Strasbourg
& the History of the Book: Five centuries of German printed books and manuscripts

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Strasbourg and the History of the Book: Five Centuries of German Printed Books and Manuscripts

1: Strasbourg: The City’s Medieval Heritage

2: Strasbourg: A Centre of Early Printing

3: Strasbourg and Upper Rhenish Humanism

4: Der Grüne Wörth

5: Books from Strasbourg from the 1480s to the 1980s

6: History, Literature and Language
The Burning of the Strasbourg Library in 1870  On 24 August 1870 the Strasbourg town library, housed in the former Dominican church, the Temple-Neuf, was burned out by German incendiary bombs, destroying the greater part of the book heritage from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.

Strasbourg, as the principal city of Alsace, had been German throughout the Middle Ages and Reformation period until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, when Alsace fell to France (though Strasbourg did not fully become a French city until 1681). After France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, which was the occasion of the bombing, Alsace-Lorraine was incorporated into the German Empire, and the library was rebuilt and restocked. Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France after the First World War in 1919, re-annexed by Germany in 1940, and then retaken by France in 1944.

Shown here is the library in the choir of the Temple-Neuf in Strasbourg being destroyed by fire in the bombing of the city during the night of 24 August 1870. From Coll. De la BNUS: Section des Alsatiques, exhibition catalogue La Mémoire des siècles: 2000 ans d’écrits en Alsace (Strasbourg, [1988]). (Private collection.)

This edition is based on the unique medieval manuscript of a Middle High German reworking of the story of Amor and Psyche, destroyed in the fire of 24 August 1870. Peter von Staufenberg, as it is nowadays known, was one of the earliest short-couplet texts from the Middle Ages to be presented in a modern edition. It is generally attributed to the Strasbourg poet Egenolf von Staufenberg and placed in the early fourteenth century. It tells the story of the nobleman Peterman Diemringer von Staufenberg who promised the fairy mistress with whom he dallied in the woods that he would never marry, broke his vow - and had to pay the consequences. The hero of the poem and the poet are both associated with the Strasbourg family of the Staufenbergs, who had links to the Ortenau across the Rhine in Germany.

The 1823 edition is our only source for the lost Strasbourg manuscript. Some fragments of a second manuscript, also from Alsace, have survived in the collection of August Closs, Professor of German in Bristol (1948-1964), now in the collection of the Institute of Germanic Studies in London.
The original coloured pen-drawings from the 1440s that illustrated the manuscript text of *Peter von Staufenberg* are lost. However, tracings have been preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire in Strasbourg, made by the antiquarian Christian Moriz Engelhardt (1775-1858) in preparation for his edition of the poem.

These tracings served as the basis for a set of thirteen lithographs, executed by G. Boehm, and published as an appendix to the 1823 edition. 26 copies were hand-coloured, copying the original manuscript. (Lithography – a method of printing using a stone plate with a smooth surface – was invented in 1798 and came to be a popular medium for the reproduction of drawings and handwriting from medieval manuscripts in the nineteenth century.)
Peter von Staufenberg first became more widely known through two quarto editions with woodcut illustrations, the first by the Strasbourg printer Johannes Prüß (after 1483), the second by Martin Schott of Strasbourg (c. 1489/90). A copy of the second edition is in the Douce collection in the Bodleian.

In the later sixteenth century the medieval poem was reworked by Bernhard Schmidt the Elder (1535–1592), the Strasbourg composer and organist at the Cathedral, and provided with an elaborate verse preface by Strasbourg’s most famous man of letters of the period, the satirist and publicist Johannes Fischart (1545–1591). The publication has a dedication to Baron Melchior Widergrün von Staufenberg, the owner of Burg Staufenberg in Durbach (Ortenau) and an official of the Margraves of Baden, for whom the text was a piece of family history.

Paracelsus (1493–1541) had cited Peter von Staufenberg in his discussion of nymphs and elemental spirits and the story was later taken over as an abridgement in Des Knaben Wunderhorn (1805/1808) and given a Romantic adaptation in De la Motte Fouquet’s Undine (c.1811).
A reprint of Johannes Fischart’s popular *Bienenkorb des heiligen Römischen Immenschwarms*, translated from the Dutch original by Philips van Marnix (1538-1598), *De roomsche bijenkorf* (1569), a bitter Calvinist-inspired satire on the Roman Catholic Church.

This small-format and often reprinted publication illustrates the popularity of Fischart’s anti-Catholic publicistic writings in the reformed city of Strasbourg. The city had accepted the Lutheran reform from about 1523. This book, however, was printed during the ‘Straßburger Kapitelstreit’ of 1583-1604, a time of sectarian dispute, when the Roman Catholics, who had a majority in the Cathedral chapter, came under fierce attack.

Fischart stands at the beginning of a Strasbourg tradition of reviving literary texts from the later Middle Ages, such as *Peter von Staufenberg* and *Eulenspiegel*. 

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Printing was introduced in Strasbourg in about 1461, and, between that time and the Reformation, the city became, together with Basel, a major centre for printing and the book trade on the Upper Rhine. Strasbourg printers – such as Johannes Mentelin, Adolf Rusch, Heinrich Knoblochzter, Martin Schott, Johannes Grüninger, Johannes Prüss, Martin Hupfuff and Bartholomäus Kistler – made their names with the printing of both learned and popular books. Many of these were noted for their woodcut illustrations which were sometimes re-used from one book to the next. Some of the printers had close links to humanist-inspired writers associated with the Latin school in Sélestat (Schlettstadt).

