

Ottheinrich von der Pfalz – a Princely Bibliophile of the Reformation



Wolfgang Metzger, Weimar, Germany

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Medal, 1520



Duke Ottheinrich (1502-1559)

Bartel Beham, 1535

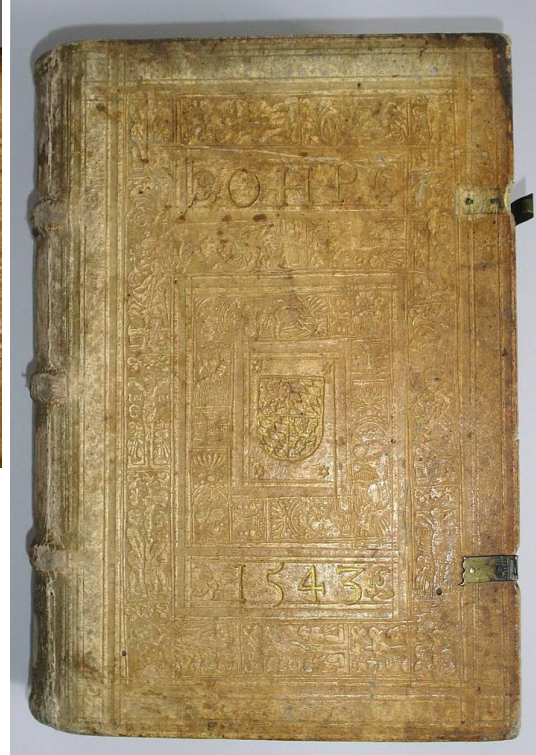
When count Palatine and Elector Ottheinrich died on February 12th 1559 - 450 years ago - , he left a collection of books that formed not only the nucleus but a broad and very solid basis for one of the most important libraries of the age, the Bibliotheca Palatina. By uniting his own collection with the library at the collegiate church of the Holy Ghost belonging to Heidelberg University and with the books of Heidelberg castle - the so called "older castle library" he in fact became the founder of this important protestant book treasury. For this reason mainly and because of the conspicuous bindings he commissioned for his volumes, he is known as a great bibliophile. However, this „bibliomania“ was not just a personal love of rare and beautiful books but had a strong religious and thus political component. It was a protestant library not just for himself and his friends but for a wider public of scholars, preachers and other intellectuals - readers and authors that took an active part in the propagation and the defense of the reformation.

In his early years however, Ottheinrich was neither sympathetic with Luther and the Reformation nor an avid book lover but simply a nobleman with taste and loving for beautiful things and the pastimes of his equals. His orientation towards the reformation

developed from the middle of the 1530s onward. Probably in 1540 the decisive turn took place and in 1541 his conversion was a fact. Ottheinrich was 39 years old then and ruler of the small duchy of „Pfalz-Neuburg“ whose finances were in an increasingly precarious state. From this time onward, he acquired not only some volumes in the fields of his personal interests, but collected books in a more systematic way.

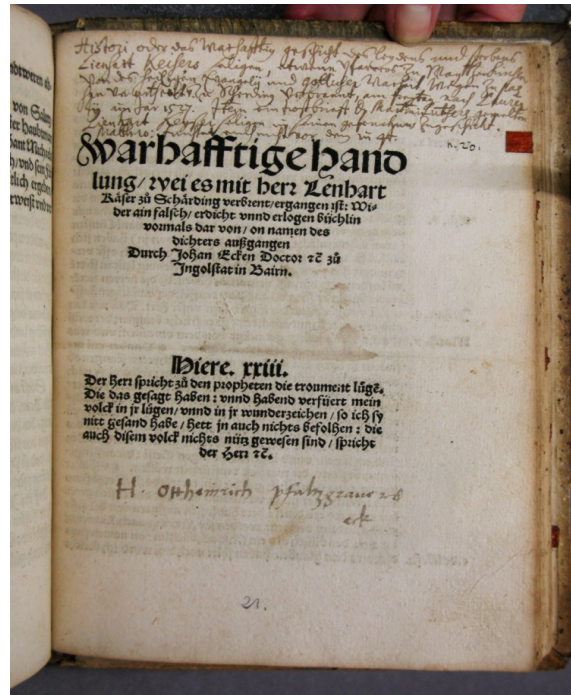
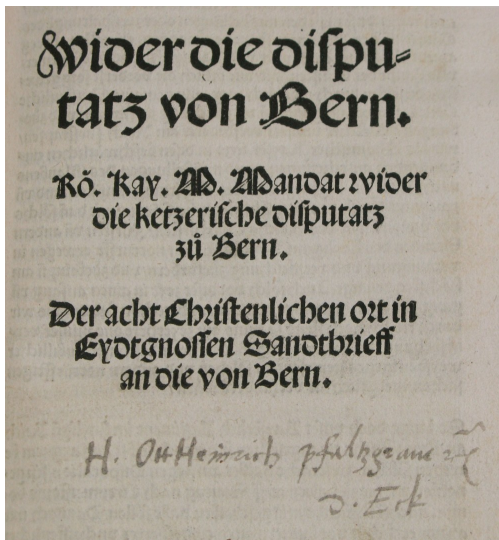


