Anna of Saxony and Her Library

Brian J. Hale

Anna of Saxony was born on November 22, 1532 at Hadersleben, Denmark to Dorothea of Saxony-Lauenburg and Christian III, the future king of Denmark. She married Duke August of Saxony on October 7, 1548 at Torgau, Saxony, and when he inherited the title Elector of Saxony in 1553, she became the electress. Anna died on October 1, 1585 at Dresden.\(^1\) Her library, which was located in the women’s quarters of the residential castle at Annaburg, Saxony, contained 500 titles in 438 volumes — arranged according to size on the shelves — and approximately 50 manuscripts.\(^2\) Shortly before Anna’s death, an inventory was taken of the medical manuscripts located in a special cabinet in her library by Abraham von Thumbshirn, an electoral Saxon councilor and the superintendent of Anna’s court. After her death, another inventory was taken of the printed books and manuscripts in her library by Sebastian Leonhart. Together with Elector August’s 2,354 volumes in his apartments at Annaburg, Anna’s collection formed the core of the later Royal Saxon Library.\(^3\)

---


The large number of German territories in the early modern period meant that court libraries played a greater role than in other countries. Lay collectors achieved personal prestige through ownership of an identifiable corpus of artifacts that allowed them to gain a physical and intellectual understanding of the rapidly changing world during the age of exploration. Indeed, the libraries of the elector and the electress must be seen in the broader framework of their other dynastic collections, including the Armory and Saddlery (Rüst- und Harnischkammer), the cabinet of coins and medals (Münzkabinett), the collection of silver plate (Silberkammer), the treasury (Schatzkammer), and the seven-room “cabinet of curiosities” (Kunstkammer). The Kunstkammer was perhaps the second oldest in the German Empire, and it had thousands of tools, scientific instruments, and other objects along with 288 books according to an inventory taken in 1587.

Together, the libraries and the other repositories formed a system of mutually exclusive but interconnected collections for “organizing knowledge about the universe” and for demonstrating human mastery of nature.

In a work published in 1524, *An die Radherrn aller stedte deutsches lands: das sie Christliche schulen auffrichten vnd hallten sollen* (To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools), Martin Luther emphasized the importance of establishing libraries for secular rulers and for the dissemination of his evangelical message. Philipp Melanchthon and Georg Spalatin, as well as the members of Lutheran parish visitation teams who attempted to reform the practices of local church communities, were also important in the

---


establishment of libraries in the Wettin lands. However, written discussions about whether princes should establish libraries at their own courts did not take place until the second half of the sixteenth century. In his famous advice manual, Regentenbuch (Book for Princes), the chancellor of Mansfeld, Georg Lauterbeck, made a direct connection between the establishment of a court library and the practice of ruling, stating that book collections would enhance the prestige of the ruler. He also noted that the development of printing and plentiful paper supplies had resulted in lower book prices, which made it possible for rulers to collect more volumes. Electress Anna owned a copy of Lauterbeck’s book.

In addition to advancing the prestige of a ruler and underpinning church reform, a court library served the practical needs of its founder and could be used as a demonstration of wealth, as a sign of social dominance, or as an act of religious belief. Some authors saw the library as a “storehouse of knowledge” (Wissensschatz) that could be handed down to future generations. Book collections were also useful for pedagogical purposes: in a letter of 1568 to the court chaplain Philipp Wagner, Electress Anna ordered a catechism with “readable print” to help her four-year-old daughter Dorothea learn the alphabet and syllables. Moreover, books were visible reminders of the continuity of the Wettin dynasty. Libraries were not simply the possessions of a princely family but also part of the treasury of the entire land. Books were concrete symbols of social prestige and power like other princely collections.

