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The Writing of University History and University Jubilees: German Examples

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ABSTRACT

University history has a long-standing record. The early formation of university historiography materialized not only as a result of scientific self-reflection, but also as an occasion-driven practice tied to anniversaries. Therefore, it was linked to a concrete context of utilization and application. Thus, university history was often some sort of casual remittance work, carried out on the occasion of a jubilee by historians who were chosen rather for their local availability than for their special knowledge. This holds true even today, in spite of the fact that since the mid-1990s there has been an increased research interest in university history, both on the national and international level. Thus, it still seems productive to ask what anniversaries mean for the writing of university history. In what follows, I will address this question by a three-step approach. First, I am going to roughly sketch out the history of university jubilees to illuminate the historical background of this particular production context. In step two, I will turn to some basic and systematic reflections about how university history can and should be written. Finally, step three will provide a short screening of the (German) anniversary publications that came out in recent years.

Keywords: historiography; university history; jubilees; Germany

Introduction

University history has a long-standing record. Its beginnings date back to the early modern period. We find the first academic accounts of university history around the end of the eighteenth century, when historiography began to turn into a science.[1] The early formation

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1 C. Meiners, *Geschichte der Entstehung und Entwicklung der hohen Schulen unseres Erdtheiles*, 4 vols. (Göttingen 1802/1805). On the history of university historiography, see R. Müller, 'Genese, Methoden und Tendenzen der allgemeinen deutschen Universitätsgeschichte. Zur Entwicklung einer historischen Spezialdisziplin', *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 20 (2000) 181–202; R. vom Bruch, 'Methoden und Schwerpunkte der neueren Universitätsgeschichtsforschung', in: W. Buchholz (ed.), *Die Universität Greifswald und die deutsche Hochschullandschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart 2004) 9–26; M. Asche and S. Gerber, 'Neuzeitliche Universitätsgeschichte in Deutschland. Entwicklungslinien und Forschungsfelder', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 90 (2008) 159–202.

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of university historiography materialized not only as a result of scientific self-reflection but also as an occasion-driven practice tied to anniversaries. Therefore, it was linked to a concrete context of utilization and application. Thus, university history was often some sort of casual remittance work, carried out on the occasion of a jubilee by historians who were chosen rather for their local availability than for their special knowledge.[2]

This holds true even today. Though since the mid-1990s there has been an increased research interest in university history, both on the national and international level, the community of actual university historians with a decided research focus in this field is still rather small. This late research boom in university history is owed to a need for historical self-assurance in times of educational and scientific-political changes, but it also reflects ongoing discussions about the knowledge society and the new attention paid to cultural matters in history, following the influence of the various *cultural turns* during the last decades. This late research boom was accompanied by a professionalization of university history. In the German context, the foundation of the *Gesellschaft für Universitäts- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (GUW) in 1995 and the foundation of a professional journal, the *Jahrbuch für Universitätsgeschichte* first published in 1997, are examples for this development.[3] Another indicator for this upswing was the project *Geschichte der Universität in Europa / History of the University in Europe* initiated by the *Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conference*. The project's findings have been edited by Walter Rüegg from 1996 onwards.[4] The four volumes that have since been completed are conceived as a large-scale synthesis of the development of universities and science from medieval times up to the present. Another impulse for investigating university history derived from the foundation of university archives and their staffing with professional archivists. Even though this process started in the late 1960s, it often was implemented as late as the 1980s and 1990s.

When looking at recent works on German university history, it soon becomes evident that in spite of the above-mentioned tendencies towards professionalization, the major part of these publications exhibits the well-known pattern of originating in the context of a jubilee. Anniversaries still provide a great opportunity for university history as demonstrated recently on the occasion of the university jubilees in Jena, Leipzig and Berlin, but also, for instance, in Oslo.[5] Such events provide access, if for a limited period of time, to remarkable resources, which results in an enormous output of publications. Thus, it still seems productive to ask what anniversaries mean for the writing of university history. In what follows, I will address this question by a three-step approach. First, I am going to roughly sketch out the history of university jubilees to illuminate the historical background of this particular production context. In step two, I will turn to some basic and systematic

2 N. Hammerstein, 'Jubiläumsschrift und Alltagsarbeit. Tendenzen bildungsgeschichtlicher Literatur', *Historische Zeitschrift* 236 (1983) 601–633.

3 On an international level, the International Commission for the History of Universities (ICHU) as an international forum for university history has existed since 1960. For announcements of conferences etc. see its homepage http://www.cihu-ichu.org (last access 31.01.2012). See also the useful homepage *University History Forum for Finnish (and Foreign) Researchers on the History of Universities:* http://www.helsinki.fi/historia/ylhist/homepage.html (last access 31.01.2012).

4 W. Rüegg (ed.), *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*, 4 vols. (München 1996–2010).

5 On the occasion of the university's 2011 anniversary, the *Forum for University History* at Oslo University evolved as a core area in the field. See E. Benum, 'On the Challenge of Writing a University History: the University of Oslo', *CSHE Research & Occasional Paper Series* 5 (1999), downloadable via http://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications (last access 9.11.2012).

reflections about how university history can and should be written. Finally, step three will provide a short screening of the (German) anniversary publications that came out in recent years.

