

Library Fundraising – Contribution to Finance or Mere Communication? A Case Study of the Austrian National Library

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Abstract

This paper analyses the book adoption campaign of the Austrian National Library, which partly finances the restoration the endangered historic book holdings. In times when the library was still a department of the Ministry of Education it was virtually impossible to reallocate funds for urgent restoration activities. Facing the danger of the irrevocable loss for the national heritage the library called upon the public to finance measures of urgent action. Though the library by now has become an autonomous organization with full budget flexibility and the financial contribution of the raised funds is minimal the programme is still continued. A reason for that might be the fact that it became a valuable public relation tool by disseminating knowledge about the library's activities in the field of conservation to an interested target group and reaching a broader public by presenting foreign politicians and international celebrities as testimonials.

Keywords

Fundraising, Libraries, Public Relations, Cultural Finance, Austria.

Introduction

Fundraising in arts organisations can be an important source of finance. But in contrary to social organisations, where the benefit for the donor bears a pure idealistic character, arts organisations have to grant some kind of concrete benefits for their private contributors. These are mostly offered as a kind of involvement in the organization's activities. According to the non-homogenous groups of potential donors and their different financial commitment, arts organisations have developed differentiated fundraising programmes.¹ Still the profitability of this efforts heavily depends on external variables e.g. the type of organisation – superstar museum vs. historic library – or its cultural environment – America vs. Europe. Evidence shows that even when offered benefits plus costs for administration equal the so earned income fundraising activities tend to be continued. This leads to the conclusion that fundraising yields an added value for the organisation that lies beyond the financial contribution, namely in opening new communication channels to different target groups. The hypothesis that fundraising also serves as an effective public relation and marketing tool shall be tested on the empiric case of the Austrian National Library.

The Austrian National Library and Its Institutional Setting

The Austrian National Library is Austria's central library, which also preserves great number of historic – partly UNESCO-listed – special collections ranging from Egyptian papyri and medieval handwritings to early globes and historic photographs. As an institution it has its roots the former court library of the Habsburg emperors ranging back into the year 1285.² Since the 18th century it has had the character of a public library and research centre – architectonically manifest in the impressive state hall by the Viennese baroque architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach. In this impressive two storey domed hall 200.000 books of the historic holdings are stored, but by now the library expanded into many other parts of the former imperial palace and even several storeys underneath it.³

Today the tasks of the Austrian National Library lie in of two fields: On the one hand the library still serves as Austria's central knowledge base by conserving and cataloguing the existing holdings and expanding its collections. It acquires not only all domestic publications but also relevant international literature in the humanities. This traditional task is complemented with new strategies of recording, accessing and long term storage of digital data. After completing the digitalisation of the catalogues the electronic recording of the objects themselves – texts and images – is enforced. Furthermore the library is responsible for the digital integration of all Austrian libraries. On the other hand the National Library partly functions as a museum: apart from the state hall itself visitors are attracted by small specialized museum departments like the papyri or globe museum or temporary exhibitions which show insights into the rich collections reaching from botanic incisions to medieval handwritings.

The National Library holds an unique position in the Austrian cultural sector, nevertheless it is one of the biggest Austrian cultural institutions having a budget of 23 million Euro. Almost 90% of the budget is funded by the Austrian Ministry for Education and Culture, only 10,7 % come from market revenues including fund raising. This comparatively small quota of earned income is due to three main factors:

- The main task of the Austrian National library is the conservation of printed knowledge, an activity suffering the typical symptoms of market failure by being a pure public good. More than six million books have to be stored, just above 200.000 are used every year. This ratio shows that it is mainly future generations will benefit from the library's core task, thus representing a future or "option" demand. Private revenues therefore can only be achieved in the still comparatively small service and museum activities.
- Austria like most countries of continental Europe does not have an highly developed culture neither in corporate giving nor in private donorship. In exchange for high tax rates the citizen expects a secured offer of cultural goods provided by the State, a tradition of "state culture" that can be traced back to the cultural patronage of the imperial court. Not only today's Austrian National Library is a remnant of the court culture, but also the country's most important museums and theatres, which were opened to the public in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Moreover the Austrian National Library was until recently managed as a department of the Ministry of Education. This meant no autonomy in management, neither in personnel nor in financial questions. The employees were civil servants, the material expenses of the institution were completely financed by the ministry. In return all market revenues had to be delivered to the central authority. Bringing no benefit to the institution there was no incentive to develop strategies for additional income. An early attempt of partial autonomy in financial matters only led to an in-transparent asymmetrical organisation.