Catalogues of books were used to understand the extent of a library, and the inventories taken by Thumbshirn and Leonhart provided Anna and August, as well as their heirs, with this knowledge. In addition to

---

9 Georg Lauterbeck, Regentenbuch (Leipzig: Jacob Berwald, 1557), LIVr–LVIIIr.
10 Syndram, Kunstkammer, 29–30; Shevchenko, Anthropologie, 117.
11 Julius Richter, Das Erziehungswesen am Hofe der Wettiner Albertinischer (Haupt-) Linie (Berlin: Weidmann, 1913), 52.
imparting an overview of the concrete holdings of the library, catalogues also fulfilled another function in the sixteenth century: they were virtual representations of book collections. The library was therefore not only a place or a collection but also the catalogue or inventory. Catalogues of large libraries provided information about the scope of the collection as well as the inclusion of specific texts.\textsuperscript{13} Above all, catalogues helped resolve the problem of systematizing and managing knowledge.\textsuperscript{14}

It is unclear whether the elector and electress followed a specific “procurement policy” to obtain books. Leonhart’s inventory reveals that a large portion of Anna’s library consisted of new books published between 1560 and 1585. The couple examined lists of recently published works and placed orders through their representatives at the book fairs of Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig; they themselves regularly visited the fair at Leipzig. Saxon diplomats, especially Hubert Languet, made purchases for them in outlying areas. Anna received numerous books, manuscripts, and medical recipes from acquaintances and friends, as well as chronicles and historical works from her family. The elector established a printing shop in the family castle at Dresden, where a psalter by the court chaplain Christian Schütz and other works were printed for Anna. However, the largest part of the book collection was undoubtedly ordered by court librarians such as Paul Vogel based on the recommendations of the faculties at the universities of Leipzig and Wittenberg.\textsuperscript{15}

The places of publication listed in Leonhart’s inventory show that electoral Saxon printers were preferred by Anna and August. Although Leipzig was a center of the book trade, approximately 64 volumes in Anna’s library were printed at Wittenberg, most of which were Bibles or works written by Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon. About 42 works


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 65–66, 70; Shevchenko, \textit{Anthropologie}, 121, 123.

were printed at Leipzig, 30 at Dresden, and 16 at Eisleben. Approximately 35 books were published at Frankfurt am Main, 33 at Würzburg, 31 at Uelzen, and 19 at Nuremberg. Many of the books printed at Dresden were bound by Jakob Krause (1525–85), who worked at the Saxon court from 1566 to 1585; he was “the greatest German master of the bookbinding craft and also one of the most famous European bookbinders of the time.”

Little is known about Anna of Saxony’s upbringing in Denmark, but there is evidence that she was taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion by Tilemann von Hussen (1497–1551), who had studied with Luther and Melanchthon. Her training may have also included medicine under the guidance of Cornelius van der Hansfort, a physician at her father’s court. Anna learned to speak, write, and read in Danish and German. There is no evidence she knew Greek or Latin. The inventory of her library shows that she owned works by the ancient authors in German translation, including Caesar’s *Caij Julij Cesaris des großmechtigen ersten Roemischen Keysers Historien vom Gallier vnd der Roemer* (History of the Gauls), Cicero’s *Officia Ciceronis Teutsch* (On Duties), Menander Protector’s *Das Buch der Histori Menanders* (The History of Menander), and Thucydides’s *Von dem Peloponneser Krieg* (The Peloponnesian War).

The library also contained books to educate the young, such as the didactic poetry of Hugo von Trimberg’s *Der Renner* (The Runner), and Petrarch’s *Von Artznei vnd Rath beydes in gutem vnd widerwertigem Glueck* (Physicke Against Fortune), a collection of 254 dialogues which was enormously

---


popular and influenced the moral thought of many Europeans during the Renaissance.21

