

**The First Use of a Library Questionnaire:  
Adalbert Blumenschein's  
Eighteenth-Century Study of European Libraries**

Thomas D. Walker  
*University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee*

A large work of library literature, the "Beschreibung verschiedener Bibliotheken in Europa" ("Description of Various Libraries in Europe") of Adalbert Blumenschein (1720-1781), which exists in a single manuscript copy in the Austrian National Library, is introduced, its methods summarized, and its use of a questionnaire documented. The questionnaire, which may be the first known to have been used by a library researcher to gather data about libraries, is reconstructed based on internal evidence.

At home in a small Austrian pilgrimage church in Maria Taferl, Adalbert Blumenschein (1720-1781), a priest and librarian, described almost 2,500 eighteenth-century European libraries in his "Beschreibung verschiedener Bibliotheken in Europa" (Blumenschein, 1781). The work is an extraordinarily rich and reliable primary source based on Blumenschein's expert observations, an unusually detailed secondary source supported by a large body of published literature, and an abundant tertiary source that describes or cites thousands of books and manuscripts in hundreds of European libraries. Blumenschein was one of the first library researchers to make extensive use of primary sources and personal observation and may have been the first to request information by questionnaire. This article describes his methodology in general terms and attempts to reconstruct his questionnaire.

**BLUMENSCHIEIN'S DESCRIPTION OF LIBRARIES**

Blumenschein's "Beschreibung" is contained in a four-volume manuscript of more than 1,600 folio pages now in the Manuscript Collection of the Austrian National Library in Vienna. Compiled at the Austrian pilgrimage church Maria Taferl, where Blumenschein was a priest, librarian, and finally chief Administrator, and in Steyr, where he lived in retirement, the volumes were acquired in 1940 by the National

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Direct correspondence to Thomas D. Walker, School of Library and Information Science, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, Enderis Hall, P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201.

Library from Maria Taferl. The manuscript is written primarily in German, but Latin appears in isolated phrases, for many book titles, inscriptions, scholarly apparatus, and in an attached "Nekrolog" in homage to Blumenschein written after his death.

Blumenschein's work is one of the richest contemporary sources of information about eighteenth-century libraries; however, due to its obscurity and inaccessibility and in spite of an announcement of the work's existence by Teichl (1937), it has received little scholarly attention and has been quoted infrequently. Blumenschein described libraries in 926 cities, towns, or other locations from 23 European countries or regions; much of his most valuable information was gathered during personal visits to 145 cities in 8 countries. In 2,489 entries, he referred to about 300 other sources by means of almost 4,400 individual citations (Walker, 1992, pp. 170, 171, and 181). Blumenschein was concerned with libraries of all kinds: monastery, church, synagogue, civil, judicial, public, private, university, school, princely, royal, imperial, business, and scientific. His work is arranged by country, then city, then by library in order of decreasing size or importance, with the lengths of the individual entries ranging from a few words to over 20 pages. Although the contents of the entries vary considerably, they typically include the following categories of information: city name, library name, location within the city or within a larger building, general evaluation of the collection's quality, historical summary, names of current administrators, statement of accessibility to scholars and the public, physical description of the building and rooms (including many detailed descriptions of paintings, statues, and inscriptions), estimate of collection size (sometimes subdivided by subject category), description of physical arrangement of bookcases and books, outline of classification system, lists of important manuscripts and early printed books, and citations to primary and secondary literature.

Blumenschein was one of many library travelers of the eighteenth century. Library travel writing matured during this period but had its roots in the middle of the previous century. Perhaps the best known early example of this genre was Johannes Lomeier's *De bibliothecis liber singularis* (1669), the tenth chapter of which, "De bibliothecis celebrioribus in Europa," surveyed the better-known European libraries of the period. Despite his thoroughly documented scholarship and the overall contribution of his work to library historiography, Lomeier, having visited few of the libraries in person, relied on secondary sources for his discussions. A different, and slightly later, tradition is reflected in the traveling scholars who started recording their personal observations of libraries, among other objects and institutions, with the express purpose of giving advice to other traveling scholars. Three such surveys valued as prototypes by later library travelers were Jean Mabillon's *Museum italicum* (1687-1689), Bernard Montfaucon's *Diarium italicum* (1702), Kaspar Neickel's *Museografia* (1727), and the *Thesaurus anecdotorum novissimus* (1721) of Bernhard Pez. Mabillon, Montfaucon, and Pez were members of religious orders, and Pez was the librarian of the Benedictine monastery at Melk, only a few miles down the Danube from Blumenschein's church.