The history of jubilees and university anniversaries as production context

At the origin of our anniversary culture, there were the church, Christianity and – perhaps surprising for many – the universities. As Winfried Müller has shown, the jubilee tradition goes back to the Old Testament, to the introduction of the Holy Year by Pope Boniface VIII in 1300 (in the beginning celebrated as a centennial) and to the first secular centenaries or bicentenaries which took place at protestant universities in the sixteenth century, for example at Tübingen (1578) or Heidelberg (1587).[6] The Reformation was the prerequisite for the anniversary cycle to be taken out of its Christian and ecclesiastic context. The first secular jubilees were used by protestant professors to reflect upon their own self-conception and to criticise the Catholic Church. Envisioning one's own history, distinguishing oneself from Catholicism and praising the ruling dynasty at the occasion of an anniversary fulfilled the function of legitimizing the university in religious and political terms. The fact that universities celebrated themselves constituted a true innovation in the history of secular memory culture. In that way, the anniversary cycle was taken out of the religious and ecclesiastical context and passed on to other institutions and areas of society. From the seventeenth century onwards, secular anniversary celebrations were adapted by other institutions, by the state and by various social groups, first and foremost the urban bourgeoisie.

In the modern era, anniversary celebrations increasingly gained importance with regard to the orientation and formation of identity. On the way to the modern culture of remembrance, universities played a key role in the spread of anniversaries. With the first university jubilees, we already find the development of components of a culture of remembrance, which has been passed on until this day. Thus, the early modern period already saw anniversary and historical retrospection as going hand in hand. The engagement with one's own history was functional in terms of the present and future. Even then, as in our time, commemorative historical texts (*Festschriften*) were published on the occasion of a university jubilee. The constructed traditions shed a light on the states of awareness and motivations pertinent to the respective time.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the anniversary celebrations of German universities became increasingly more elaborate and colourful. By then we find expanded press coverage even in the illustrated journals, and memorial publications were distributed for free around the world. There was severe competition among universities in terms of an exuberant staging of the jubilee since all of them sought to profit from this event in the competition for students, professors, financial resources and public attention. A preferably splendid and long historical tradition was a definite competitive advantage. In the nineteenth century, university anniversaries thus marketed events for the university itself as well as for the city, for the respective State (that is for Saxony, Baden, Bavaria or Prussia) as sustainer of the universities as well as for the nation as a whole.[7]

6 W. Müller, 'Erinnern an die Gründung. Universitätsjubiläen, Universitätsgeschichte und die Entstehung der Jubiläumskultur in der Frühen Neuzeit', *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 21 (1998) 79–102.

7 See for example W. Tischner, 'Das Universitätsjubiläum 1909 zwischen universitärer Selbstvergewisserung und monarchischer Legitimitätsstiftung', in: U. von Hehl (ed.), *Sachsens Landesuniversität in Monarchie, Republik und Diktatur* (Leipzig 2005) 95–114.

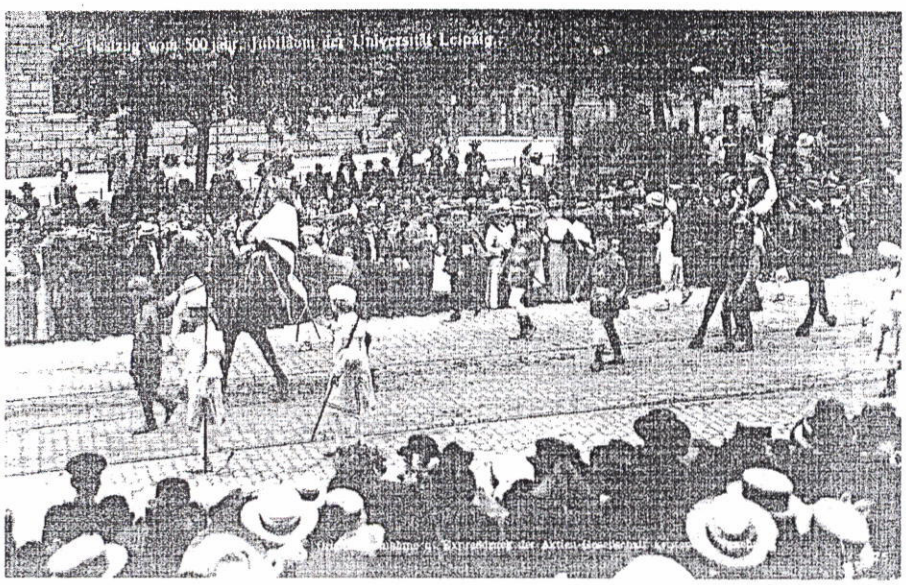

Fig. 1: Historic procession at the Leipziger university jubilee of 1909.

With regard to its function of shaping unity and orientation, a jubilee needs a harmonious celebration and a university history, which is functional for the present time and consensually embedded into the dominant culture of remembrance. Anniversaries cover the past with an order-constructing time frame. And yet, in light of the non-linear and contingent course of history, they ultimately are coincidental dates. So what happens when anniversaries fall into times of crisis or political upheaval, as for example in the twentieth century? In this regard, we find a great range of variation on the part of the universities. Jubilees were celebrated either cautiously or not at all, if a historical tradition with the potential to 'match' the present was not yet available and thus still waiting to be constructed. But anniversaries could also be used to demonstrate the institution's adaptation to the new political system or on the contrary could be transformed into events of protest.