1. Julius Caesar, Commentaria de Bello Gallico, German translation by Matthias Ringmann (Strasbourg: Johannes Grüninger, 17 June 1508).

Matthias Ringmann (1482-1511) was a prolific Alsatian writer and editor who studied in Sélestat with the Strasbourg humanists Jakob Wimpheling and Gregor Reisch, before dying at a very young age. He is known for his editions and translations for Strasbourg printers, such as Matthias Hupfuff and Johannes Grüninger, as well as for Latin poetry and school texts. Ringmann’s Gallic War (1507) is in fact a compilation of Cicero’s Gallic War and Civil War, the Bellum Alexandrinum and other classical and Renaissance historical works, including Lucian and Plutarch’s Life of Julius Caesar.

The Taylorian copy shown here is an example of the second edition with an abridged text, in which Ringmann’s Plutarch translation has been replaced by Johannes Adelphus Muling’s translation of Suetonius’ Life of Julius Caesar.

This edition has seventeen woodcuts in a style particularly favoured by the printer Grüninger. We show here the ‘author portrait’, depicting the murder of Julius Caesar by Brutus, printed from three blocks enclosed in a frame.
The text describes how not one of the murderers outlived their victim by more than three years.

It is printed in an Upper Rhenish gothic Bastarda type, with looped b and h, tailed f and s, but no loops on the ascenders of d and l.

[Shown here is the only page in our copy of the book with hand rubrication.]


On his way back from America, Columbus’ ship was caught up in a great storm. Fearing that they might never make land, on 14 February 1493 he set down an account of his discoveries, sealed it in a barrel, and entrusted it to the waves.

The letter describing ‘the recently discovered islands’ which he addressed to the king of Spain is dated a day later, 15 February, and seems, therefore, to have been a second report. It was printed by German craftsmen in Rome, and then again in Basel, Paris and Antwerp, in a Latin translation from the original Spanish by Leandro di Cosco. There are also Italian versions. The German printed text states that it has been ‘translated into German from the Catalan language and from the Latin in Ulm’. No Catalan version survives, but the existence of such a text is attested in the catalogue of the library of Christopher Columbus’ son, Fernando Colon, which is preserved in Seville: ‘Letra enviada al escrivano de racio, a. 1493 en catalan’.

A number of superior readings in the German text make it plausible that the translator was working from both Catalan and Latin texts, combining elements of both. The identity of the translator is unknown, but he describes himself as working in Ulm, which, like Strasbourg, was a great printing centre. It is possible that Bartholomäus Kistler’s print, which is preserved in a unique copy in Munich, was based on an Ulm printed edition of which no copies have survived.
Kistler provided a woodcut as a frontispiece depicting Christ appearing before the king of Spain, calling on him to convert the heathen. This design was not originally intended for the Columbus letter, but was produced in preparation for an edition of Lichtenberg’s *Prognostic* that appeared four weeks later (Strasbourg: Kistler, 31 October 1497), in which the same picture is used to depict Christ appearing before the Emperor Maximilian I and the princes of the realm.

The text is printed in an Upper Rhenish gothic type with loops on the ascenders of h and l (d sometimes with, sometimes without) and tailed f and s.


The Alsatian satirist Thomas Murner (1475-1537) hailed from Obernai (Oberehnheim), near Strasbourg, and became a monk in the Strasbourg Franciscan convent. As a Franciscan, he was able to take up studies in various European universities, becoming in due course both Doctor of Theology (Freiburg, 1506) and Doctor of Civil and Canon Law (Basel, 1519). His learning is manifest in his translations into German of classical texts, notably Vergil’s *Aeneid* (1515) and the law codes of Justinian (1519. During the period 1521-1532, he became a champion of the Catholic opposition to Luther and Zwingli (as is evident in *Vom Großen Lutherischen Narren*, 1522). His literary reputation was founded on a series of pre-Reformation satires, composed in the period 1512-1519, and represented here by *Die Mühle von Schwindelsheim*, which satirically twists the name of the village of Schwingelheim into ‘Swindlehome’. These texts mark a development of the approach adopted by Brant in his *Narrenschiff*, in this case portraying the mill, the ‘miller’s fools’, and, in particular, the miller’s wife, as symbols or representatives of worldly living and sexual licentiousness. His satires were printed by Johannes Knobloch, Matthias Hupfuff, Johannes Grüninger and others, and were embellished with fine woodcut illustrations and ornamental gothic / Renaissance borders.
The preface to Die Mühle von Schwindelsheim is illustrated by a picture of the miller, represented as a donkey in royal robes seated on a cushion, before whom the fools have to posture as if before the emperor himself. Printed in an Upper Rhenish gothic Bastarda without loops, but with tailed f and s.


