The influence of reading room rules on the quality and efficiency of historical research

Jürgen Beyer

This essay is based on longtime research experience in the cultural history of early modern Lutheranism and was triggered by an invitation to speak at a conference on censorship ("Information as a problem") organised by and held at the Royal Library, Stockholm, in November 2011.[1] My paper (which I shall not summarise here) was to deal with about seventeen small books in Swedish, printed at Reval (Tallinn) by Johann Köhler between 1718 and 1726, i. e. after the Russian conquest of 1710.[2] Most of the books, known as the "Reval tracts", were of pietistic ilk and apparently meant to be smuggled into Sweden and Finland. The exact number of these imprints was unclear, since some of them, lacking indication of the printer, had merely been attributed to the Reval printshop by various scholars. Some of these attributions seemed dubious for several reasons, so I decided to scrutinise all the books by comparing the typefaces and the watermarks.

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[1] Unless otherwise stated, "Royal Library" in this essay always refers to the Royal Library in Stockholm – now officially called the "National Library of Sweden" in English, but "Kungliga biblioteket – Sveriges nationalbibliotek" in Swedish. Many readers, however, will unfortunately be able to substitute this library's name with that of an institution in their vicinity. Work on this essay was supported by Targeted Financing Scheme SF0180040s08 at Tartu University Library and by grant 9178 of the Estonian Science Foundation.

[2] Cf. Jürgen Beyer, 'Förbjudna böckers smittofara. Attribueringen till Revals boktryckare av svenskspråkiga pietistiska traktater från 1700-talets början,' trans. Jonas Nordin, in *Information som problem. Medieanalytiska texter från medeltid till framtid*, ed. Otfried Czaika, Jonas Nordin & Pelle Snickars [Mediehistoriskt arkiv 26] (Stockholm: Kungl. Biblioteket, 2014), pp. 120–137; extended English version: id., 'Pietist tracts in Swedish, printed at Reval/Tallinn in the early eighteenth century: background and bibliographical career,' *Ajalooline Ajakiri. The Estonian Historical Journal* 147 (2014), 115–135.

Unfortunately, no library holds the entire set, but Uppsala University Library and the Royal Library both own most of the imprints. At Uppsala, one of the titles is missing, unfortunately a publication central to my investigation. Since the only known copy of this imprint survives in Stockholm, I decided to start at the Royal Library – after all my paper on these books was to be delivered in the very building housing them.

The book in question carries the pressmark *Rar 530* at the Royal Library: a Swedish translation of a German tract by Caspar Neumann on Silesian children praying in the open air.[3] The pamphlet itself carries no indication of printer, place or year of publication, but the Royal Library is convinced that it was produced in 1708, as this date is added on the spine of the binding. A pencilled endpaper note facing the title-page states that the book was printed at Reval, and the catalogue entry, too, has ”Reval”.

Even if the book was not printed at Reval in 1708, it might have been printed there ten to fifteen years later, together with the well-known "Reval tracts" of pietistic persuasion. I therefore found it necessary to compare it to the seventeen established "Reval tracts" (one of which the Royal Library only holds in the form of a bound photocopy) and also with another Swedish and two German versions of Neumann's pamphlet.

Comparing 21 small books might be an easy task at other libraries, but unfortunately it is not so at the Royal Library. Readers are only allowed to order seven books at a time. After taking the train to Stockholm and having signed for the seven books ordered in advance, one is allowed to order seven more books. They will arrive in the afternoon. After having signed for these, one may order yet seven more books which brings us up to the required twenty-one, but they will first be fetched the following day, making a new journey necessary. This may sound like a small hurdle. However, rare-books-room rules only allow three or four books on the desk at the same

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[3] Caspar Neumann, *Oförgripelige Betänckiande Öfwer de i Schlesien offentligen Bedjande Barnen / Hwilket Af honom i HErrans fruchtan är samman fattat / och den 29 Februarij 1708. Uthi den dåwarande Afton=Predikan sine Åhörare förestält; Men af Tyskan efter någras begiäran på Swenska Tungomålet öfwersatt Af JOH. WITTE* (n. pl.: n. pr., n. d.).

time. If one wants to see an additional book, one has to return one of the others. Comparing thus, say, the shape of upper case *G* in an alleged Reval imprint with the upper case *G* in the attested Reval imprints will thus necessitate a constant running back and forth and exchange of books at the borrowing desk.

Since all the other "Reval tracts" are available at Uppsala as well, I asked Uppsala University Library on 6 June 2011 to obtain the book from Stockholm on inter-library loan. It took quite some time for the Royal Library to reply, but on 14 July the answer was available. It was a short and simple *nyet*. Since the catalogue entry had been changed in the meantime and now stated "UTLÅNAS EJ" *[no circulation]* for the book allegedly printed at Reval in 1708, I wrote to the head of the Library Department[4] on 21 July, since it was this official who had refused to send the book to Uppsala. I pointed out that I found it strange that I was invited to give a paper at the Royal Library, but that the same library made it impossible for me to prepare my lecture, since the book was simply taken out of circulation. The head of department, being on holiday, delegated the affair to a colleague, who allowed me to use all books at the same time in the Royal Library's rare books room. We agreed on 2 August for my first visit.

Visit to the Royal Library by special arrangement

When I arrived at the Royal Library's rare books room, I was told by the librarian on duty that the book allegedly printed at Reval in 1708 was not to be used in conjunction with the other books as it contained a slip with an instruction to this end. After some discussion and after pointing out that I had a written permission to consult all books at the same time, I was finally able to start my work.

[4] The Library Department is one of the six departments of the Royal Library and the one responsible for the core library business such as acquisition, cataloguing and circulation.

Result of the comparison

The result of my investigation was clear. Neither the book of 1708, nor several others attributed to the Reval printer in the Royal Library's online catalogue and in *LIBRIS*[5] – the Swedish union catalogue – were produced by him. I even have some doubts whether all books bearing Köhler's name on the titlepage were produced by him, but this would complicate matters even further, leading us into the field of virtual publishers spearheaded by Pierre Marteau in Cologne.[6]

Origin of the attributions

How should we explain this proliferation of attributions to the Reval print-shop? Interestingly, *LIBRIS*, when stating that these books were printed at Reval, does not mention the printer. This suggests that the attributions are fairly old, dating back to a time when library catalogues would only indicate the town of publication but not the publisher or the printer. Until the end of the eighteenth century Reval only housed one printer at the time,[7] and indicating this place of publication, in fact, simultaneously attributes the imprint to a certain printer.

I think the mechanism behind these attributions was the following: Librarians and scholars – such as Carl Gustaf Warmholtz two hundred years ago[8] – knew that there had been a series of pietistic books in Swedish from Reval, and whenever they found a Swedish book of the same ilk not indicating the printer, they located it to

[5] http://libris.kb.se.