To give a few examples: the transition from the German Empire's constitutional monarchy to the post-1918 Republic also had its bearings on university anniversaries. The rejective attitude towards the young Republic exhibited by the majority of German professors can be traced in Munich University's anniversary of 1922.[8] This anniversary was celebrated in rather modest terms because the University's national-conservative president did not want the event to legitimize the despised Republic. This stands in stark contrast to the 1942 celebration in Munich when the University's national-socialist *Führerrektor* gave instructions to prepare a 470-year celebration (a rather unusual date to remember in the anniversary cycle) in order to prove the university's strategic importance to national socialism and to prevent its closure.

Changes in the political system and in society were responded to through the construction of a new historical tradition that brought together the old and the new, if only with a certain temporal delay and after a period of insecure attempts. This can also be evidenced in post-1968 West Germany: university celebrations were interrupted and radically questioned in their traditional form by the students' movement. Their ritualistic vocabulary of forms was

8 M. Schreiber, 'Die Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität und ihre Jubiläumsfeiern in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts', in: E. Kraus (ed.), *Die Universität München im Dritten Reich*, Teil 1 (München 2006) 479–504.

attacked as the symbol of an undemocratic and outdated institution. Thus, between the late 1960s and the 1980s the West German universities were characterized by a rather low-key celebration culture. It was typical for the old Federal Republic of that time that next to the official *Festschrift* there was often a 'Counter-Publication' (*Gegen-Festschrift*) usually edited by students and representatives of the non-professorial faculty (*akademischer Mittelbau*).[9] These groups sought to write an alternative, critical history of the university and demanded to come to terms with the thus-far suppressed time of National Socialism. This, however, was an undertaking which at many universities became possible only from the mid-1980s onwards due to formerly dominating fears of conflict and protest on the part of families and pupils of incriminated professors.

From the 1990s onwards, a new consensus with regard to anniversary culture seems to have emerged in West Germany. Jubilees were again celebrated on a large scale; they were – again and even more intensely – utilized as PR events and machines for the production of corporate identity. What has developed is an institutional culture of remembrance in which the attempts to come to terms with National Socialism and to pay tribute to the exiled, prosecuted and murdered members of the university (for example through commemorative insignia) have become central ingredients of the institutional culture of remembrance. One can also observe the decided way in which universities in East German states took issue with the political upheavals and experiences of dictatorship of the twentieth century. Here again we can detect a tight interlocking of the university's culture of remembrance with the collective memory of society.

Thus, university jubilees not only highlight the history of the university, but also the respective overall political, societal and cultural conditions. University anniversaries never just exhibit a purely commemorative dimension. They simultaneously serve political and economic interests and bring the university and the public into closer contact. In terms of ritual, university anniversaries encourage reflection upon the prevailing self-identity of the institution. The context of a jubilee is janus-headed: it clearly holds affirmative and legitimizing traits, but it often also provides (material) resources for investigating university history and thus enables reflection on the tasks and functions of university and science through the engagement with history.

University history: fields of study and levels of investigation

University history is about investigating the university's historical change as a social institution in terms of its self-image and functions, its social and cultural practices as well as its modes of producing, mediating and storing knowledge. University history also poses questions about the interactions of the institution and its members with state, society, economy and culture, and looks at the various spatial dimensions and relationships of the institution.[10] A useful methodological approach to university history is to work with the three core functions of universities – general education, academic qualification, and the production of

9 E.g. K. Buselmeier, D. Harth and C. Jansen (eds.), *Auch eine Geschichte der Universität Heidelberg* (Mannheim 1985).

10 On the following considerations regarding writing university history see the more detailed S. Paletschek, 'Stand und Perspektiven der neueren Universitätsgeschichte', *NTM. Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* 19 (2011) 169–189, 173.

knowledge – as well as a consideration of their various levels – discursive, institutional, material, social, cultural and spatial. These will be expanded upon in the following.

The modern university's core functions are defined by a triad: general education, professional academic qualification (*akademische Berufsbildung*) and scientific knowledge production. The field of general education is closely linked to the ideological, political and habitual socialisation of students at the university. The university influences the up-and-coming elites of society, and university history is therefore intimately connected with the questioning of political as well as social and gender history. The educational function of the university involves not only the internal socialisation of students, but also possibilities for wider education and knowledge transfer to the greater public. Knowledge transfer can be understood here as an 'external' educational function of the university, also described in the concept of PUSH (public understanding of science and humanities), which suggests a reciprocal transfer between society and institutions of knowledge production and mediation, and is thus important to consider when researching the history of universities.

