

# Archival Review: The Herder Institute

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The Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe was founded in Marburg in 1950 by the Johann Gottfried Herder Research Council. At the Herder Institute, research relates to the territories of Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Kaliningrad region, which are explored in their historical, cultural, transnational and global contexts. The rich materials of the Herder Institute reflect many aspects of the history of East Central Europe, including many local traces of German history and culture. Combined with the extended knowledge of the team, students, visitors, visiting scientists and conference participants a wealth of information on the territories is available.

The Institute is a member of the Leibniz Association, one of the major research organizations in Germany, and is therefore funded by the federal and state governments. The Herder Institute employs about 90 staff members dedicated to a range of tasks and research subjects, conducting about 15 projects of varying scope and funding, developing new online applications and producing Qualification theses or academic publications based on the materials.

The Herder Institute houses an extensive and diverse range of collections relating to East Central Europe. It includes a library with a music and press collection, an image archive and a document and map collection, holding materials that are particularly unique in character. The collection spans modern-day Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and the Kaliningrad Region, as well as the Czech Republic and Slovakia. There are



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also some collections relating to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Hungary. Thematic focal points are history, art history, culture, and the region's common cultural heritage, and includes image, map and archival materials in both digital and analog form. Collections cover a time frame spanning the long period from the Middle Ages up to the twenty-first century. The collections are increasingly searchable online and many of them can also be consulted online.

The first port of call is the Research Library, which is the largest specialist library with an East Central European focus in the German-speaking countries. Whatever is not available on site can be obtained quickly through national and international interlibrary loan. The inimitable collections, with their primary and often unique research materials, provide an invaluable source base.



Pictures 1-2: Collection of Prof. Przemysław Urbańczyk from the early 1980s

## **Holdings of the Research Library**

The holdings of the Research Library encompass around 545,000 bibliographic items most of them available as books, data records, phonograms, microfilms and microfiche (<http://opac.ub.uni-marburg.de/DB=2/>). The library also contains a separate press collection consisting of a newspaper collection and a unique archive of media clippings (comprising around 5 million cuttings) as well as a music collection and special collections such as scholarly estates, or series of so-called “gray literature”, including for example the ‘samizdat’ collection. The Research Library also maintains a bibliography portal and participates in library-oriented thematic portals (such as <https://www.osmikon.de/>). The scope of topics ranges from politics to culture and includes economics and social history as well as cultural studies on East Central Europe. Most of the literature stems from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

For almost all regions there are items available on national movements, parties, conflicts, subaltern organizations or minorities. Collections are indexed and curated according to its own internal systematics. It allows to search for specific titles (with author names, titles, keywords, title, etc.), use substantive criteria (guided search) to look up persons or locations, or conduct a search with the help of selected tag lists. (<https://www.herder-institut.de/en/departments/library/opac-and-catalogue-facilities.html>)

## **Example: Samizdat Collection of Prof. Przemysław Urbańczyk, Warsaw from the early 1980s**

Since the early years of the Institute, almost all documentation related to East Central Europe and its history has been gathered and curated. This not only includes written or printed textual sources, but also various types of visual sources such as photographs, postcards, illustrations and, last but not least, maps. Our collections are of course constantly updated and extended as new acquisitions, donations and deposits, including acquisitions from private collections and bequests are collected. A fine example is the private collection of Prof. Przemysław Urbańczyk from Warsaw, who collected approximately 1,100 monographs and periodicals of the Polish underground press, especially from the early 1980s. Graphics and photographic materials of that collection are also preserved in the image archive. Since 2013 this holding of so-called samizdat publications has been made fully accessible. As a workshop at



the Herder Institute on protest movements and samizdat showed, these issues are highly contested in terms of discourse. As collective, contemporary historical phenomena they can illuminate exciting cases of civil society and alternative public spheres. At the same time this collection raises pressing key issues of preservation. Due to the poor paper quality of the early 1980s, documents are already occasionally difficult to read. This raises new challenges related to the Institute's capacities to preserve, digitise, and curate this important collection – so how can they be preserved and, if necessary, digitised?

## **Holdings of the Image Archive**

The Image Archive holds and indexes image sources that relate to East Central Europe which are made available to researchers and the interested public. The archive contains a wide range of photography, postcards, as well as artwork and drawings from the sixteenth century to the present day. The holdings of the Image Archive can be divided into four categories according to their provenance: some have been passed down from institutions (archives, monument preservation organizations), others from photographers or companies (agencies, publishing houses). Some material has also been obtained from researchers (working in the areas of architecture, history, art history, urban planning) or originates from private collections. The main focus of this graphic material is on the documentation of urban and rural settlements, (cultural) landscapes, and on secular and religious buildings, along with their fixtures and features. Moreover, the collection holds images of historical events and festive occasions, as well as a wide range of pictures documenting everyday life and portraits of personalities. The Image Archive is considered an important addition to the holdings of the map and document collections, offering unexpected access to knowledge about East Central Europe, both as it was and is today, from various angles.

## **Example: Collection of Prof. Rudolf Jaworski: Propaganda Postcards about National Movements from the interwar period until the middle of the twentieth century**

The bequests and collections preserved in the Herder Institute not only shed light on individuals and organizations but also on contemporary historical issues. The Collection of Prof. Rudolf Jaworski (Propaganda Postcards about National Movements from the interwar period until the middle of the twentieth century ([https://www.herder-institut.de/bildkatalog/index/index?tree\[Sammlungen\]=27](https://www.herder-institut.de/bildkatalog/index/index?tree[Sammlungen]=27))) serves as an illustrative example. The “Jaworski Collection” has around 2,500 historical postcards with political motifs, iconography and propaganda from around 1890 to 1945, with the majority of postcards originating from around 1900 to 1925. The collection was a gift made by Prof. Dr. Rudolf Jaworski who had collected these postcards for research purposes





and is currently being made accessible. An important topic on postcards of that time is the appreciation of the colors, since many propaganda postcards, even those dating from before the First World War, depict flags, coats of arms or national colors. Around 1918 they are often associated with a patriotic motto or a hero as leading motive and become particularly important in the spread of nationalist ideas.

Pictures 3-4:

Jan Žižka leads the Czechoslovak legionaries into battle, postcards from the Jaworski Collection, around 1918 (inv.no. 219877 and 219908)