detail: monogram and motto



Weimar, Herzogin Anna Amalia
Bibliothek, Inc. 397,
bound 1543 for Ottheinrich

The volume you can see here was bound for him in 1543 and belongs to the early examples of personalized bookbindings for the Pfalzgrave. It does not yet show the typical features of later years – the portrait in gold on dark leather for example. Like other books bound in these years, it shows golden letters that were set on top of the already existing blind printed roll in a second step. It is hard to see in the photograph. The volume comprises a collection of 26 prints concerning contemporary events and controversies published from 1520 to 1543. Three of them were provided by Johannes Eck the famous anti-Lutheran professor of theology at the university of Ingolstadt – situated rather close by, just outside Ottheinrichs territory, in Bavaria.



Johannes Eck, two dedications to Ottheinrich. Weimar, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Inc 397

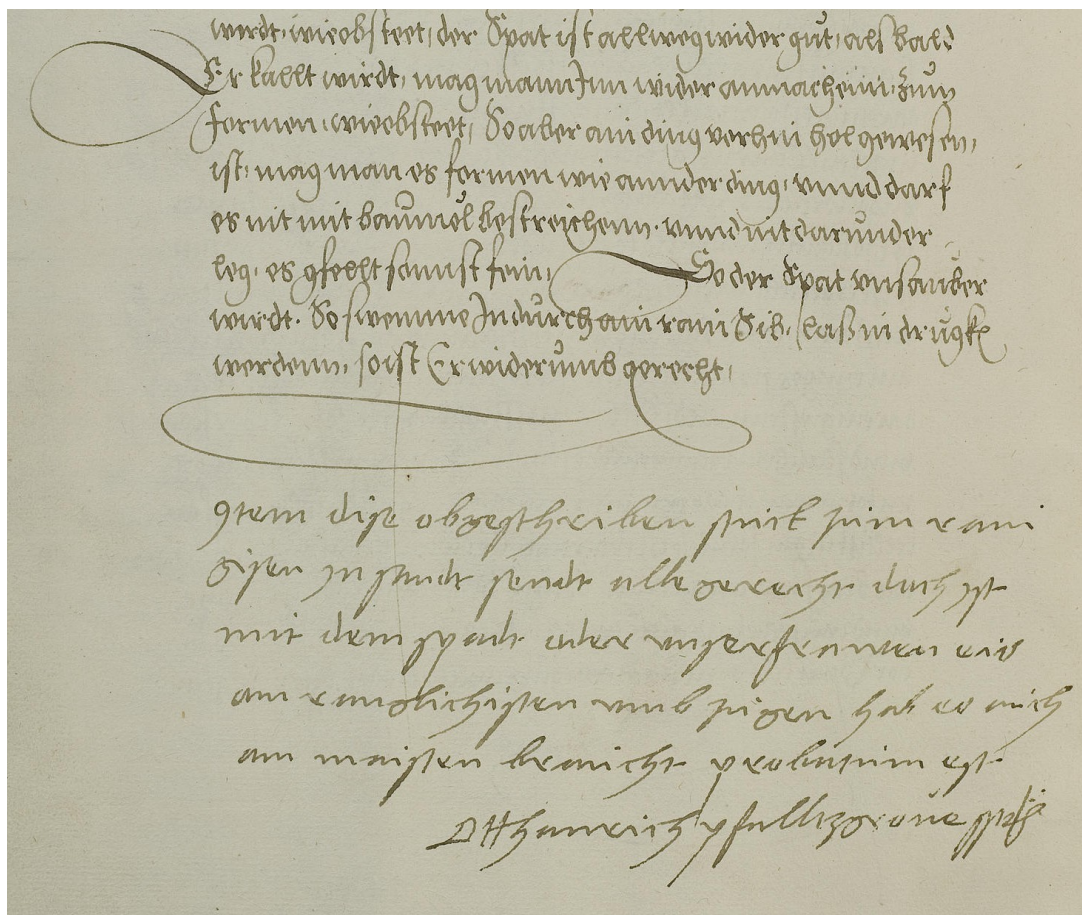
We know also from his letters, that Eck sent books to the duke in this period, mostly on issues of reformational concern. Certainly Eck knew well enough that Ottheinrich was slowly drifting towards the protestant side and tried to lead him back to the catholic church. Two of the three publications from Eck in this volume where printed in 1527, one in 1536 when the duke already showed a certain interest for reformational concerns.