The institutional function of the professional academic qualification is also closely connected to the history of the respective professions and the demand for qualifications within the state and society. The qualification and training of future academics who then continue to work at universities or research institutes is a quantitatively small, yet from the standpoint of the academic community an extremely significant function of the university. The constantly changing demand for various experts – in Early Modern times this was mainly for theologists and lawyers – provides a picture of the development of society and has a strong impact on the production of knowledge at the university and the status of the respective disciplines. Thus, in the face of improving educational standards and changes in society since the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an ever-increasing demand for experts, for higher education instructors, for economists and legal practitioners in institutions of public administration, as well as for scientists – chemists, biologists, pharmacists and physicists – due to the increasing use of technologies in economics, the military and society. In contrast, the demand for theologists, the 'experts' of the pre-modern universities, began to drop. These developments within society were reflected in the numbers of students and were important yet often ignored factors in the process of expanding and differentiating academic disciplines, which proceeded rapidly during the second half of the nineteenth century.

A third function of the university is as producer and repository of knowledge. Generally one can say that the transition to the modern or so-called research university took place during the course of the nineteenth century. In that period the production of new knowledge gained decidedly more relevance while the universities of the medieval and early modern periods were predominantly characterized by the organizing, storing and passing on of knowledge. Nevertheless, the manner in which knowledge was ordered remains important for the study of academic development, for instance an analysis of which disciplines and professorships were institutionalised and how they were organised into faculties and other groupings. Although the retention of traditional designations such as the faculty of philosophy (*Philosophische Fakultät*) seemed at first glance to reflect consistency, the institutional structure constantly underwent a process of transformation. Thus it remains important to study the effects that this changing pattern had on the university's knowledge production, the development of academic disciplines and the courses of studies themselves.

According to Rüdiger vom Bruch,[11] a university history must include an appropriate consideration of its academic knowledge production, otherwise it would be an "empty shell" (*leeres Gehäuse*). However this does provide several theoretical and practical problems for university historians, for they must not only work with the history of the various disciplines, but also rudimentarily with the contents of each discipline in order to trace the former. A history of the university including its knowledge production is an idealistic idea and perhaps only possible through collaborative work. For an individual researcher this would be impossible, and therefore collaboration and a division of tasks would be indispensible.

Because many university histories are written in the context of a jubilee, the history of the university and its knowledge production is often written by persons available on-site and not authored by a university historian or a skilled historian of science. Due to a lack of knowledge regarding new concepts in the history of science, and for reasons of labour economy, the everyday practice of dealing with the history of academic disciplines was long subjected to intellectual biographies and constructed in terms of a sequence of chair holders and their special fields of study. When the individual scholars are highlighted, this was frequently done by drawing on ex-post value judgements, previous constructions of tradition and teleological lines of development that characterize the respective discipline.

The three core functions of the university – providing general education, academically grounded professional qualification and knowledge production – establish a complex field of tension and must not be conceived in terms of an equilateral triangle. Moreover, it is important to note that they do not characterize the various national university systems in equal measure. In historical terms, they underwent changes in terms of emphasis and one or the other core area pointedly emerged to the foreground. To give just one example: in immediate post World War II Germany, the assignment of moral and general education as a remedy against the barbarianism of dictatorial and inhuman political systems such as National Socialism took centre stage in the public discussion about the tasks of German universities.[12] In contrast, the reform discussion carried out from the 1960s onwards stressed the assignment of producing knowledge, i.e. the research imperative. Likewise, the current *Exzellenzinitiative* (initiative for excellence) in Germany strongly emphasizes – both in discursive and material terms – the research imperative within the above-mentioned triad of assignments.

It is frequently overlooked that German universities, which have been classified as cutting edge in terms of research, have been addressed particularly in their function as institutions of higher general and professional education in public debates of the nineteenth and throughout major parts of the twentieth century. Thus, university history must not be conceived merely in terms of a history of scholars and of academic knowledge production. Rather, the history of the institution's functions of providing general education and professional qualification in their diverse entanglements with politics and society at large as well as the thereby produced path dependencies for the production of scientific knowledge must form

11 Vom Bruch, 'Methoden' (n. 1) 10.

12 B. Wolbring, '"Ein wirklich neuer Anfang". Öffentliche Kritik an den Universitäten und Reformforderungen in der Besatzungszeit (1945–1949)', in: A. Franzmann and B. Wolbring (eds.), *Zwischen Idee und Zweckorientierung. Vorbilder und Motive von Hochschulreformen seit* 1945 (Berlin 2007) 61–76.

a central part of a university history. If university history is to be written as an institution's *histoire totale*, a cardinal problem is the conjunction of the three areas of investigation. In other words, a fundamental question of a university history with this entitlement is how to correlate the university's institutional, social, political and cultural history to the history of the academic disciplines and knowledge production.

The university's three core areas sketched out above are entangled across different levels – discursive, institutional, material, social, cultural and spatial. The level of discourse signifies the tasks and functions of universities as defined by politics and society. This means to investigate the circulating images of the university, the constructions of historical traditions, as well as the self-image held by the institution and its members. Writing university history merely as a history of discourse focusing on the 'master texts' of major university reformers and scholars and conflating this kind of intellectual history with the institution's *Realgestalt* and actual practice is much too narrow. And yet it was, and still is, common practice, for example in the context of commemorative speeches. Against this practice, the university's history of discourse must be presented in its interaction with institutional and material structures and with social and cultural practices. Admittedly, the challenge of this lies in the necessity of small-scale research and hard empirical work.

