bonn, and, more importantly, some of the copy specific information matched the books recorded as lost by Bonn. The medieval manuscripts also contained Bonn inventory numbers.

We therefore contacted Bonn University Library to ask for further details of their losses, and further research revealed that all the books matched those listed on ULB's Inventory of Losses, thanks to ULB's excellent records.

Every year, our Restitution and specialist departments examine approximately 15,000 individual lots, ranging from paintings to works of art and books and manuscripts, for sale at our European auction locations. On average, only a few dozen items need further attention and usually significant cases of restitution only affect individual paintings. So, the scope of the present return is unprecedented for Sotheby's."

The Disappearance

How exactly the books and manuscripts found their way to Belgium is not known, however it is possible that they were taken by Belgian soldiers in the years immediately after the end of the war. Curator of Manuscripts and Rare Books at ULB, Dr. Michael Herkenhoff says: *"Many valuable volumes were stored between 1946 and 1950 in a bunker in Bonn. They may have been stolen during the period of the Belgian occupation in Bonn."*

According to estimates, the Bonn University and State Library lost up to 180,000 volumes during the Second World War. Many books were irretrievably lost in the devastating bombing that destroyed the main building of the University on 18 October 1944. But even from the depots, in which many books had been outsourced as a precautionary measure to protect against the effects of war, an unknown number of other volumes disappeared at the end of the war and in the immediate postwar period. Whether they were destroyed or stolen cannot be ascertained today.

This rediscovery follows the return of four other books in recent years. Michael Herkenhoff of the ULB recalls: *"We received a book in 2011, and three books back in 2018, all of which had been taken away by American soldiers at the end of the war. The return was in, the first case, by the soldier himself, in the second case by the heirs."*

The Repatriation

The return of the books was quick and by mutual agreement, taking little more than a year and facilitated by the support of the Cultural Foundation of the Länder and the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

ULB Director, Dr. Meyer-Doeringhaus says: *"The exemplary cooperation of all involved in this matter is exemplary. We have every reason to solemnly acknowledge the hassle-free return with a ceremony, and we hope this example will make a difference. "*

The ceremony:

The ceremony to commemorate the return was held at 16.00 CEST today at the University Club Bonn, Konviktstraße 9. In attendance were Rector Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Michael Hoch and ULB Director Dr. Ulrich Meyer-Doeringhaus, Head of the Department of Culture, Ministry of Culture and Science, North Rhine-Westphalia, Dr. Hildegard Kaluza, Secretary-General of the Kulturstiftung der Länder, Prof. Dr. Markus Hilgert and Mayor Ashok Sridharan.

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