



the publishing house, which are supplemented by original Justus Perthes publications, copper plates, and classroom maps. The Gotha Research Library holds the only archive of a cartographic publishing house in the German-speaking countries.

COLLECTION OF EMIGRANTS' LETTERS

The library acquired its collection of emigrants' letters as a deposit in 2002. It contains a remarkable number of letters sent by German emigrants in America, Australia, and other countries to their former homes in Germany after 1820. Continually expanding, it is one of the largest collections of its kind in the world.

The Gotha Research Library collects, indexes, preserves, and researches its holdings in original and digital form, makes them available, and communicates them to science and society. It is an inspiring place of work and encounter for national and international scholars. The library hosts conferences, lectures, and exhibitions in its remarkable historic rooms. It facilitates guest seminars by foreign lecturers and supports on-site university teaching. Together with the Gotha Research Centre and the Centre for Transcultural Studies / Perthes Collection, the Gotha Research Library runs fellowship programmes to promote work with its historical collections and to support young academics in Gotha. It is also a place for school learning and facilitates school projects.

CONTACT

director: Dr. Kathrin Paasch
phone: +49 (0)361 737 5540
bibliothek.gotha@uni-erfurt.de
www.uni-erfurt.de/en/gotha-research-library
https://blog-fbg.uni-erfurt.de
Bluesky: @fbgotha.bsky.social
X: @FBGotha

University of Erfurt
Gotha Research Library
Friedenstein Castle
Schlossplatz 1
99867 Gotha

state: 04/2025
text: Dr. Kathrin Paasch
illustrations: east tower of
Friedenstein Castle and library hall
photographs: Sergej Tan (east tower)
and Thomas Wolf (library hall)



**UNIVERSITY
OF ERFURT**
Gotha Research
Library

GOTHA RESEARCH LIBRARY

**Library for the Cultural
and Intellectual History
of the Modern Era**

The Gotha Research Library is one of Germany's most significant historical libraries. It houses a collection of materials on the cultural and intellectual history of the modern era that is unparalleled in Europe.

HISTORY

The roots of the Gotha Research Library can be traced back to 1647. Originally, it was the court library of the duchy of Saxe-Gotha(-Altenburg) founded by Ernest I at the Friedenstein Castle. During the early modern period, the duchy was politically and culturally the most significant of all the Ernestine principalities. Its dukes saw themselves as custodians of Lutheranism in the territories that made up the heartland of the Reformation, and it was this zeal that motivated them to establish a universal library with an ambitious acquisition policy. By 1800, the court library had become one of the best-known princely libraries in the Protestant areas. After the Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg lineage died out in 1825, it operated as a second court library of the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Its collections were expanded especially in the humanities. The ownership of the library became controversial in 1918; ultimately, the collections held in Gotha came into the custodial care of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha Foundation for Art and Science.

The library suffered considerable losses during the Second World War. When the government of the German Democratic Republic withdrew support for central regional libraries in its 1968 directive, the Gotha Research Library persisted in the face of adversity. It held the status of a largely completed special collection of historical volumes. In 1999, the library became part of



the University of Erfurt, which had been re-founded in 1994. With support from the Cultural Foundation of the German Federal States, the Free State of Thuringia acquired the monumental holdings of the former Justus Perthes Publishing House in 2003 and consigned them to the University of Erfurt. Now known as the Gotha Perthes Collection, they have been a central part of the research library ever since.

COLLECTIONS

The Gotha Research Library holds about 1 million physical library items, including about 350,000 prints up to the year of publication 1900. 8,200 medieval, early modern and modern manuscripts as well as 3,500 oriental manuscripts belong to the approx. 11,700 volumes of manuscripts. It owns 185,000 maps, 3,450 school wall maps and 800 linear metres of archival records. In addition, there are 93 early modern and modern bequests, 1,650 copper plates, 62 early modern and modern globes, a collection of 11,130 letters from German emigrants to America from the 19th century and a library archive with 83 linear metres.

EARLY MODERN COLLECTIONS

The early modern holdings are represented by two large, universal collections: the Ducal Palace Library and the Ducal Gymnasium Library. In addition, the Gotha Research Library houses the private libraries of members of the ducal family from the 18th and early 19th century. These collections offer insights into the acquisition policy of the Dukes and Duchesses of Gotha, who gathered formidable holdings in Gotha and expanded them into princely

academic libraries. The Gotha collections are highly representative of courtly culture between the Baroque and Enlightenment period.

Their holdings from the early modern period are centred around a collection on the history and reception of the Reformation at that time. It contains many letters and documents from the most important Protestant Reformers of the 16th century alongside those written by Catholic authors. Among its other holdings are materials on the history of education, including bequests from eminent scholars and the written heritage of the Gotha Ducal Gymnasium, and an extensive collection of sources on the natural sciences with a focus on astronomy, alchemy, and botany.

COLLECTION OF MIDDLE EASTERN MANUSCRIPTS

The collection of Middle Eastern manuscripts was gathered by Ulrich Jasper Seetzen, a scholar who travelled the region in the early 19th century. It is the third largest collection of its kind, surpassed only by those in Munich and Berlin, and represents a cross-section of Islamic scholarship over a period of 800 years. It also reflects the reception of Islamic culture in Europe during the early modern period.

GOtha PERTHES COLLECTION

The Gotha Perthes Collection forms the core of the Gotha Research Library's modern sources. It comprises the holdings of the former Justus Perthes Publishing House, then based in Gotha and Darmstadt, and the VEB Hermann Haack in Gotha. Its three constituent collections are the library of the publishing house, the map collection, and the archive of