The institutional and material structures are regulators of how the institution of the university, its members and the dissemination and production of knowledge are organized. In this respect, the university's constitution, its academic (self-)government and its administration must be seen as major facets. The structural and material level also comprises the financing of the university, the structuring of existing jobs and positions with regard to scientific and non-scientific employment as well as its spatial and aesthetic design (as we see for example in the interior and exterior of university buildings).

The university's social structure always was and still is subject to permanent change. Since the end of the nineteenth century universities have turned into mass institutions. Starting out with hundreds and advancing to thousands and tens of thousands of affiliates in the twentieth century, the social structure of the university members is determined by factors such as social, regional or ethnic background, gender, confession or age. In this respect, 'classical' social history and quantitative methods are still helpful. Quantitative surveys and analyses are important for an overview and first approach to the university as an institution. Not only students and scholars, but also the so-called non-academic staff, unfortunately left out of the picture by most accounts, were an integral part of a university's social history and therefore must be investigated. As an aside, it should be noticed that this group's enormous growth and feminisation are central traits of the modern university's development in the twentieth century.

Talking about social and cultural practices at the university relates to its day-to-day work life. The habitus of differing status groups and individuals – that of faculty members and students of the various disciplines or of decision makers in the academic administration such as president, deans and (vice) chancellor – come into the picture. How do they negotiate hierarchy or ranking, how do they handle conflicts and exert power and how do they perform an academic habitus via rhetoric, gender roles, performance, the handling of space or artefacts? In recent work on university history even the *cultural turn* has been dispensed with. Nevertheless, a historical anthropology of a university, or a gender history, as well as a history of transnational university relationships, all continue to present desirable criteria.

Universities not only have a social dimension, but also a spatial one. A university is always embedded in regional, national and transnational academic and educational landscapes. Important here is not only the respective university's territorial affiliation to its town or city, but generally its geographic position with regard to traffic infrastructure, its urban catchment and its regional, national and transnational relationships. Of interest is also the coordinate system mounted by the connections to other universities, other types of academic institutions (such as universities of applied science for example) or extramural education and research facilities.

Narratives: the Humboldt myth and university history as a success story

Like other research areas, the history of the university has formed narratives as interpretive patterns which produced consensus and facilitated syntheses, yet at the same time placed limitations with regard to perspectives. A typical case in point is the Humboldt myth that emerged in the twentieth century and remained unchallenged in the history of the university for a long time.[13] It was particularly the 100th anniversary of the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin in 1910 which played a major role in this national – and later also international – invention of a tradition.[14] On the occasion of this centennial, the incomplete short text by Wilhelm von Humboldt entitled *Über die innere und äußere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin* (*On the Internal and External Organisation of Higher Education Institutions in Berlin*) published for the first time only a few years earlier, was popularized in various speeches. The programmatic texts authored by von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Fichte and Steffen on the occasion of the Friedrich Wilhelm University's foundation in 1810 were newly edited and re-interpreted according to the needs pertaining to the contemporary politics of science. The newly founded Berlin University of 1810 was imagined as the modern research university's archetype and model. The ideal conception held about a university in the beginning of the twentieth century by contemporaries primarily committed to basic research was projected into the past. The German universities' development in the nineteenth century was narrated with a Prussian-centred bias and an exclusive focus on the history of ideas, condensed into the Berlin Friedrich Wilhelm University's national success story.

This narrative originated in the context of a jubilee and was (unconsciously) designed for the purpose of identity formation. It was repeatedly accessed in the (national and international) discussion about higher education and science policy throughout the twentieth century and remodelled according to contemporary legitimation requirements. This 'Humboldt-narrative' was built on an analysis of a few selective programmatic 'master texts' but not on empirical historical research on German universities. Accordingly, the success of German universities in the nineteenth century and the early rise of the research imperative were explained merely by the idea and the ideal of the freedom and unity of research and teaching. The Humboldt myth was intrinsically tied to the idea that science in itself fulfils an educational purpose and provides the best academic professional qualification possible since

13 M. Ash, *Mythos Humboldt. Vergangenheit und Zukunft der deutschen Universitäten* (Wien 1997).

14 See S. Paletschek, 'Die Erfindung der Humboldtschen Universität. Die Konstruktion der deutschen Universitätsidee in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts', *Historische Anthropologie* 10 (2002) 183–205; D. Langewiesche, 'Die "Humboldtsche Universität" als nationaler Mythos. Zum Selbstbild der deutschen Universitäten in ihren Rektoratsreden im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik', *Historische Zeitschrift* 290 (2010) 53–91.

