

Our Karlstadt edition – Looking back after ten years

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I would like to explain the significance of our Karlstadt-Edition because not so long ago – somehow something has changed, maybe I have just become more blunt – I faced a wall of consternated silence or open contempt, especially from colleagues advanced in cultural theory, when I confessed that I considered editions to be extremely useful, even indispensable.

Editing means first and foremost: tracing down traditions to the last detail, sifting through them and weighing them, all with the aim of gaining the maximum amount of knowledge possible about the document and its history. Editing is the moment of truth; whether I am really able to understand something becomes apparent when I try to present it to others in an understandable way in an edition. In doing so, one soon encounters facts that distinguish our handling of objects, which is certainly very much shaped by the cultural dominance of the image, from those of earlier times: If at all possible, we would like to explore the watermarks of the writing material, the nature of the seals, peculiarities of the writing, the writing utensil, the ink, and so on. And we find that much of what we are interested in has not been taken into account, for example, in already existing classical editions on the history of the Reformation. Whoever edits today becomes aware, *nolens volens*, of many shortcomings in existing editions.

When editing an author like Karlstadt, whose relevant contemporaries – such as Luther, Melancthon, Müntzer – were in relationships with him and have in many cases already had one or even several editions developed of their writings, one inevitably encounters facts and decisions of earlier editions which one considers problematic. The early disputation theses of the Wittenberg Theological Faculty represent a not at all marginal example. As a rule, they have survived in collected editions; the authorship of the individual theses is often unclear. However, previous research has mostly been guided by the judgments of Karl Knaake, the inaugurator of the Weimar Luther edition. And his criteriology was often anything but clear. Simplified and certainly a little polemically formulated, one could say: Luther's theses were those that fit into Knaake's image of Luther. For Karlstadt, it was rather the dregs that remained. The context of the transmission of the theses, i.e. the collections in manuscript volumes, but above all in the collected editions that appeared outside Wittenberg – in Louvain, Basel and Paris – and which presented the Wittenbergers as a unified entity, played no role for the Luther edition oriented to Luther's authorial genius; jewels were selected and collected into the treasure chest of the Weimar edition. This editing practice for a not exactly casual source corpus such as the early theses of the Wittenberg Theological Faculty dominates the field to this day. If we had not edited Karlstadt, we would certainly not have encountered this problem.

From this follows: An edition is rarely a stand-alone incident. On the contrary, the example just outlined illustrates that editions always open up new perspectives on a field of research or on contexts of transmission, which are seen in a new light and prompt further work, even new editions. From the new Karlstadt edition it follows in a certain way that especially the older parts of the Weimar Luther edition actually have to be revised or edited anew. In fact,

editions do not lead to the fixation of text versions and research statuses, but to their fluidization and questioning; indeed, editions pave the way for new research. The latter is of course particularly the case with digital editions. In view of what is possible today or already standard in many cases – the parallel view of all original sources and transcriptions, for example – we find many of the older editions insufficient.

But I am far from cheering the digital edition for which I am responsible. The past ten years have also been extremely stressful time and again, not least because of constant pressure to adapt to new developments and expectations. It was only when one of our former IT staff succeeded in setting up a transformation scenario that enabled editors to work largely in MS Word, i.e. to really see their texts beyond the coding frenzy, and to automate the transfer to XML files, that a constant source of frustration could be drained. Moreover, I must not conceal the fact that the Karlstadt edition is a so-called hybrid edition – something for which the advocates of the pure doctrine of digital editing naturally feel only contempt. But I consider the reasons irrefutable: If one invests about 4 million euros of public funds in such an edition, then the most sustainable safeguarding of the result imaginable must be ensured. And that is indeed still the printed edition – even if it naturally falls far short of the possibilities of the digital edition. However, elementary experiences such as the fact that, for example, digital copies cannot be displayed in parallel view (for whatever reason) – the work with the *German Research Foundation Viewer* has brought a certain stability here – show that it is probably an illusion to claim permanent immunity for digital editions.