↑ illumination of ca. 1430

← illumination commissioned by Ottheinrich, 1530

Of course, Ottheinrich did own books before his conversion. The great „Ottheinrich-Bible“, a New Testament in German language he had inherited from the Landshut branch of his Bavarian relatives for example. As the illumination had been left unfinished by the illuminators from the Bavarian town of Regensburg in the 1430s, Ottheinrich commissioned the completion by a contemporary painter Matthew Gerung of Lauingen in 1530. Some manuscripts and prints of private, religious character were in his possession as well as a number of writings about (primarily Wittelsbach) history and about alchemy and metallurgy.



Ottheinrich, autograph notes,

Heidelberg University Library, Cod. Pal. germ. 843, Fasz. 1, f. 5v

Here you can see a text on metallurgical experiments, written in the 1540s, with autograph notes by the duke, commenting on the text from a practical viewpoint. In many places he wrote “probatum per me”, sometimes adding his name or details about

his own experience. In fact, Ottheinrich was a practitioner in the field of alchemy and some sophisticated techniques of metalwork. His three handwritten prayer books, today in the Vatican Library, must also be mentioned among the books that came early into his hands. A letter of duke Louis of Bavaria to Ottheinrich written in January 1540 bears witness to the later's vivid interest for books on the history of the house of Wittelsbach and their lands.

Obviously he had asked Louis for such writings in a previous letter. The Bavarian duke answered that probably Ottheinrich already possessed more books on the subject than he did. The vast majority of his library however was acquired after he became a protestant and with the explicit aim to create a great protestant library for the „pastores“ and authors who struggled for the propagation of the new creed.

Ottheinrich in fact was no scholar himself. The fact that today - at least in Germany - he is well known as a bibliophile has several reasons: maybe the most important is, that whereas his paintings, tapestries and other valuable possessions were dispersed or destroyed, the books are still there and to a great extent easily recognizable by their characteristic bindings.

Further books of his are known from inventories. Dedicational prefaces in print, handwritten dedications of books he received as a present and letters are other sources of information on Ottheinrich's love of books and his activities concerning them. In the following presentation I just want to characterize the library of Ottheinrich and give some examples for his activities as a book collector.

The earliest known bookbinding that shows Ottheinrich's monogram, his arms and his motto, contains an edition of 1540, printed in Strasbourg. The volume was bound by a workshop probably active at Augsburg and individualized in a second step for the duke by the addition of his monogram, motto and arms in



Heidelberg, University Library: Feldbuch der Wundarznei , bound 1540 for Ottheinrich

gold. The application of gold leaf on dark calfskin bindings still was not a very common feature in Germany. It came from Italy and – for the contemporaries of Ottheinrich – it may have had a certain touch of humanism and classical scholarship.