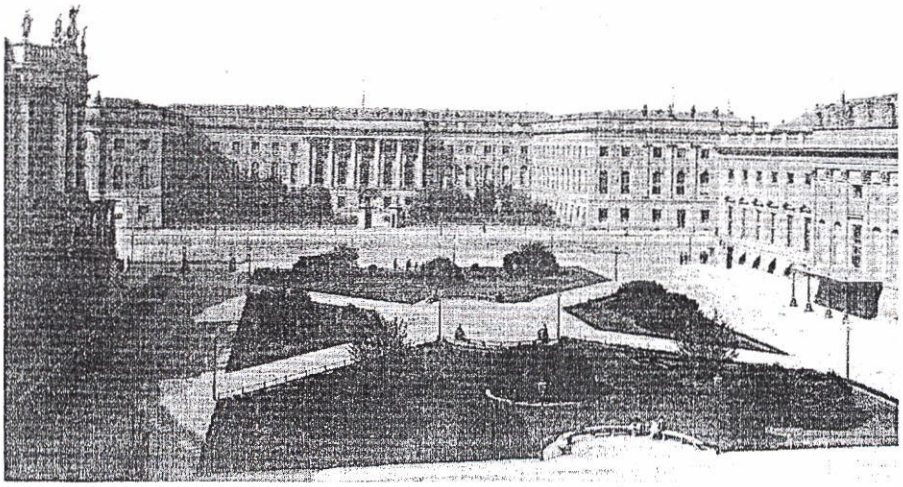

Fig. 2: Friedrich Wilhelm University around 1880. Photo by F. Albert Schwartz.

it mediates problem-solving skills and prepares one for future, still unforeseeable changes. In its simplicity and coherence, this was an impressive idea since it merged the university's three major tasks under the roof of science through leadership by 'great' scholars into a seemingly clear-cut solution. Yet, a look into the depths of day-to-day university life shows that the multiversity of institutional tasks could hardly be resolved merely through this idea. The formation of the research imperative emerged from a complex mixture of factors owed to the history of ideas as well as to social, political and material dimensions.

Most older works on university history operate with the Humboldt myth and we still find newly published monographs which uncritically reiterate the Humboldt myth and present a teleological success story by drawing a long line from medieval times to the present.[15] Within this overall success story, the Prussian university reform under Humboldt in the early nineteenth century and a Golden Age of the German University during the German Empire (1870–1918) provide the two climaxes, while the optional dates of World War I, 1933, 1968 or, as is currently quite popular, the Bologna process, are marked as stages of decline. In these publications, mostly leaning on great 'master texts' of the Prussian university reforms and a concentration on the nineteenth-century Prussian administration of education (*System Althoff*), a biographical focus on exceptional scholars is still dominant. Overviews of this kind perpetuate the traditional narrative of university history without taking on board new insights provided by recent research. They also construct historical images that thus are absorbed not only by the scientific community at large, but also by the public and by decision makers in politics and society. These narratives coin public images of university and science and are incorporated in policy decisions and concepts for the future.

15 E.g. T. Ellwein, *Die deutsche Universität. Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt 1992). Despite partial relativization, even newer standard texts such as the following still adhere to the Humboldt myth and the dominance of a Prussian university model: W. Rüegg, 'Themen, Probleme, Erkenntnisse', in: *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*, vol. 3 (München 2004) 17–42; C. Charle, 'Grundlagen', in: *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*, vol. 3 (München 2004) 43–78, 55–59 and 63–66; H.-A. Koch, *Die Universität. Geschichte einer europäischen Institution* (Darmstadt 2008).

Even today most university histories are written in the context of anniversaries. A university jubilee tends to lend itself to a monumental view of history rather than a critical one and to writing history in terms of a success story rather than one that (also) accounts for losses. Moreover, practicing university history means that the writer partly writes his or her 'own' history, i.e. that of his or her own institution, profession or discipline and thereby negotiates his or her current self-interpretations and identity formations in terms of his/her role as academic and teacher. Both are crucial reasons to critically reflect on the narratives underlying university history. Therefore, a critical university history must reflect upon the narrative and the historical images constructed by both academic and 'popular' publications. Recent works in university history take on this task[16] for example by increasingly looking at the memory culture of universities, as will be shown in the following.

Snapshots: a short screening of recent German university histories written on the occasion of jubilees

In recent years we have seen an almost insurmountable mass of publications on the history of German universities in the context of upcoming university anniversaries. By comparison, the output of topical monographs and anthologies which is not owed to the production context of an anniversary is clearly much more limited.[17] Among the numerous university anniversaries celebrated in the past years – for example 400 years in Giessen (2007), 550 years in Greifswald (2006),[18] 550 years in Freiburg (2007),[19] 450 years in Jena (2008), 600 years in Leipzig (2009)[20] or 200 years in Berlin (2010) – the major activities undertaken by universities in the Eastern *Bundesländer* (German states of the former GDR) particularly stand out. In the light of the political turn of 1989 and the various breaks throughout the twentieth century, the need for historical (re-)assessment arguably was considerably stronger than at West German universities. Departing from these ruptures, quite present to many contemporaries, the focus chosen in the *Festschriften* frequently has been on the history of the university in the twentieth century.

Among the jubilee publications, the project undertaken in Jena clearly has set a new benchmark, not the least due to remarkable resources provided there. While impressive publications have also been presented elsewhere, the Jena work group intensively studied both the new approaches in university history and the university anniversary as production

16 E.g. J. John and J.H. Ulbricht (eds.), *Jena. Ein nationaler Erinnerungsort?* (Köln 2007); R. vom Bruch, 'Universität, ein "deutscher Erinnerungsort"?', in: Ibidem 93–99.

