



The Consortium of European Research Libraries is the international focal point for the engagement with the written heritage of Europe, represented by the collections of our members and beyond. We focus on manuscripts and printed books produced before the middle of the nineteenth century. CERL is where library and information professionals work together so that people can gain the full, connected meaning from our distributed collections.

‘Our members in Europe and North America have collections which document a European and a worldwide history which is inextricably interconnected, intellectually, commercially, and politically. These collections have been formed as a result of economic and cultural ties but also as a result of our often violent history. This can make them deeply meaningful, with the potential to be very differently meaningful for people of different backgrounds, in our localities, elsewhere in Europe and worldwide.’ [You might like to continue to read this blog by CERL Chair, Kristian Jensen, on our role as custodians of cultural property.](#)



The Polonsky Foundation has recently funded a project to create a copy census of Dante, *Comedia*, Florence, 1481, with engravings by Botticelli. Over 130 libraries worldwide have been approached and together they are cataloguing all 166 extant copies in Material Evidence in Incunabula (MEI). Images of provenance and use are uploaded onto CERL's Provenance Digital Archive (PDA). This material will be used to create a webpage and two videos which will enhance our understanding of an iconic work of literature by setting the history of the copies in the wider context of the reception of Dante's works, to explain how this seminal work was actually read and commented on by its contemporaries, and by later generations.

For CERL, this new way of bringing together our collections around a theme, whether an edition, an author, a work, a printing place or a printer, with the support of our digital resources, is providing a model for future collaborations.

The [CERL Grant programme](#) aims to support early career librarians or scholars to spend time at a CERL member institution, to work on CERL projects and to be trained on CERL databases.

The scheme is popular with our members, also in the United States. Colleagues enthusiastically put forward projects for consideration and libraries are frequently able to offer matching funding. The scheme attracts excellent candidates, many of whom report that the internship boosted their career.

Due to COVID-related travel restrictions the recipients of the CERL Grant in 2019/2020 undertook online cataloguing and editing tasks. And we managed to get together during a lively online event where they presented what they had been working on. The programme, slides and links to each recorded presentation are available [here](#).

In 2020/21, we were not able to offer the grants within the usual time-table, as the host libraries could not plan internships. We are in touch with them, and if they indicate they are ready to host interns again, we will issue a call.



CERL Working Groups

Colleagues at the CERL member institutions form an active community, working together in working groups and delivering continued professional development through a programme of workshops, seminars, online videos and publications.

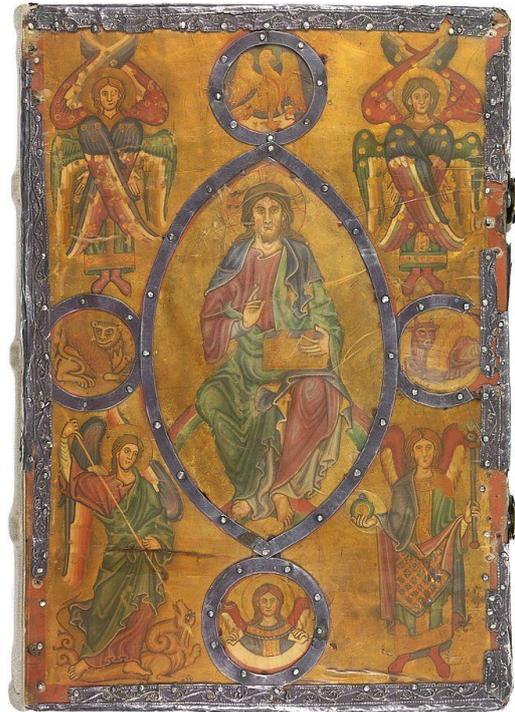
The primary aims of the [Manuscripts Librarians Working Group](#) are to act as a forum for curatorial concerns and to enhance understanding and practical cooperation among curators across Europe and North America, taking account of the differences in approach which have developed historically. Recently, the Working Group created a resource [listing](#) institutional, regional, national and transnational catalogues, research tools and other resources. The Working Group has also started the planning for its 2022 conference.