Other historical and political texts and works of advice in Anna’s library included Kaspar Hedio’s Ein Außerleßne Chronick von anfang der welt (An Excellent Chronicle from the Beginning of the World), which has an entry for 1509 about seven people brought from the New World to Rouen, possibly the earliest reference by German authors to Canadian Indians. Sebastian Münster’s Cosmographia oder beschreibung aller lander herrschaften (Cosmography) has hundreds of pages on the history and geography of Europe, as well as sections about the newly discovered territories of Africa, America, and Asia. A copy of Elector August’s Landesordnung (Territorial Ordinance) of October 1, 1555 was an important political text about administrative policing. The genre of advice books was well represented by Werner Leonard’s famous Fürstlicher Trostspiegel und christlicher Seelen-Trost (The Mirror of Princely Solace and Christian Comfort of the Soul) and Georg Lauterbeck’s Regentenbuch (Book for Princes), the most important work on political thought in German during the age of confessionalism.22

According to a post-mortem estate inventory done by Thumbshrin at Annaburg, the electress kept two books on her night table: a children’s postil by M. Veit Dietrich and a religious work, Das seelige neue Jahr (The Blessed New Year).23 She was devoted to studying the Bible and reading other religious texts, including the apocryphal Jesus Syrach Deudsch (Book of Ecclesiasticus), a misogynist work which imparted to children the belief that women should be married and submissive to their fathers and husbands.24

23 Ibid., no. 297; Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden (hereafter cited as SHSA Dresden), Geheimer Rat (Geheimes Archiv), Loc. 8032/2, fol. 11v; Keller, Anna, 15.
In the sixteenth century, many Lutherans wanted to study Luther’s writings for inspiration and edification, and approximately two-thirds of Anna’s library consisted of titles by the reformer and other Lutherans. Anna purchased the nineteen-volume Wittenberg edition of Luther’s works and thus had almost all of his publications in print with the exception of the postils. Luther’s individual compositions were also part of the library, such as copies of the Der kleine Catechismus (Small Catechism) and his table talk. In addition, Anna owned one of the first biographies of Luther, written by Johannes Mathesius and published in 1566.

Only a small selection of Melanchthon’s works was represented in the library, including Justus Jonas’s translation into German of the Loci communes (Theological Commonplaces), the Augspurgische Confession (Augsburg Confession), and the Apologia der Augspurgischen Confession (Apology of the Augsburg Confession). Shorter works by Melanchthon included Von der Priesterhe (On the Marriage of Priests) and Gründlicher Bericht vom Abendmahl (Fundamental Report about Holy Communion). A small volume, Fragstücke von der christlichen Lehre aus dem Examine Philippi Melanthonis gezogen (Questions about Christian Teaching taken from the Exams of Philip Melanchthon), is in sextodecimo format and contains extracts from his theology in a catechetical style. Anna owned commentaries about the Augsburg Confession by Jakob Andreae the Elder and David Chyträus, who had studied at Wittenberg and lived in Melanchthon’s house. Although Anna did not possess a copy of the Book of Concord, the Apologia oder Verantwortung des christlichen Concordien-Buchs (Apology, or Justification of the Book of Concord) by Timotheus Kirchner, Nikolaus Selnecker, and Martin Chemnitz was on her shelves.

---

25 Robert Kolb, Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 138, 150.
26 Ibid., 146–47.
The library contained the writings of Wittenberg theologians, such as Georg Major’s *Trost, Wider das schrecken des Tods* (Consolation Against the Horrors of Death), and those who had studied with Luther and Melanchthon, including Caspar Huberinus, who published his *Der Kleine Catechismus mit vil schoenen Spruechen heiliger schildigt* (Small Catechism with Many Beautiful Sayings from the Bible) in several editions around the mid sixteenth century.29 In addition to numerous Bibles, Anna owned church postils by Niels Hemmingsen, a Danish Lutheran theologian and professor at the University of Copenhagen, as well as exegetical works by Jakob Heerbrand, professor of theology at Tübingen, Georg Listhenius, chief court pastor in Dresden, and others.30 Anna’s collection included songbooks by Luther and 40 prayer books. In addition, the inventory lists books about the life of Christ and church histories written by Johannes Bugenhagen, David Chyträus, Johann Habermann, Andreas Osiander, and Andreas Musculus. Interpretations of biblical texts, including the Epistles, Gospels, Psalms, and Prophets by Georg Edelmann and Hieronymous Weller, made up an important part of the library as well. The introduction to Weller’s book about the Psalms states that Anna liked to read it.31