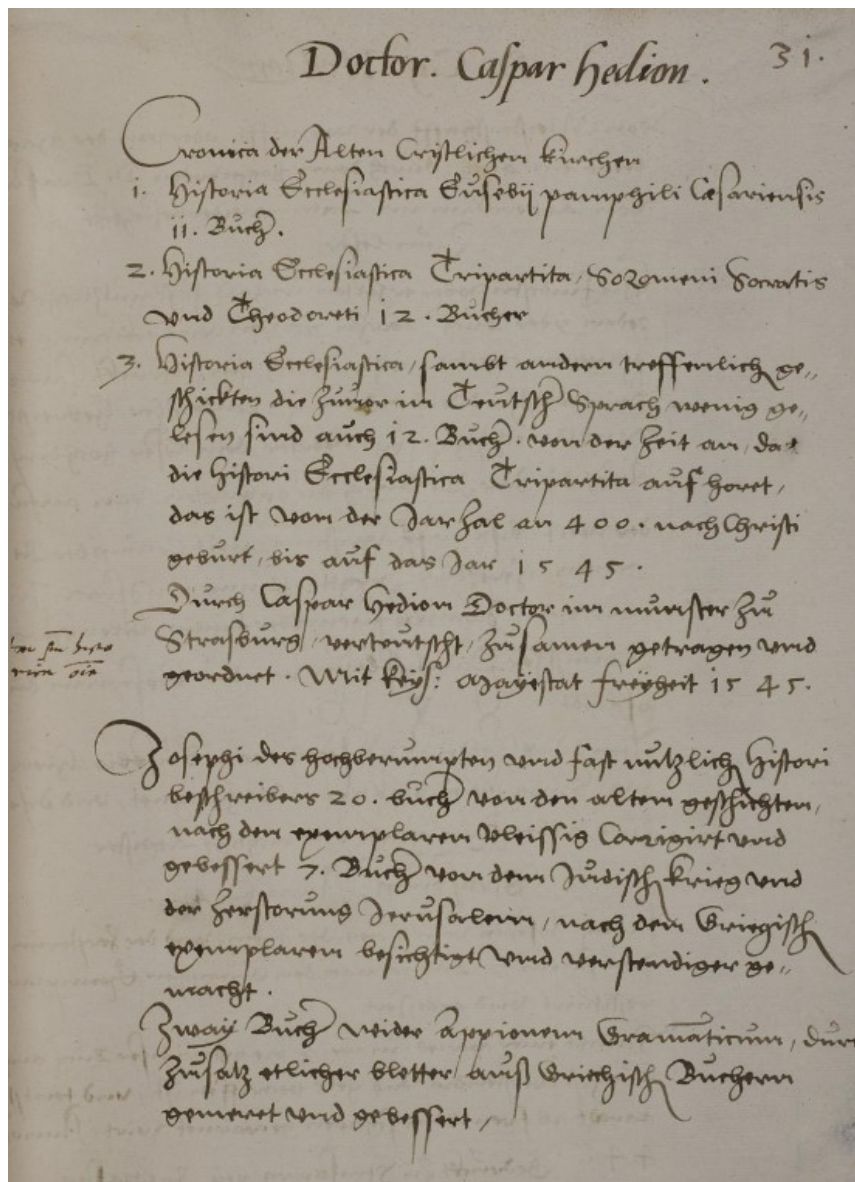
A good example for Ottheinrichs struggle for old and valuable manuscripts is the case of the “Itinerarium Antonini”. The manuscript of the 10th century contains a register of roman traffic routes and the so called "Notitia dignitatum" on state offices together with a series of illustrations that closely follow their late antique models. It was kept then at the cathedral library of Speyer, some 25 Km from Heidelberg. When in 1542 Ottheinrich commissioned a copy of it - after trying in vain to bring the original codex in his possession - he wanted the illustrations to be copied exactly as they appeared in the codex. Executed in the high middle ages as the rest of the codex, they still preserved many of the details of their ancient model. The first artist of Ottheinrichs copy however modernized them according to the style of the 16th century. A good deal of the value as a source for the images of the roman original was lost. Ottheinrich was not satisfied and straight away ordered a second set of illustrations that reproduced the

rather precise medieval copies of the late roman illustrations with as little changes as possible. If he could not have the real thing, he wanted at least the authentic look and information. Later on he could acquire the original as well and we find both manuscripts in the inventories, the „old, right exemplar“ and the copy. Today they both belong to the Bavarian State Library at Munich. It was the real, antique piece, he was looking for, transmitting the authentic content in adequate form. The way Ottheinrich was collecting shows, that often he was not merely after the rare and precious but that he wanted to get good, authentic source material for his library.