[6] Cf. http://www.pierre-marteau.com.

[7] Endel Annus, 'Boktryckerierna i Estland 1631–1900,' in *Den estniska boken genom seklerna. Bokhistoriska uppsatser*, ed. id. & Esko Häkli [Helsingin yliopiston kirjaston julkaisuja / Helsingfors universitetsbiblioteks skrifter 57] (Helsinki: Helsingfors unversitetsbibliotek, 1995), pp. 190f.; cf. also *Eestikeelne raamat 1525–1850*, ed. E[ndel] Annus [Eesti retrospektiivne rahvusbibliograafia 1] (Tallinn: Eesti Akadeemiline Raamatukogu, 2000).

[8] Carl Gust[af] Warmholtz, *BIBLIOTHECA HISTORICA SUEO-GOTHICA; Eller FÖRTECKNING Uppå ... Böcker ... om Svenska Historien ...*, 15 vols. (Stockholm [etc.]: Anders Jac. Nordström [et al.], 1782–1817).

Reval. Later scholars have continued to build castles in the air on this basis.

Similar cases of questionable attributions to printers can be found in the otherwise splendid bibliography of Low German imprints by Conrad Borchling and Bruno Claußen.[9] They made it a rule to assume that such an imprint of which they knew only one copy was printed in the town in which they found it preserved. While I do agree that many early modern books were mostly spread regionally – this even includes certain kinds of Latin books –, I do not think that this was a wise principle to adopt by Borchling and Claußen. Their method quickly finds its limits when additional copies show up in other towns or when the only copy is preserved outside the Low German language area.

The concept of rarity

Another of the "Reval tracts" is classified at the Royal Library as a rarity, *Rar 543*: *De Trognas Delachtighet i JEsu CHristo*, 1725. Of this book, I could trace four other copies, in Uppsala, Norrköping, Lund and Helsinki. The Stockholm copy had been bound in a very modest way sometime during the twentieth century and does not contain any manuscript notes. Why is this book treated as a *rarum rarissimum*?

The Royal Library holds other books with even more dubious claims to rarity. I shall only mention Conrad Lycosthenes' illustrated *Prodigiorum ac ostentorum chronicon* of 1557. It carries the pressmark *RAR 148 A*. The catalogue entry warns potential readers: "UTLÅNAS EJ" *[no circulation]*. It may be a precious book – a copy, advertised as "The mother of all UFO & Fortean books", was on sale a few years ago for 10000 dollars –, but the book is by no means rare: At least 70 copies are preserved in European libraries.[10] Uppsala

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9 Conrad Borchling & Bruno Claußen, *Niederdeutsche Bibliographie*. *Gesamtverzeichnis der niederdeutschen Drucke bis zum Jahre 1800*, 3 vols. (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz, 1931–57).

10 Jürgen Beyer, '[review of Conrad Lycosthenes, *Wunderwerck*, ed. Pia Holenstein Weidmann & Paul Michel, 2007],' *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 107

University Library holds two of them, both of which can easily be consulted. Many books on local and regional history published in our days are preserved in significantly fewer copies. Often – to take the Swedish example – there is only one copy held by the Royal Library and another one by a library in the region – but these true rarities anyone can consult without much ado in the general reading room.[11]

Rarity in a library context has a strange quality in common with holiness in the Catholic tradition. When the corpse of a saint was divided into several pieces, and the individual bones were spread among many different churches, the sanctity of each part and its healing power was still the same as that of the original corpse in its entirety. Rare books in libraries follow a similar arithmetics. If they have once been classified as rare, they will continue to be treated as such, regardless of how many copies might turn up later.

Placing a book in a *rara* section is like sentencing an offender to preventive detention as it is possible, for instance, in New Zealand and Germany. The book (or the offender) will never be released from prison or some other walled facility not formally called a prison. It is high time to revise classifications such as *rara*, *rariora* or *rarissima* in the light of recent (and not so recent) research. Many of such classifications seem, in fact, to go back several centuries. Let us recall the categorical statement by Jacob Friedrich Reimmann in his *BIBLIOTHECA HISTORIÆ LITERARIÆ Critica* of 1739: "All printed books are rare if produced between the invention of typography and the year 1500. Further those forbidden, burnt, purged or mutilated by the authorities. Also those bound together with others, those annotated, corrected, enlarged or enriched with some previously unknown additions by their authors or also by some other scholar, those suppressed for particular reasons, as well as heretical books. Further books printed in very small numbers and those printed at the expense of their authors. Finally those printed in remote places such as Portu-

(2011), 245f., here p. 245; cf. id., 'Lycosthenes, Conrad,' in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 33 (Nordhausen: Traugott Bautz, 2012), coll. 793–798.

[11] See, for instance, the production of the Gotland publishing house *Haimdagar* in *LIBRIS* (as in n. 5).

gal, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Russia etc."[12] Interestingly, Reimmann, writing in Hildesheim, mentions all books published in far-away Sweden as rare. The Royal Library, I must say, has fully adopted this ancient concept. Why, may I ask, is the status quo of 270 years ago still maintained, even though research in all other areas has progressed tremendously during the last centuries? Already 150 years ago, the large *Trésor de livres rares et précieux* by Johann Georg Theodor Gräße does not mention any of our Reval tracts.[13]

The *Universal Short Title Catalogue*, based at St Andrews and claiming to record all titles published before 1601 anywhere in the world, was launched in the autumn of 2011.[14] Even though it covers some regions more thoroughly than others, it is certainly more complete than any of the tools we have had at our disposal until now. It clearly shows that many of the books classed by libraries as *rara* are in no way scarce, while countless books which only survive in a single copy are not viewed as rare at all by the libraries owning them. The fact that books are scarce, however, should not prevent their consultation in a reading room. Thoroughly inspecting items taken out of the reading room should suffice.

A deserving subject for a Ph.D. thesis in librarianship (or information sciences, as seems to be the current term) might be entitled: "The notion of *rare books* in libraries: the history and application of a concept from the beginning to the present day". I should not be surprised if the results of such an investigation were to be summarised

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[12] [Jacob Friedrich Reimmann,] *BIBLIOTHECA HISTORIÆ LITERARIÆ Critica, eaque Generalis, hoc est CATALOGI BIBLIOTHECÆ REIMMANNIANÆ Systematico-Criticæ TOMVS SECVNDVS* ... (Hildesheim: Vidua Lud. Schroederi, 1739), p. 103: "Omnes libri impressi rari sunt, qvi excusi sunt ab inventione Artis typographicæ usqve ad A. C. 1500. Item qvi auctoritate publica prohibiti, combusti, expurgati, castrati. Qui cum aliis collati, ab ipsis Auctoribus, vel etiam ab alio erudito Viro notati, correcti, aucti, additametis [sic] qvibusdam ineditis locupletati, singulares ob causas suppressi, παϱαδοξοι. Qvorum oppido pauca excusa sunt exemplaria. Qvi prodierunt sumtibus Auctorum, in locis dissitis: Lusitania, Hispania, Italia, Svecia, Russia &c."

