

**INTERVIEW:  
“ A VERY EXCITING  
LONG-TERM  
LOAN ”**

**The library of the former Mainz Academy project *Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei* (Research on Ancient Slavery) has moved to Bonn and is now available to the students, fellows and faculty of the *Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies* (BCDSS) and the *Heinz Heinen Kolleg* (HHK) within the Cluster of Excellence *Beyond Slavery and Freedom: Asymmetrical Dependencies in Pre-Modern Societies*.**

The Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero once claimed that a person wanted for nothing as long as they had a garden and a library (Letter to Varro: Ad Familiares IX 4). Covid-19 has doubly confirmed the validity of this statement: under pandemic conditions, researchers especially know how important reliable and fast access to necessary literature can be. The *Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies* (BCDSS) and the *Heinz Heinen Center for Advanced Studies* are therefore very pleased that the library collected by the Mainz Academy Project *Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei* (Research on Ancient Slavery) ([www.sklaven.adwmainz.de](http://www.sklaven.adwmainz.de)) is being housed in Bonn for the duration of the Cluster of Excellence. The transfer was initiated by Winfried Schmitz, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Bonn and a member of the Mainz Academy ([www.adwmainz.de](http://www.adwmainz.de)). The Academy is loaning its library to Bonn for free. We spoke with Johannes Deißler, a former researcher at the Academy project who was in charge of the library for many years.

“ Researchers know how important access to literature can be, especially under pandemic conditions. The BCDSS and the Heinz Heinen Center are therefore very pleased that the Mainz Academy specialist library on Ancient Slavery is now in Bonn for the duration of the Cluster of Excellence. ”



The arrival of the books.

**Mr. Deißler, what kind of library is now enriching the Bonn collections?**

The Academy project *Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei* was a long-term project jointly funded by the Academy, the Federal Republic of Germany and the state of Rhineland-Palatinate until 2012. With the founding of the Academy Program in 1977, this Academy project established a research center whose

tasks included building a special library available to all contributors of the project and to all other interested researchers worldwide. With start-up capital, special funds and an annual budget, the project aimed to collect all existing and subsequently published literature on slavery in the ancient Mediterranean and the surrounding region. Over the course of these three decades, the library accumulated some 16,600 media units.

**Media units?  
What does that mean?**

Besides classic books or monographs there are also numerous printouts or photocopies from encyclopaedias, journals and anthologies, as well as some microfilms and a large stock of PDF files.

### How are the holdings catalogued?

The entire collection is accessible by means of an alphabetical card catalogue, which also moved to Bonn. For the titles that are directly relevant to slavery there is also a digital catalogue, the *Bibliography on Ancient Slavery Online* (BASO) (<https://www.sklaven.adwmainz.de/index.php?id=1584>). This is the updated version of the last printed version of our *Bibliographie zur antiken Sklaverei* (Bibliography on Ancient Slavery) from 2003. We converted this printed version to a database and added all subsequently published titles to it directly. BASO thus contains all monographs, essays, and encyclopaedia articles on the scholarly study of ancient slavery known to our Slavery Center up to 2012. The database has a sophisticated expert search function and is equipped with indexes and a descriptor search based on the systematics of the print version, allowing quite complex search strategies. BASO lists all titles relevant to ancient slavery, and the collection that is now in Bonn contains 95% of those titles. Sadly, we were unable to procure the remaining five percent during the project period. They can be easily identified in the database by the absence of a shelf mark. In the card catalogue, of course, these missing titles do not appear at all. About one third of the collection is more general, i.e. texts on general or social history that are not directly relevant to slavery. But because it was a working library, scholars needed to be able to consult those titles for general background. These titles that are not part of BASO, but they are included in the card catalogue and listed in a separate data list. Of course, it would be great if the different databases could now be merged in Bonn.<sup>1</sup>

### What are the main focuses of the collection?

The project primarily focused on ancient slavery, i.e. in classical Greece and the Roman Empire. However, we were always concerned to include literature from other areas and epochs. The library includes works on slavery in prehistory, in the Ancient Near East (Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran/India) and East Asia, as well as Byzantium, the Barbarian successor kingdoms to the Roman Empire, the Early Middle Ages and early Islam. We also collected reception history (including children's and young adult literature) and didactic material. However, the majority of the works looks at classical antiquity. Importantly, we did not restrict ourselves in terms of language; in addition to the European scholarly languages, we also have many texts from the Slavic, Nordic and Finno-Ugric language families, as well as titles in Hebrew, Turkish, Japanese, Korean and Chinese. It is my opinion that with this loan, Bonn gains the most comprehensive specialized library on the subject of ancient slavery worldwide!

“ *The library includes works on slavery in prehistory, in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran, India and East Asia, as well as Byzantium, the Barbarian successor kingdoms to the Roman Empire, the Early Middle Ages and early Islam.* ”

### You mentioned books in Japanese, Korean and Chinese. So there are researchers in modern Asia who focus on ancient Mediterranean slavery?

There are indeed, especially colleagues in South Korea and Japan have been quite outstanding. I am convinced that we only know about a small part of their research, unfortunately. Finding out about them was quite a laborious process, and in some cases only possible with the support of native speakers. To incorporate these titles into the database was a challenge. For literature with non-Latin characters we used simplified transliteration according to the rules for alphabetical cataloguing in academic libraries. Whenever an object was written in a less common language, we added a German translation and a language abbreviation of the original language in parentheses. In the days before services such as Google Translate were widely available to the public, this took a lot of time and effort.