The Origins of the Book Adoption Campaign

Non regarding these obstacles the Austrian National Library started to developed an ambitious and – when it was invented – unique fundraising programme. It was launched in the year 1990 when a part of the historic book stock was in acute danger of falling apart and being lost forever. The decay of paper, vellum, binding and the leather covers called for urgent action, which could not be financed by the inflexible budgets of the ministry. A public outcry on the loss of national heritage marked the beginning of a the so called “book adoption campaign” (German: “Aktion Buchpatenschaft”). This initiative called the public to contribute to the conservation of the national memory: The idea was and still is to encourage private individuals to take over the restoration costs of at least a single book each, thus becoming its patron. In return the donor is to be mentioned in the restored book and a certificate of patronage is released. Originally designed as a temporary project of urgent action the programme became a permanent activity of the library. Up to now more 4.000 books and – later on – other objects found their patrons.

From the beginning the programme was not only targeted to private individuals, but also promoted to companies. Nevertheless the model is clearly distinguished from the library’s sponsoring activities and is still one of the few examples for corporate fundraising in Austria. The first enterprises approached by the library’s development department where those which somehow have to do with books – like publishers, bookshops and printers. The activities were soon expanded to other all other kinds of enterprises and organizations. Recently even public bodies – including schools or cultural institutions like the Salzburg Festival – joined in, a development which might be criticized as a kind of public cross-subsidizing.

Winning the donors needs an extensive effort in cultivation. The riches of the Austrian National Libraries – not always on display and extremely large in number – are little known to a broader public. What is true even for the highlights of the collection (who knows e.g. the Vienna Genesis, one of the most prominent handwritings in the world), the books at risk are completely unknown. So a major part of the effort in the campaign concentrates on disseminating information about the historic holdings and on creating awareness for the single collections which the endangered books and documents belong to. The most endangered holdings are the oldest ones like the Egyptian papyri, medieval handwritings or early prints, but surprisingly also books from the 19th century when low quality industrial paper was introduced.

These restoration problems show that communication must not only concentrate on the content but also on the media, i.e. the book as a tangible object. If only the content would count, digitalisation or microfilming instead of restoration might be the easier way, a strategy which is – for the moment – partly followed with historic newspapers in regular research use. But as a general rule also the media should be safeguarded the book being itself a physical monument of cultural values. It is often neglected that the value as a source of cultural history is also contained in the artistic making and the historic craftsmanship of the book. The book adoption campaign therefore concentrates its educational activities and publications in dispersing knowledge about the techniques, materials, the craft of historic bookbinding and the problems in restoration. Thanks to a cooperation with the multinational company Henkel the library is the technology leader in a paper restoration method in which not only single pages, but whole paper stacks can be stabilized in one step.

The positive results of the book adoption campaign were regularly presented in exhibitions of recently restored highlight objects in the state hall. This way of creating publicity with temporary shows is not unusual at the Austrian National Library as all exhibition activities have always been part of the public relations department. This reflects that public display – unlike in a museum and in contrary to collection, conservation and the classic library services – is not seen

as core task of the library. Still the display in the impressive baroque state hall gives the library a public cultural presence which goes beyond ordinary PR and marketing measures. So far three exhibitions – in 1993, 1997 and for the 10th anniversary of the campaign 2000 – took place and the accompanying catalogues update the information on the restoration activities. An appendix lists restored works and patrons, though apart so the concrete patronage stays anonymous.⁴

The publicity of exhibitions and publications is still limited to the quite small target group which also the book adoption campaign is addressed: These bibliophiles are over 40 years of age, have an above-average income 40% of them having an university degree. In order to reach also the general public via the mass media well known personalities were invited to participate as testimonials, among them Pope John Paul II, Michail Gorbachev or Martin Scorsese. In most of these cases the patronage was not actively sought by international celebrities and foreign politicians but offered by the inviting Austrian institutions. Soon no relevant state guest could escape becoming a book patron, a fact that might be due to the sheer physical neighbourhood of the National Library to the office of the Austrian Head of State, both in the former imperial palace. In this publicly promoted “donorships” it was tried to achieve a matching of certain books with obvious or supposed interests of the donors. Gorbachev was offered an old description of the Russian empire, the pope became patron of a medieval bible.