A first hint, that Ottheinrich followed a plan with his book acquisitions of the early 1540s, can be found in a letter of Martin Bucer to Heinrich Bullinger of October 1544: Bucer wanted Bullinger to ask Conrad Gesner whether he could send the already printed gatherings of his „Bibliotheca universalis“ - the first comprehensive Bibliography - to Ottheinrich. The duke had, according to Bucer, begun to build up a library and wanted to learn from Gesners work, which books he should buy. This information in the correspondence of two of the most important protagonists of the reformation in southern Germany is our first news about systematic acquisitions for the foundation of a library and the search for information on the relevant books.

Meanwhile Ottheinrichs collections of other valuables, that were not so mobile, suffered a substantial drawback from the Schmalkaldic War. In 1546 Neuburg was invaded by catholic troops and looted. As far as we know however, little books were taken away then.

In the following years Ottheinrich concentrated even more on his book collection and the library project. He repeatedly asked for bibliographic support in the form of library catalogs and book lists. The Preacher and translator Caspar Hedio of Strasbourg sent him his translation of the history of the popes by Platina together with a list of publications in German for the growing library.



Caspar Hedio(?):
list of german
books, 1546

Heidelberg
University
Library, Cod.
Pal. germ. 841,
f. 31r

A copy of this list, in fact a quite substantial bibliography filling almost 350 leaves, of mostly religious printed books in the German language, seems to have come down to us among the German manuscripts of the Bibliotheca Palatina at Heidelberg. You can see here the beginning of the part listing the works by Hedio himself – following immediately after the publications of Luther.



The preface of the book, published 1546, is one long eulogy on libraries in common, some passages however sound like a program for Ottheinrichs activities as a collector of books and patron of authors and printers in the following years. Already in the year before, Hedio had been talking with the duke about his plan to bring together a library, at first hand for the „pastores“, with the most important works in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, but also for

future generations and at last for a broader public with good translations in German. The translation Hedio dedicated him now was explicitly to be seen in the context of this project. He also points to close relationship between Ottheinrichs grandfather Phillipp – called „der Aufrichtige“ - and Rudolph Agricola as a model. Obviously Hedio knew, he could count on the dukes consent in his thoughts about a good library with free access for the „pastores“, the preachers and theologians of the reformation. Most uncommon for the age however was Hedio's vision of a much wider public of readers right down to ordinary craftsmen who, so he hoped, should rather enter the reading hall of such a library than spend their time drinking and bowling in the pub.

In October 1547 Ottheinrich received also a list of Hebrew books from Paul Fagius at Strasbourg. In November of the same year he wrote to Theobald Billican at Marburg questioning him about the library of the monastery at Fulda and asking him to look for a catalog of it. The fragment of the Carolingian catalog from Fulda at the Palatine library (CPL 1877) may well have come from Billican into the hands of Ottheinrich. He also asked him to look for old liturgical books. The search for early sources of the old liturgy was part of the project to go back to the good old use of the early church. It was not just a hunt for collector's items.

When in winter '47/'48 Ottheinrich asked the son of Conrad Peutinger for a register of his fathers books, he also wanted to learn, which books where important enough for the great humanist to buy them for himself. In these years, when he was exiled from his own small duchy of Neuburg to Heidelberg and Weinheim, Ottheinrich was eagerly collecting bibliographic information for his library-project.

In the second half of the 1540s the development of the characteristic features of the „Ottheinrich-Bindings“ and the

infamous acquisition of the library of the old and renowned monastery of Lorsch, not far from Heidelberg, where decisive steps towards the foundation of an important library.