Johannes Muling (c.1482/85 - c.1523), a Strasbourg doctor of medicine who had studied at the Latin school in Sélestat and in later life took up appointments in Switzerland, was an associate of Wimpheling, Geiler von Kaysersberg and Sebastian Brant, and an advocate of their humanist-inspired learning. He is known for his prolific activities as an editor of Latin texts, working closely with Strasbourg printers such as Huptuff, Grüninger and Flach, as well as for his translations of medical texts, classical authors (Suetonius, Vergil and Aesop), and historical writings. In 1513 he published his Historia de Rhodis, an account of the Siege of Rhodes by the Turks in 1480, which he translated from the Latin original by a Knight Hospitaller, Guillaume Caoursin, vice-chancellor of Rhodes. The ‘Turkish Chronicle’, which was conceived as a continuation of the ‘History of Rhodes’, is Muling’s own compilation of earlier texts, which he presents in German translation, all relating to the history, topography and customs of the Ottoman empire.

The opening displayed shows the end of a ‘historical song’, in the manner of the interpolations in late medieval Swiss chronicles, describing a victory over the Muslims won by the Knights Hospitaller with the help of John the Baptist, and a picture of Turkish princes praying at the tomb of Mohammed.
Martin Flach’s edition has twenty-four woodcuts altogether, by several artists, as well as the printer’s monogram in the colophon. The type is an Upper Rhenish gothic Bastarda with tailed f and s, but without the loops which characterize the type used by Grüninger in item number 1 in this case.
The most famous German book of this period is Sebastian Brant’s ‘Ship of Fools’, the Narrenschiff. Brant was born in Strasbourg in 1457. In the 1470s and 1480s he studied at the University of Basel, where he went on to teach Canon and Civil Law. In 1500 he returned to Strasbourg, where, in his capacity as a university-trained lawyer, he became Town Clerk, an office which he held until his death in 1521. His writings combine elements of early Rhenish Humanism with a commitment to the medieval worldview and pedagogical zeal. His Narrenschiff, with its revue of 112 fools from different walks of life, was written in German during his time at the University of Basel and was accompanied by a famous cycle of woodcut illustrations which form an integral part of Brant’s social satire.

The first edition, printed by Bergmann von Olpe in Basel early in 1494 (shown here from a facsimile of the copy in Berlin), was immediately followed in the same year by a Strasbourg reprint by Johannes Grüninger (active 1482-1531), with copies of all the woodcuts. The publishing success was enormous, consisting of numerous reprints of the original text, of an expanded text entitled Das neue Narrenschiff (Augsburg 1498), of the Latin translation made in 1497 by Jacobus Locher (1471-1528), who was Professor of Poetry at Freiburg and Ingolstadt, and of the French translations by Pierre Rivière (Paris 1497) and Jean Drouyn (Lyons 1497). The Narrenschiff and its translation became sought-after items for bibliophiles, hence the extensive collection which came to the Bodleian Library in 1834 with the bequest of Francis Douce.
A first collection of Brant’s Latin verse (Carmina in laudem virginis Mariae multorumque sanctorum = ‘Songs of all kinds in praise of the glorious Virgin Mary and the saints’) was published in 1494. It was followed in 1498 by an augmented collection under the title Varia carmina (shown here). The second collection is notable, not just for the religious poems, but also for the treatment of patriotic themes, praise of the Emperor Maximilian (who was in due course to bestow various honours on Brant), and a wide range of occasional poems on Christian and classical subjects, in which the author demonstrates his command of rhetoric and classical metres. Brant’s interest in Latin language and poetry marks out a more conservative, pedagogically orientated element in the Upper Rhenish humanism.

We show the opening with Brant’s self-portrait, a dedication to the reader and the printer’s mark of Johannes Bergmann von Olpe, dated 1497.
Jakob Wimpheling (1450-1528) is the central figure of early sixteenth-century Rhenish Humanism. He was born in Sélestat, studied in Freiburg, Erfurt and Heidelberg, became Dean of the Faculty of Arts and in 1482 Rector of the University of Heidelberg. From 1483 to 1497 he was cathedral preacher ('Domprediger') in Speyer, at the same time as Geiler von Kaysersberg was ‘Domprediger’ in Strasbourg. He went on to take up a professorship again in Heidelberg, and in 1500 retired to Strasbourg, spending the last years of his life in his home town of Sélestat. He is particularly known in a literary context for his Latin humanist dramas. One of his most celebrated works was the Germania, which is a significant statement about Germany and regional identity, looking back over the whole period from classical antiquity to the present. Like many shorter texts in this period, the Germania was published as part of a composite volume.

