

**“There once was a young man
who left home in order to buy lots of books,
and even as an old man he hadn’t got any wiser
and still diligently kept buying them ...”**

The History of a Library
and the Personal Reflections of a Collector

This rather fairy-tale title surely isn’t entirely wide of the mark, as it can only have been a good (?) fairy who so comprehensively and miraculously fulfilled my wish – already evident at a precocious age – for a rich bounty of books. But will she lay claim to my soul as recompense? Indeed, has she perchance taken possession of it already?

It was not a fairy but rather my mother who once told me that, as a two-to four-year-old in the days before television, I was most easily kept quiet by the provision of a few books, which I apparently proceeded to leaf through from cover to cover and back again for hours on end. I would have been still happier scribbling in them, but my father – a great bibliophile – knew how to thwart the urge.

As a child I was already very fond of reading, and today I can still hear my father’s dictum that one should borrow novels from public libraries. After all, one reads them only once. I actually followed this dictum for many years, until it became clear to me that great world literature for the most part holds far more enduring treasures than scholarly works of non-fiction.

In my thirteenth or fourteenth year I began to consciously keep books and take pleasure in the growing pile (I shan’t yet speak of ‘collecting’). That included my first ‘esoteric’ books. There were works on Tibet and India as well as yoga. In an interview accessible on the internet I have already described the deep impression Lobsang Rampa’s *The Third Eye* made upon me at the age of eleven or twelve. It was not until some years later that I was touched by the truly decisive Far Eastern influence; it came from Ramana Maharshi, whose persistent ‘I’ question has me in its thrall to this day.

Nevertheless, it soon became clear to me that most books on esoteric experiences owed more to fantasy than to anything the authors had actually lived through themselves. This contributed to the fact that I (often unfairly) laid Theosophical and Anthroposophical works to one side, and preferred instead to occu-

py myself with Eugen Herrigel, Graf Dürckheim, Alan Watts and D. T. Suzuki; in their wake came Carl Gustav Jung and Mircea Eliade, who promised something altogether more ‘authentic’. I also read Sigmund Freud because every young man is intrigued by sexual questions.

As a counterpoint I devoured self-help books with just as much gusto, particularly those which allowed me to dream of affluence: Napoleon Hill, Dale Carnegie, etc., but also the analyses of Peter F. Drucker, to whom I am much indebted. My book purchases proceeded in accordance with this predilection, to which must be added books on magic (initially it was surely an ‘esoteric’ version of the American dream of the self-made man). I recall the first works were those of H.E. Douval (Herbert Doehren). In the German-speaking world of the time my pursuit was aided by a publisher at Freiburg im Breisgau, Hermann Bauer Verlag, which regularly sent out catalogues on esoteric books, and which I soon visited in order to rummage through its in-store offering. In the English-speaking world back then it was Thorson’s Publishers, which was able to deliver many works on magic and modern witchcraft.

As one might expect, when I first travelled to London at the age of nineteen I immediately discovered Watkins Bookshop near Trafalgar Square. Subsequently I lingered there for days on end. For two months beforehand I had been working in the hotel business on the beautiful island of Jersey, where I pocketed a good number of tips. Thus I not only rummaged, I bought as well – indeed, I bought so much that there wasn’t enough money left over for food. However, my haunts in those days were either hippy communes or with the Children of God and the Hare Krishna devotees, so instead of nourishing meals I treated myself to Aleister Crowley first editions, which could still sometimes be had for less than ten pounds in small bookshops. Henceforth I always carried the books I had acquired with me. Yes, true bibliophily is also a physical activity. Thus the foundations of my collection were laid.

First published in 1967, the *Experimentalmagie* of Dr. Klingsor (Prof. Dr. Adolf Hemberger) kindled in me a tremendous yearning for magical orders and the arcane. It was, I believe, the first book in which I studied the bibliography with the same avidity as the actual text. Despite my university studies, at that time I was already engaged in all kinds of paid employment; as a result I had money at my disposal, and so I systematically attempted to acquire all the books I found cited there (as yet unaided by the internet, of course). Prof. Hemberger personally assisted me in this endeavour by naming acquaintances from the most diverse magical orders who were willing to sell to me.