The Austrian National Library as a Modern Cultural Institution

The book adoption campaign initiated first public relation efforts of the Austrian National Library. Once on the stage of public discourse, the received attention was consequently used to improve the image of the institution, which until recently lagged behind the innovative competitors in the cultural sector. Furthermore the fundraising activity – born as an urgent measure to bridge a financial gap – also started to ferment the development of other functional systems which constitute a modern cultural organization, like corporate sponsoring, marketing and professional exhibition management. This proved also to be a useful preparation of the Austrian National Library for the transformation the whole Austrian cultural sector underwent.

Until the year 2000 the big cultural flagships of the state were managed as departments of the respective ministries and had no legal capacity to act. In the late 1990ies the disadvantage of this organizational setting became obvious, as operations had to be designed along the standards of a public administration rather than modern (cultural) management. The personnel was part of the ministry staff consisting of civil servants appointed for lifetime. Lack of flexibility made reorganizations almost impossible and had a negative impact on motivation as modern compensation and incentive systems could not be applied. Accordingly theatres, museums and also the National Library were an integral part of the state budget. This was far from providing financial transparency and did not allow any effective and flexible financial management. The duty to deliver revenues back to the ministry did not foster any innovative activities in regard to sponsoring or fund raising.⁵

These initiatives were organized in all kinds of parallel organizations like association or outsourced companies, later on the organizations got a kind of limited autonomy with partial legal capacity. This led to an asymmetric two tier management which outsourced profitable activities and kept the costly duties within the public structure. Also the book adoption campaign of the Austrian National Library was managed under this limited autonomy. The merits of this legal construction had its downside in further financial in-transparency: As no data about the actual revenues are available, no statements about the efficiency of the programme in its first years can be made.

The first institutions to get full autonomy were the four federal theatres (among them the Vienna State Opera), followed by the seven Austrian federal museums (among them the “Kunsthistorisches Museum”), which were reorganized as “scientific statutory corporations of public law” (German: *Wissenschaftliche Anstalt öffentlichen Rechts*). This new legal framework was created in order to avoid the institutions being organized as companies of commercial law. This was more a psychological move, nevertheless the museums now work similar to private limited companies. The legal framework was also applied to the Austrian National Library, which got its autonomy at the beginning of 2002. The Austrian National Library as an institution is now an entity with full legal capacity, though the ownership of the collections stays with the state.⁶

One of the first steps of the now autonomous organization was the adoption of a new mission statement, which contains the collection guideline and positions the National Library, as a centre of information and research, a service provider in the information society, the country's memory and a multilevel centre of education and culture (see appendix). Public tasks like conservation and research are to be continued whereas customer service should be strengthened, both with support of the latest technologies.

The reorganization also brought full autonomy in personnel questions, although it will take decades before the last public servant retires. Until then frictions between public and private employees might be a threat to necessary structural changes. In the field of financial management full autonomy is reached immediately. The only link to the state budget is a base subsidy of 20,6 million and from now on all income from service charges, sponsoring and fund raising is at the full disposal of the library.

The published profit and loss statement of the Austrian National Library for the first two years in autonomy is therefore structured as follows:

Table 1
The Austrian National Library's profit and loss statement
in the first two years of financial autonomy (thousands of Euros)⁷

	2003	2002
Base subsidy	20.602	20.602
Sales	942	900
Contributed income (sponsoring, fundraising)	1.523	900
Total income	23.067	22.402
Material expenses	0	-18
Personnel	-12.397	-12.424
Depreciation	-924	-787
Other expenses	-7.616	-7.169
Purchase of objects for the collection	-1.163	-1.024
Purchase literature	-1.076	-1.073
Expenses for bookbinding	-199	-209
Restoration/Materials	-667	-838
Advertisement/Exhibitions/Publications	-297	-385
Running costs	-2.625	-2.444
Other administrative expenses	-1.589	-1.196
Operative result	2.130	2.004
Financial result	166	155
EGT	2.296	2.159
Corporate taxes	0	-5
Profit of the Year	2.296	2.154
Appropriation to Profit Reserves	-2.296	-2.154
Balance sheet profit	0	0

