

## SCIENTIFIC REPORT

WORKING GROUP 4, COST ACTION IS1310

In the month of February I had the opportunity to contribute to working group 4 of COST Action IS1310 “Reassembling the Republic of Letters” by executing a Short Term Scientific Mission (STSM). My work consisted of digitising the titles of books containing letters as listed in the bibliographies of Estermann, Arenhold and Molhuysen. The first week of February I visited the team of Cultures of Knowledge at the University of Oxford. There I benefitted from the team’s extensive experience with the construction of Early Modern Letters Online (EMLO). The visit provided me with some fascinating insights into the problems with compiling and digitising such extensive databases. Further, I was fortunate enough to attend a talk given by Miranda Lewis about the Bodleian Library’s card catalogue, which was especially interesting given my work with the Molhuysen Apparatus, which is a similar - though less extensive - card catalogue.

In the week I spent in Oxford I, much to my surprise, managed to complete entering the data from Estermann. I collected a total of 569 titles in no more than 13 hours total: That means that I needed approximately a minute and twenty seconds to enter one title, which is far less than the initial estimate of three minutes. This was at least partially due to the fact that I quickly noticed that almost all these titles were easily findable in the online catalogue of the Herzog August Bibliothek. The remaining few could be found in WorldCat. This meant that I did not have to search several databases, which, I suspect, saved me quite a bit of time. I would like to point out that someone doing this type of work should not underestimate how tiring this work is. To avoid getting headaches and neck pain I made sure to work in smaller blocks: I worked 4,5 hours max before taking a long break.

Upon returning to the Netherlands I began working on Arenhold. Unfortunately I found myself delayed due to illness, but in all this part of my STSM proceeded at an acceptable pace. I entered a total of 855 titles in 43 hours, which means I needed roughly 3 minutes per title. This is clearly much slower than Estermann, which can in part be explained by my illness, but is - in my opinion - mostly due to the way the books are listed in Arenhold: Whereas Estermann gives simply the title, Arenhold tells us things like “There exist two letters in the second edition...” and depending on which part of the work one is working with, this information is given in different languages.

Finally, I spent two half-days in the Leiden University Library to work on Molhuysen. Molhuysen turns out to be a much more valuable source than I initially expected. My expectation was that many of the works would prove difficult to find due to the minimal amount of information that Molhuysen gives about them and those that could be found would probably also be listed in either Estermann or Arenhold. This turned out not to be the case. I entered a total of 495 titles into the Zotero database. Although there may be some duplicates, I have avoided this as much as possible. The task took me 7,5 hours, which means one title cost me approximately one minute to enter.

I made an effort to save all the URL’s of the digital versions listed in Worldcat. I hoped that this would make Emma Mojet’s work a little easier. From this I gleaned that quite a lot of these works are indeed digitally available — and I have to admit I found this surprising. Mostly, however, I was excited by this discovery. I could not help but feel excited about the opportunities afforded by widely available material like this! This sense of excitement was also clearly present in everyone I have come across in this project; Dirk, Miranda, Arno, Howard and that made this project extra special. For that, I am grateful.

To sum up: In a total of some 8 full working days I managed to create a database with approximately 1900 titles. The task was quite tedious and spreading the work was necessary, but ultimately the project was very rewarding. I am excited to see what the end result will be and will certainly be paying close attention to efforts to make the Republic of Letters available in the digital age.

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