Through Prof. Hemberger I also got to know other important book collectors. First and foremost I must mention privy counsellor Karl Worel, who had around 5000 esoterica on his bookshelves right in my own hometown, including the rarest alchemical texts. Still today I have in my safe-keeping his handwritten diaries

with numerous alchemical experiments. Without doubt, Worel decisively influenced me. He was already around eighty years old when I first met him; I was impressed not only by his precious books, but still more by the fact people constantly visited him. Their purpose was to speak with him concerning his studies, and in so doing hold one or another rare book in their hands. Through my esoteric interests (which were still uncommon at that time) I had already made the acquaintance of other older people, who were exceedingly grateful to receive visits from interested youngsters. Not so Worel: I could only visit him once a week, for perhaps two hours at a time. He simply had too much to do and too many visitors. He surely didn't suffer from the slightest trace of loneliness in his old age, nor from a shortage of significant younger (and hence invigorating) acquaintances. Moreover, because he readily wrote to well-known authors and collectors as well as magical orders in the German-speaking lands, he had a lively exchange with such people. Back then it was already clear to me: to own an important library is to possess an antidote to the frustrations of aging.

This fact was still more evident in the case of Oskar Schlag, whose excellent esoteric collection in Zurich is today part of the Zürcher Universitätsbibliothek. Initially it may well have been difficult for him as a German exile to establish connections in Switzerland. Yet he found them all the same: members of rich families, frequently female, who bestowed upon him gifts – at times munificent – for the improvement of his wonderful book, orientalia and art collection. For over twenty years I met him regularly in his house for conversations about books; I learnt a great deal from him, and also bought from him (his enduring rationale was that he needed money for his travels). But Schlag had still another trump up his sleeve: he led a magical order, which of course made him particularly attractive. I didn't sense he suffered from any of those frustrations of aging, in any case.

As in the case of Schlag, I also got to know Ellic Howe through Prof. Hemberger. Howe was always very realistic (i. e. disillusioning) whenever he spoke of magical societies, particularly the Golden Dawn. At his home I once had the pleasure of marvelling at – and even handling – original magical garments and other artefacts from the famous order.

I was able to inspect another bounteous esoteric library at the Swiss O.T.O. in Stein/Appenzell. There it was Frau Borgert, Frau Aeschbach and also Hermann Metzger himself who allowed me to delve into and peruse the order's large collection. I still clearly remember how warmly Metzger recommended Hanns Heinz Ewers' *Alraune* to me. Besides Crowley I read a great deal there from the workshop of the Fraternitas Saturni, whose then leading members I had already personally met through Prof. Hemberger. I was even invited to put the entire O.T.O. library in order a year later, but despite my enthusiasm this sadly didn't come to pass. Today the collection is housed in the Collectio Magica et Occulta of the Kantonsbibliothek Appenzell Ausserrhoden in Trogen.

The works of Dr. Henri Birven were essential reading for me. His lucid writing style stood in stark contrast to his overbearing personality, at least according to those who knew him. At any rate, through him I became better acquainted with French occultism (Lévi, Papus, etc.), which Prof. Hemberger had already recommended to me. He also led me to Julius Evola, and thereby indirectly to other representatives of the 'Italian esoteric school' (which remains for me one of the most interesting and profound esoteric schools worldwide) such as Giuliano Kremmerz, Arturo Reghini and Massimo Scaligero – and also to Tommaso Palamidessi. In exactly the same way – that is, via this Italian detour – I came upon René Guénon and the 'traditionalist school' (Schuon, Nasr, Coomaraswamy, and later Küry and Ziegler in the German-speaking world). Because I always seemed to find money for books my collection grew accordingly, and the 'integral tradition' still forms one of its focal points today.

Naturally my salary then as an employee in a large export company (I had to finance my university studies myself) was only enough for the chief works of all these authors. The luxury of being able to buy 'all' the works of my favourite authors in order to 'completely' possess them was only later accorded to me, as I continued independently in the business I had learnt as an employee of a big company. I lived in Milan during my first years of self-employment, and while there laid the foundation of my extensive collection of Italian writings.