The [CERL Collection Security Working Group](#) exists to help member libraries enhance the security of their culturally important heritage collections. It has published the third edition of the [Quick Audit Tool](#). This tool is freely available, and may be used by libraries and archives to review their institution's arrangements around security and compare their preparedness to other organisations in the CERL community. By repeating the exercise after two or three years you can map progress.

This year, the Working Group is collecting documents on security policy, instructions and guidelines from CERL member libraries. These may act as an inspiration when your institutions has to draw up similar documentation. The Working Group is also in the process of developing a card game to encourage staff to interact effectively with the Quick Audit Tool. As in previous years, we will organise a [Collection Security Summer School](#), at a minimum online, but hopefully supplemented by an event that brings people together in one physical location.

Other [CERL Working Groups](#) focus on the HPB database, the CERL Thesaurus, Engagement and Promotion, Cultural Property, Digital Humanities, and Incunabula.

Bamberg Psalter with horn binding



The [CERL Book Binding Working Group](#)'s overall objective is to promote the knowledge of all aspects of historical book bindings, and encourage a wider interest in the field. Traditional library cataloguing is often not sufficient for discovery of this highly interesting heritage resource so a major issue which the WG seeks to address is how to complement traditional library cataloguing of book bindings with more images, on-line resources and information.. The WG has recently organised two well-attended online events. All presentations were recorded and are available via the Working Group's [webpage](#).

The WG is about to publish its second newsletter and plans to organise further online events after the summer holidays. Contributions to the Newsletter or an offer to do an online presentation are very welcome.



Hosting scholars' annotations of bib records

CERL has created an environment where scholars can annotate bibliographical records with their own information. Imprint information is imported from MEI, ISTC or HPB. Linking to the CERL Thesaurus and the Provenance Digital Archive is built in. CERL continues to host the scholars' tailored databases after their projects have ended. Since they employ a similar data model and structure we aim to make them accessible from a single access point.

It all began with Dr Laura Carnelos' [PATRIMONI](#) project (a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship 2016-18), which resulted in a database of rare or unique sixteenth-century Italian popular editions held today in the British Library (i.e. not surviving in any Italian libraries). It was modelled on the Material Evidence in Incunabula (MEI) database and constructed using international standards for describing the material, textual, and visual characteristics.



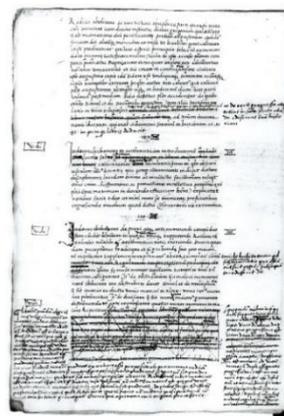
In 2019, Dr Sabrina Minuzzi, was awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellowship for her project [MAT-MED in Transit](#) (running from Oct. 2019-Sept. 2021). The acronym MAT-MED stands for *materia medica*, which is the body of knowledge concerning medicinal properties of plants, animals and minerals – the so called ‘simples’ – that formed one of the bases for the preparation of medical remedies. Her database [MatMed-Readers](#) will allow for the systematic analysis and recording of the traces that past readers left on printed books concerning *materia medica*.



Venice, Marciana National Library, 215.D.35
Pietro Andrea Mattioli, *Commentarii in sex libros Pedacii Dioscoridis Anazarbei de medica materia...*, Venetiis, ex officina Valgrisiana, 1565



The database [Mainz Early Modern Academics' Libraries](#) (MABFN) contains the material from a study by Dr Christina Schmitz on book collections of citizens with an academic background and members of the lower and middle clergy living in Mainz around 1600. Her database contains 1,341 works in 733 volumes from 48 identified book owners, with detailed information on material-specific characteristics, traces of usage and biographies of the owners. As the reconstructed collections are fragmentary, she is planning additional research to complete the networks and reveal new insights.



This year, Dr Matilda Malaspina, part of the research team headed by Prof. Matthew Driscoll at the University of Copenhagen, has begun work on the *Libro de los Epitomes*, a catalogue that summarises the content of part of the library of around 15,000 to 20,000 books that Hernando Colón assembled in the early sixteenth-century in an effort to create a library of every book in the world.

The database will make the *Epitomes* searchable and will link the information to its bibliographical references (HPB), other Colón catalogues and, where possible, the actual books in his magnificent library.

