



**Dispersed collections virtually rejoined?
Why, how and possible wherewithal**

Elisabeth Eide
Department of Scholarship and Collections
The National Library
Oslo, Norway

Meeting: 99. Rare Books and Manuscripts

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 76TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ASSEMBLY

10-15 August 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden

<http://www.ifla.org/en/ifla76>

Abstract:

After a brief sketch of the history of three Norwegian dispersed collections, I try and weigh the pros and cons as to the desirability of rejoining them virtually. My focus is not on problems related to formats or preservation, but rather on the desirability of rejoining some collections and what arguments to use to obtain financial support for such an undertaking.

One of the three collections described, that of the war traitor Vidkun Quisling, would have been high up on any list of priorities. However, the collection has been dispersed in such a manner that it cannot be virtually rejoined.

The two other collections, previously belonging to parliamentarians from 1814 (Horneman and Aall) have the potential for a complete reconstruction. On a list of priorities I discuss which arguments would carry most weight. My conclusion is that the arguments for reconstructing the book collection belonging to Jacob Aall would have top priority, because he was a more interesting figure historically and because his collection may tell us more about Norwegian history in the early nineteenth century.

In the following I will briefly sketch the history of three Norwegian dispersed collections. Subsequently I will try and weigh the pros and cons as to the desirability of rejoining them virtually, before discussing the wherewithal, i.e. the possibility of financial support for such undertakings. It is my belief that a library will need sound arguments if it wishes to enlist political (and public) support for possible increase in a budget. If there is no such increase, the library will have to undertake the priorities within its own resources. In both instances arguments for and against should be weighed before a decision is made.

I will not concern myself with problems related to formats, preservation or conservation, but with considerations such as whether a reconstruction should take place or not, in what form and for whom.

More than thirty years ago the then Royal University Library of Oslo received a book gift, through a testament. The gift was from the widow of Vidkun Quisling, and Quisling was so well known as a traitor during the Second World War that his surname even became a noun in English – a quisling – is a traitor to one's country.

The then Librarian gave his staff very strict orders: the books were to be checked against the catalogues (card catalogues at that time), and any book admitted into the library must have all traces of previous ownership erased before being incorporated into our collections. Books not wanted by the library should be disposed of through the usual channel, i.e. the furnace. At that time the staff were not permitted to give away books to other libraries so any superfluous book was destroyed. No list of the books or no trace of Quisling's ownership were to be found, or is today found in our archives.

A few years later, having changed my position from subject librarian to Head of the national and special collections, I was given a furious upbraiding by a scholar from Leiden. She was working on a thesis on how and why people became traitors, and she had heard about the gift from Mrs. Quisling to the Royal University Library. She was interested in what books he had owned, and if he had noted down anything in any of the books. It was incomprehensible to her that the library had not made an inventory of the books owned by Quisling, and she made it very clear that she thought the library had committed an act of vandalism.

At the time of the gift, the Librarian's main concern was to avoid relics from Quisling becoming collectors' item. No burgeoning Nazi should be able to claim to have got hold of relics from Quisling through the Royal University Library. At that time this was regarded as a conclusive argument. However, when the part of the Royal University Library that had become the National Library some years later received the book collection assembled by former Norwegian Nazis with the purpose of rewriting history, it was evident that the library earlier had made a regrettable decision. Among the books there were several owned by Quisling, and in their catalogue, every book owned by him was marked with a Q.

My reason for drawing your attention to this collection is to illustrate that a library may be its own worst enemy. As far as I know, libraries have regularly dismantled collections, and with the digital age quite a few card catalogues have been scrapped. A virtual catalogue comprising all books owned by our most prominent traitor would undoubtedly have been of interest not only to scholars studying the Second World War, but also to students of Norwegian activities abroad (aid to Soviet, to Armenia, etc.) If it had been possible, I believe such a virtual catalogue would now have been very high up on any list of priorities.

But, to exonerate the library – or libraries – the last years the National Library of Norway has been working hard to create various databases related to people in the public eye. For Ibsen, this has meant participating in various editing projects and in a database for performances of Ibsen; for another grand literary figure, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, it has meant creating a database with most of Bjørnson's articles (approx. 3500) about a wide range of topics. Another possibility, so far not considered, is to make a database over the book collections of famous men or women, with digital versions of whatever books it was that they had scribbled in or set down comments in.

With such a database the audience would get information on:

- a) What books they had owned
- b) What books they had scribbled in/made notes in
- c) What the scribbling consisted of
- d) The original text of the book

A scholar would then have the possibility of deciding whether the scribble in any way was of interest to the famous person's work.