Then came my stay in Switzerland, where Fortuna granted me the acquaintance of two outstanding (if somewhat different) business partners; rather than being divided into thirds, my profits were tripled by the resulting synergy. My book-buying corresponded precisely to the new financial situation. Business constantly led me around the world, and hence in the course of my many years of travelling I bought not only in London from Watkins, but also from Weiser in New York, from the Librairie du Graal in Paris, from the Libreria delle Meraviglie in Rome and from the Caves Book Shop in Taipei (a note of explanation: in my youth Taiwan still hadn't signed the conventions for the protection of copyright, and there one could procure the most expensive multi-volume scholarly works – Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China*, for example – in acceptable 'pirate' editions at favourable prices).

In those days there were still a great number of specialty mail-order companies for occult literature. First and foremost I must mention a friend and expert on esotericism, Joscelyn Godwin. Few people know that although he was active as an antiquarian bookseller for only a few years (several of the books I bought from him proudly carry his ex-libris), he nevertheless issued some very interesting catalogues. Then there is Todd Pratum, who sold rare books to me for many years. J.D. Holmes, who still distributes catalogues today, likewise aided me on my quest for special titles. In England it was Robert Gilbert in Bristol for higher quality books and Helios Book Services for the popular titles, as well as

Magis Books and Chthonios; on the other hand, Quaritch's famous antiquarian bookshop was almost always too expensive for me. In Holland the preeminent supplier was of course W.N. 'Nick' Schors' Boekhandel Arcanum, where I dare say I did most of my shopping. I will speak in greater detail about Nick Schors in due course.

There were always a great number of French esoteric mail-order catalogues: La Table d'Émeraude and Librairie du Graal, for instance, and later Florence de Chastenay, Dervy and Intersigne. In Italy my first specialist supplier was Laszlo Toth of Arché, who in the meantime has set up his headquarters in Paris. Back then his bookshop was located near Milan Cathedral. The esoteric books to be found there were for the most part exceptional – in the middle of the 1980's, for example, there were the previously secret sex-magical writings of Giuliano Kremmerz in the smallest of print runs at crazy prices. Then works necessary for my book on Eranos were procured for me by Toth in France, where his laudable publishing house Edizioni Arché (Edidit in Paris) still produces extraordinary but equally controversial rarities today.

Later Bruno Bertozzi with his Edizioni Phenix in Genoa became important for me. Bertozzi had begun in 1978 with reproductions of selected books on alchemy and Hermeticism in small print runs. He had collected the originals himself. As interest in these difficult texts was rather modest, he simultaneously offered new releases as well as antiquarian books in Italian and French, whereby he was always ready to maintain a certain standard of quality. As a customer of his mail-order bookshop I received many a rare book, above all in the subject area of Giuliano Kremmerz. In exceptional cases he offered original documents. His specialist service also consisted in offering hectographed limited editions of old and extremely rare books and manuscripts. Scarce reading matter was also provided by the Primordia bookshop in Milan under Dario Spada, as well as by Vittorio Fincati, who dealt in a very special field.

My most important German book supplier was undoubtedly Wolfgang Kistemann, whose wonderful catalogues were so rich in bibliographic references. Then there was Volker Lechler, whom I now consider to be the most important author on the modern German history of occultism. In later years there was also Antiquariat Lange, which to the best of my knowledge is the last one to produce printed occult book catalogues in Germany. Smaller dealers were Antiquariat Mühlen, J. Reinhardt, Scheppler & Müller, Lotos Versand, Rainer Feucht and Scholz-Okkult.

I purchased regularly from these antiquarian booksellers over many years. In addition there were individual auction houses – the most important auction in the field of alchemy and occultism in Germany took place in autumn of 1998 at Zisska und Kistner in Munich. Half the world gathered there and incredibly high prices were fetched.

All these activities also spawned my very extensive collection of occult antiquarian booksellers' catalogues, which I supplemented as well as possible with special additional purchases of particularly important older catalogues (e.g. Rosenthal). But there were also completely normal antiquarian booksellers which offered esoteric works for sale from time to time.