Eighteenth-century writers produced library travel accounts that may be grouped into three major types: "literary" travel journals, "social-scientific" travel journals, and the relatively comprehensive library surveys such as those by Blumenschein and F.K.G. Hirsching (Hirsching, 1786-1791). Several accounts of the first two types have been discussed by Peter Jörg Becker (1980) and others.

Blumenschein's "Beschreibung" shows a concern for the tradition of bibliographic scholarship descended from other religious figures, such as Mabillon, Montfaucon, and Pez, who traveled to religious centers of scholarship in the course of their work, as well

as an attraction to the more widely conceived data gathering methods of the eighteenth-century traveling researchers. It was written against a backdrop of churning social change. Even monks in isolated monasteries could not have ignored the political changes, scientific discoveries, and cultural currents that were prominent in the second half of the eighteenth century. Blumenschein read many newspapers, kept up with the book trade and current literature, met people from all of central Europe on a daily basis, and was extremely well traveled. He could not have escaped noticing the events that were occurring in Europe and abroad. He must have been aware of advances in the sciences, the social sciences, the arts, politics, and philosophy—the forward-looking changes that were part of the Enlightenment. He must also have been keenly versed in the attitudes that threatened him and other clerics in a time of externally imposed religious reforms. In order to understand the currents Blumenschein may have felt from the Enlightenment and pre-Josephinian church reforms, one must consider too, that they had been filtered through his local environment, a pilgrimage church and scene of miracles (Walker, 1992, pp. 26-31).

### BLUMENSCHIEIN'S METHODS

The "Beschreibung" was Blumenschein's life work. Data were gathered over a 25-year period, with the most concentrated effort occurring during the last 10 years of his life. It is based on almost 400 personal library visits by Blumenschein and on a large number of secondary sources. Almost 4400 citations refer to approximately 300 printed sources, including bibliographies, library catalogs, books, journals, and newspapers. For library historians and other library researchers, the work is noteworthy not only because of its size and scope but also because of its approach to methodology and the place it should claim in the history of library research. Apart from the printed sources cited in most of his entries and the data gathered from his several hundred personal library visits, Blumenschein also obtained information from believable witnesses and, in at least one instance, from a questionnaire.

Blumenschein did not believe everything he read or heard. He was wary of librarians' estimates of the sizes of their own collections and went to great efforts to examine as many printed sources as possible for each library he described. He even verified information on site when he could. Yet, on occasion, he had no printed information for particular collections and was not able to make personal visits. In these cases how was he able to say anything at all? Blumenschein addressed the problem in his introduction:

Ich hab hievon blos angeführt, soviel mir eintweders selbst untergekommen, oder was ich durch gedruckt- und geschriebene, oder auch zuweilen, wiewohl sehr sparsam, durch glaubwürdig, mündliche Nachrichten in gesicherte Erfahrung bringen mögen. (Blumenschein, 1781, vol. I, ff. viii<sup>f</sup>-viii<sup>v</sup>)

(I have included only what I myself have come across, or what I can trust, whether it be from printed or written [sources], or also occasionally, however very sparingly, from believable oral reports.)

In other words, he based his descriptions on his own experiences, on printed and written sources, and on "believable" oral reports. He neither itemized his criteria for

accepting an oral source as "glaubwürdig" (believable), nor identified these sources; however, he must have intended to inform his readers that he knew not all such reports would necessarily be reliable.

Not many of Blumenschein's entries were based on third-person reports: Only 65 entries (3%) of the entire "Beschreibung" included the abbreviation "Nachr." (Nachricht or Nachrichten) among their source lists, and only 49 (2%) were based solely on such reports. The number of reports increased for the sections of the work representing areas visited by Blumenschein. During his travels he surely acquired contacts who told him about collections they knew or sent him information later. Even at home in Maria Taferl, which was a travel destination for thousands of pilgrims, he may have met informants he considered reliable. The fact that about 75% of the entries based solely on these reports describe monastery libraries may indicate that many of Blumenschein's suppliers of Nachrichten were members of religious orders. About 50% of the "Beschreibung" entries are for libraries of religious institutions, 41% for monastery libraries.