The percentage of non public finance is comparatively low and lies at about 10,7%. The revenues of fundraising are included in the contributed income. They are not reported in an extra position but are estimated to be only about 2% of the total budget. The income of the associated "Friends of the Austrian National Library" as an independent body does not enter the accounts at all.

As mentioned above the low private contributions is due to the low percentage to the high percentage of public service. This disadvantage lies in the nature of a central library, but in all other fields the Austrian National Library tries to catch up with the standard of other cultural institutions. The development of private sponsoring and entrance fees is pushed by new offers

and the extension of the museum activities. Just at the moment the new and worldwide unique museum of historic globes is opened in a new location.

Fundraising Activities Today

The well proven book adoption campaign was taken over by the restructured library, though with new methods and objectives. Thanks to the newly obtained financial autonomy the immediate threat to the objects ceased to exist. The campaign is therefore converted into a subsidiary source of finance. This change is also reflected in the design of the programme. Originally the “price” for the patronage was made up from the actual restoration costs of a single book, the salvation of the object was thus assigned a *material value*. Following this rule an elaborate matching between the patron’s willingness to pay, his taste and an adequate object was necessary. Now the price of patronage is proportional to the estimated historic importance and prestige of the book. The future donor may select his object of desire from a list and pays a price starting at EUR 500,-. The rates are calculated to a assumptive *cultural value*, the actual restoration costs are not considered anymore. The income then enters a restoration fund which is managed flexibly according to needs and capacities.

Facing the still extensive cultivation and consultation efforts to win future patrons, membership rates of less than 500,- Euro are not seen to be efficient. In order to open alternative possibilities for lower contributions the “Gutenberg 3000 initiative” was launched. This new activity aims to protect the about 8000 early prints from the period of 1454 to 1500, the so called incunabula. The public is called to contribute to the purchase of acid free card boxes for 36,- Euro each. As a benefit the donor receives a facsimile page of a book and a CD-Rom of the Gutenberg Bible.

This shift from a concrete to a more idealistic support is also reflected in the public relations of the programme. The mission statement positions the library as a competence centre of modern knowledge conservation. Overstressing the danger for the objects, together with pictures of decay and destruction would therefore be irritating for the public. Such kind of bad news is therefore banned from the communications, as this would suggest that library is not able to protect the entrusted heritage. Consequently the campaign is not anymore promoted as urgent relief action, but more positively as an initiative for continuous public participation.

The book adoption campaign is not the only fundraising campaign at the Austrian National Library. In order to raise an amount of 300.000 Euro the brickstone campaign was launched, which contributes to financing the new globe museum situated in a baroque palais. Up to now the programme found just 17 donors – amongst them the friends’ association described below – which contributed about 52.000,- Euro.

The Association of the “Friends of the Austrian National Library” was founded as early as 1921 as a non-profit organisation uniting the benefactors of the library. The statutes define the objective of the association in supporting the Library intellectually and financially by helping to acquire and preserve objects of the collections, advancing its research and advocating the cause of the Library in public. Membership rate is 40,- Euro per year and there are discounts for associated members, students and library staff. The benefits enjoy free entrance at the museum collections and the state hall, are invited to openings and participate in exclusive extra events plus the Newsletter and a 15% discount on all publications. The advanced categories are the “Sustainers” paying at least 200,- Euro, the “patrons” paying 400,- Euro and the “donors” paying more than 7.500,- Euro.

Participation in the advanced categories is quite low, there are no “donors” at all and only 18 “patrons” and “sustainers” mentioned on the webpage. Moreover there are three categories of

corporate members ranging from 1.000,- to 5.000,- Euro for only 13 (!) corporate members. This low number of advanced memberships might be due to the bandwidth of membership rates and the humble special extras the higher level donors get. Apart from the benefits of the normal membership they consist only in a second free entrance to the museum areas, free entrance to the reading areas (normal price 10,- Euro) an invitation to the annual reception and the mentioning on the web page.