But let me talk about the advantages of the digital edition:

1. One can correct errors at any time, at least as long as a project is running and the persistence of the edition is ensured.
2. One can make the tradition visible in all its aspects and thus open up possibilities for the user to reconstruct or correct edition decisions.
3. The installation of additional search functions goes far beyond the possibilities of an index common in books.
4. The linking of quotations with the original documents, for example, opens up perspectives for further work that are hardly imaginable in the analog world.
5. The possibility created in the Karlstadt Edition to print the pdf of the print version of each document or volume published so far is in fact an open access solution; it was only made possible by the fact that the non-profit scientific *Verein für Reformationsgeschichte* (www.reformationsgeschichte.de) holds the publishing rights and can relinquish profits. In the case of two other Reformation-historical editions – the *Southwest German Reformer Correspondence* by Christoph Strohm in Heidelberg and the edition of the *European Peace Treaties of the Early Modern Period* by Irene Dingel – we are proceeding accordingly.

The greatest challenge of a digital edition is, of course, its persistence. My decision to run the edition together with the *Herzog August Library* in Wolfenbüttel (www.hab.de) had, on the one hand, strategic implications for science – it seems to me urgently necessary to cooperate and work together with those who are attached to quality and try to secure it. Furthermore, according to human judgment, libraries as archives of human knowledge are

permanent institutions. The ten-year data protection that we have to guarantee the *German Research Foundation* is absolutely disproportionate, even absurd, for extremely complex editions and is basically irresponsibly short. However, libraries will probably only be able to cope with the problem of carrying out any reworking or corrections that may be necessary in editions if they have additional resources. Or we will have to find ways of 'archiving' digital editions that we will no longer be able to develop and update, and we will have to provide the technical prerequisites to be able to use them in the same way in fifty years, for example, as we use microfilms or microfiches today. The idea of keeping digital editions permanently migratable is unlikely to be financially viable. Even in the digital age, we have to live with the coincidence or simultaneity of different media or digital formats and aggregate states, i.e. we must remain capable of historization in the digital era, or become so. The current presentism, which is primarily economically induced and in the interest of the IT giants, involves the danger that new operating systems or updates are incompatible with existing systems or paralyze them, and also ruinous in terms of scientific culture.

Digital editions are the elementary driving forces in the comprehensive process of the digital transformation of the humanities. And here I see – once the phase of millenarian promises of salvation seems to be over – above all a challenge, namely that of integrating the previous scientific tradition. Let me demonstrate this with a very simple example: Whoever works today with the excellent digitized copies of, for example, the *VD 16*,

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Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des 16. Jahrhunderts (VD 16)

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
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will find valid bibliographic information on the formats, volumes, printer attributions, etc. However, he will not find any reference to the extremely rich research; and he is left alone with regard to the question of the concrete classification of the print (is it a first printing; how does it relate to the other editions). A less scientifically-oriented user will not feel any problem here and will simply use any edition of, for example, *Karsthans*;

Normnummer: VD16 K 135
Titel: Karsthans.!!
Ausgabebezeichnung: [Straßburg: Johann Prüß d.J. und Reinhard Beck d.Ä. 1521]
Impressum: Straßburg : Prüß, Johann d.J. : Beck, Reinhard d.Ä., 1521
Kollation: [15] Bl. : TH. ; 4
Quelle: Köh.Bibl. 1977
Weitere Informationen:
 Berichtigte Aufnahme. - Lt. Köhler 1977 Bogen ccvon Reinhard Beck d.Ä. gedruckt.
Sprache: Nicht einzuordnen
Medientyp: Monographie ; Online-Zugriff
Permalink: <http://gateway-bayern.de/VD16+K+135>

 Volltext

 (Services, Fernleihe und weitere eXtras)

Bestand:
 Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz
 Berlin, Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, Bibliothek
 Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek
 Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek
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 Staats- und Stadtbibliothek Augsburg (Sigel: 37)
 Wittenberg, Reformationsgeschichtliche Forschungsbibliothek
 Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek

Karsthans in VD16

(https://www.gateway-bayern.de/TouchPoint_touchpoint/singleHit.do?methodToCall=showHit&curPos=1&identifier=19_FAST_1883014065)

a scientifically-sensitive user, however, is left to his own devices and will at best come across, through random and wild searches in the usual search engines, that there is indeed a critical edition of the text. If the challenge of integrating traditional knowledge into digital formats, as outlined here in this simple example, does not succeed, the consequence is quite clear and is already beginning to emerge. What is not on the net is forgotten and lost; the scientific work of generations is ignored – in the name of supposed progress. Especially if we are serious about the digital transformation of the humanities, which we should push for the sake of the higher performance of digital editions, enormous tasks lie ahead of us.

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