[13] Jean George Théodore Graesse [Johann Georg Theodor Gräße], *Trésor de livres rares et précieux ou nouveau dictionnaire bibliographique* ..., 7 vols. (Dresden: Rudolf Kuntze, 1859–69).

[14] http://www.ustc.ac.uk.

as follows: The concept of *rare books* developed in the late seventeenth century together with the rise of book collecting for bibliophile purposes (and not only as working tools for scholars or as forms of representation for noblemen).[15] While the Latin word *rarus* originally meant 'thinly spread', the word acquired additional meanings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, possibly first in French. A *rarity* was now 'something exceptional, worth to be preserved or to be displayed'.[16] *Rare books* were thus not only books preserved in a few copies only, but also copies with a special history, books of great significance to the history of learning or books peculiar in some other way, for instance Bibles with important printing errors such as the *Printers' Bible*, the *Adulterous Bible*, the *Murderers' Bible* or the *Purgatory Bible* – all named after significant mistakes which had escaped the attention of the correctors.[17] Needless to say, many of these books are not at all scarce, though they may fetch astronomical prices at auction sales.

Doing book history on the basis of reproductions?

Many of the more obvious research questions in book history cannot be answered on the basis of reproductions: secondary forms do not show watermarks which are essential for determining where and

[15] Cf. H. Walravens, 'Kuriositäten,' in *Lexikon des gesamten Buchwesens*, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, ^{2}1995), pp. 369f.; G[ünther] Pflug, 'Rara,' *ibid*., vol. 6 (^{2}2003), p. 176f.; G[ünther] Pflug, 'Rararitätenkabinett,' *ibid*., p. 177.

[16] *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* ..., ed. Alain Rey, vol. 3 (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2000 (^{1}1992)), p. 3091; *The Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 13 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, ^{2}1989), pp. 194, 196; Jacob Grimm & Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 8 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1893), coll. 124f.

[17] István Ráth-Végh, *Die Komödie des Buches*, trans. Erika Széll (Budapest: Corvina, 1964), p. 49; Johann Melchior Goeze, *Fortsetzung des Verzeichnisses seiner Samlung seltener und merkwürdiger Bibeln in verschiednen Sprachen, mit kritischen und literarischen Anmerkungen* (Hamburg & Helmstedt: Johann Heinrich Kühnlin, 1778), p. 98, cf. also pp. 95f.; Friedrich Adolf Ebert, *Allgemeines bibliographisches Lexikon*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1821), col. 178.

when the paper was produced or whether a manuscript volume was given its present shape right from the start or not. The fact that a document has been folded will sometimes not show on a reproduction, and future scholars not accustomed to originals may not be aware of the fact that this is a fairly clear indication for the document in question having been sent by mail before being archived – such an observation may change the interpretation of the document dramatically. Bindings are often not shown in reproductions, sometimes not even the entirety of the volume a certain reproduced item is preserved in. Many digital editions (such as the database *Early English Books Online*) simply start with the title-page and end with the last printed page. The basic unit here is a certain text, not a physical object.[18] The context in which earlier owners had placed the item has been removed.

It should be noted though that diverging interests among book historians can lead to different demands on the source material. Some might want to trace the impact of successive owners on a certain copy of a book. They would, for instance, meticulously document that a copy had first been bound in a *Sammelband* which was later dissolved; then the item was interfoliated and rebound, with parts of the printed text replaced by a revised manuscript version of the text. Others would in such a case deplore the successive loss of bibliographical evidence concerning the shape in which the original item had left the printing presses. While certain originals will only help either one, none of the two book historians will derive any benefit from standard digital reproductions.

The century-old procedure of comparing three or more books at the same time spread out over a large desk is almost impossible when

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[18] This procedure obviously owes much to current forms of text production becoming less and less dependent on a certain medium (cf. Thomas Stäcker, 'Vom Leit- zum Leidmedium – Bibliothek und Buch zwischen auratischem Charakter und Verschwinden im digitalen Raum,' *Wolfenbütteler Notizen zur Buchgeschichte* 36 (2011), 71–79). For a more detailed discussion of the layered relations between an individual copy of a book and the informational content it may share with other copies, editions, versions etc., cf. Rolf E. DuRietz, *Kulturarvshyckleriet. Bibliofobi, ignorans och info-fundamentalism bakom dagens bibliotekskatastrof?* (Uppsala: Dahlia Books, 2010), pp. 14–17, 51 et passim.

reading digitised versions on the small laptop screens most scholars use. Doing such a comparison on microfilm readers is entirely impossible.

Archeologists tell us that findings from early excavations are of limited use to present-day scholarship since excavators at the time were primarily interested in digging up treasures. Early archeologists did not – as later generations would – document the different strata in order to give a clearer picture of the chronology or of the context in which the items were embedded. Similarly, other disciplines such as folklore studies saw it as their task during the nineteenth century to collect treasures – in this case the perceived treasure of oral tales allegedly handed down from times immemorial.[19] Nowadays, folklorists, too, are more concerned with the contexts in which stories are told.

I am afraid that those who fob off readers with reproductions are at the same level of scholarly sophistication as the very first archeologists and folklorists: important to them is the mere text in old books, and nothing else. We find the same attitude behind Google Books. People offering digital copies of this kind do not realise that book historians for generations have put the contextual information provided by watermarks, bindings, fore-edge decorations, endpapers, breadth of margins, marginal notes, the composition of *Sammelbände*, printed wrappers (frequently discarded by binders), typefaces etc. to as fruitful a use as archeologists have done with various kinds of evidence in careful excavations. While archeologists and folklorists are allowed to ever refine their methods, book historians are, unfortunately, bombed back to the early nineteenth century by librarians claiming to act in the best interest of old books.[20]

Our French colleagues have long spoken of the “materialité du livre”. More recently this has translated into a broader trend to study materialities among English language historians as well. The ap-

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19 Mare Kalda, *Rahvajutud peidetud varandustest. Tegude saamine lugudeks* (diss. Tartu) [Dissertationes folkloristicae Universitatis Tartuensis 15] (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2011), pp. 27–29.