At the moment the fundraising programmes seem to be too diverse, especially when related to the low number of participants. On the first look the number of 4000 book patrons looks impressive, but these donors were accumulated over 15 years. The total amount of money raised annually seems to be quite humble and might hardly surpass the internal expenses for the development department.

A step to higher efficiency would be the integration of the programmes. The cultivation effort of the book adoption campaign is quite high, but the donors are only solicited once and have no other benefit but the dedication in the book. It would therefore make sense to offer a one year “sustainer” membership together with the book patronage. This benefit represents a value of 200,- Euro, but it is not likely anyway that a newly won patron could be solicited for a second time in the same year. For next year’s membership rate he would not have to be approached for another time, but he himself would actively have to refuse the prolongation of his membership. The same strategy could be adopted combining the Gutenberg 3000 initiative with an ordinary membership. In this respect the book adoption campaign could be remodelled as a teaser for sustainable membership relations. Campaigns for special projects may be continued, as long as they are integrated with the continuing programmes. Even though an American level of public penetration is out of reach, a noticeable rise in the number of higher level members would also have a positive impact on the attractiveness of the programmes without yet losing its exclusivity.

The Austrian National library claims to be the first historic library to have introduced a book patronage programme. There is no proof for that, but in the meanwhile similar fundraising programmes can be found in several historic libraries in mainly in Germany e.g. the state library of Bavaria or the university libraries of Kiel, Düsseldorf and Lübeck. The rising demand for restoration services being created by these initiatives, was soon realized by specialized suppliers: By now private companies in the field of book and paper restoration consult libraries in creating similar patronage programmes.

Conclusion

Despite its professional management the programme does not seem to yield relevant incomes, its actual return is not even stated in an own category of the annual report. Amongst the market revenues of the library – which constitute only 10,7 % of the total finance – commercial licensing of content as well as renting venues for all kind of events might be much more profitable. Therefore the revenue from fundraising activities have to be estimated at just 2% of the total budget. This contribution might even be equalled by internal administrative costs, which neither can be directly identified. Nevertheless the layout of the programme as an effort for the conservation of cultural heritage contributes to a positive image of the institution. This effort leads to involvement of the public in the library, but also the library gets involved in society. On the more pragmatic side, the sheer attempt of raising private money makes the institution the darling at its main financier, the Ministry of Education and Culture. Their benevolence is in fact the only crucial factor for the finance of the institution.

In the given case the net revenue might be close to zero and the communicative aspects are dominant. Though not admitted inside the organisation fundraising is obviously reduced to a self-financed and therefore cheap, but nevertheless effective public relations and marketing measure.

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Notes

¹ For general strategies cf. Brooks Hopkins, K. and C. Stolper Friedman ²1997. *Successful Fundraising for Arts and Cultural Organizations*. Westport, CT: Oryx Press

² Kubadinow, I. 2004, *The Austrian National Library*, Munich: Prestel, p. 12 ff.

³ Kubadinow, I. 2004, p. 28/29.

⁴ Strassnig-Bacher, M. R., (ed.) 1993. *Restaurierte Buchschätze der Nationalbibliothek im Prunksaal. „Aktion Buchpatenschaft“*. Vienna: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

Strassnig-Bacher, M. R., H. Harauer (eds.) 1997. *Restaurierte Musikschätze der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek durch die Aktion Buchpatenschaft*. Vienna: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

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⁵ Reder C. 1991, „Dienstleistungsstudie. Studie über resonanz- und einnahmensteigernde privatwirtschaftliche Dienstleistungen des österreichischen Museums für angewandte Kunst.“ Ein Museum im Aufbruch. *Manuskripte des MAK vol. 2*, Vienna: Museum für angewandte Kunst, p. 81.

⁶ About the autonomous status of the Austrian Federal Museums and other cultural institutions see: Heskia, T. 2001, *Organisationaler Wandel im öffentlichen Kulturbetrieb. Der Prozess der Ausgliederung der Österreichischen Bundesmuseen am Beispiel von Kunsthistorischem Museum und MAK*, Vienna, unpublished Master Thesis.