I should not neglect to mention that, at the end of the 1970's, I was a partner in one of the most important esoteric publishing houses of the time in the German-speaking lands, namely Ansata-Verlag in Switzerland. My partner Paul A. Zemp – who unfortunately died far too young – initially also compiled occult mail-order catalogues; he had a comprehensive bibliographic knowledge from which I naturally profited. In addition he knew all the essential German, English, American, French and Italian publishers in the field of esotericism, who offered him their texts in the hope he would also bring them onto the German market. After a few years I got to know them all as well – the annual Frankfurt Book Fair was an ideal meeting-place – and this gave me the immense advantage that I only had to say a certain book interested me in order to receive it promptly in the post. Thus friendships also came into being which persist to this day – with Gianni Canonico of Edizioni Mediterranee, for example, or Ehud Sperling from Inner Traditions. Thanks to the Frankfurt Book Fair custom of lugging as few as possible of one's own display books back home, I easily managed to pick up books at a 50% discount, even from publishers with whom I was totally unfamiliar. My partner Zemp, who always travelled with a car, would then bring some of them back to Switzerland for me.

Nevertheless, as a general principle the collection developed from my reading, for footnotes and bibliographies always exercised an immense fascination over me. A classic example is Julius Evola, who dealt with so many fields of knowledge that I was likewise 'forced' to explore them myself. These stretched from art (Futurism and Dada), philosophy (Plato, Pythagoras, Schelling, Fichte, French Personalism, Nietzsche, existentialism) and the old religions (Rome, Mithras, Gnosis) to alchemy, the grail, Freemasonry, spiritism, Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Tantrism, magic, sexuality, politics, fascism and racial theories. Because I was always convinced – and remain so today – that I 'must' obtain as many divergent testimonies as possible in every field, I can thank Evola alone for the purchase of around two or three thousand books. I bought specialised publications by and about Evola (autographic letters and so on) above all from Renato del Ponte, the publisher of the Evolian magazine *Arthos* and the long-standing director of the Centro Studi Evoliani, who moreover supplied me with small Evola-influenced periodicals for a number of decades. Indeed, this was pretty much a necessity given that I wrote several pieces on and about Evola myself, in addition to translating some of his writings. When one takes on such a controversial author, one should at least be well informed about him. Hence

it is particularly satisfying that many of my Evola articles have been translated into Italian.

Nevertheless, in the case of my book on Eranos the circumstances were exactly the opposite. It was the many books I owned by Rudolf Otto, Walter F. Otto, Karl Kerényi, Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem, Joseph Campbell, Henry Corbin, etc. that led me to the Eranos conferences in the first place, for it only became clear to me relatively late in the piece that all my ‘intellectual heroes’ had visited these conferences. Only after this ‘discovery’ did I attempt to follow the Eranos trail myself, and as you might expect, along the way I stumbled upon other authors who held me similarly spellbound.

However, in order to acquire truly rare works it is necessary to have personal contacts with specialist antiquarian booksellers – those who practice so-called book-hunting, i.e. actively searching for books at other antiquarian booksellers and at auctions or deceased estates. The long-standing acquaintance between client and bookseller (who must be familiar with the collection concerned, and sometimes also receives lists of sought-after books from his clients) enables the book hunter to make offers which are precisely tailored to the client. For me the three most important ‘book hunters’ were Todd Pratum, Wolfgang Kistemann and Nick Schors, whom I may also speak of as friends. It goes without saying that they all had particularly comprehensive bibliographic knowledge.

Todd Pratum began in San Francisco in 1981 and was subsequently stationed in Healdsburg, California, where in 2000 he encountered a financial impasse which forced his business to close. Today he operates from Oakland. Pratum was always prepared to seek out predominantly English-language books at fair prices for me, and he also procured specialised literature for my first Eranos book. Time and again he had entire book collections and estates in his commission, and because I trusted him I would advance him often sizeable sums of money. In return I received the rarest of works at really good prices. Over the years he offered me the book collection from the estate of the alchemist Leonard F. Pembroke, as well as Golden Dawn material and C. G. Jung’s rare hectographed *Seminar Notes* from the 1930’s, which Mary Foote had transcribed and bound.