With two exceptions, the entries based entirely on written or oral reports are particularly short, averaging only about nine lines per entry. For the Pauline monastery library in Budapest (Blumenschein, 1781, vol. IIIa, pp. 154-155), Blumenschein wrote an entry of about 67 lines and cited "Schriftl[iche] Nachr[ichten]" (written report). Slightly longer is an entry written for the Cistercian monastery library in Neuburg, Austria (Blumenschein, 1781, vol. II, pp. 157-159), which at 75 lines must also have been based on a rather long communication. In the following case, a librarian supplied Blumenschein with fairly detailed answers to what may be the first recorded use of a library questionnaire.

### BLUMENSCHHEIN'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Like other early library visitors, Blumenschein gathered much information on site directly from librarians or other officials. As detailed as the reports of some visitors were, there is little evidence that they took systematic approaches to data collection, whether from existing printed sources, catalogs, or through personal contacts. Aside from occasional citations that indicate a particular visitor's use of a source for additional information, almost nothing is known about their methods of gathering data. The use of a questionnaire, however, can be documented in the Blumenschein "Beschreibung."

With a brief description of a very small library at the monastery at Engelhartszell in Austria (Blumenschein, 1781, vol. II, pp. 130, 130a-b, and 138a), Blumenschein included a note in the margin: "S[iehe] das eingesch[obene] Bl[att] 130." What is waiting for the reader, on both sides of "the inserted leaf 130" (and on one side of a leaf inserted after page 138), are handwritten answers to nine numbered questions about the contents and physical characteristics of that library, prepared by its librarian and archivist, Calestinus Weinberger (Blumenschein, 1781, vol. II, pp. 130a-b and 138a). The manner in which the answers are presented, both in format and content, suggests answers to written questions, or less likely, to spoken questions that were notated in order to be answered later or in more detail than might have been possible during a conversation. Although the questions themselves were not reproduced verbatim by Weinberger, they were restated. It is fairly easy to reconstruct the original questionnaire because the answers are organized around nine questions as apparently

posed by Blumenschein. The questions addressed several distinct points of interest to Blumenschein—points that recur throughout the manuscript.

The brevity of Blumenschein's entry is made up for by the inclusion of Weinberger's informative reply. Blumenschein's entry consists of a label, a marginal note referring the reader to Weinberger's notes, the short entry itself, and the letter B, which Blumenschein used to indicate a personal visit had taken place:

Engelhardscell.\*\*

\*\* S. das eingesch. Bl. 130. Die Büchersammlung in dieser denn Bernardinern zuständigen Abtey steht zwar in einem ganz neu- und sauber errichteten Behältniß; ist abermercklich enge, und wird über 5000. Bände nicht viel fassen. Ich fragte nach einigen seltenen Wercken; allein Man sagte mir ganz Kurz: es seye von dergleichen nichts vorhanden. B: (Blumenschein, vol. II, p. 130)

(\*\* See inserted leaf 130. The book collection in the abbey, which belongs to the Bernardines, stands in a completely new and cleanly constructed room, but is however noticeably narrow and would not hold many more than 5000 volumes. I inquired about some rare works, however one told me very simply, that there are none of the kind to be found. B:)

Weinberger's answers, referred to by the marginal note are arranged point by point. Calling these areas of interest *Fragepuncten*, he sometimes combined more than one in a paragraph and labeled them in Latin: "Ad 1mum et 2dum," "Ad 3tium," etc. (to the 1st and 2nd [points], "to the 3rd," etc.). The answers begin,

Beantwortung der fragepuncten von der Beschaffenheit und Einrichtung der Stüfts Bibliothec zu Engeldzell.

Ad 1mum et 2dum Von Wem, und um welche zeit der hiesigen Bibliothec der grund geleget: auch von dero Einrichtung, Vermehr- und Verbesserung: (Blumenschein, 1781, vol. II, p. 130a)

(Response to the questions about the contents and arrangement of the monastery library at Engelhartzell.

