CALL FOR ARTICLES

LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS IN SWITZERLAND, 17TH-19TH CENTURY: A PARALLEL HISTORY

Between the 17th and 18t^h centuries, the Swiss territory saw the emergence of an urban network of "public" libraries. The phenomenon interested both the large and the smaller towns. The creation of these institutions was the result of private or public enterprises; their collections and readership varied according to several criteria, among which the linguistic and religious context of the area where the library was located, as well as the financial means at its disposal. Their goal, however, remained the same: the sharing of a permanent book collection among a community of readers whose management and responsibility were delegated to a committee. Subsequently, the adjective "public" referred to the opening of these establishments at a certain time of the week and not to a desire to democratize access to knowledge. *Ancien régime* libraries were virtually accessible to anyone, but in most cases their high subscription fees made them a privilege for elites.

A second common denominator characterized these institutions: the presence of objects or curiosities cabinets. The relevance of the relationship between books and objects has been pointed out by some authors by means of the equation *Bibliothek = Kunstkammer*. Since the 17th century, this interaction was thematized as an essential library management question: coins, medals, scientific instruments, natural samples and exotic artifacts were called upon to dialogue with the volumes in order to nourish the library's encyclopedic knowledge project. Objects were both ornaments and complements to written knowledge, of which they represented and displayed the material dimension.

These collections were not based on a specific acquisition policy. For the most part, they were assembled through donations from local personalities, notables, or travelers. Their primary function was to establish the status of the library. However, they were also involved in an identity project. On the one hand, these objects belonged to the readers community who benefited from the library; on the other hand, they were often gifted by the readers themselves. In Switzerland, these features became even more significant in the second half of the 18th century: the display of naturalist specimens in library cabinets materialized Swiss naturalist knowledge, as well as the desire to turn regional, or even national, nature into heritage and to better understand natural resources, in order to exploit them.

Objects were finally banished from libraries following the French Revolution, which decreed the museum as a public space for didactic, heritage and civic purposes. Subsequently, they supported and guaranteed the birth of museums between the end of the 18th century and throughout the following century, when innumerable museums were created from collections that were "ejected" from libraries. Practical reasons explained this "forced" autonomy, as objects collections had often reached a scale that no longer allowed them to be stored in the same space provided for books. Nevertheless, political, scientific, and epistemological reasons also came into play.

This book aims at questioning the role played by libraries as a *sine qua non* prerequisite for the emergence of the broad Swiss museum panorama and at analyzing an interaction that today seems to have lost its meaning, at least in the eyes of library users and museum visitors.

To this end, the work will gather case studies dedicated to Switzerland or studies that can shed light on the Swiss context. It will privilege a global approach of the phenomenon by examining the objects, the actors and their practices, as well as the institutions in a historical and contemporary perspective. The volume will focus essentially on the period between the 17th century and the end of the 19th century, although papers on the 20th century will be welcome if they are in dialogue with the past practices. The study of the relationship between libraries and museums will be considered in a bidirectional way: from the library to the museum, but also from the museum to the library.

Proposals of 300 words max. – in French, German, Italian or English – should be sent to Rossella Baldi (rossella.baldi@unine.ch) and Valérie Kobi (valerie.kobi@unine.ch). The deadline for submissions is 30th November 2023. Responses will be sent in January 2024. The publication of the volume is planned for 2025.