17 In a German context, e.g. T. Maurer (ed.), *Kollegen – Kommilitonen – Kämpfer. Europäische Universitäten im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart 2006); T. Maurer (ed.), *Der Weg an die Universität. Höhere Frauenstudien vom Mittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2010); A. Franzmann and B. Wolbring (eds.), *Zwischen Idee und Zweckorientierung. Vorbilder und Motive von Hochschulreformen seit 1945* (Berlin 2007); P. Wörster (ed.), *Universitäten im östlichen Mitteleuropa. Zwischen Kirche, Staat und Nation – Sozialgeschichtliche und politische Entwicklungen* (München 2008) and T. Becker (ed.), *Zwischen Diktatur und Neubeginn. Die Universität Bonn im ‚Dritten Reich' und in der Nachkriegszeit* (Bonn 2008).

18 D. Alvermann e.a. (ed.), *Die Universität Greifswald in der Bildungslandschaft des Ostseeraums* (Berlin 2007).

19 *550 Jahre Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg. Festschrift.* 5 vols. (Freiburg 2007).

20 On the occasion of the forthcoming anniversary numerous volumes were published in the series *Beiträge zur Leipziger Universitäts- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (24 volumes); for an outline of research questions, see U. von Hehl, 'Zum Stand der Leipziger Universitäts- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte zur ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts', in: U. von Hehl (ed.), *Sachsens Landesuniversität in Monarchie, Republik und Diktatur. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Universität Leipzig vom Kaiserreich bis zur Auflösung des Landes Sachsen 1952* (Leipzig 2005) 19–50.

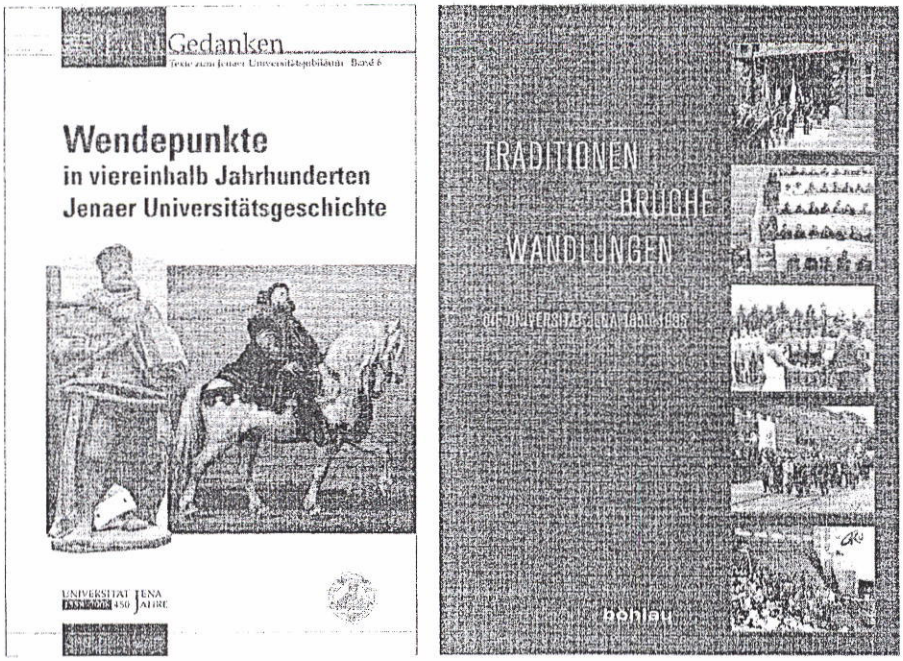

Fig. 3: Two jubilee publications celebrating the anniversary of Jena University

context.[21] The concluding synthesis on the history of Jena University was based on long years of systematically allocated scientific theses together with several anthologies and conferences.[22] As a result, the Jena University can be considered the best researched German university of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

In conceptual terms, there was a twofold starting point on which the Jena project was based: firstly, there was the argument in favour of investigating a given university's *Realgestalt*, i.e. for a methodologically open and multidimensional structural history of the university as an educational, research and service institution put forward in preceding work.[23] And secondly, there was the model of science and politics as reciprocal resources.[24] The project thus set out to capture the complex interrelations between university, science and society by way of a structural history and to tie this to an analysis of self-images and remembrance cultures.[25] Thus, Stefan Gerber, one of the Jena university historians, argued in favour of differentiating between the retrospective narrative of the German university's success story and the university's de facto achievements. Particularly the study of the history of East German universities and their multiple fractured histories raises the question about the

21 S. Gerber e.a., 'Einleitung', in: S. Gerber e.a. (eds.), *Traditionen – Brüche – Wandlungen. Die Universität Jena 1850–1995* (Köln 2009) 1–22.

22 Gerber, *Traditionen – Brüche – Wandlungen* (n. 21). The book was published by the 'Senatskommission zur Aufarbeitung der Jenaer Universitätsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert'. See also U. Hoßfeld e.a. (eds.), *Hochschule im Sozialismus. Studien zur Geschichte der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena (1945–1990)*, 2 vols. (Köln 2007); M. Steinbach and S. Gerber (eds.), *"Klassische Universität" und "akademische Provinz". Studien zur Universität Jena von der Mitte des 19. Bis in die dreißiger Jahre des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Jena 2005).

23 S. Paletschek, *Die permanente Erfindung einer Tradition. Die Universität Freiburg im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart 2001) 1–7.