20 Cf. also Rolf E. DuRietz, ‘Bonniers ”tusenden” omkring förra sekelskiftet. Funderinger kring första-upplagan av *Karolinerna*,’ *Text. Svensk tidskrift för bibliografi* 8 (2011ff.), 90–108, here 94.

proach is not restricted to historians of the book, but book history is one of the more obvious fields of research in this vein.

Future generations of book historians will probably be theoretically much better informed than we are, and they will be able to draw on an ever-growing body of research. I am not convinced, however, that their results will be so much better than those of scholars in the past. Without access to the originals and being restricted to the use of digital copies, they will lack an understanding of the materiality of the early modern book, they will not intuitively understand whether a binding is coeval with the printed sheets, and they will not be able to analyse the composition of *Sammelbände* as one could when working with originals. In a word, they will be like critics writing about food they have seen digitised images of but not tasted.

It is my firm impression that the dramatic deterioration of scholars' working conditions coincides with a generational shift in the running of archives and research libraries.[21] While formerly this was the domain of learned archivists and librarians, we now largely find managerial staff in the leading positions. They are probably much better paid than their learned predecessors – they have, it is often claimed, such a huge responsibility to bear concerning budget and personnel –, but they appear to have little knowledge of how research is being done on the material they are set to administrate. If one should put them to the test, I am afraid most of these well-paid administrators would surrender before texts written in Latin or with gothic handwriting. They thus lack two of the absolutely basic skills of our trade.

Conservators – who are trained as craftsmen or chemists, but not as historical or literary scholars – and administrators seem to be unable to imagine other uses of books and manuscripts than reading them from cover to cover – just as one would do with a crime novel. I must admit that I very occasionally do read an early modern book from cover to cover, but that is much of an exception. More fre-

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[21] Archives and libraries are now often – together with museums – termed *memory institutions*. I shall abstain from using this collective term since it confuses the vagaries of human brain activity with the keeping of basically stable physical objects.

quently, I am looking for a passage quoted in another work, and after having traced it, I follow up on the reference found this time. Or, I would study the same text in many editions and would only be interested in the variant readings distinguishing these editions. Or, I would not study the text at all but concentrate on traces of use left by earlier generations of readers. Or, I would compare the typeface of a book I am interested in with the production of a number of printshops which might have produced the book.

After comparing such a book with 50 or 100 other books it is often possible to show conclusively which printer produced it. Isak Collijn, head librarian of the Royal Library from 1916 to 1940, was a master of this art. His present-day successors, unfortunately, do everything to prevent this kind of research being conducted at their institution. Should we interprete this in a psychological way? Well knowing that they are much less skilled than Collijn, they keep everyone else from following in Collijn's footsteps, hoping that this way no one will notice the fundamental difference between Collijn and the office holders in our days?

Another project, I just began, would be quite impossible to base on digitisations. I am looking at printed lists of errata. Yes, they are actually quite interesting. They can be found at the end of the book or at the end of the preface. They may be placed on the last sheet to be printed or on separate leaves later added to the book. This is impossible to see in reproductions, but the way errata lists were added can reveal significant details about the routines of book production. Furthermore, the lists can inform us more precisely about the expected readers than sweeping statements in the preface. Through most of the eighteenth century, to give an example, corrigenda to books in Estonian were held in German, which suggests that different groups of readers were expected to deal with the same object in different ways: Germans (and German-educated readers) might take their pens and correct the mistakes listed; Estonians – being only taught to read but not to write – would not indulge in this exercise. Determining whether there is a list of errata and which languages are used in certain parts of the book takes a few minutes with an original but at least half an hour with a digital reproduction. Checking in which way the corrections have been implemented (if at all) by earlier readers may take another half hour with a digital copy, but again only a few minutes or maybe only seconds with an original.[22]

The people running libraries and archives today seem never to have tried to read on a laptop screen a folio size manuscript written with small script and adorned with countless additions in the upper, lower, left and right margins. The screen will at best show a third of the text in a readable size at any one time. On a desk such a manuscript is easy to read, since conventional signs make it clear where additions are to be placed. On a laptop screen it is basically impossible to get any meaning out of it.

Some readers might have got the impression that I am against digitisation. No, I think digitisation is a good thing. It has many advantages (even though its costs are necessarily taken from funds earlier devoted to originals). When digitised versions are freely available on the internet, texts are readily accessible which otherwise could only be consulted after a long journey or after ordering a copy at a high price, but the downside is that many institutions refuse access to originals which have been digitised.

Strangely, some institutions only give access to their digitised holdings via expensive subscriptions to commercial publishers, on a computer within the premises of the institution itself or with an IP number from the same country. While the first solution rather limits than enlarges the use of the library's holdings, the second variant clearly shows that such an institution has no real understanding of the technical possibilities available today, and the third decision smacks of a nationalism dating back to the times before the invention of the internet.

Digitised versions of books and manuscripts can certainly answer a number of questions scholars that might have concerning a document. In this way these versions reduce the use of the originals which are thus less exposed to wear and tear. Allowing users to take their own digital photographs of the originals has the same effect. After having examined and then photographed the book or the record, most

[22] The article has been published in the meantime: Jürgen Beyer, 'Errata und Korrigenda,' *Wolfenbütteler Notizen zur Buchgeschichte* 37 (2012) [printed 2013], 27–39.

users will have much less need of further consulting the original, which thus can spend more time in the cosy atmosphere of the well-tempered stacks. Unfortunately, a number of institutions have not understood this advantage, and the Royal Library is clearly one of them. Photographing rare books and manuscripts is strictly forbidden for users.[23] If readers need a reproduction they have to order it at a truly prohibitive price. The library quite obviously sees this as a way to earn money, not to protect the originals. Shamelessly, in a way otherwise only known from libraries and archives in Russia, foreigners are asked to pay two and a half times the price charged from Swedish nationals.[24] And the prices for Swedes are already exorbitant. In Uppsala, for instance, all users pay only one fifth of the price the Royal Library charges foreigners.[25] Here the Royal Library clearly displays what the brief of the Stockholm conference called a "marknadsorienterad kultursyn" *[market oriented perception of culture]*.

Working conditions at the Royal Library

The Royal Library terms itself a research library, but to my mind it is much more of a research prevention library. One could also call it a book museum,[26] or to put it more bluntly, a book prison. After all, an Estonian colleague of mine compared the Royal Library's rare books room to a prison since all readers are constantly treated as suspects capable of anything evil and are therefore strictly supervised.