Anna asked court chaplains and Wittenberg theologians to translate texts from Latin to German, which indicates her interest in reading about and understanding contemporary religious issues. A translation by court chaplain Caspar Peucer of Melanchthon’s revision of the Latin version of Johannes Carion’s *Chronicon Carionis* (Chronicle of World History) was dedicated to her in 1573. Nicholas Selnecker, Georg Listhenius, and Phillip


Wagner represented a pronounced Lutheran and anti-Calvinist faction at the electress’s court. Selnecker translated his biography of Luther from Latin to German for her. Listhenius dedicated to Anna his commentary on the 42nd and 121st Psalms and Wagner on the 128th Psalm. Theological works in her collection included Hieronymus Weller’s *Haußtafel* (Table of Domestic Life), which set forth the duties to be performed in the household according to the Lutheran catechism, Johann Habermann’s *Vita Christi . . . In schoene Kunstreiche Figuren . . . gefasset* (Life of Christ with Illustrations), and Johann Schütz’s *Funffzig erhebliche Vrsachen/Darum die Lutherischen zu den Sacramentierer oder Caluinisten nicht tretten noch jre falsche Lere* (Fifty Fundamental Reasons why Lutherans should not become Sacramentarians or Calvinists), which contained a polemical attack on Calvinism and alleged that all Wittenberg theologians since Luther’s death were Sacramentarians. A number of works in the library by Christoph Vischer warned about “sects,” “Calvinists,” and “Zwinglians,” in particular *Trewhertzige und notwendige Warnung vor den falschen Propheten* (Truthful and Necessary Warning against False Prophets). His monumental, three-volume work about the four evangelists and 25 copies of his analysis of the seven penitential Psalms were available for use by the electress. In addition, he dedicated a book about Communion to her. The presence of these works in her library testifies to Anna’s Lutheran piety.

One of Anna’s great passions was medicine. According to Thomas A. Brady, Jr., “Mother Anna,” as she was often called, not only “sewed, washed, and churned butter,” she also “bore fifteen children, and dosed the survivors and her husband when ill.” Noblewomen had long been expected to provide medical care to both the rich and poor, and throughout the

---

35 Thomas A. Brady, Jr., *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 240.
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many of them became famous locally for their therapies. Anna had extensive contacts with other medical practitioners across the Holy Roman Empire, participating in the “pluralistic medical marketplace” available to patients in early modern Europe.\textsuperscript{36}

An early work in Anna’s library at Annaburg was a twenty-eight-page manuscript of gynecological recipes and advice which she began writing shortly after her marriage. Entitled \textit{Edlich guet ertzeneey den Frauen} (A Number of Good Medicines for Women), it describes treatments for problems associated with menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth and provides detailed information about the measures that needed to be taken during pregnancy to avoid complications, including a section about pediatrics and post-partum care for the mother.\textsuperscript{37} Anna herself gave birth to fifteen children, eleven of whom died at birth or during infancy and childhood; it is not known how many miscarriages she had.\textsuperscript{38} Her library also included a number of printed books about midwifery: Adam Lonitzer’s \textit{Reformation oder Ordnung für die Hebammen} (Reformation or Ordinance for Midwives), Walther Hermann Ryff’s \textit{Frauen Rosengarten} (Women’s Rose Garden), and Eucharius Rößlin’s \textit{Der schwangern Frauwen und Hebammen Rosengarten} (The Rose Garden of Pregnant Women and Midwives), whose works were so popular that he was called “Teacher of Europe’s Midwives.”\textsuperscript{39}

Recipes were very popular forms of medical texts in the sixteenth century; after being written down and bound, they provided standardized procedures to practitioners and represented knowledge about the human body in textual form.\textsuperscript{40} Boxes and cabinets in the Annaburg library contained recipes for medicines to improve women’s health and to decrease the problems associated with pregnancy and birthing. For example, a booklet