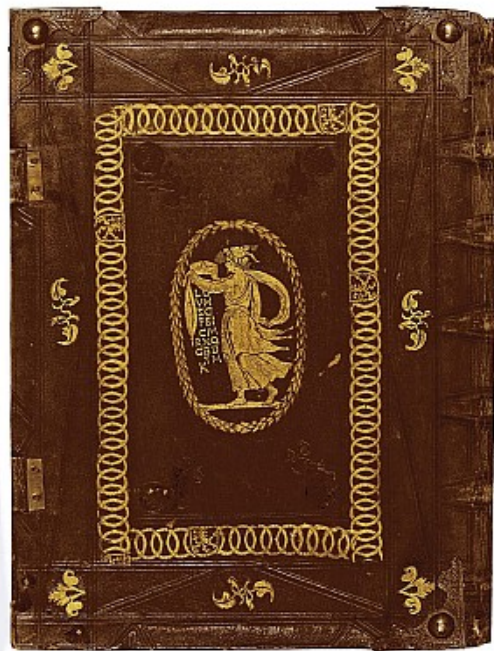


Vatican Library,
Stamp. Barb. FF VI 50

Ottheinrich binding
of 1550, probably
by Jörg Bernhard

The inspiration of the typical Ottheinrich bindings from Wittenberg models is easily recognizable now as then (see below). The use of gold leaf on dark leather was a reflex of the Italian style, as a whole however, the bindings show much more a Lutheran look. By 1548 Ottheinrich must have acquired the library of the monastery of Lorsch. In this year at least three manuscripts from Lorsch were bound for the duke. The transfer of the books from the ancient monastery into the hands of the protestant duke - in the catholic chronicle of the Zimmern Family stylized as a kind of criminal assault - probably took part between August 1547 and Fall 1548 when Ottheinrich was living at Weinheim, 20 Km north of Heidel-

the printing workshop of Kilian. After its destruction during the "Schmalcaldic War" it took until 1556 until the next work could be printed. Kilian also was active as a musician, later he is mentioned as "Chemicus", the alchemist, of Ottheinrich. He further kept a collection of writings by Paracelsus, that unfortunately today is lost. Also at Heidelberg Ottheinrich successfully could initiate a workshop. Hans Kohl however was only of minor importance compared to Kilian or the Heidelberg printers of the late 16th century. Nevertheless he issued a very interesting work, the book of lute tablatur of Sebastian Ochsenkuhn a famous lutenist and composer. It is unusual insofar as the polyphony of the voices in the original compositions are transposed into the instrumental music in a most comprehensive way. In the year 1561 the series of books printed by Kohl and subsequently by his widow ended.



printers sign of Hans Kilian as supralibros on a volume of Ottheinrich

About his chamber library - the „Kammerbibliothek“ - we are quite well informed by an inventory of the volumes that were transferred from Neuburg to Heidelberg in 1556, when he became elector at last. The Kammerbibliothek however was only a part of his treasures. There must have been a fair number of books that formed a library of a more personal, private character. We can

presume that the greater part of his acquisitions of the time he was exiled in Heidelberg and Weinheim, was deposited at the "Kurpfalz" when he returned to Neuburg. Ottheinrich kept his residence at the Heidelberg corn market and could also dispose of rooms at the castle. In 1547-48 books of Ottheinrich were mentioned in two rooms at the castle. Neither the manuscripts from Lorsch - more than 130 volumes - nor the 15 oriental manuscripts bought from the French scholar Guillaume Postel in 1555, can be found in the inventory of the Kammerbibliothek. Together with other treasures and the lavish garden in town, they waited for the day Ottheinrich would return as Elector and ruler of Kurpfalz.

The inventory of the Kammerbibliothek lists 390 items - a respectable but not extraordinary number. The choice of subjects in this collection for the use of the duke and his small court gives an interesting profile of Ottheinrich's interests and preoccupations. Certainly, it was not a well balanced universal reference library. The whole complex of religion with more than 150 titles (ca. 40%) is by far the largest segment. In the first place stand the writings of the Reformation, many of them polemic works in the struggle between different orientations of the movement or against the catholic church. The later acquisitions also show a focus on literature about the religious controversies of the time.

Other fields of special interest are discernible: 60 works on astrology, alchemy, geomanty and related subjects for example (16%). One of those, is a manuscript translation of the „Margarita Philosophica“ - a compendium of alchemy - that was dedicated to Ottheinrich in 1554. With 57 titles not much smaller is the part of history. Many works by Johannes Aventin are quite conspicuous in the list.

These three fields of special interest just mentioned comprise 70% of the books in the inventory. Architecture is the fourth complex of

knowledge especially cherished by the duke. There is of course Vitruvius in Latin and Italian and Sebastiano Serlio as important author of the Italian renaissance. Reformation, astrology and alchemy, history and architecture: these are the fields of knowledge that attracted Ottheinrich most.