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[23] http://www.kb.se/besoka/kopiering/Anvanda-egen-kamera, cf. also the leaflet *Att fotografera med egen kamera på KB*, Stockholm: Kungl. Biblioteket 2009.
[24] http://www.kb.se/besoka/kopiering/prislista/foretagskund; http://www.kb.se/besoka/kopiering/prislista/privatkund, cf. also Diskrimineringsombudsmannen, file no. ANM 2011/678.
[25] http://www.ub.uu.se/sv/Service/Kopiering-och-reprotjanster/Priser.
[26] While DuRietz, *Kulturarvshyckleriet* (as in n. 18), pp. 18–22, 75–87, uses 'book museum' in a positive sense for an institution devoted to the systematic collection of books as physical objects not meant for reading but available for inspection by bibliographers, I understand the term to denote a collection of precious books on display but definitely not available to scholars.

In the rare books room, scholars are only allowed to order, as already stated, seven books a day, and of these seven books they are only allowed to have three or four on the desk simultaneously. This might appear generous if the plan is to read the books from cover to cover, but if one tries to determine whether the somewhat unusual upper case *D* and the lower case *h* of the book under consideration can be found in the production of contemporary printshops from Lubeck, Rostock or Copenhagen, this investigation will take a few weeks whereas it might be successfully brought to an end within a single day, if one could have all the comparative material on the desk at the same time.

I much prefer the practice at the Estonian Historical Archives at Tartu (or *Dorpat* in German and Swedish). This institution has some general guidelines as to how many records readers may order at a time, but they are not strictly applied. If a reader explains why he needs more (for instance by pointing out that the records in question tend only to contain one leaf each), he will get it right away, without maintaining an extensive correspondence right up to the top of the administration as in the case of the Royal Library. Obviously the archives want to avoid that a reader orders 50 voluminous records and then comes in once a month to inspect them for half an hour at a time. If, for instance, a scholar arrives from abroad for a week's research, he will easily get 100 records at the same time. The archives can be assured that all records will be returned within a week, and the slight lack of space in the reading room will only be temporary. The scholar can thus use his limited research allowance more effectively spending his time at Tartu on research and not on constantly ordering, returning and re-ordering records.

The Royal Library's superficial attitude to scholarly work on books can possibly be explained by the institution's history. The library goes back to a representative suit of rooms at the Royal Palace which was more of a book museum than a tool for scholars. The library seems now to have returned to its roots. But what use is a library following monarchic ideals in the twenty-first century? If we look at another library founded some decades earlier, but in a republican context, we can observe quite a different approach. Leyden University Library sticks to the principle of making its originals available to scholars. This library was founded as a research library in a republic very much open to the world, Leyden University being the only university at the time not caring about the students' religious affiliations. Similarily, another republican foundation, Zurich Central Library makes its originals available to scholars without much ado. I shall mention yet another republican foundation, the municipal library in Lubeck. Already Collijn was full of praise for the working conditions he had experienced there.[27]

It is high time to discuss how the Royal Library – and libraries and archives in general – can be made to serve the needs of the republic of letters in the twenty-first century. I do hope the solution will not consist in creating a readers' ombudsman. I know that Swedes are very proud of this kind of institution, but I suppose most historians will agree that ombudsmen are relics of absolutism, designed to iron out the worst excesses of administrative arbitrariness while keeping the power structures intact. What we need is not an ombudsman who after many months of deliberation declares that the library possibly rather should have allowed a reader to inspect an original but clear and binding rules making the running of the library transparent to the public.

It is well known that some years ago the Royal Library was the victim of large-scale theft carried out by a senior librarian. Similarly, the Royal Library in Copenhagen had several years earlier systematically been stripped of many valuable books by a senior librarian. There are, however, some differences between the two royal libraries. In Copenhagen, internal routines have changed in order to prevent further thefts from members of staff, while readers are still allowed to pursue their research. In Stockholm, on the contrary, the Royal Library now tries to prevent scholars from using rare books. Scholars, however, were not responsible for the book thefts, so this is a solution to a problem the Stockholm Royal Library did not have.[28]

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[27] Isak Collijn, 'Lübecker Frühdrucke in der Stadtbibliothek zu Lübeck,' *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Lübeckische Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 9 (1907), 285–333, here 285, 333.

[28] I still remember the day in 1995 when the Silver Bible was stolen from Uppsala University Library. When I came to the library, the main entrance was blocked by the police. A short while later, however, some side entrance was

Hiding away books bought with taxpayers' money might prevent the theft of books by readers, but it more certainly will make the discovery of thefts by library staff more unlikely: If no one can order these books, no one will notice whether they have gone, as most libraries today cannot afford regularly to revise their entire holdings.

Few old books look alike, since books were not bound by the publishers as today. Therefore it is fairly easy to remember in which of the ten or twenty bindings on the desk a certain version of a text is to be found. In the Royal Library, unfortunately, most old books are handed out in modern boxes or jackets, and variation between them is minimal. The Royal Library seems to follow a policy reminiscent of former socialist countries: the individuality of books is hidden away by dressing them in some kind of Mao suit. I can see the point of putting books into these straightjackets during transport and possibly even during storage, but, please, take them off before handing the books over to readers for a few days or weeks in the reading room! Mao suits have been out of fashion in China since the 1990s, since even there the symbolism of proletarian uniformity has been superseded by individualism, so truly there is no point in introducing this custom at European libraries of the twenty-first century.

Given the systematic efforts conducted at the Royal Library to prevent serious research in book history, I find it highly ironic that the library recently tried to raise funds for a visiting professorship in book history. Uppsala University Library, for instance, would be a much more appropriate institution to house such a chair.

Waste of time and money

Sending e-mails and negotiating my limited access to the books necessary for writing the conference paper took me more time than the actual research undertaken in the rare books room. What a waste of time! What a waste of public research money! What a waste of lib-

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opened and readers could enter and leave the library this way. Only the area around the exhibition hall remained closed as long as the police documented the traces on the crime scene. The usual readers obviously had had no share in the theft, and care was taken to disturb them in the least possible way.

rarians' working hours! Clearly, the Royal Library must be a grossly overfunded institution of the Swedish Central Administration which would do much better with a leaner administrative structure and a more modest definition of its tasks. Or, to be more precise: a reorientation of the library from research prevention library to research library would free enormous resources to buy books – both on paper and in electronical form – and to make them available to readers.