In the rest of my talk I will focus on two book collections of importance to the development of book history in Norway. The digital era opens new venues for both the scholar and the library to gather information on book history. The two dispersed, but special collections, will therefore be discussed as to arguments for and against a reconstruction of the collections in the form of a virtual catalogue. The viability of the arguments will be considered in connection with practical options and financing. In our digital era, what is possible to do, and what would be desirable to do with that information: create a digital library, a digital catalogue or a digital basis of information for study of the history of the book?

During the 18th and 19th centuries the family of Horneman, being merchants, industrialists, mine-owners, and shop-owners in the town of Trondhjem, had amassed a book collection estimated at 10-20 000 volumes.¹ In 1814 one Horneman represented Trondhjem at our first national assembly. From the 1720-50ies up to 1860 the books had been collected by a book loving family with a great range of interests. At three intervals from 1860 books were seceded from the collection. The secessions are well documented. The first, in 1860, was to the Royal University Library in Oslo. From the vast collection the Library selected 1576 titles of books. The same year 168 titles went to The Society for Scholarly Research in Trondhjem. In 1880, at a time when the Horneman town house was sold, one of the descendants was permitted to select 1233 titles from the family library, and these books went to the cathedral school in Hamar. It is also known that books were donated to other recipients. Subsequently the remaining books were moved to a newly built manor house in the countryside, where one of the descendants around 1890 started preparing an inventory of the books. He got to 857 titles, and then presumably gave up. I visited the manor house in 2008, and estimated that the library there contained approx. 10 000 books, and that it had not been used since around 1890. Through the various printed lists of gifts, the hand-written inventory and the remaining books it would be possible to make a virtual catalogue of most of one of the largest 18th century book collections in Norway.

The second collection to be considered is that of Jacob Aall (1773-1844). Jacob Aall took part in the first national assembly in 1814, where he played an important role in working out and structuring Norway's constitution. Also during later national assemblies he was an influential figure. Having studied theology, he chose to earn his living as an industrialist, a merchant, an iron master, and (a very humane) landowner. By inclination he was a scholar and a polyhistor, and he published works on the economics of iron ore and on farming. He translated sagas from Old Norse, was occupied with history and wrote his memoirs. His library reflected both his interests and his love of books (not as aesthetical objects but as a means of information and reflection.) He had, for instance, more than 50 books on/of Kant. When he died in 1844, his library (of approx. 4 000 titles) was sold by auction. The printed

¹ Contemporary estimates vary between 10 000 and 20 000.

catalogue still exists, and it is known that his eldest son, Nicolai Benjamin Aall (1805-1888), with strong interest in mineralogy and the natural sciences, bought part of his father's library. (He is known to have bought zoology, botany, parts of history, and the large aesthetic collection in toto.) It is also known that Nicolai Aall, within his own special field, added to the library. The book collection, such as it was when Nicolai Aall died, is still preserved in the library that Jacob Aall built in a wing of the original manor house. Through digitalization of the original catalogue, Jacob Aall's collection is now made available to scholars. And if this virtual catalogue, with ties both to Norwegian early independence, history and early foundation for the natural sciences, is virtually joined together with a similar catalogue of the present collection, scholars may study the development of industrialism, of natural studies and mineralogy in Norway through book acquisitions in the whole of the seminal 19th century. (One minor problem here is that the library is housed in a wing without electricity, so it can only be done during the summer season.)

HORNEMAN

The Horneman- and Aall-collections are alike in some ways, but differ in certain essential features. The collection of Horneman is unique in a Norwegian context, both because of the size of the collection and for what is known of its composition. (Large collections are extremely rare in Norway). With solid documentation of approx. 3800 titles, plus a not catalogued quantity (of unknown quality) of approx. 10 000 volumes still remaining in the library constructed around 1880, any virtual reconstruction would give students of book history and mentality studies a solid basis upon which to draw conclusions about the selection of books, where they were they acquired, reflexions of continental interests versus national or local, (one of the five printing presses in Norway was situated in Trondhjem), books about early industrialism in Norway, forestry and forest administration, timber export, the position of classical studies, the low position of English (as opposed to Latin, German and French), to mention but a few relevant topics.

There is every indication that the present owner of the manor house would be happy to have his collection catalogued, but so far he has taken no initiative himself. The house is well kept, no trace of mildew among the books and no indication that the rest of the collection will be dispersed.

As an added inducement, the Horneman family deposited their private archive at the county archive, so a virtual database combining library and archival information might be made very interesting for someone interested in Norwegian book history in the 18th and 19th centuries.

