ARCHIVAL SUMMER SEMINAR IN GERMANY, 2010


The GHI’s eighteenth archival summer seminar took place in Germany from June 14 to 25, 2010. This year, the group visited research institutions and met with archivists and scholars in Speyer, Düsseldorf, Koblenz, Cologne, and Weimar. The aim of the seminar, as always, was to introduce American doctoral students of German history to a wide range of research institutions in Germany and to support them in preparing for prospective dissertation research in German archives and libraries. In the first part of the seminar, participants learned to read documents in old German handwriting. The second part consisted of visits to local, state, and federal archives and libraries to allow participants to familiarize themselves with the German archival system and to learn the basics of what German archivists call Archivkunde. The group also met with two scholars to discuss research methods and receive advice about the practical side of archival work.

As in former years, the seminar started off at the Landesarchiv Rheinland-Pfalz with a one-week course in paleography led by
Walter Rummel and Franz Maier. Under their guidance, the group learned to read documents from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Besides providing an introduction to the evolution of German handwriting and the technical aspects of paleography, the course also covered the basics of Quellenkunde, source criticism, as well as a tour of the Landesarchiv. In the afternoons, students had the chance to explore Speyer with its famous Romanic Dom and Judenhof, both dating from the eleventh century.

On one of the afternoons, the participants met with Isabella Löhr (University of Heidelberg) to discuss practical aspects of archival research. An expert on international cooperation and the globalization of intellectual property rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Löhr offered valuable advice on how to prepare for archival visits, make the most out of the time spent in the archives, and optimize note taking. She encouraged participants to use databases, both as digital resources and as tools for efficiently organizing their own findings.

Following the paleography course, the group spent a day at the Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW), Abteilung Rheinland, in Düsseldorf. Archivists Uwe Zuber and Kathrin Pilger explained the archive’s organization, provided an overview of its holdings, and offered helpful advice on a number of research questions. Of special value was a practical exercise in working with archival files. Since the Landesarchiv NRW is famous for its large holding of Gestapo files from Düsseldorf, the archivists used some of these documents to give the students a feel for the kinds of information archival material can either offer or lack.

At the Bundesarchiv Koblenz, President Hartmut Weber kindly welcomed the participants. During the morning session, archivist Thekla Kleindienst introduced them to Archivkunde, including the “secret language” of symbols and colors used to communicate between different departments, subdivisions, and staff members. This will undoubtedly prove valuable to the students when they work with government documents. In the afternoon, the group was given a tour of the archive. Oliver Sander acquainted them with the Bundesarchiv’s digital photo archive, which offers access to a continuously growing collection of more than 11 million photographs, posters, and aerial photographs. The digital archive cooperates with Wikipedia and can be accessed through www.bild.bundesarchiv.de.
That evening, in a spontaneous event, the group discussed the individual research projects of three participants who volunteered to present their dissertation topics. Sharing in this semi-formal atmosphere, these participants received thoughtful feedback and were exposed to diverse methodological perspectives. All agreed that the presentation of dissertation projects should become a regular part of the seminar in the future.

On the last day in the Rhineland, Joachim Oepen welcomed the group at the Historisches Archiv des Erzbistums Köln. He explained the *Provenienzprinzip*, the principle of provenance, which is crucial to understanding the organization of many European archives. It is especially important concerning historical developments that led to administrative changes on the regional and state levels. For example, in the early nineteenth century, secularization resulted in the break-up of Church archives’ holdings. These were then transferred to state and local repositories, creating a complicated network of archives. Something similar happened in the postwar era, when new states and bishoprics were created. Following this theoretical lesson, the students did a hands-on exercise, working with finding aids to locate files of potential interest for a specific research question, in this case, the National Socialist confiscation of a particular Church property.

The third and last station of the seminar was Weimar. Here the group visited the Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, where Ronald Hirte led participants on an excellent tour of the grounds. Afterward, archivist Sabine Stein presented the site’s archival holdings. Since the SS destroyed most of the concentration camp’s documents at the end of the war, sources are scattered and incomplete, but the researchers at Buchenwald are cooperating with numerous national and international institutions to assemble as much information about Buchenwald and its many satellite camps as possible.

The last day of the seminar was devoted to the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek (HAAB) in Weimar. In the morning, Roland Bärwinkel led the group through the rococo reading room and library, which, though destroyed by a fire in 2004, were restored and reopened in 2008. Focusing on the exquisite historic building and a modern addition across the street, the tour highlighted the outstanding working conditions offered by the HAAB. Afterward, the group met the library’s director, Michael Knoche, who kindly took the time to talk about the library’s work. Afterwards
Johannes Mangei gave a lecture on the salvaging and replacing of books damaged or lost in the fire. Hans Zimmermann then presented the journal *Simplicissimus*, which has now been digitalized and made available for online research by the library (www.simplicissimus.info). Finally, Annett Carius-Kiehne discussed the issue of *NS-Raubgut*—in this case, books stolen from libraries and individuals during the Nazi period—and the HAAB’s efforts to find and return these books to their rightful owners.

In the afternoon, the seminar group met with Christiane Sibille, a specialist on the history of the League of Nations who works at the University of Basel. Sibille introduced the group to online German research tools and networks for researchers, providing an overview of journal databases, digitization projects, archival web sites, and communication platforms for historians. She also enabled the participants to prepare for their research trips as much as possible beforehand.

The GHI organizers would like to extend their heartfelt thanks to all the individuals and organizations that contributed to the 2010 Archival Summer Seminar in Germany. An announcement of the program for the 2011 seminar can be found on the GHI web site at http://www.ghi-dc.org/seminars.

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