The first part of the book is the Declamatio ebriosi, scortatoris et aleatoris (a satirical dialogue poem spoken by a drunk, a fornicator and a gamester) by Filippo Beroaldi (1453-1505). This is followed by the Germania and a second text by Wimpheling, his Oratio de annuntiatione angelica, stating his position in the controversy about the point at which the Virgin Mary was made free of Original Sin. Special mention is made of dedicatees and others associated with the book. Beroaldi’s poem has a preface written by the Heidelberg humanist Johannes Henlin (‘Gallinarius’), a dedicatory epistle by Wimpheling, and a dedication by the poet to Sigismund Gossinger of Wroclaw. The Germania is prefaced by an epistle from Wimpheling to his lawyer friend Thomas Vogler (‘Dydimus Aucuparius’) of Strasbourg, and a poem by Johannes Henlin addressed to Wimpheling. The dedications point to a network of friendships, such as were cultivated by the humanists and which in Strasbourg found expression in a ‘literary circle’, the Sodalitas literaria, which encompassed the group of ‘Christian humanists’ associated with Brant, Wimpheling and Geiler in the first decades of the 15th century. The opening displayed shows the concluding passage of the Germania, with a woodcut of the arms of the city of Strasbourg, followed by the first page of the Oration on the Virgin Mary, depicting the enthroned Madonna and Christ Child and a text reading ‘O virgin, call upon the child to serve the people and the city’ (‘Virgo roga prolem: quod plebem seruet et urbem’).
Johannes Geiler von Kaysersberg (1445-1510), who came to Strasbourg in 1478 to take up the position as cathedral preacher (‘Domprediger’), was the most significant promotor of pre-Reformation piety and popular religious literature in late-medieval Alsace. He was brought up in Kaysersberg, north-west of Colmar, and whereas his contemporaries and associates Sebastian Brant and Jakob Wimpheling made their careers at the universities of Basel and Heidelberg, Geiler was a student (1460-) and later professor and Rector (1476) of the University of Freiburg im Breisgau. His writings are a by-product of his preaching, both to nuns in the Strasbourg convents, and more famously to a broader public from the cathedral pulpit. His work was based on the writings of late-medieval ecclesiastical reform, redolent of scholastic learning, and yet with a distinctive popular, even populist tone. Some of his writings, such as the Nauicula sine speculum futuorun (sermons based on Brant’s ‘Ship of Fools’), were published in Latin, but most of his writings are in German, whether as his own original German text, as a German translation, or as a German transcription of his preaching by members of the audience. In fact, most of his writings were mediated by the involvement of translators (including Jakob Wimpheling, Johannes Muling and Johannes Pauli), editors (including Jakob Otther, Geiler’s nephew Peter Wickgram, Johannes Muling and Johannes Pauli) and the Strasbourg printers, who all played a part in establishing ‘Dr. Kaysersberg’ as an iconic figure in the German book production of pre-Reformation Strasbourg. Many of these publications were richly illustrated with woodcuts, which, as with other contemporary products of the Strasbourg printing houses, form an integral part of the religious instruction as well as the social satire. Oxford has an extensive collection of original editions, with at least one copy, either in the Taylorian or the Bodleian, of every one of the Geiler texts published before 1520.

The Pater noster is an elaborate illustrated treatise on religion and morality, based on the Lord’s Prayer, but also containing a large number of illustrative narratives and allegories, and accompanied by an extended cycle of woodcut illustrations. Its full title is ‘Dr. Keiserspergs Pater noster: A commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, which we say every day, ‘Our Father, which are in heaven’ etc., by the most learned and worthy preacher of the praiseworthy city of Strasbourg’ (Doctor keiserspergs pater noster. Des hochgelerte(n) würdigen Predicanten der loblichen statt Straßburg. Vßlegung/ über das gebette des herren/ so wir täglich sprechen. Vatter vnser der du bist in den hymeln etc.). It was first published in this German-language version edited and translated by Johannes Muling five years after Geiler’s death.
We show an illustration which contains one of the famous portraits of Geiler preaching in Strasbourg cathedral to an audience of pious lay people (with their rosaries). The shield in the upper corners of the frame shows the arms of the city of Strasbourg (as also in the edition of Wimpheling’s *Germania*, displayed in this case), that in the lower margin the double-headed eagle of the Empire. In this picture the personality cult of Geiler von Kaysersberg and promotion of the imperial city of Strasbourg are combined.


The full title of this treatise is ‘The book of the sins of the mouth, by the most learned Dr. Keisersberg, who calls them blisters on the mouth, about which he composed twenty-nine sermons and lessons. Also, as an addition, Dr. Keisersberg’s Alphabet set out as twenty-three sermons, valuable and beneficial for those who read them and wish to be improved by them’ (*Das būch der sūnden des munds. Uon dem hoch gelerten Doctor Keisersperg/ die er nent die blatren am mund daun er .xxxix. predigen vnd leeren gotten hat/ Auch darby Doctor Keiserspergs Alphabet in .xxiii. predigen geordint Nützlich vnd gut den menschen die das lesen/ daun wol gebessert mögen werden*).

This is a series of invectives against individual sins, illustrated by exemplary stories, many of which are associated with woodcut illustrations. It is based on a cycle of sermons preached by Geiler in Strasbourg Cathedral beginning on Ash Wednesday 1505. He took as his theme Exodus 9,9: ‘And there shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt’, in the Latin Bible: *Erunt in hominibus vesice turbentes*, describing the plague as one of ‘swollen blisters’.

We show the first opening of the sermon for Whitsun, condemning those who are two-faced (‘two-tongued’). The woodcut combines three elements, an illustration of the colloquial expression ‘to cook
pepper and rice pudding in the same pot’, the two-tongued man, and a travelling knife-sharpener (who sharpens his tongue). The theme is illustrated in the text by the stories of the father who says one thing to his son and another to the schoolmaster, and of the Italian woman who tells the Ghibellines the Welphs are attacking, and then goes to the Welphs to say that the Ghibellines are attacking.
1. ‘The House of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in Strasbourg, called ‘the Green Isle’, destroyed in the year 1633’: thus reads the text at the top of this seventeenth-century engraving, here reproduced from an original in the Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin in Strasbourg.