⁷ data: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ed.) 2003, *Annual Reports*, Vienna: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

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Appendix

The Mission statement of the Austrian National Library:

As the main scientific library of the Republic of Austria, the Austrian National Library (ANL) can look back on a history rich in tradition dating to the 14th century. It is a living bridge between the rich heritage of the past and the claims of a modern informed society oriented toward the future. The ANL regards itself as

- a centre of information and research set up to provide services;
- the country's excellent bank of memories;
- a multilevel centre of education and culture.
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As an information centre for providing services, the ANL offers its visitors access to and professionally competent advice on its own holdings (over seven million objects), and links to international databases as well. In addition it accepts research commissions and consults documentation centres and services, e.g., on literature devoted specifically to women. Since the beginning of the digital age a constantly growing portion of the service is carried out through the homepages of the ANL.

Because of a requirement of the Austrian Media Law the ANL is the only library in the country that receives a copy of every publication appearing in Austria, including university theses and products of the electronic media. Those obligatory items are simultaneously the basis on which the Austrian Bibliography is published. In addition to that the Library systematically chooses and collects literature from foreign countries that specifically refer to Austria, and literature on the humanities that is of particular relevance for our collections.

In its ten collections the ANL, as the heir to the Habsburg Imperial Court Library, conserves an important part of the world's written cultural heritage and feels a duty to guard that permanently. Of special international significance are the holdings of manuscripts from Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the modern era, originating in the most varied cultural areas; add to that the music texts and the incunabula and old prints, historical maps, portraits and other pictorial documents, posters, ex-libris and pamphlets. No less important are the literary estates of Austrian authors. Three museums that are a part of the Library present the public with objects of the world's greatest papyrus collection, of a unique holding of historic globes of the earth, and an impressive collection on the international language Esperanto.

The baroque Hall of State, built in 1723-1726 according to the design of Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach, is one of the world's most imposing library buildings and is reminiscent of the Imperial Library.

All of the collections are places of lively scientific research carried out in close contact with other scientific research institutes (partly on the basis of projects supported by the EU).

The essential basis of that work is consistent formal gathering of the collection items that are constantly being supplemented. A particular challenge is that of gradually presenting the holdings digitally.

It is a part of the ANL's aim to open itself up to as broad a circle of interested clients as possible. That goal is fulfilled in various ways, such as regular exhibitions to make known the holdings and - partly in collaboration with other cultural and educational institutes - such events as readings, book presentations, symposia and concerts. With the entire range of these and its other activities the ANL not only fulfils its legal task of educating, but also expresses its image of itself as a many-sided and multi-cultural centre of education and culture.

We, the staff of the Austrian National Library, take care to provide a prompt and accurate fulfilment of our work assignments "internally and externally". Professionally competent and pleasant treatment of our visitors from every part of the world is something we take for granted. We are happy to escort our visitors through a fascinating library world in which an atmosphere rich in history, modern library architecture, holdings that speak of the past and the present, and the latest technology create a vital symbiosis.

This paper presents a case study of the National Library Board of Singapore, in playing a vital role to facilitate the realisation of a long-term key national program, The Singapore Memory (SM) Project. SM embraces the attributes of the Library 2.0 environment to enable the nation's memory to be collected, organised, preserved, discovered, researched, augmented and created. With the acquisition and creation of scholarly communication platforms/infrastructure by major commercial entities, the balance of influence continues to shift. The ACRL/SPARC Forum at the 2018 ALA Midwinter Meeting brought together library stakeholders for a conversation about how the library community can reassert its influence to shape the open access publishing landscape. Panelists focused on Library Fundraising – Contribution to Finance or Mere Communication? A Case Study of the Austrian National Library. Thomas Heskia, Lecturer International Centre of Culture and Management, Salzburg, and University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten, Austria. Thomas Heskia studied Trade & Commerce and Art History in Vienna complemented by postgraduate studies in Arts Management in Salzburg, Rome and Chicago and is now PhD candidate at Erasmus University, Rotterdam. The Austrian National Library is Austria's central library, which also preserves great number of historic – partly UNESCO-listed – special collections ranging from Egyptian papyri and medieval handwritings to early globes and historic photographs.