



# A LIBRARY FOR THE CENTURIES

When Ros Dorsman travels, she likes to visit libraries. Ros says she is curious about how others present our profession and library spaces have internet connections and people who are willing to help you decipher yet another keyboard configuration.

I met Karin Kleiber, Team Leader of the Austrian National Bibliography at the 2008 IFLA Conference in Quebec City. When I visited Vienna in 2010, she offered to organise a behind-the-scenes visit to the Austrian National Library with her colleague Wolf Dieter Lang, who turned out to be a knowledgeable, courteous and amusing tour guide.

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The Austrian National Library ([www.onb.ac.at](http://www.onb.ac.at)) has its origins in the court libraries which had their beginnings in medieval Europe. The splendid Baroque building was constructed between 1723 and 1726, with an extensive renovation and modernisation completed in 2004. The conservation issues for this institution inevitably include maintaining historic buildings as well as their unique collections plus the challenges to provide modern library services to the citizens and scholars of Vienna and elsewhere. Its ten collections have more than eight million items, of which around 3.5 million are in a print format.

While I was waiting for my guide, there was a steady stream of library clients heading for the reading rooms turnstile and swiping their library card to gain entrance. According to the information brochure, there is a charge for the annual membership card (€10) or for a day ticket (€1,50). Users must be over 15 years and have a photo ID card. This is obviously very different from the open access for our state libraries. Increasingly, their clients too want to have convenient computer access. Most of the people using main reading areas had their laptop with them although the view into the adjoining Burggarten would be pretty distracting.

It was a privilege to see the rare collections housed in the subterranean stacks, connected by a bewildering network of corridors, stairwells and lifts. I had a few 'Kommisar Rex' moments when I expected to see Rex & Co. emerge from one of the curved corridors.

As we walked through the building, we talked about the particular challenges of managing competing demands on the collections and services.

These fragile collections require expensive specialist conservation and preservation skills to deal with books from the 15th century, political broadsheets and manifestos from the 1848 revolutions, objects, sound recordings and more. They too are investigating how best to manage current online content and digitally created information which falls within their collecting policy. Newspapers and other documents are being digitised and made available online with over five million pages on view at [anno.onb.ac.at](http://anno.onb.ac.at). (Wolf Dieter did look a bit startled when I spoke about how users of Trove could correct digitisation errors in some of our online newspapers.)

The State Hall (Prunksaal) houses the *Bibliotheca Eugeniana*, comprising 15,000 volumes which originally belonged to the collection of Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736). At his death, the collection was valued at over 150,000 guilders and was used by his niece, Victoria of Savoy, to bargain for an annual pension. This collection also contains engravings, miniatures, drawings and manuscripts. The State Hall now holds about 200,000 volumes in beautiful wooden bookcases typical of the Baroque 'universal library', has superb ceiling frescoes completed in 1730 and changing exhibitions of the library's treasures.

Other collections managed by the Austrian National Library include the unique Globe Museum with impressive maps from 1536 to 1850 and the Papyrus Museum. Devotees of Star Trek might like to go to the Department of Planned Languages and Esperanto Museum where you can see an edition of Hamlet in Klingon or brush up on some Elvish.

When preparing for a trip, I now pack a small amount of Central West Libraries and ALIA merchandise so I may leave a little gift at any libraries I visit. I think that I will also carry a card with "I am a librarian from Australia and would like to visit your library" in a variety of languages and see where it takes me next time.

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A book of zodiac signs, Salzburg c.818, State Hall, Austrian National Library