Engraving of the Grüner Wörth
(Archives départementales du Bas-Rhin, Strasbourg. MS H 2185)

The Green Isle (‘Grüner Wörth’) was founded in 1367 as a kind of lay monastery by the merchant banker and religious writer Rulman Merswin, and was shortly thereafter incorporated into the Order of St John of the Knights Hospitaller. It soon grew into the large monastic complex represented in this engraving, occupying a site just to the east of the modern city centre. In the late medieval period it became a centre for the litterati not just of Strasbourg, but of all southern Germany, and housed an unparalleled collection of manuscripts and early printed books – all destroyed, with only a handful of exceptions, in the great fire of 1870.
This incunable is the very first edition of the German sermons of the great Strasbourg preacher, the Dominican Johannes Tauler (d. 1361). After the sermons, follows a second text known as the ‘Book of the Master’ (Meisterbuch), in which a devout layman convinces a learned cleric of the error of his proud ways. Its author, who compiled its content from several sources, was in fact Rulman Merswin, the founder of the Grüner Wörth - who had, entirely coincidentally, taken Tauler as his confessor in 1348. In this edition the Meisterbuch is introduced as ‘The Tales of the Venerable Doctor Johannes Tauler’ (‘die hystorien des erwirdigen docters Johannis Thauleri’). This erroneous identification of the learned master of the Meisterbuch with Johannes Tauler persisted until the myth was finally exploded in 1879 by the Lutheran scholar Heinrich Denifle.

The trenchant conclusion to his refutation of nearly four hundred years of tradition can be seen here in the next item.

TAY 97.C.11
Rulman Merswin’s autobiography, shown in this photograph, survives as an autograph copy that was bound into a much larger manuscript after his death and intentionally preserved for posterity ‘as a relic’ (‘glich eime heiltüme’). It describes the initial four years of his life after his decision in mid-1347 to turn from the sinful ways of his banking career to pursue a holier life of prayer and penitence. It is in this work that Merswin writes of Johannes Tauler’s role in his spiritual development. Merswin’s handwriting, though compact and regular, presents some difficulties to the uninitiated reader. In 1927 the work was edited by Philipp Strauch, one of the leading medieval Germanists of his generation, shortly before his own death.

The opening of the text can be seen - and compared with the original - in the next item.

TAY EC.755.A.1, vol. 2
The same manuscript into which Merswin’s autobiography is bound also contains another inserted work, shown in this photograph: the ‘Book of the Five Men’ (Fünfmannenbuch), which presents itself as a work sent to Merswin by the ‘Friend of God from the High Lands’ (‘Gottesfreund vom Oberland’). In reality, this mysterious figure never existed: although the handwriting is subtly different to Merswin’s, this alleged autograph copy of the Gottesfreund vom Oberland’s work is thought to be a clever forgery, produced by Merswin himself.

The Fünfmannenbuch tells of the supposed life stories of five men of very different backgrounds, all now living together in a harmonious communal life; it is thought to have served as an idealised model for life in the Grüner Wörth community. It was first edited by the Strasbourg professor Carl (Karl) Schmidt in 1866, who believed - erroneously - that he could identify the Gottesfreund vom Oberland with a convicted heretic called Nikolaus von Basel. The opening of the text in Schmidt’s edition can be seen - and compared with the original - in the next item.

TAY VET.GER.III.B.1053
Carl Schmidt produced the first edition in 1859 of the most famous work to emerge from the early community at the Grüner Wörth, the ‘Book of the Nine Cliffs’ (Neunfelsenbuch). This was the only work from Merswin’s circle to achieve a wide circulation in late medieval Germany and beyond: Dutch and Latin translations also survive, and the work made the transition into print - though not under Merswin’s name, but erroneously under that of the Dominican writer Heinrich Seuse. After a biting critique of the mores of various different social groups, secular and religious, the Neunfelsenbuch presents a vision of the nine stages of ascent to spiritual perfection as nine cliffs which must be climbed - all the while avoiding the devil’s attempts to catch the unwary climber with his great fishing-hook baited with temptations. Merswin’s autograph copy of the Neunfelsenbuch survives as an insert in a later manuscript.

The work was copied repeatedly at the Grüner Wörth, and was included in one of the compendia of the early community’s writings: the so-called ‘Great German Memorial’ (Grosses Deutsches Memorial), of which fol. 6r is reproduced here. Amongst the heraldic insignia can be seen Merswin’s device of the black boar.
9. *Grosses Deutsches Memorial* (Strasbourg, Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire, MS. 739, fol. 6r). (photograph)
The University of Strasbourg goes back to a sixteenth-century academy, originally founded in 1567 and re-established as a university in 1631. It came to be famous for its historians and legal scholars, such as those whose work is displayed in case number 6. Goethe studied in Strasbourg in the early 1770s and recorded his impressions of the city in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The French Revolution brought a decline in numbers and closure, but on ‘15 Brumaire XII’ (7 November 1803) the institution was refounded as a French protestant academy.

Schricker’s history of the university (shown here), which has the red seal from 1567 on its title-page, treats its subject matter from a German national perspective, marking the reopening of the German university of Strasbourg after the Franco-Prussian War.

It is bound together with Chr. G. Hottinger’s *Die Kaiserliche Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1872), which is the first history of the library, and Wilhelm Arnold’s *Die Bedeutung der kleinen Universitäten* (Marburg: Elwert, 1872).

The Strasbourg library was both the town library and that of the university, and was augmented in 1765 by the rich collections of Johann Daniel Schöpflin (1694-1771), who is also noted for his maps of Alsace, published in the two volumes of his *Alsatia illustrata* (1751-1761). After the destruction of the library in the fire of 24 August 1870, there were immediate plans to rebuild and to refound the institution as the Imperial University and State Library of the new German university.  