In the Royal Library, as in most other libraries, books required for further use will be kept in the reading room until the next visit a few days later. Not so at the Gotland Record Office at Visby. Here all records have to be returned in the evening and ordered again next morning. This consumes a fair bit of a scholar's time: the ordering slips have to be filled in every morning, and then one has to wait until the records arrive. When I asked about the background of this strange procedure, I was told that the record office was allocated funds according to the number of records fetched from the stacks. Order forms filled in by readers served as documentation in this context. The archivist said in full earnest: "This is necessary to secure our jobs." That may be so in a short-term perspective, but would it not be better for all to find new jobs for those at the National Archives making such prescriptions and those at the Gotland Record Office complying with these regulations without protesting? It is not only a waste of scholars' research time, it is also a waste of archivists' working time to fetch and return the same records time and again, and thirdly, it constitutes a hazard to the preservation of the records. If there is one thing much worse for the records than a reader breathing over them, it is transport. Ironically, the same record office consistently refuses to hand out originals once they have been microfilmed or digitised. This concerns not only the intensively used parish records of baptisms, marriages and burials, but also records ordered once every ten years at the utmost, such as draft minutes of parish council meetings from the 1830s.

Most research in the humanities is – directly or indirectly – funded by taxpayers' money, as are archives and libraries. Many archives and libraries try to comply with effectivity targets and saving goals imposed according to the school of New Public Management. On the other hand they put a tremendous effort into forcing state-funded scholars to waste a maximum amount of their research allowances on other things than research. Even if such precautions might prevent some minor damage to books and records, the money to be saved on restauration amounts only to a fraction of the cost incurred on society in terms of wasted research time. In other words, while in individual libraries and archives the access restrictions may appear to be penny-wise, at state level they are clearly pound-foolish.

Possible agendas for scholars

There are, luckily, some chances of continuing research on related subjects under the reigning conditions set by archives and libraries. I, for my part, have discovered the following way around this dilemma. Studying the crafting of texts is, fortunately, not restricted to manuscripts and printed books. Inscriptions in churches and on churchyards provide a rich source material as well, and here it is still possible to see and touch the artifacts in their original surroundings (or almost; normally they have been moved around within the church premises in the course of time).[29] Inscriptions provide fascinating insights into how messages were expressed with letters, how craftsmen – or those producing the drafts for the craftsmen – composed texts drawing on writing conventions and language standardisations not always fully mastered.[30] But is it really the intention of head librarians and head archivists that scholars interested in the history of writing wander off into the study of epigraphy?

An international database detailing the conditions of use in individual libraries and archives and maintained by a learned society might prove to be a tool of great potential. It would enable serious

29 Cf. Jürgen Beyer, 'Gravmindevandring i Sankt Petri Kirke i København,' *Kirkehistoriske Samlinger* 2013, 79–99.

30 Jürgen Beyer, 'Den så kallade stenmästargravstenen från 1570-talet i Vamlingbo kyrka på Gotland. Text, tolkning och bakgrund,' *Fornvännen* 106 (2011), 113–126; id., 'Stiftung, Plazierung und Funktion von Wand- und Kronleuchtern in lutherischen Kirchen,' *Zeitschrift für Lübeckische Geschichte* 92 (2012), 101–150; id., 'Gravmindevandring' (as in n. 29); id., 'Donations by strangers to Lutheran churches during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,' *Journal of Social History* 47 (2013–14), 196–221.

scholars to concentrate on those institutions still supporting first-hand research, while the restrictive institutions would experience smaller user numbers and consequently a decline in their allocated funds. Such a database, and that should be made very clear, will not serve as a working tool for book thiefs. Reasonable security measures must be taken and will not be discussed in the database, but such precautions need not interfere with the working routines of scholars. Even today, it is probably more difficult to steal an old book in Uppsala than in Stockholm, but it is definitely much easier to work with it in Uppsala. The database should also, as has become customary in recent years, offer a summary in the form of a ranking. This would help politicians to channel money to those libraries and archives offering the best possibilities for original research.

Positive effects on collections when readers are allowed to work with originals

As explained above, giving me access to the originals of the "Reval tracts" resulted in showing that many catalogue attributions to Reval printers cannot be upheld, and I hope that the catalogue entries will be corrected in due course in order to save future scholars from drawing misguided conclusions when not inspecting the books themselves. *LIBRIS* should be a source of information, not a source of misinformation.

The Estonian Historical Archives at Tartu encourage users to report printed materials found among the mostly handwritten records. The printed items will then be catalogued in the OPAC of the institution's library.[31] This adds significantly to the knowledge of ephemeral publications from the region, since many of the ordinances or occasional prints catalogued this way are not to be found in research libraries in Estonia or abroad.[32] Had the archives pursued a policy of

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[31] http://www.ra.ee/urram/avaleht/avaleht.php.

[32] Cf. Jürgen Beyer, 'How complete are the German national bibliographies for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (*VD16* and *VD17*)?,' in *The book triumphant. Print in transition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries*, ed. Malcolm Walsby & Graeme Kemp [Library of the written word 15; The hand-

hiding the originals from users, this increase in public knowledge would not have occurred.

Tartu University Library holds a manuscript[33] which had been catalogued as being written around 1701 by Johann Fischer, superintendent-general of Livonia, an important figure in the early history of printing in Estonian and Latvian. Possibly the manuscript was catalogued this way because the cataloguer used the digitised version available from the library's website. At least on my computer it was not possible to rotate the text in order to read the marginal notes, some of which ran from the bottom to the top, while others were written upside-down. I insisted on using the original. The unbound papers were, obviously, easy to rotate on the desk in the reading room. Then it very soon became obvious to me what the manuscript was about. This was a copy of the entry on Fischer published in 1744 in Johannes Moller's unsurpassed *Cimbria literata*.[34] Most of the marginal notes were written by a person calling himself "JBdeF." He termed Fischer his "patruus", i. e. his paternal uncle. The author of the notes could thus be none else but Johann Bernhard v. Fischer,[35] which, indeed, suits well with the date 1766 provided in one of the notes. The entry in the online catalogue has now been corrected.

Even the preservation of old books can benefit from exposing them to readers. The Royal Library's only complete copy of the first Latvian Bible[36] was wrapped in some white paper, apparently a measure of protection. Since I wanted to study the binding, I took the paper off and discovered two clasps, which had been bent backwards and had suffered badly from this treatment. Now that the Bible has been used by a reader, it is being stored in a more competent way, but the leather of the clasps will probably have to undergo some repair. I am afraid, though, that this incident will make Stockholm lib-

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press world 9] (Leyden & Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 57–77, here pp. 73–76, on the importance of archives for the survival of ephemeral publications.

33 F. 3, Mrg. CCCLIV^{b}, Ep. erud. cel., fols. 75r–79v.

34 Johannes Moller, *CIMBRIA LITERATA* ..., vol. 3 ([Copenhagen: Gottmann. Frid. Kisel, 1744]), pp. 255–260.

35 Cf. *Deutschbaltisches biographisches Lexikon 1710–1960*, ed. Wilhelm Lenz et al. (Cologne & Vienna: Böhlau, 1970), p. 218.

