

The collections of the Jagiellonian Library in Kraków comprise numerous manuscripts written by women, including vast epistolary materials, being an invaluable source of knowledge concerning social and cultural life since the mid-18th century up to these days. However, many of these resources have not been studied yet. The Karl Varnhagen collection which is preserved in the Jagiellonian Library is an enormous body of letters, literary manuscripts, journals, notes etc. covering the literary, cultural and political life of Europe from the end of the 18th century until the mid-19th century. Importantly, it gathers a considerable number of manuscripts written by dozens of women who belonged to the German-speaking cultural community. Not only did they shape the history of the German culture but, through their vast networks, they influenced the literary discourse of other European countries, including Poland. Alongside well-known names like Bettina von Arnim, Sophie Mereau-Brentano or Rahel Varnhagen there are less known or forgotten women authors to be rediscovered. Usually, they are not included in the canon of current literary studies but they gained recognition among their contemporaries and played an important role in the literary life. The manuscripts written by some of them will be the subject of this project.

Our research project is aimed at philological description, representation and analysis of the selected corpus of letters belonging to the Varnhagen collection and written by German-speaking women writers from the last years of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, including the exploration of materials and letters related to those documents. The basis of the study is a manuscript collection of about 2,400 sheets, most of them letters, written by eight selected authors: Charlotte von Ahlefeldt (1781-1849), Helmina von Chézy (1783-1856), Amalia von Imhoff (1776-1831), Amalia Schoppe (1791-1858), Fanny Tarnow (1779-1862), Karoline von Woltmann (1782-1847), Caroline de la Motte Fouqué (1775-1831) and Amalia von Voigt (1780-1840). Apart from the epistolary relations, they were interconnected by vast and varied activities in the literary field (literary, translating and/or journalistic activities), and can be seen as mediators between cultures (e.g. between Germany, France, Poland, Czech Republic, Sweden, USA).

This body of manuscripts is to be examined with all its references within the epistolary, cultural, scientific and social networks of that time. Furthermore, the project will examine the wider context of this corpus within the Varnhagen collection as well as its interconnections with other relevant collections. The manuscripts will be evaluated with regard to publications of the above named authors and presented as (1) a printed volume (annotated edition of selected letters) and (2) a digital edition (all letters) on a specially developed dedicated digital platform providing (3) additional biographical and bibliographical information, links to digital representations of publications of the selected authors and to corresponding digital projects. Such an attempt has not yet been undertaken with regard to the Varnhagen collection.

Providing and elaboration of so far unknown manuscripts will open new perspectives for further academic research, both in the field of studies on social aspects of literature (including cultural and literary emancipation of women, functioning of the literary field) and poetological studies (development of concepts of work and authorship), as well as in the field of edition philology (including placing an item within the collection, digital representation, etc.). The results of the research will be additionally assembled in a volume of articles (4).

As preliminary research has shown, the material selected for processing may cast new light on the social and cultural life of the first half of the 19th century and modify the views on historical literary constellations. The planned publications (especially the digital edition) will go beyond narrow disciplinary boundaries and thus be useful in further interdisciplinary studies as a research tool which may contribute to changes in the way the history of German (and also European) literature is regarded. Moreover, the combination of the printed and digital edition together with exploring the specific aspects concerning the clearly defined section of the Varnhagen collection can be seen as a pilot project which may open a new stage in the process of archival and academic work on this collection, especially within the bilateral cooperation. Although some research on a part of the Varnhagen collection is already done, there is a dire need for further intense work on it and develop new methods of making it available for academic purposes.