The new library was founded in 1872 and housed in a new building on the Kaiserplatz (now Place de la République). It was completed in 1894 and opened its doors on 1 October 1895. Whereas the historical collections were lost, the library was restocked on the basis of an international appeal. In January 1872 the University of Oxford presented 650 leather-bound volumes printed by the Clarendon Press. The publication by Sebastian Hausmann describes the rebuilding and restocking of the library, and contains architectural drawings and plans of the building.

Schon diese erste Schreckensnacht brachte neben der Vernichtung zahlreicher Privathäuser auch die Einräumung einiger öffentlicher Gebäude, von denen das eine den schwersten Verlust bedeutet, den Straßburg in jenen traurigen sechs Wochen überhaupt erlitten hat: die ehemalige Dominikanerkirche, seit der Reformation „Neue Kirche“ genannt, wurde, von einer Brandgranate getroffen, bis auf die Fundamente ein Raub der Flammen. In dem gewaltigen Chor dieser „Neuen Kirche“ aber waren die beiden grossen Straßburger Bibliotheken untergebracht, so dass sie
den besten Hoffnungen berechtigt ist. Ganz unbegründet ist auch die Befürchtung mancher Kreise, dass der Fassungsraum der neuen Bibliothek in verhältnismässig naher Zukunft schon sich als unzureichend erweisen könnte. Eine Erweiterung der Magazinräume ist durch Ausbau der beiden Lichthöfe leicht ausführbar, indem dieselben mit Glas überdeckt und die Zwischenböden in Drahtglasplatten ausgeführt werden; ausserdem ist eine Vergrösserung nach der Ostfront möglich. In absehbarer Zeit wird aber eine solche Vergrösserung sicher nicht nöthig werden, nachdem
The ancient prose romance of Alexander, already attested in the 2nd century BC in Greek, was brought to the court of Duke Roger of Naples by Archpriest Leo in 942 and translated into Latin. By the year 1000, the Latin text had reached northern Europe, where it was known as the Historia de preliis and in due course provided a basis for the widespread medieval tradition of the romances of Alexander – in French, in Occitan, in English, in German, and in Czech. The first printed edition was probably executed in the Low Countries (c.1475/1489).

The Strasbourg reprint (shown) was printed by Georg Husner (active 1473-1505; also known as the ‘Printer of the 1483 Jordanus of Quedlinburg’) as a companion volume to a history of the Trojan War by Guido de Columna, the printing of which is dated 9 October 1486, and it is thus evident that it was intended to appeal to an interest in ancient history. This interest was later taken up by Alsatian humanists and gave rise to a number of German translations, such as those displayed in case number 2.

This book is a fine example of the use of the more conservative typeface, based on medieval textualis script, that was used for Latin books, and which contrasts with the distinctive ‘German’ typefaces, with looped ascenders and tailed s and f, favoured for vernacular books, such as that used for the next item.
The full title is: ‘This little books tells of the torments that are prepared for all those who die in deadly sin, and who advise and support such deeds, as is apparent from what follows, with many pleasing pictures and worthy examples’ (Dis büchlin saget von den peinen die do bereit seint allen denen die do sterben in tod sünden Vnd die radt vnd that darzü gebent / als her nach folget mit vil hüüschen figuren vnd güten exempelen).

This is one of two copies of this edition known to exist. The main part of the text consists of a visionary account of the torments of Hell witnessed by Lazarus during the three days between his death and miraculous resurrection. It is a German translation of the Vision of Lazarus contained in a Paris edition of the French Shepherd’s Calendar (Kalendrier des bergiers), but in which the greater part of the descriptions of the torments of Hell is borrowed verbatim from the German text of one of the Strasbourg printed editions of Tondolus der Ritter (Visio Tinugdali), which Hupfuff, Kistler and Knobloch published repeatedly from about 1500 onwards. An appendix presents ten exempla (illustrative narratives) with accounts of Purgatory, including a visit to St Patrick’s Purgatory on an island in Lough Dearch in Ireland. Some of the twenty-seven woodcut illustrations were executed specially for this book, combining motifs from the French Kalendrier des bergiers and those from the vision of Tondalus. Others are examples of the re-use of woodcuts originally intended for earlier books. The opening displayed has a full-page woodcut depicting the smithy in Hell where the greedy, usurers and thieves are tormented, some of them boiled in cauldrons, others hammered on the anvil, another having coins thrust into his mouth, observed by an angel and the visionary’s soul. On the facing page a courtly knight is shown committing suicide as he rides backwards (as a symbol of evil) on a dragon, urged on by a monkey-faced taloned devil.

The text is printed in an Upper Rhenish gothic type with looped ascenders on b, h and l (d sometimes with, sometimes without), tailed f and s. Two registers of type are employed.
The Alsatian dialect of German is a significant component in the cultural diversity of the region. André Weckmann, whose anthology bluddi hand (‘Bare Hands’) is shown here, has been a significant figure in German dialect literature more generally, as well as specifically in the context of Alsace and Strasbourg. He belongs to a group of experimental poets, like his contemporary Ernst Jandl in Vienna, who were in their early twenties when the Second World War ended and who engaged in various experiments in the production of non-traditional, sometimes even aggressively non-standard dialect texts.

