

Rudolf Lenz, ed. *Katalog der Leichenpredigten und sonstiger Trauerschriften im Thüringischen Staatsarchiv Rudolstadt*. Marburger Personalschriften. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008. XIII + 668 pp. EUR 54.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-515-09206-7.

Rudolf Lenz, ed. *Katalog der Leichenpredigten und sonstiger Trauerschriften in den Kirchenbibliotheken St. Nikolai und St. Thomas zu Leipzig*. Marburger Personalschriften. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008. xiv + 216 pp. EUR 34.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-515-09291-3.

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Biographies in Early Modern Germany

When at Martin Luther's funeral, Johann Bugenhagen preached a sermon and Philipp Melanchthon gave an oration, a nascent tradition begun by Luther himself at the funeral of Frederick the Wise was more firmly established. It led gradually to a new liturgy for funerals in the emerging Lutheran church. Soon it became customary to preach a sermon and read a biography, which were then printed as a memorial. Together sermon and biography gave testimony that the deceased had died in faith, but they also provided the family with the opportunity to extol the life, virtues, and importance of the deceased. At first funeral booklets were printed and disbursed only for German rulers and their consorts; later they appeared for the nobility as well. By the early 1600s, the custom was appropriated by the learned and well-to-do bourgeoisie: that is, anyone who could afford the cost of a funeral sermon, a biography, and their printing. The sermons dispensed consolation and the biographies—resembling extended obituaries according to an established chronological pattern—provided detailed life stories of men and women who were known and respected in their own locales, but whose biographies might not have made it into the chronicles that have come down to us. Around 1700, sermons were no longer preached at Lutheran funerals; the books had become very elaborate and their printing costs excessive. Thus the custom collapsed under its own

weight. This is regrettable because those that survived have provided later centuries with sometimes detailed insight into the daily lives of men and women.

The printed funeral booklets were sent to family, friends, and acquaintances. As with all occasional prints, many were discarded, but they also became collectors' items, and more than 250,000 remain in today's libraries and archives. For centuries, not much attention was paid to these extensive life accounts. In the 1960s and 70s, Fritz Roth published ten volumes with ten thousand synopses of funeral biographies, but had to have his life's work printed at his own expense. Then, with the rising interest in genealogy, researchers discovered this treasure trove about their long-forgotten forebears. Accessibility is hampered by the fact that the funeral books were often hidden in public and private libraries and archives, including those in East Germany. Many were cataloged insufficiently, or not at all.

In 1976, the Forschungsstelle für Personalschriften was established at the University of Marburg. (Since 1991 it has also had a branch at the University of Dresden.) Under the direction of Rudolf Lenz, the institute set out to encourage the use of funeral books, especially the biographies, as valuable tools in all branches of re-

search: medicine (for its extensive description of the last illness), marriage customs, childrearing, religion, cultural customs, and so on. The institute also initiated a twofold catalog system. First, a card catalog was prepared that listed all funeral books known to the institute by author, subject, date of publication, and location. It also published in succession a series of printed catalogs for specific institutions, the first volume listing the ones in the University of Marburg library (1983). The catalogs give specific information about each funeral book. This information can help the user decide whether to order a copy or visit a specific library to read the funeral book in its entirety. In 1991, when technology had advanced sufficiently, the card catalog was transferred to the Internet at www.uni-marburg.de/fpmr. It remains a work in progress, as new finds and the content of new catalogs are added. Roth's ten thousand items are listed there now; so are the items in one of the largest assemblages of funeral books, the Stolberg collection, on permanent loan to the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel. This Internet site has grown into a tremendous biographical data bank about seventeenth-century celebrities as well as men and women of whom otherwise little is known.

The catalogs give more detailed information. In addition to authors, subjects, dates, and place of publication, they list and index prints in the funeral books, as well as

artists, funeral songs and their composers, additional poems (epicedia) and their authors, and so on. A guide to the use of each and a key to abbreviations are incorporated. Still, it takes some effort to become familiar with their organization. It helps if one has a specific name or place of publication in mind. The books are useful for finding specific biographical and printing data about a particular funeral book in a specific library.

Some desiderata: When the database was originally transferred to an Internet site, a system was chosen that the Internet could handle at that time. In its simplicity (subject, author, printing information, date, location, and call number) it was designed to handle a large number of entries without becoming unusable. This decision also necessitated the continued publication of more elaborate printed catalogs of increasingly small and obscure libraries, as these also might have funeral books that might be of interest to researchers. The resulting back-and-forth between Internet and printed catalogs is cumbersome, if unavoidable. However, the institute, now under the directorship of Eva Maria Dickhaut, should be commended for having started this project and for the diligence with which the holdings of additional libraries have been disclosed in print as well as in the central database. They have proven to be a very valuable research tool.

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