The Latin classics and scholarly works on greek and roman antiquity are almost absent. There is Vitruvius, as already mentioned, two works on numismatics and a greek Ptolemy. Two manuscripts of Vergil and Horaz may have been attractive because of their age. The two German translations of the Terentian comedies *Andria* and *Eunuchus* have been a present for Ottheinrich. Of Cicero there are only German versions of „de senectute“ and the “tusculan disputations”. The translations were made by the famous scholar Johannes Reuchlin for Philipp, Ottheinrichs grandfather. It is quite obvious, that Ottheinrich was not a great reader of classical literature.

However, Ottheinrich didn't collect his books only for his own, private use, but as an intellectual treasure for scholars and as a weapon in the struggle for the reformation of the church. The many texts on the theological controversies of the time were probably not for his private reading. After all his knowledge of Latin was rather limited. When in 1545 his chaplain presented him a long latin poem with dedication, he added a German translation. Definitely he couldn't read the books in Greek, Hebrew and Arabic he bought. In 1556 the two scholars Cornelius Wouters and Georg Cassander wrote in a letter from Cologne, where they had acquired books for Ottheinrich, that after all he had not the intention to build a library just for himself or to boast with it but for the public benefit.



Heidelberg Castle from the north-east

The library at Heidelberg Castle also played an important part in Ottheinrich's library scheme. In 1550 he had browsed through the books at the castle of his uncle Frederic II and taken an inventory of them. We know that Ottheinrich was thinking in detail about his waiting inheritance, planning his steps. Frederic II on the other hand was complaining that his nephew was impatiently waiting for his death. It is very probable that Ottheinrich already saw the castle library as a future part of his project, the big protestant library and wanted to know what he would get.



The gallery in the nave
of the Holy Ghost
Church at Heidelberg

The unification of the castle library with the library at the Heiliggeistkirche turned out to be the founding act of the Bibliotheca

Palatina. The question is whether this happened more or less by chance – the castle library being only deposited at the Holy ghost church (Heiliggeistkirche) because of the plan to build a new library at the castle, which would not have been executed after Ottheinrich's death. Or whether Ottheinrich had planned to bring together all these books at the church as one great library. To my opinion it would not have been necessary to remove the books completely from the castle while establishing a new location for them. Frederic II didn't do this when he planned a new room for the library there in 1550. The castle had by far enough space to store these approximately 6600 volumes for some time. If we look at the book collecting activities of Ottheinrich since the beginning of the 1540s it is very probable indeed, that what happened was more or less exactly what he had planned for a long time already: To bring together his collection with the books of the university at the Heiliggeistkirche and with the castle library in order to form his great protestant library. The famous paragraph in his last will of 1558/59 where he provided 50 Guilders per year for the acquisition of new books to keep the library up to date shows his intentions clearly. He also wanted that even after his death all books that had been in the library during his lifetime should be bound in the same way as before with his image and Initials. This however didn't happen. We don't know any Ottheinrich binding that would have been made after 1559.

Conclusion

The project to bring together a rich protestant library for everyone labouring for the propagation of the reformed church accompanied Ottheinrich's life from the time he took the part of the reformation about 1540 until his early death in February 1559. As the church historian Daniel Pareus tells us, Ottheinrich believed firmly, that he had been without a heir – what ended the older electoral line of the Palatine dukes – as a punishment for a crime his ancestor Louis III, had committed as protector of the council of Constance.



Elector Palatine Ludwig III at the Council of Constance: the burning of Jan Hus and Hieronymus of Prague in 1415.

Ulrich Richental, Chronicle, ms. from St. Georgen, Karlsruhe, BLB

Louis was held responsible for the arrest and consequent burning of the Bohemian reformer Jan Hus in 1415. Ottheinrich in fact saw his own achievement as founder of a library that was quasi a weapon in the struggle for the reformation of the church as a kind of compensation for the murder of one of it's most important forerunners.



Paris, Musée du Louvre, bust of Ottheinrich in his later years, alabaster

Ottheinrich obviously wanted this library to persist, to develop and to continue to grow even after his death. The bindings of his books should not only protect the volumes and give them a beautiful and

stately appearance, they also where to carry his effigy and his fame as a library founder into the future. What they certainly did. May Ottheinrich not reach the perpetual fame of a Ptolemäus II. Philadelphus, founder of the legendary library of Alexandria, he nevertheless is known to the present day as one of the great book collectors of his time and as a patron of scholars, printers and artists.



This text is a slightly longer version of the paper presented March 21st at the 2009 annual conference of the Renaissance Society of America at Los Angeles.