Weckmann, who writes in Alsatian, German and French, published a series of anthologies of Alsatian dialect poetry over the period 1975-1989. The title bluddi hand is taken from a sequence of poems which use ‘bare hands’ to conjure up the idea of direct contact with reality, not filtered through the world of urban modernity, war and suffering (which included the suffering of the ‘geschundne landel’, war-ravaged Alsace). The opposition of town and country, modernity and tradition, is a theme of the more traditional dialect poetry and Weckmann appears to have wanted to reformulate it in a non-sentimental, non-conservative, ‘critical’ mode.
The poem that we show is specifically concerned with Alsatian language:

‘où le geai craille à la gloire / du coucou pendant dans le nid du merle.’

I passed through our towns and did not find you. In your stead some kind of French from the telly, like a synchronized film. Lips speak differently from the sound that comes pouring out of the box. I searched for you and failed to find you. Somewhere you must be lying by the wayside like a spat-out damson stone. The ravens pick it up. How am I to manage without you?

Die and become, a professor once said to me. He has already become. He became a nightingale, or so he thinks. It’s just that he doesn’t notice that he is now cawing like a jay.
Medieval manuscript materials from Strasbourg are extremely sparse, because of the losses of 1870, to which this exhibition necessarily makes reference again and again. This means that a particular significance attaches to the ‘books that got away’. One such case is the manuscript library of the Dominican nunnery of St. Nikolaus in undis, where the nuns were tolerated for some 70 years after the Reformation (which had led to a partial closure in about 1523). At a late date in the sixteenth century many books from this library were purchased by a private collector, Daniel Sudermann (1550-1631), also known as a poet, whose books passed to the Royal Library in Berlin.

Even today books from medieval Strasbourg come onto the market. In June 2009 the Bodleian Library was able to purchase a German illuminated prayerbook, which contains an inscription recording the donation of the book from sister Christina Seyczin to sister Sibilla Schaupin. Christina Seyczin was one of the last nuns at St. Nikolaus in undis, who lived secretly in the nunnery in the years around 1590, only to be evicted and charged with prostitution and similar crimes by the Protestant authorities. The prayerbook contains a large number of completely unstudied German texts, mostly relating to the subject of the eucharist, and a fine miniature showing angels holding up a monstrance in which the host can be seen to have been miraculously transformed into the Christ Child.
One of the most significant and celebrated manuscripts destroyed when the Strasbourg library burned in 1870 was the *Hortus Deliciarum* of Herrad von Hohenburg, abbess of the house of Augustinian canonesses at Hohenbourg (Sainte-Odile) on the Mont Sainte-Odile, near Obernai (which is today a famous Alsatian pilgrimage centre). Herrad was abbess from 1178-1196, at a time when the abbey enjoyed the particular favour of the imperial family. The *Hortus*, or ‘Garden of Delights’, was a large-format collection of originally 342 leaves, mostly in Latin, with encyclopaedic texts, prose theology, biblical history, hymns and songs, some with musical notation, and an extensive Old High German / Middle High German glossary, but most famous of all for its 153 mostly full-page miniatures: a remarkable testimony to the learning and to the literary and visual culture of an aristocratic German nunnery of the Hohenstaufen era.

The destruction of the manuscript was seen as a major loss to Alsatian culture. But not all was lost. Some of the texts had been transcribed and published in the 1820s, including the large body of Old High German glosses. The Latinist Wilhelm Stengel had made further transcriptions c.1840. As for the pictures, about forty of them had been traced by the Strasbourg antiquarian Christian Moritz Engelhardt in about 1815, in preparation for an album in which he published a number of tinted reproductions (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1818). (This, incidentally, is the Engelhardt whose edition and facsimiles of a Middle High German poem, *Der Ritter von Staufenberg*, is presented in case 1.) Engelhardt’s coloured tracings and other nineteenth-century copies made before 1870 by admirers of the manuscript formed the basis of an edition of what survived by Alexandre Straub and Gustave Keller, *Herrade de Landsberg, Hortus deliciarum* (Strasbourg, 1879-1899). All these materials were presented again in the remarkable facsimile and reconstruction attempted by a group of scholars centred on the London Warburg Institute, published in 1979. We show one of the pages which Engelhardt published in 1818 as a full-page coloured facsimile, depicting the ladder to heaven, based on a treatise by the Greek church father Johannes Klimakos, in which various clerical figures attempt to ascend through a sequence of fifteen virtues, only to be shot down by the devilish archers with their arrows.

The multi-volume *Thesaurus antiquitatum* documents a period of Strasbourg antiquarian studies which also saw some of the first publications of Medieval German vernacular texts. Its compiler, Johannes Schilter (1632-1705), was brought up in Leipzig and went on to study Philosophy and Law in Jena and Leipzig. After holding various positions as a lawyer in Naumburg, Jena, at the court of the Duke of Sachsen-Meiningen, and in Frankfurt am Main, in 1686 he transferred to a post as ‘Ratskonsulent’ and honorary professor of Law at the University of Strasbourg. He is known particularly as a legal historian, and it was his legal interests that led him to collect the material published posthumously in the ‘Thesaurus of Germanic antiquities’, shown here.