36 *Ta Swehta Grahmata Jeb Deewa Swehtais Wahrds* ... (Riga: Johann Georg Wilcken, 1689) (pressmark: Teol. Bibel. Övers. Lett. Ex. A).

rarians lock the book away since it had been damaged by inappropriate handling. As readers will remember, the reaction to the large-scale thefts by a member of staff was to pester readers. A conclusion more to the point would be to have the librarian or the conservator – whoever bent back the clasps before wrapping the book in paper – pay for the repair and let readers continue to have access to the book in order to quickly discover future damage by library staff.

Proposals for a more reasonable access policy

The Royal Library claims to be an institution serving the interests of democracy: preserving the cultural heritage[37] and making it available to all taxpayers. I am sorry to say that the Royal Library is very far from achieving this aim. Indeed, it is actively working against it. I should therefore like to make a number of proposals which could help the library to get closer to its aim.

Unlike county record offices, rare books rooms are not visited by hobby genealogists in any significant numbers. Quick glances at the two kinds of reading rooms will tell the difference. Hobby genealogists visit reading rooms in groups of at least two persons, scholars go there on their own. The users of rare books rooms in research libraries tend to be the same two dozens of people year after year. I frankly do not think that these regular visitors pose any significant threat to old books and manuscripts. A visitor from abroad ordering truly expensive books – and especially expensive books from entirely different fields of study – constitutes quite another risk factor. Staff should keep a keen eye on this kind of users, but they should not concentrate their energies on pestering scholars who use the library regularly.

The largest threat to library books are definitely not readers, but librarians. This concerns not only, as already noted, the theft of rare books to be sold on the black market, but on a much grander scale the

[37] Why such a static conception of culture has gained so much ground in recent years is a question well worth investigating, cf. Willem Frijhoff, *Dynamisch erfgoed* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2007).

amazingly quite legal destruction of books deemed not to be needed anymore or to fill up too much space.[38]

Many questions asked in present-day research cannot be answered at all by studying reproductions, while the answering of other questions will take far too much of precious research time when having to cope with the secondary forms many institutions try to fob off scholars with. There are, admittedly, some few originals which are in a bad shape or which will suffer if handed out to anyone asking for them. Church records listing baptisms, marriages and funerals are probably the best examples. The vast majority of early modern holdings, however, certainly more than 90 per cent, are at the utmost ordered once every ten years. A number of times I did see the originals which I was refused access to a short while earlier or later. Without a single exception, these originals were in perfect shape and could stand scholarly use for centuries to come.

None-the-less it is argued that such originals are taken out of circulation due to their fragility and for the best of their preservation. This is a very bold lie, but easy to maintain as long as the public cannot prove the opposite since the originals are locked away. The judicial system would not be allowed to lock people away in perpetuity on the grounds of their alleged dangerousness without long and public court proceedings. Books are just taken out of circulation without any public control. I do not think information as such is a problem, as the conference title at the Royal Library suggested, but incontrollable decisions about locking away books and thus denying access to information. That, in my opinion, is a much more serious problem today.

In the royal presentation copies of the Tartu-Estonian New Testament of 1686 and of the Latvian Bible of 1689 held at the Royal Library, several pages still adhere together, as one frequently finds with new books.[39] Nobody had read these books from cover to cover

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38 Lars Munkhammar, 'Kremera eller balsamera? Kulturarvet inför evigheten,' *Biblis* 22 (2003), 12–26; DuRietz, *Kulturarvshyckleriet* (as in n. 18), pp. 58, 67–75.

39 *Meije Issanda JEsusse Kristusse Wastne Testament* ... (Riga: Johann Georg Wilcken, 1686) (pressmark: Teol. Bibel. Övers. Estn. Fol. RAR. Ex. A); *Ta Swehta Grahmata* (as in n. 36) (pressmark: Teol. Bibel. Övers. Lett. Ex. B). Cf.

until I ordered them. The number of scholars who might show an interest in these books – as well as in thousands of other books the Royal Library is denying access to – is so small that they will not pose a threat to the books' preservation, at least not in the present millennium. How many users of the Royal Library read Estonian and Latvian, and how many of these would want to order the originals, both of which are available in reprint editions? Or does the Royal Library see it as its task to maintain these books in their physical state of being unread all the way into the fourth millennium?

Good intentions often develop their own dynamics and eventually can become destructive. In many archives users are instructed to touch records only while wearing cotton gloves. This is said to protect the paper from being soiled by dirty fingers – but how many readers enter the reading room with completely unwashed hands? Turning leaves wearing gloves is much more difficult than turning them with bare fingers. The risk of breaking brittle paper ends is far greater using gloves.[40] This has already made many of the more sensible conservators reverse their positions.[41] They rather run the risk of users staining the paper slightly than breaking or tearing it. After all, it turned out at closer inspection that most of the dirt on the paper in archives and libraries was already there before the records reached these institutions and was not caused by readers in reading rooms. As such, the dirt can serve as an important historical source. Stained titlepages in bound books, for instance, tell us that the book was frequently handled before being bound.

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now Jürgen Beyer, 'Undeutsche Bibeln für Deutsche? Zur Benutzung der ersten lettischen, dörptestnischen und revalestnischen Bibeldrucke (1685–1715),' in *The German book in Wolfenbüttel and abroad. Studies presented to Ulrich Kopp in his retirement*, ed. William A. Kelly & Jürgen Beyer [Studies in reading and book culture 1] (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2014), pp. 37–82, here pp. 50, 66, 72.

[40] Cf. also the thoughtful remarks on user restrictions such as gloves by former Visby head archivist Tryggve Siltberg, 'Landsarkivet i Visby 1971–2005,' in *Landsarkivet i Visby 1905–2005*, ed. Tommy Sundberg [Arkiv på Gotland 3] (Visby: Ödin, 2005), pp. 49–116, here pp. 109–113.

[41] Cf. now Hannah Clare, 'The gloves are off' (http://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/the-gloves-are-off, posted 1 September 2013).

Using gloves has one more negative effect. It takes much more time to turn leaves and to take notes wearing these garments. Checking whether a certain copy of a book contains manuscript notes is done quickly with naked fingers; thumbing through the pages is an extremely fast but not entirely reliable method. Wearing gloves, however, it takes ages to discover manuscript notes, as every leaf has to be turned very slowly.

The injunction to write in pencil has a similar effect. It is obviously a matter of taste, but in my experience it is much faster to write in ink than in pencil, and ink is definitely clearer to read. Asking readers to write in pencil is not, as some may think, an innovation of recent decades. We find such a prescription already issued for the use of the systematic catalogue at Tartu University Library in 1873: “It is forbidden to use pen-and-ink when consulting the catalogue. The necessary notes are to be taken in pencil.”[42] This rule seems to have been drawn up out of concern for ink stains not always avoidable when dipping the pen into the inkstand. Since then, however, writing utensils have greatly evolved and no such stains are to be feared from present-day fountain pens or from ballpoint pens, yet some libraries continue to inforce the precautionary rules of yesteryear.