Wolfgang Kistemann began offering books for sale in 1987. The first catalogue was also sent to Ansata-Verlag, where I was a partner, and hence it came to my attention very quickly. A long ‘love affair’ ensued, for Kistemann always took the trouble to make the bibliographic comments on his range of books as precise and thorough as possible. That’s liable to delight every bibliophile. His skill increased with almost every new catalogue, and hence they are sought after by collectors and aficionados alike. I believe I am justified in asserting that he produced the most meticulous occult sales catalogues to be found anywhere in the world. Unsurprisingly, the complete catalogue collection constitutes an important component of my library. One only needed to scan them to have every

description instantly at one's fingertips on the computer. He searched unceasingly for additions to the collections of his best clients. I can thank him for a particularly large amount of material from the (original) Illuminati and Gold- und Rosenkreuzer, as well as the Ariosophists. Nevertheless, he was just as much concerned with manuscripts and periodicals. Because he probably supplied all of the foremost collectors (that includes Umberto Eco), he also came to acquire their duplicate works or even their estates: thus he procured the manuscript holdings of Prof. Hemberger for me, as well as the collection of Ekkehard Hieronimus, the expert on Lanz von Liebenfels. Unfortunately Kistemann has long since ceased to make such exceptional offers, and now only sells over the internet the kind of merchandise prevalent elsewhere there. Apparently he would rather keep the really beautiful items – which he doubtless still possesses – all to himself. Like all exceptional antiquarian booksellers, he too is deeply in love with his subject matter.

The most colourful and quite probably the most important book hunter in Europe in the field of occultism was undoubtedly W. N. 'Nick' Schors of Amsterdam (Boekhandel Arcanum), who also procured books for people such as Gershom Scholem, C.G. Jung, Oskar Schlag, Antoine Faivre and Joseph Ritman (Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica). In his youth he had begun his career as a brothel director; he subsequently became one of the principal dealers in rare erotica, counting all devotees of this literary genre among his clients, from politicians to the highest aristocratic circles. Countless stories from his career in this connection are told in his book *Memoiren eines Erotica-Händlers*, authored under the pseudonym Armand Coppens. 'This book is one of the most perplexing ever written', it says in the dust-jacket text from Gala Verlag, Hamburg, where the work was published in 1970. His extraordinary expertise in this field is apparent from his foreword to a reprint of the famous *Cataloge du Cabinet secret du Prince G****, which tellingly expounds upon 'l'amour, les femmes et le mariage'.

It was only thereafter that he began to specialise in occult literature. One couldn't fail to admire his comprehensive knowledge, and I often bought a valuable book that I knew absolutely nothing about from him simply because he had recommended it. I never regretted it. He travelled the world visiting fairs, auctions as well as private collectors, buying the most beautiful exemplars he could find. As a general rule his books were always in first-class condition. Thus he earned a reputation as an antiquarian bookseller who, although he was not cheap, was nevertheless exceptionally quality-conscious. He too initially issued smaller catalogues and subsequently interspersed them with special catalogues dedicated to exceptional rarities.

The major 'turning-point' in my book acquisition career occurred in 1989, when I sold off my shares in fourteen companies across thirteen countries and could subsequently afford rarissima. It may well have been a *kairos*, as it was just

at that point in time that Schors informed me he was thinking of giving up his dealership after his then third (?) heart attack. He wanted to sell his stock – with which I was roughly acquainted from my visits to Amsterdam – and only retain one hundred of his favourite books. Accordingly, during two trips to Amsterdam we went together through his books; their rarity and fine condition lit up my eyes over and over again. All too often I couldn't resist the temptation, I'm afraid to say. An agreeable discount on the marked price further strengthened my resolve. But I am still of the opinion that – in true mercantile tradition – both parties were satisfied.

With the turn of the millennium this 'bountiful' period of book collecting as well as an especially intensive acquisition of periodicals came to an end. Rare books had become too expensive, and I too had to be more economical with money (I didn't wish to continue in business due to my esoteric studies). Hence I limited myself to filling any possible gaps in my holdings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century esoteric literature, as well as acquiring new publications. These abruptly proliferated during the period in question. Thanks above all to Antoine Faivre, the academic study of esotericism had slowly established itself, and university libraries began to purchase such books as well. While there had previously been a dozen important new releases in this field per year at the very most, now there are ever more and more.

There had always been high-quality scholarly books on the subject of religion, but for me it was only important to possess the books in themselves, since I was primarily interested in their content, regardless of whether they were first editions or not. That was also fundamentally true for political and historical works, art books, secular philosophy, and even for literary works, which I do not wish to go into here. My collection is only truly significant in the field of esotericism, although I look upon the 'other' books as very much essential for an understanding of the intellectual context in which esotericism was able to flourish. I am really pleased that my friend Joscelyn Godwin in particular has appreciated this idea of a necessary balance during his visits.