The *Thesaurus* is of particular literary interest for its inclusion of a Middle High German epic poem, the *Rolandslied*, composed c.1172 by a certain Pfaffe Konrad for the court of Duke Henry the Lion in Braunschweig. The manuscript was one of the treasures of the Strasbourg library later destroyed in the fire – a manuscript of particular significance on account of both its antiquity and its illustrations. It appears to have dated from the later years of the twelfth century. The *Rolandslied* is a German verse reworking of the French national epic, the *Chanson de Roland*, the earliest and best copy of which is held in the Bodleian Library (MS. Digby 23). The Strasbourg manuscript of the German text had been studied by Schilter’s pupil Johann Georg Scherz (1678-1754), who was one of the editors of the *Thesaurus antiquitatum teutonicarum*, and it was Scherz who took the initiative to add what, on the basis of
comparison with other manuscripts, would appear to be a remarkably faithful transcription of the Strasbourg manuscript in an appendix to volume 2 of the Thesaurus.

This edition of 1727 also contains a copperplate engraving of one of the illustrations, which is now our only source of information about the style of the lost picture cycle. If it had survived, it would have been the earliest known manuscript of an illustrated Middle High German poem.

The antiquarian endeavours of Schilter and Scherz are to be seen in the context of the University of Strasbourg and other educational establishments in the city. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Strasbourg grammar school was upgraded several times, finally to become, in 1631, the ‘königliche Universität’. In 1696 Schilter published the Old High German Ludwigslied, and in 1698 the late fourteenth-century chronicle of the city of Strasbourg by Jakob Twinger von Königshofen. In addition to editing texts, Schilter worked on a glossary of the medieval German language, which Scherz went on to augment, and subsequently publish, in the third volume of the Thesaurus. Scherz, who himself became professor of Moral Philosophy and Law at the university, continued his teacher’s lexicographical work throughout his life, but without bringing it to a conclusion before his death in 1754.
Scherz’s contribution to German lexicography, the *Glossarium germanicum mediæ aevi*, did not appear in print until 1781-1784, when it was published by Jeremias Jakob Oberlin (1735-1806), a Strasbourg schoolmaster and university professor of the next generation. Oberlin enhanced his teacher’s work by supplying additional material taken from Middle High German literary texts in the manuscript collection of the Strasbourg library. The manuscripts he used were of course those that were later lost in the fire, and the quotations in the dictionary are in some cases primary evidence for the reading of the lost texts.

Much of the vocabulary documented in the early dictionaries is primarily of historical interest, and it is easy to see how Schilter, Scherz and now also Oberlin excerpted their sources with an eye for legal and historical nuances in the use of words. But this was not all, and Oberlin’s entry for *kemenæte* (chamber, private room, heated room, bedchamber), for example, demonstrates how he also had recourse to Middle High German courtly literature in his search for examples (cols. 773, 774):

The first examples are taken from printed dictionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where kemenâte translates Latin ‘camineta’ and ‘conclave’, but in the second part of the article the use of kemenâte is documented by reference to King Marke’s bedchamber in the romance of Tristan and Isolde by Gottfried von Straßburg, for which Oberlin was able to consult a manuscript copy that was later to be destroyed in the fire in the Strasbourg library. Further examples showing how the word kemenâte was used to denote the private rooms (and not just bedrooms) of women are taken from the poem Tristan als Mönch, the short story ‘Diu halbe bir’ (which he knew from MS. A.94, which came from the library of the Knights Hospitaller at the Grüner Wörth) and a German ‘Historienbibel’ (Par. P. V. T. = MS. A.75 from the Grüner Wörth), all taken from Strasbourg manuscripts that are no longer extant.

This item forms part of the Taylor Institution Library’s comprehensive collection of pre-1800 dictionaries, which is a major research resource for linguistic study.
Oberlin was also interested in Romance Philology and in dialectology. His publication of 1775 is an anthology of texts, together with a grammar, contrasting the language of Le Ban de la Roche, a French-speaking Lutheran enclave in Alsace, and the town of Lunéville in Lorraine. He dedicated his linguistic studies to the Göttingen historian August Ludwig von Schlözer (1735-1809). Oberlin provides numerous short texts, such as dialogues, anecdotes, rhymes and letters, sometimes with translations into contemporary French, in order to illustrate the ‘patois’ of these two localities. He also prints examples of medieval and early-modern French from sources in this region, taking his texts from manuscripts in Paris and elsewhere.

We show pp. 122-123, which contrasts a conversation in the ‘patois’ of Le Ban de la Roche with the equivalent in the local dialect of Lunéville. Oberlin’s enterprise is of interest not only as a document of different forms of French dialect in the second half of the eighteenth century but also on account of the specific interest in regional language that it demonstrates. Attitudes to the ‘Alemannisch’ spoken by Alsatian German speakers have changed dramatically in the course of the political history of this region over the centuries, with the result that Alsatian dialect, which is linguistically very close to the Swiss German of Basel or the dialect of the Breisgau region across the Rhine, stands in a very different relationship to the standard language. In French the relationship between ‘patois’ and the standard language is different again, for the use of regionally coloured speech has much lower status than in German. Oberlin’s monograph is of particular interest as documentation of a mixture of scientific interest in language and patriotic regional awareness at a particular moment in pre-Revolutionary French history.
Prof. N.F. Palmer / Liz Baird, 11.7.09.
(Text and images for the case on the Grüner Wörth: Dr S. Mossman)

The contents of this booklet are on the web at:
http://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/german/strasbourghob/