However, even though one Horneman was a deputy to our first national assembly, and another was a representative to the Storting for several years, the family never played any crucial role in the development of Norwegian history and their reputation is mostly connected to their collection of books. Any effort to bring together a digital version would have to originate with either the National library, or with the scientific institutions in Trondhjem or with especially concerned book historians – so far none have been forthcoming.

Arguments for making an effort:

WHY

- a) One of Norway's largest private collections from the early 18th century
- b) A well-kept archive might add information on practical issues related to book collection in Norway

HOW

- c) Due to printed catalogues, there is a real possibility of recreating virtually a large library

POSSIBLE wherewithal

- d) A virtual effort might draw upon local resources in mid-Norway

Arguments for not promoting a project of Horneman:

- a) The family have played a minor role in Norwegian intellectual life
- b) The collection is too vast and with no specific focus
- c) So far few notes have been found in the books
- d) A virtual catalogue would be of interest to a limited number of people

AALL

The collection of Aall's is not as large as that of Horneman. As mentioned, the auction catalogue from 1845 comprised approx. 4 300 volumes. The catalogue plus the books now residing in the library at the complex of houses at Nes, are estimated to approx. 5-6 000 titles. The composition of J. Aalls original collection was:

Theology	235 titles
Philosophy	381 "
Classical lang.:	278 "
History	982 " (of which 652 in Nordic history)
Law	577 "
Natural sciences	82 "
Mathematics	84 "
Physics/chemistry	132 "
Astronomy	35 "
Mineralogy	215 "
Medicine	54 "
Encyclop/periodical	102 "
Aesthetics/lit.	903 "

The catalogue from 1845 was printed with black letter types, which for all practical purposes makes it difficult to use. As a basis for a virtual catalogue, however, much more information might be added. It is known that Jacob Aall kept an accession protocol for his library, the *Catalogus librorum Jacobi Aall*. In that is also noted which books came from a brother of his (who together with Jacob Aall invested in the iron works at Nes. This brother was of a very scholarly inclination, and collected books especially on travel literature, philosophy from the Middle Ages and Spinoza. There is also a protocol from the 1880ies of the books then present in the library, made when Nes iron works went bankrupt. In addition the family archives would presumably contain material that might throw light upon book acquisitions, possible binding expenses etc. In other words, the potentiality is vast when it comes to an Aall-library database, and the quality of such a virtual database would depend more upon what finances are possible than on other things.

In connection with the celebrations of Norway's 200 year old constitution in 2014, several initiatives have been taken. One initiative, originating with the faculty of Law, is concerned with intellectual impulses behind the constitution. The project has questioned how many copies of books by authors such as Adam Smith, John Locke, Montesquieu or Tom Paine,

and how many books about the revolutions in France and the United States are to be found in Norwegian private collections? What books did the representatives to the first national assembly possess or have access to? Since Jacob Aall's part in the writing of the constitution was so great, the question of where he found his intellectual inspiration is of interest to both law and history studies. (Since his library room was so beautiful, it may be that concepts of his book collection are more in people's mind than other book collections)

Aall's book collection is also of relevance to another field of research – that of Norway's early industrial development. Perhaps a tenuous argument, but this may also be related to the rewriting of history in connection with Norway's preparations for the marking of 200 years of independence. Because both father and son Aall were among the early industrialists, the father having studied mining and mineralogy in Germany, the son chemistry and zoology, and their manor house relying on local woodland to supply the ironworks, their library is of interest to students of law, of history and of the natural science

WHY create an Aall database/virtual catalogue

- a) Aall was an influential and important person in the early 1800
- b) Aall's son was an early practitioner of the natural sciences
- c) Nes iron works has an interesting industrial history
- d) Interest in Aall comes from several fields of research

HOW

- a) Through digitising/transforming the black letter catalogue to Latin types
- b) Through digitising hand written accession protocols and hand written bibliography from 1880ies
- c) Through scanning Aall books with hand written notes on political topics
- d) Through digitising parts of the private voluminous archives

THE WHEREwithals

A project on Aall is more likely to receive support both from national channels such as the National Library, the committee to mark 200 years of our constitution and from scholars in a wide variety of fields. In this respect it is important to note that such a project may have a rather modest beginning, but the scope for enlargement is great. If all book lists are scanned it will give scholars access to information about the actual collection; if books with notes in them are scanned, it will make a dynamic version of the books possible. An interactive system, whereby a scholar, interested in the progression/evolution of our constitution, may follow traces made by people involved in the actual process must constitute a new experience for a scholar. If other metadata, such as archival information, also is added, we have begun to aggregate one repository for our history.

Target groups: book historians; Students of the constitution; History students; Students of industrial development; Local historians