

# Archival Review: A showcase of the German Historical Knowledge Landscape – The Library of the German Historical Institute (GHI) Warsaw

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The library, the focus of this article, is nestled in an ancient palace, a testament to the rich history of Warsaw. Situated on a bustling street, home to numerous embassies, the building itself is a well-known landmark. Its extensive renovation in the late 1990s earned it a prestigious award from the Office for the Protection of Monuments of the Republic of Poland in 1999, further cementing its historical importance. The library's reading room, adorned with high windows, double doors, a fireplace, and a grand chandelier, transports readers to a bygone era, setting the stage for immersive reading and research. What hidden treasures lie within these hallowed halls?

The institution, intricately linked with the German Historical Institute in Warsaw, stands as a distinct entity among its counterparts in Rome, Paris, London, and Washington. It was born out of a pivotal historical moment, founded in the aftermath of the peaceful revolutions of 1989/1990 with the endorsement of the German Chancellor and the Polish Prime Minister. The dedicated founding team embarked on their mission in May 1993, and the institute's library opened its doors to its first users in 1995, heralding a new era in historical research.



The Institute's mission is to conduct cross-epochal academic research into the history of Poland-Lithuania and its interrelationships in a European and trans-regional context. However, its role extends beyond research. The Institute is a catalyst for historical discourse, both nationally and internationally, by disseminating information and findings from Germany and the host country. The library, a vital tool in this knowledge transfer, plays a pivotal role in fostering intellectual exchange and promoting a deeper understanding of history.

The DHI Warsaw library is a specialized academic and reference library. Its collection spans the history of Germany and Poland, the history of German-Polish relations in a European and international context, and the history of Eastern European Jews. Complementing these specialized

areas, the library also houses general historical, humanities, and social science literature. This diverse collection not only caters to the needs of specific research areas but also serves the local community. Since 2009, the library has primarily acquired literature in Western European languages, fulfilling a ‘complementary function’ to the Polish libraries. The institute library is a testament to the breadth and depth of the German historical knowledge landscape.

A unique feature of the collection is the inclusion of items from the private libraries of various well-known historians. These include, for example, the private library of Gotthold Rhode, which was acquired in October 1995. Gotthold Rhode (1916–



1990) was one of the most influential German historians of Eastern Europe and Poland. His collection focuses on works on the history of Germans in East Central Europe, Polish publications from 1945 to 1990, and numerous now-unknown publications on German-Polish relations during that period.

A short time later, around 1000 titles were acquired from the private library of the Polish medievalist Benedikt Zientara (1928–1983). The library received further old holdings from the estates of the constitutional law expert Theodor Eschenburg (1905–1999) and the Polish historian Aleksander Gieysztor (1916–1999).

The collection currently comprises 100,110 print and online media units, including 326 current journals. The library is open not only to the Institute's academic staff, visiting academics, and scholarship holders but also to external users.

The acquisition strategy is primarily determined by the Institute's researchers. At the same time, care is taken to acquire library-specific literature and close specific content gaps to continue building up the collection following the collection profile systematically. The library also obtains numerous bibliographic and full-text databases, electronic journals/newspapers and their archives, and electronic books to ensure the digital information supply to its users. There has been a broadly consistent switch to electronic journals in recent years. As part of the Max Weber Consortium, numerous series have also been converted to a joint online subscription.

Since 2015, English-language e-books have accounted for many newly acquired English-language specialist books. Thanks to joint acquisitions with other libraries of the Foundation and its licenses, the DHI Library offers access to the content of numerous electronic journals from renowned publishers such as Cambridge, de Gruyter, Sage, and Wiley. Although many Polish academic libraries now have access to international electronic journals, the Institute Library can still offer numerous specific periodicals unavailable in Poland.

Since December 2014, the library has had a new OPAC based on a VuFind discovery system (<<http://vufind.dhi.waw.pl/vufind/>>). This catalog offers a user-friendly interface and functions that make it possible, for example, to organize and comment on literature yourself. It can be accessed in German, English, and Polish. The library's holdings are also listed in the Electronic Journals Library (EZB) and the Database

Information System (DBIS). The library's holdings can also be found on World Cat: <<https://search.worldcat.org/>>.

Unfortunately, the World Cat is still relatively rarely used by Polish users. Polish readers traditionally use a country-specific catalog that summarizes the holdings of the country's academic libraries <<http://katalog.nukat.edu.pl/>>. This catalog is based on its incompatible system. At present, however, the continued funding of this catalog is not secured. For this reason, no decision can currently be made as to how the Institute Library's holdings can be made even more visible to Polish readers.

The library cooperates with other academic libraries in Warsaw, particularly with the Library of the Historical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the University Library, and the Library of the Jewish Historical Institute. Corporate lending also works for these partners.



In recent years, the DHI library has started cooperating with the digital library Polona of the National Library of Poland (<<https://polona.pl/>>).

Polona presents digital collections of the National Library and cooperating libraries. Initially, the DHI placed two publications (manuscript and print) not protected by copyright in Polona. These publications were scanned at the readers' request and placed in the public domain. More will follow.

The scientists at the Institute benefit most from the library. They can order research literature within certain limits and use it thoroughly for their projects. The Institute's numerous scholarship holders also benefit significantly from the



specific features of the collections. The scientific interns who come for a few months also help greatly. Within the internship program, 50% of the time is dedicated to their research. As a rule, the interns, mainly history students, begin to find and research their Bachelor's or Master's topics during this period. In this situation, staying in this library usually proves to be an incredible stroke of luck as the students can draw on the full range of resources and consult with the institute's academics. Quite a few interns return to the DHI as scholarship holders, i.e. in the doctoral phase.

The new acquisitions of the e-books are presented on the Institute's website with the digital pinboard 'Padlet'. The library is creating its Facebook page to communicate more closely with students using this prevalent medium in Poland. The library is open to external visitors for reference use. It is open five days a week. Home lending is not possible. Use is free of charge. The reading room on the first floor of Palais Karnicki has computer workstations for catalog research and the use of digital resources, as well as twenty reading places, some of which are equipped with connection options for your notebook. Copies, scans, and printouts can be made for a fee.