Naturally so many reams of printed paper require space, and although my late-nineteenth-century house is large enough in and of itself, structurally it is nevertheless unable to carry the weight. Consequently I had a large annex built in 1993. The world-famous Castel del Monte built by the Hohenstaufen Emperor Friedrich II in Apulia served as inspiration, and I likewise chose an octagon as the basic form. My then brother-in-law was a specialist in the restoration of castles; he eventually converted my heavily symbol-laden instructions into a congenial building plan, and two outstanding, independently-minded and intelligent craftsmen with their staff brought it all into being on the earthly plane.

Eight is the symbol of resurrection and 'eternal' consummation (the *ogdoas* as the land of perfection – hence baptisteries are so often octagonal). According to an ancient interpretative tradition, Christ was resurrected on the eighth day

(the first day of the new week). The *ogdoas* likewise symbolises the heaven of fixed stars or the cosmos after the conquest of the seven ancient planets (cf. the seven initiatory grades of the mysteries of Mithras). In the realm of fairy tales Snow White, ‘the fairest in the land’, also lives behind the seven mountains.

Characteristic of this library are the high, narrow windows in every part of the octagon. Not only do they increase the incident light, they also lend the entire room a certain sacral ‘touch’. A view onto the ‘heavens’ is opened up by a small glass cupola, which corresponds to a gilded disc on the floor: thus whoever glances down into the reflective disc looks up into ‘heaven’. As above, so below. Unfortunately the original symbolism is now only partially perceptible amidst the ever-more dense bookshelves at the interior.

A gilded wooden relief portraying the temptation of Jesus by the devil hangs over the only entrance from the ‘profane’ world. Whoever steps inside does indeed face the danger of succumbing to the splendour of the ‘outer’ book and forgetting what is ‘essential’, the ‘inner’.

Once the library was built, after breathing a deep heartfelt sigh I was finally able to ‘bring home’ all the books I had in storage and ‘survey’ them in their entirety. Could there be any greater bliss for a book-lover?

But why on earth does somebody amass so many books? Because they wish to err on the side of caution and have everything verified? Because they are under the impression they own the knowledge accumulated therein, although at the very most one can only claim to own printed paper bound in parchment? Because it is socially acceptable to do so? In other words: due to insecurity? There’s surely more than a mere grain of truth to that.

Here the Latin aphorism Nietzsche so beautifully elucidated comes to mind: ‘aut libri aut liberi’ (‘either books or children’). That doesn’t necessarily imply chastity, but certainly renunciation of the nurturing instinct so disrespectfully described by Nietzsche as “lay eggs, cackle, brood” – a source of joy on the one hand, but highly energy-consuming on the other. As I was not destined to have children, so only books were left to me.

Similarly it brings to mind Mircea Eliade’s ‘antithesis’ to which Giovanni Casadio so suggestively alluded: that is to say, the antithesis ‘between the libido copulandi and the libido scribendi’, both of which Eliade regarded as forms of creative potency, culminating in his lament: ‘To think what I might have created had I been less of a slave to my flesh’.

I began book-collecting because my curiosity for esoteric books was inexhaustible, yet there simply weren’t any to be found in the public libraries (still less could one expect foreign-language esoterica). In time the collecting takes on a momentum of its own – at least once the realisation dawns that the many books one so ‘urgently’ needs can no longer be read within one’s lifetime. A somewhat vampiric desire for ‘completeness’, which after all can never be fully satisfied,

often comes along as well. Friends know my saying: 'I don't possess the library, the library possesses me.' At some point one also begins to believe – greed never sleeps – that books might represent some kind of investment, whilst blinding oneself to the fact that a collection this specialised is only of value to those few souls with the same interests – and that only in 'good' times. What is more, such people have money only in the rarest of cases.