24 M. Ash, 'Wissenschaft und Politik als Ressourcen für einander', in: R. vom Bruch (ed.), *Wissenschaften und Wissenschaftspolitik – Bestandaufnahmen zu Formationen, Brüchen und Kontinuitäten im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart 2002) 32–51.

25 S. Gerber, 'Universität zwischen 1850 und 1914: Grundfragen', in: *Traditionen – Brüche – Wandlungen* (n. 21) 23–47.

kind of narrative, which has the potential to do justice to contradictory and conflicting developments. The prevalent master narrative – culmination of the German universities' international reputation during the German Empire and its reverberation during the Weimar Republic, their decline during the era of National Socialism and in the DDR, a confined advancement in the 'old' Federal Republic of Germany and after reunification – glosses over empirical evidence of contradictions in this development and de-emphasizes both international developments and transnational interdependence.[26] From the Jena project emerges a new interpretive paradigm, namely the significance of the rhetoric of crisis as the university's and its members' reaction to socio-political change. The metaphor of crisis and new departure signified the Jena University's self-interpretation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.[27]

While the Jena project has undergone an intense examination of systematic issues, a synopsis with other anniversary-based publications reveals commonalities. The commemorative paradigm, i.e. the reflection of universities' memory culture, is also taken up by other publications, as the *Festschrift* of the university Giessen shows.[28] Also, most of the jubilee publications pay attention to the spatial dimension, i.e. to the local science culture in its regional, national and international enmeshments. With its title *Universalität in der Provinz* (*Universality in the Provinces*) the Giessen *Festschrift* adopts a self-confident, ironic manner to depict the university as determined by the tension between research and service provision, self-sufficient provincialism and international science avant-garde (for example the Giessen chemist Justus Liebig). Likewise, the Jena university history illustrates the significance of 'soft' factors within the ensemble of resources for the rise of the university and the formation of a science culture in the second part of the nineteenth century. Among the soft factors are the geographical location, landscape and family tradition along with Jena's specific situation as an industrial town.

Likewise, the thus-far published volumes of the Berlin *Festschrift* illustrate the importance of local research contexts, resources and communicative links for disciplinary development. The publications also exhibit the tendency towards *Realgeschichte* by asking how day-to-day university life and labour allowed for the realization of 'pure science'.[29] Based on this account, the formation of disciplines in Berlin did not come about according to visions spelled out by the philosophers or university reformers. Rather, what was decisive here were local premises and communicative contexts, i.e. Berlin's existing collections and resources, the requirements of education as well as expectations by the state and the nation. It is only in the second part of the nineteenth century that we can speak of a research university and a variety of scientific practices. Frequently, the formation of the disciplines and

26 M. Grüttner e.a., 'Wissenschaftskulturen zwischen Diktatur und Demokratie. Vorüberlegungen zu einer kritischen Universitätsgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts', in: M. Grüttner e.a. (eds.), *Gebrochene Wissenschaftskulturen. Universität und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2010) 18.

27 S. Gerber e.a. (eds.), 'Einleitung', in: *Traditionen – Brüche – Wandlungen* (n. 21) 5; J. John, '"Not deutscher Wissenschaft"? Hochschulwandel, Universitätsidee und akademischer Krisendiskurs in der Weimarer Republik', in: Grüttner e.a. (eds.), *Gebrochene Wissenschaftskulturen* (n. 26) 107–140.

28 H. Carl and F. Lenger (eds.), *Universalität in der Provinz. Die vormoderne Landesuniversität Gießen zwischen korporativer Autonomie, staatlicher Abhängigkeit und gelehrten Lebenswelten* (Darmstadt 2009).

29 H.-E. Tenorth, 'Genese der Disziplinen – Die Konstitution der Universität. Zur Einleitung', in: H.-E. Tenorth and R. vom Bruch (eds.), *Geschichte der Universität Unter den Linden* 1810–2010. *Vol. 4: Genese der Disziplinen – die Konstitution der Universität* (Berlin 2010) 9–40.

their further differentiation was advanced by internal and external conflicts, power-based negotiation processes between the state and the university as well as between scholars and academic bodies.

The works on university history published in recent years on the occasion of German university jubilees provide numerous new results and impulses for a re-conceptualization of the university, particularly for the twentieth century. What is still missing are modern syntheses based on the recent state of the art. What remains to be seen is what kind of sustainability will emanate from the recent research boom in the field of university history triggered by the anniversaries. What is indispensable is critical reflection on previous master narratives. Such reflections are necessary in both scientific and political terms, since the myths of university history still play a significant role in the universities' current assessments and future scenarios. However, a structural history of the university, inspired by cultural and social history, which no longer interprets institutional development primarily in terms of the history of ideas, i.e. via reform texts, commemorative speeches, or the impact of 'great personalities' but seeks to capture the university through a variety of sources and access paths, also has to face the problem of having to organize this mass of information.[30] The former master narratives not only provided coherence to the story told, but also allowed for a massive reduction of facts and factors qualified as relevant. What a new master narrative that takes the differentiated results into account might look like and whether we really need such a construct, remains for me an open question and ultimately a problem which is not specific to university history.

30 For example, the concluding synthesis on Jena University's history from the second part of the nineteenth century until today has about 1000 pages.