In order to preserve the originals, it should suffice to ask readers not to make marks of any kind in the books and manuscripts, not to wetten their index finger on the tongue before turning the leaves and otherwise to touch the originals as little and as carefully as possible.

I do not think it would be a solution to maintain the rigid reading room rules and to say to individual scholars: “Okay, if you do need a certain book or record, you can always explain why you want to see it and write an application. We will then consider the matter and let you have the book or the record, if your application is found to be reasonable.” Writing the application will take an hour, and waiting for the reply maybe a week (well, in Sweden at least three weeks).[43]

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[42] *Schlüssel zum systematischen Catalog der Dorpater Universitäts-Bibliothek* (Dorpat: W. Gläser, 1873), p. [3]: “Der Gebrauch von Feder und Tinte ist bei der Benutzung des Catalogs verboten. Die erforderlichen Notizen sind mit Bleistift zu machen.”

[43] While public institions in many other EU countries are required by law to answer enquiries within five or ten working days, the Swedish law governing

This might be a feasible way if one wants to read a certain book from cover to cover, but if one wants to inspect it for five minutes, and possibly again for three minutes two days later, writing an application is not a reasonable option, even less so when wanting to order fifteen books to be inspected for five minutes each.

Libraries run with taxpayers' money should be forced to state in the catalogue why a certain book has been classified as rare and why access to the original is restricted. If this is explained with the physical condition of the book in question, a link to a free digital reproduction in high quality – also showing the binding and other parts without printed text – should be provided to allow the public to verify the claims.

When making grants for digitisation, funding bodies should wield their influence to secure the possibility of continued research on early modern books and manuscripts by stipulating that the digitised originals remain accessible to scholars and, obviously, that the items are properly catalogued before being digitised.[44]

Heads of administration nowadays seem to feel uneasy when having to make decisions without being able to base themselves on statistics and so-called indicators.[45] Let us provide head librarians and archivists with such data (in addition to the ranking suggested above). Let those librarians responsible for making reading room rules and the reading room staff participate in a recataloguing project: There are countless entries in the Royal Library catalogue attributing places of publication to books which lack such informa-

public administration only specifies that answers be given at the earliest convenience (*Förvaltningslag*, § 4), sanctioning in practice a delay *ad kalendas Græcas*.

44 How to catalogue for the best of future research is, of course, a tricky question, cf., for instance, DuRietz, *Kulturarvshyckleriet* (as in n. 18), pp. 80, 90, on distinguishing between print-runs and on describing individual copies; Jürgen Beyer, '[review of *Handbuch des personalen Gelegenheitsschrifttums* ..., ed. Klaus Garber, vols. 1–26, 2001–09],' *Wolfenbütteler Notizen zur Buchgeschichte* 36 (2011), 169–175, on cataloguing (collections of) occasional verse.

45 Cf. now Jürgen Beyer, 'Comparer les bibliothèques universitaires: réflexions d'un chercheur en histoire et ethnologie,' *Arbido newsletter* 2012, no. 8 (http://www.arbido.ch/fr/artikel_detail.php?m=3&id=1560&n=121).

tion as in the case of our book "[Reval 1708]". Many of these attributions are probably wrong as well. The project would consist of having the library staff check the catalogue data by studying the typefaces and the watermarks of the books in question and comparing them with those of other books known to have been printed at the same time and place as the attributions suggest. This should be done in two ways: One group working under the current rare-books-room regime of the Royal Library, another group under much more liberal rules, for instance those applied in Uppsala. Afterwards, one should, of course, assess the exercise: How many book attributions were checked per day? Which degree of correctness was achieved? How meaningful did the staff find their work? How did the books survive the exercise (were there more traces of wear and tear on books constantly repacked into their jackets and transported back and forth, or did the books placed nakedly on the desk suffer greater damages)? I should not be surprised at all if the Uppsala rules turned out to have lead to the best results on all accounts. Such an exercise would also tell us how little staff is actually needed to run the rare books room. We should, too, get to know to what an extent current regulations waste scholars' research time.

Since institutional egoisms probably will work against conducting such an investigation, maybe some research foundation could get involved and finance this small project? Including all preparation and analysis, we are assumedly speaking about no more than three or four months' salary. Money invested this way would give manifold returns.

Concluding remarks

While the examples given above were taken from the field of book history, the need to inspect originals is shared by most historical disciplines. Art historians will not want to base their analyses on reproductions. Manuscript scholars still need to determine the gatherings certain parts of the text are placed in. Students of maps cannot do without knowing the right scale, and they must be able to scan – with their eyes! – a large map, not only the small part of it displayed on a computer screen. None of them – nor other historical scholars –

will have surplus time to waste on the peculiar procedures devised by bureaucrats with no understanding of how the documents are used by contemporary scholars (nor, for that matter, of how they were produced centuries ago). In short, anyone not only interested in historical sources as timeless texts but also in the contexts in which they were produced and read – i. e. basically any serious historical scholar – will continue to need access to the originals. Libraries and archives should follow up on their rhetorics of recent years trumpeting that by digitising they are making collections available to the public. So far, this has rather meant that many institutions have started to deny scholars access to the originals.[46] If this trend is allowed to continue, it will lead to second-hand scholarship,[47] and this cannot be the intention of politicians nor of head librarians and archivists.

Final remarks, August 2014

The manuscript for this article was submitted on 16 August 2012. While going through the proofs in August 2014, I obviously added specifics of cited works published in the meantime. However, I did not have a chance to revisit all institutions referred to in order to check whether procedures had changed. Inevitably, the content of some webpages quoted was altered during the time the manuscript rested on the editor's desk. In this period I had further vivid experiences in reading rooms, both frustrating and encouraging ones. Even though some details concerning specific libraries or archives might not be correct anymore, it will be possible to find similar practices at other institutions. I therefore refrained from changes or additions to the text. I could certainly make further comments on the problems treated here and hope that other scholars as well as librarians and archivists will join the debate.

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[46] Still more frightening, the rhetoric of making collections available over the internet has served as a cover-up for the large-scale destruction of originals (e. g. newspapers, journals etc.), cf. also n. 38.

[47] Cf. also Willem Frijhoff, 'Wetenschap uit de tweede hand,' in *Bij de wereld wil ik horen! Zesendertig columns & drie essays over de vorming tot academicus*, ed. Henk Procee et al. (Amsterdam: Boom, 2004), pp. 61–63.