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Rankin, \textit{Panacea’s Daughters}, 3, 5, 7, 25–26, 28–32.
\item \textsuperscript{37} “\textit{Edlich guet ertzeneey den Frauen},” SLUB Dresden, Mscr. C 294 (1548).
\item \textsuperscript{38} Otto Posse, \textit{Die Wettiner}, ed. Manfred Kobuch (Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat Leipzig, 1994), Table 29; Rankin, \textit{Panacea’s Daughters}, 242n135.
\item \textsuperscript{39} SLUB Dresden, Mscr. IB, Vol. 24a, nos. 59, 201–2; Keller, \textit{Anna}, 169; Bayerischen Akademie, \textit{Neue Deutsche Biographie}, 21: 752–53.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Rankin, \textit{Panacea’s Daughters}, 62–63, 77, 85; Monica H. Green, \textit{Women’s Healthcare in the Medieval West} (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2000), 7: 47.
\end{itemize}
of recipes written by Countess Dorothea of Mansfeld (1493–1578) contained information about difficult births and the methods to counteract them. In 1563, Katharina Wernerin, a widow from Zwickau, sent Anna a thirty-seven-folio booklet of recipes which included concoctions for sleeping, stomach problems, post-partum care, edema, hyperthermia, throat problems, epilepsy, shortness of breath, and chills. An ornately decorated, twenty-eight-folio manuscript of recipes sent to the electress by Hans Ungenad von Sonnegg and his wife Magdalena included a recipe for a panacea salve, as well as instructions to make a plaster for war wounds, powders to counteract rabid dog bites, and “swallow water” for kidney problems, strokes, fevers, and the removal of unseemly hair. Other recipes aimed to prevent kidney stones, breast problems, tumors, worms, insects, fevers, low urine production, and jaundice. The Ungeands’ recipe collection was a “medical wonder and a tangible object of knowledge.” The postmortem inventory of Anna’s manuscripts on medicine lists approximately fifty handwritten volumes found on special bookshelves in the electoral library at Annaburg, and all but four of them were recipe collections.

The recipe collections and manuscripts of the electress were supplemented with at least thirty-four printed books about medicine, a number exceeded only by the religious texts in her library. One impressive volume was the German translation of an illustrated commentary by the Sienese botanist Pier Andrea Mattioli on the ancient Greek physician, pharmacologist, and botanist Dioscorides. Anna owned the herbals of Adam Lonitzer and Eucharius Rößlin. The elector and electress also supported

41 SHSA Dresden, Loc. 8032/2, fols. 7v–9r; “Arzneibuch,” SLUB Dresden, Mscr. C 317, fols. 23v–24r; Rankin, Panaceia’s Daughters, 20, 240n95.
42 “Katharina Wernerin, Wittfrau (in Zwickau), Püchlein, darinnen vil schöner bewerter kunst ist,” SLUB Dresden, Mscr. B 201, fols. 1v, 9r–32v; Rankin, Panaceia’s Daughters, 82.
the publication in 1563 of an herbal with 600 illustrations by the Torgau physician Johannes Kentmann.45