### Do you regret the library's relocation?

Of course it is never easy to hand over a library from one's own care into the custody of others. However, it is a necessary and a good step: a library must be used and its contents must be looked after. If there is no budget to keep the library updated, it makes sense to open it up again and make its contents accessible to a larger group. Some former employees, researchers or students from Germany and abroad from time to time asked for literature or even spent a few days and weeks in Mainz working with the library, but this was only occasionally. Such a valuable collection deserves more frequent use, even if we no longer added to the collection after 2012. So I was absolutely in favour of the transfer. Requests and users will now simply be redirected to Bonn.



Bibl. Reg.  
1923-24. 2791  
Mainiensis

(Giovanni Pontano)

The earliest work in the library, a book on obedience by the Italian humanist Giovanni Pontano, or, in its Latinized form, Ioannes Iovianus Pontatus.

IOANNIS IOVIANI PONTANI AD  
ROBERTVM SANSEVERINVM  
PRINCIPEM SALERNITANVM:  
IN LIBROS OBEDIENTIAE PRO  
HEMIVM INCIPIT FELICITER.

Ortante te jmo & iubente Prin-  
ceps Roberte/ut quos de obedie-  
tia scripsissem libros/ tandem ali-  
quando ederem: perdifficile uisū  
est exhortationem aut parū sequi-  
tiam/ aut non obtemperare uoluntati. Equidē  
edendis his abstinēbam: non q̄ non libenter  
ultimam eis manum imponerem: sed quia in-  
telligēbā quibus ipse me obtreccationibus ex-  
ponerem/ sic abeant apud neminem/ q̄ i  
qua nati domo essent habituros. Etenim cō-  
siderabam eos qui nūc philosophantur/ genus  
hoc dicendi (quanq̄ peruenit ipsum quidem &  
philosophorum proprium) omnino improba-  
re: atq̄ quosdam nimisq̄ ieiunias/ ac parū iu-  
cundas auditoribus dissertationes/ sedāris: quas  
aut ipsi foli legant/ aut pauci admodum/ con-  
similes: ut mihi quidem uideantur non tā do-  
cere uelle q̄ litigare: nec ita studere/ ut obscuras  
atq̄ abditas res aperiant/ q̄ inculcare atq̄ deicere  
a ii'

the millennium onwards this really meant *all*. We spent a great deal of money in bookstores and antiquarian bookshops. The project assistants made countless photocopies and scans in all accessible libraries (and presumably cursed quite a bit), the Mainz University Library trembled in the face of our interlibrary loan requests, and finally some wires were occupied with searching the Internet for electronic versions. All in all, a total of 16,600 media units were collected, that is about 3,500 books, 12,250 photocopies or printouts of articles, and about 3,100 PDF files. Perceptive readers will notice that the total adds up to almost 19,000 copies – the reason is that we have some titles in multiple formats, such as print and pdf, for example.

### Collecting ended in 2012?

It had to. Without a project, there were no funds. From 2012 onwards, we could only add in-house productions of the former project or donations, and the library could no longer be expanded. The in-house productions were several monographs published in the *Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei* series – and of course the *Handwörterbuch der antiken Sklaverei*, a valuable reference work.

### What is the oldest work in the collection?

The earliest work in the library dates from 1472; it is the work of an Italian humanist, Giovanni Pontano, entitled *De obedientia*. This is not an original, of course, but a reprint of the 1490 edition. One of the great challenges was precisely how to acquire pieces that had been published a long time before the library was founded in 1977. A lot of money has been spent on this; Pauly's *Realenzyklopädie* (RE), for example, the standard encyclopaedia on classical antiquity, could only be

acquired with a five-digit extraordinary allocation. This sounds incomprehensible in view of the fact that today, many of the RE volumes and much more are inexpensively available on the Internet, but you must remember that the twentieth century was a very different time.

“ The earliest work in the library dates from 1472; it is the work of an Italian humanist, Giovanni Pontano, entitled *De obedientia*. ”

### Could you describe the acquisition process?

It always began with the search for relevant literature. We did this systematically with the help of specialized bibliographies, the supplements of *Classics* journals and those of related disciplines, catalogues from German and international publishers, as well as online databases and library systems. We attempted to obtain all titles found in this way, and from the turn of

### Did you manage to acquire all the works you wanted for the library?

I regret to say that this is not the case. Sometimes we were simply unable to acquire some known and newly bibliographed titles, or we stopped searching for them. In view of scarce resources in terms of time and finances – the library was an important working tool, but it was just one of the areas in which the Center was active – this was painful, but made sense. After all, it was important to keep an eye on the whole and not to concentrate exclusively on, for example, an Uppsala dissertation published in 1818.

“ I hope that as many colleagues as possible will benefit from the entire collection. Every book, every photocopy, indeed every media unit is a treasure itself. ”

### In your eyes, is there a special book?

I have a favourite. Its shelf mark is S Ro 38. It is a book, but it is also a lot more. It contains a handwritten dedication which makes it also a memory of an ancient historian who died only recently, and a testimony to modern history. It has been years since this book was purchased second-hand – without knowledge of the autograph – but I still remember how much it caught my attention when it arrived. However, I would like researchers to make active use of all titles equally and in the same way. I hope that as many colleagues as possible will benefit from the entire collection. Every book, every photocopy, indeed every media unit is a treasure itself.

The very special copy of "Spartacus", with an autograph by the great Czech classicist Pavel Oliva, who passed away in March this year.

We agree entirely!  
Thank you very much for the information and the interview.

The collection is housed at the **Heinz Heinen Kolleg for Advanced Studies (HHK)** site at Heussallee 18–24, 53113 Bonn. Scholars who want to use the library are welcome to send an email to

[library@dependency.uni-bonn.de](mailto:library@dependency.uni-bonn.de)



A shelf of encyclopedias.