To the 1st and 2nd [points] By whom and when the present library was founded; also about its arrangement, additions, and improvements:)

Weinberger could not comment much about the collection of earlier times because the monastery suffered many mishaps: wars, attacks, secularization of the monastery, fire, and even the plague, which claimed the entire monastery population, "zusamt dem damahligen Abbt" (including the former Abbot) (Blumenschein, 1781, vol. II, p. 130a). The term *Fragepunkt* implies more than "question." It reflects the use here of individually numbered "question points" that comprise Blumenschein's questionnaire. Weinberger addressed each of the remaining seven questions in a similar way: a) by providing the numbers of the points being answered, b) (usually) by restating the

content of the question, and c) by answering the question. Since some answers address two questions, it is not possible to know precisely how Blumenschein numbered the original questions. Weinberger's last paragraph, for example, covered Blumenschein's eighth and ninth questions:

Ad 8vum et 9end So sind übrigend keine Globi, noch auch Medaillen kästen, weder auch Mathemisch. Instrumente, oder andere Samlungen seltene dingen vorhanden: massen bey errichtung diser ganz neuen Bibliothek nur auf die beyschaffung gutten, und zum gebrauch nuzbahren Bücher das erste, und haubte absehen gewesen, welcher doch in einer respective so kurzen zeit soweit bewärcket werden.

P: Caestinus Weinberger, p:t: Biblioth: et Archivar. (Blumenschein, 1781, vol. II, p. 138a)

(To the 8th and 9th [points] Thus there remain no globes, nor cases of medallions, nor mathematical instruments, nor other collections of unusual things; in the setting up of this completely new library [we] have had to give first and most important consideration to the acquisition of good and practical books, which can actually be accomplished in such a relatively short time.)

Blumenschein was obviously looking for information about the existence in this library of miscellaneous materials. In scores of other entries, Blumenschein included this kind of information, usually toward the end of the entry, before the lists of manuscripts and early printed books. Whether Blumenschein's eighth question dealt with "globes" or "globes and medallions" or some other combination cannot be determined from Weinberger's answer.

Blumenschein's questionnaire may be reconstructed on the basis of Weinberger's restatements of the questions and on his answers, as follows:

- 1) When and by whom was the present library founded?
- 2) What are its physical characteristics? Were there any additions or improvements?
- 3) How many books does it contain?
- 4) How many early manuscripts does it contain? In which languages are they written?
- 5) How many early printed books does it contain?
- 6) How are the books arranged? What sources of light are present? Is the library safe from fire?
- 7) How is the library decorated?
- 8) Does it contain any globes, medallions (coins), or mathematical instruments?

9) Does it contain any other collections of unusual things?

Such "free-answer" questions would have given Blumenschein's respondents a high degree of latitude in providing answers. Although there is not much explicit internal evidence that Blumenschein habitually gathered data in this way, it appears that most of the work's entries do favor an arrangement that places the physical description of the library (including geographical location, size and numbers of rooms and their locations) first, followed by details regarding the arrangement of books, a general survey of the collection by general subject area, and an estimate of its size, followed in turn by information about decorations, murals, paintings, etc., and closing with lists of special collections, remarkable manuscripts, early printed books, and lists of sources consulted by Blumenschein for the entry. While most entries contain information in the same broad categories sought in the questionnaire, it cannot be concluded that all entries were based on data collected by questionnaire. While Blumenschein may not have used this "information gathering instrument" for his entire work, at least in the case of Engelhartzell there is clear evidence of an early occurrence—perhaps the first—of the use of a questionnaire for gathering information about a library.

Explicit study of the development of research in library and information science has been given very sporadic scholarly attention. In this discipline, unlike history of science and history of medicine, there exists little framework for systematic examination of the development of our literatures and methodologies. Indeed, we know almost nothing about our literatures and methods before the middle of the present century. Yet even a cursory look at Blumenschein's "Beschreibung" demonstrates the existence in an earlier century of significant, even monumental works on libraries. Thus the impetus behind the entire Blumenschein project, of which the reconstruction of his questionnaire is a small part, lies in a desire to document and evaluate early library literature and research methods. Understanding even small parts of a whole, in this case, one of several data-gathering methods used by an eighteenth-century library researcher, contributes to a broader conception of the history of the discipline.

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