Anna’s library contained printed books about distillation, surgery, anatomy, fevers, and the complexions. Among the most prominent were Flavius Vegetius Renatus’s *Von rechter und warhaffter Kunst der Artzeney, allerley Krankheyt und Schäden der Thier . . . zu heylen* (The Correct and True Art of Medicine), and Paracelsus’s *Opus chyrurgicum* (Large Surgery), *Drey Buecher* (Three Books), and *Wundt vnd Leibartznei* (Wound and Body Medicine). She possessed two Paracelsian manuscripts: an *Artzneybuch von Theophrasti Paracelsi* (Book of Medicines by Theophrasti Paracelsi) and a *Compendium der Heilkünste der Theophrastus Paracelsischen Wurzeln der Krankheiten und ihren Artzneien* (Compendium which Summarizes the Main Points of the Theophrastus Paracelsian Source of Disease and its Medicinal Cures) of his work written by Marcus Müller, an alchemist at the Dresden court.46 The library contained works by the popular medical author Walter Hermann Ryff, including his *New Großes Destillierbuch* (New Large Distillation Book).47 Caspar Peucer contributed folio-sized manuscripts, entitled *Tabellae medicae* (Medical Tables), on a wide variety of fevers, skin diseases, and tumors in German and Latin. The manuscripts were teaching tools for both the theory and practice of medicine.48 Other works translated into German included *Das Buch der haymligkaytenn Magni Alberti, von Artzney vnd tugenden der Kreütter, Edelgestayn, vnd von etlichen wolbekannten Thieren* (The Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus, Of Medicines and the Virtues of Herbs, Stones, and Certain Beasts), falsely attributed to Albertus Magnus, which provided Anna with an


47 SLUB Dresden, Mscr. IB, Vol. 24a, nos. 69, 328.

encyclopedia about nature from the medieval world. Another translation in her collection—belonging to the genre of sixteenth-century encyclopedias about nature—of Girolamo Cardano’s *Offenbarung der Natur vnnd Natürlicher dingen auch* (Revelations about Nature and Natural Things) included sections on natural history. These titles in Anna’s library clearly reflect the rise in manuscript and printed vernacular literature about medicine and science during the late sixteenth century.

A third important part of Anna’s library consisted of works concerning agriculture. Before marrying Elector August, she learned in her homeland about an agricultural system used in Denmark and Holstein called *Koppelwirtschaft*, in which land was enclosed, turned into pasture, and plowed again at a later date. This procedure improved the quality of the grassland, and manure was absorbed to fertilize what would eventually be plowed again. Anna used this knowledge when she was put in charge around 1550 of an outlying farm at Ostra near Dresden by the elector, who wanted to use it to supply food to their residence in Dresden and as an experimental site for new agricultural methods. Approximately twenty years later, the electress was named supervisor of approximately seventy of the hundred electoral demesnes in Saxony by her husband. She probably consulted her German translation of Pliny’s *Natürlicher History* (Natural History) to obtain information about enriching manure on the farms. Moreover, Anna possessed an important collection of classical agricultural texts by Cassianus Bassus entitled *Der Veldtbaw* (Farm Work), translated by Michael Herr.

---

51 Rankin, *Panacea’s Daughters*, 5.
Anna’s library contained several manuscripts, which were eventually printed, about the administration of farms, works she probably consulted to help with her own supervisory duties. Thumbshirn’s *Haushaltung in Forwergen* (The Management of Outlying Farms) of 1569 deals with methods to improve planting, raising livestock and poultry, gardening, bee-keeping, mills, viticulture, raising sheep, fishing, hunting, and forestry. On a similar topic was *Opus Ruralium Commodorum. Von dem nutz der ding die in aeckeren gebuwt werde* (Book of Rural Benefits) by the natural scientist Pietro de Crescenzi, based on classical and medieval sources. Thumbshirn’s *Oeconomia* (Economy) of 1571 contains an abundance of practical knowledge about farm management. Thumbshirn also contributed to Anna’s library a detailed report about a visitation he conducted in 1571 of forty-five electoral farmsteads.\(^55\)

Electress Anna’s library helped make the Saxon court a “vibrant center of knowledge transactions” and a site where the “management of knowledge” was achieved.\(^56\) The manuscripts, printed books, and recipes signaled the electress’s education, interests, and wealth. She used personal, hands-on knowledge and expertise to gain knowledge about religion, medicine, and farming, but ownership of books and manuscripts also provided her with legitimacy and a means to search for universal truths as well. Anna was undoubtedly proud of the library, because it revealed not only her high level of literacy and social rank but also her participation in the “boom of book culture” that took place in the sixteenth century.\(^58\)

---