Naturally I deeply believe that these books contain valuable knowledge, or perhaps even experience gathered across the centuries which is of great consequence – above all in periods dominated by materialistic worldviews and an alienation from the cosmos. It is for this reason, too, that I open my doors so freely to 'genuinely' interested parties. Nevertheless, everyone must first agree to submit an independent piece of writing so that I may determine their 'seriousness'. Students of the humanities in particular – those from Amsterdam (History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents), for example – are most welcome and show up frequently, as do befriended authors. But it grieves me that interested students from Austria are so rare. You see, I have a vague notion of a 'Platonic academy', but I have neither the spirit of Plato nor the money of Lorenzo de' Medici, who promoted Hermetic studies in his Academy during the Italian Renaissance.

Another initiative I was keen to support in order to pass this spiritual heritage on to future generations was the founding in 1995 of the Archiv für Altes Gedankengut und Wissen (AAGW) together with Hildegard and Wolfram Fritsch. Hard-to-find texts were to be reprinted and furnished with a foreword in order to appeal to a new readership. We envisaged beautifully bound and carefully produced, numbered editions to make the worth of the books tangible as well. With the advent of the free accessibility of such texts on the internet and a simultaneous downturn in economic circumstances this model had to be relinquished. On the other hand, however, our aspirations for dissemination were served in the best conceivable way by the advent of the internet, even if it is human nature to place little value upon something that costs 'nothing'. Likewise, in our periodical *Gnostika* we always printed rare esoteric texts.

Although I am surely not a 'knower' myself, nor a 'scholarly' writer in my chosen field (I studied law), I nevertheless wish to pass on the 'torch' by preserving valuable foundations of this knowledge beyond my death. Hence I formulated a plan to put everything into an endowment which I can then pass on to a university library (I favour Zurich, as I am extraordinarily indebted to Switzerland, and multilingualism is self-evident there). However, public libraries almost never have adequate space to accept what now amounts to 40,000 books and perhaps 200 shelf metres of periodicals. That's why I am constantly advised to have my rare holdings scanned and to keep the physical books. But who pays for the scanning, which demands either a great deal of time or alternatively a great many

personnel? Not to mention the time which I would personally have to invest in the process, and which at my age is becoming ever more valuable. Day after day, for months on end, I would have to sit at home and supervise everything. Do I really want that? Digital storage has the additional disadvantage that – in contrast to older writing materials such as stone tablets – it is not truly durable, and in the worst case can also be manipulated. Only access to the originals grants conclusive certainty. Digitalisation and the preservation of originals merely complement one another.

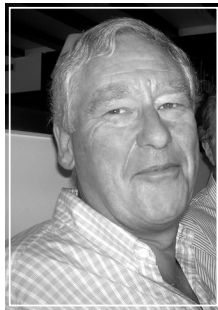
The scanning also doesn't solve the problem of the fate of the physical books after my death. As a rule, on financial grounds alone a private individual can't afford a library which needs so much space. Therefore one of the chief *raison-d'être* for this tome is the possibility of locating (public) parties interested in a (naturally cost-free) take-over.

As far as is humanly possible, an endowment should also ensure that no books go astray. In view of the difficult financial situation my mother country is also facing, which sooner or later must lead to a higher wealth tax, the endowment model is an additional precautionary measure to avoid having to sell off rare books simply so I can afford the taxes on the rest of them. A free financial space for cultural assets would of course be more rational and preferable to me – but who would define 'cultural asset'?

These deliberations demonstrate just how worthy of a secure future I deem this collection to be. Of course it would be much simpler to sell the books off piecemeal over the course of several years and retire with the proceeds to the proverbial island paradise.

Nevertheless, what will actually come to pass and to what extent my ideas will be realised lies 'in the stars', to formulate it in the terminology of my field of interest. The course of history is (hopefully) always open, despite dreaded climate catastrophes and the possibility of economic or political collapse.

P. S.: Besides all the splendour and joy, there are also pensive or even melancholy points when one devotes oneself to collecting books: life passes by still more quickly. But one first realises this only in old age, when it is already (almost) too late. The time expenditure for collecting is so massive (reading catalogues and offerings, ordering, making payments, compiling book lists, classifying) that one hardly finds the time for sociability or conversations with family and friends in the course of the year. And precisely because I collected so many books, only a little time remained for reading, and I was completely unable to pursue many of my interests. The classic paradox of the collector. Nevertheless, happily I 'always' had a dog who waited for me outside the library and loyally looked up at me to remind me of my responsibilities. So at least not all of the beauties of nature passed me by.



Hans Thomas Hakl

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