The [Heritage of the Printed Book \(HPB\) database](#) is freely available and currently contains around 8 million high-level bibliographical records for items of European printing of the hand-press period (c. 1455–c. 1830) held at major European and North American research [libraries](#) in some 24 countries. The database is continually enriched with new and updated records, and we would very much welcome a contribution from your library.



Detailed indexing of the data does justice to the expert cataloguing of our rare book librarians. All records indicate the source of cataloguing, as records are not merged. We plan to group records so that users will be presented with a set of records for the same or a similar imprint.

Records are provided with persistent identifiers for use in citations. Increasingly records contain links to digitised copies and/or provenance information.

[Material Evidence in Incunabula \(MEI\)](#) is a database designed to record and search the material evidence (or copy specific, post-production evidence and provenance information) of 15th-century printed books: ownership, decoration, binding, manuscript annotations, stamps, prices, each geographically located and chronologically dated. MEI is linked to the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC) from which it derives the bibliographical records, and it allows the user at last to combine searches of bibliographical records with copy specific records.

MEI always intended to offer a physical representation of the circulation of books throughout the centuries, from place of production, to their present locations. In February 2021 we set up a [map showing the location of collections of incunabula recorded in MEI](#).



The [CERL Thesaurus](#) combines local and national authority files and records forms of imprint places, imprint names, personal names and corporate names as found in material printed before the middle of the nineteenth century - including variant spellings, forms in Latin and other languages, and fictitious names. We regularly add new records and new links.

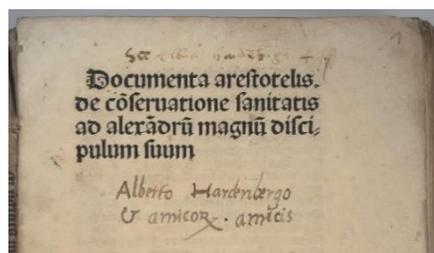


It supports searching on variant forms of a name in the HPB database and is a popular stand-alone resource. Records link internally (e.g. cities-printers) and externally (e.g. to provenance details, type fonts, wiki data, printers' devices, etc.).

The CERL Thesaurus records are published as linked open data. A small team of volunteer editors works hard to deduplicate records. The record display makes clear which data element was contributed by which organisation.

The [CERL Provenance Digital Archive](#) allows you to organise sustainably your images of provenance evidence.. After you have logged in with your Google, Orchid or Facebook account, you can post provenance evidences (image and short description) and post notes with other people's uploads (e.g. responses to requests for assistance in identifying former owners). You can find more information on how to contribute to the CERL PDA in these [Guidelines](#).

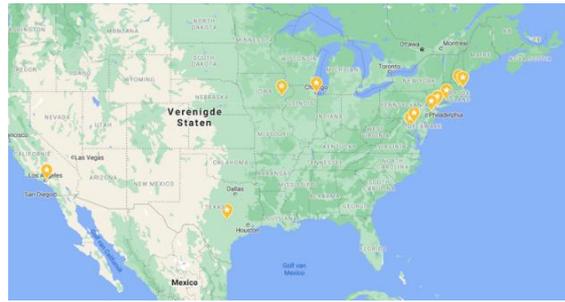
The CERL PDA is hosted in the Arkyves environment, hosted by Brill Publishers. While Arkyves is available as a subscription service, CERL PDA data will always be free under a CC0 license and the images you upload are made available as IIIF. If you do take out a subscription from Brill, CERL data will be shown in the context of the other datasets brought together in Arkyves.



Joining CERL

We warmly welcome you to join CERL if your library, archive, museum or similar has a collection of manuscripts and/or early printed books which are part of the European cultural heritage. If your research takes you to these materials we look forward to providing you with relevant data presented in a meaningful context and an expert community always happy to liaise with you on the interpretation of this information.

We encourage members of the community to exchange knowledge on all aspects related to the curation of manuscript and early printed collections, ranging from cataloguing, storage, access, and collection security, via national bibliographies, book history, and provenance, to digitisation, IIIF, Linked Open Data, and Digital Humanities, to diversity, education and advocacy.



CERL members in the US

We are committed to curating data sustainably, creating connections where possible and providing convenient access to data, with the aid of up-to-date standards and technologies.

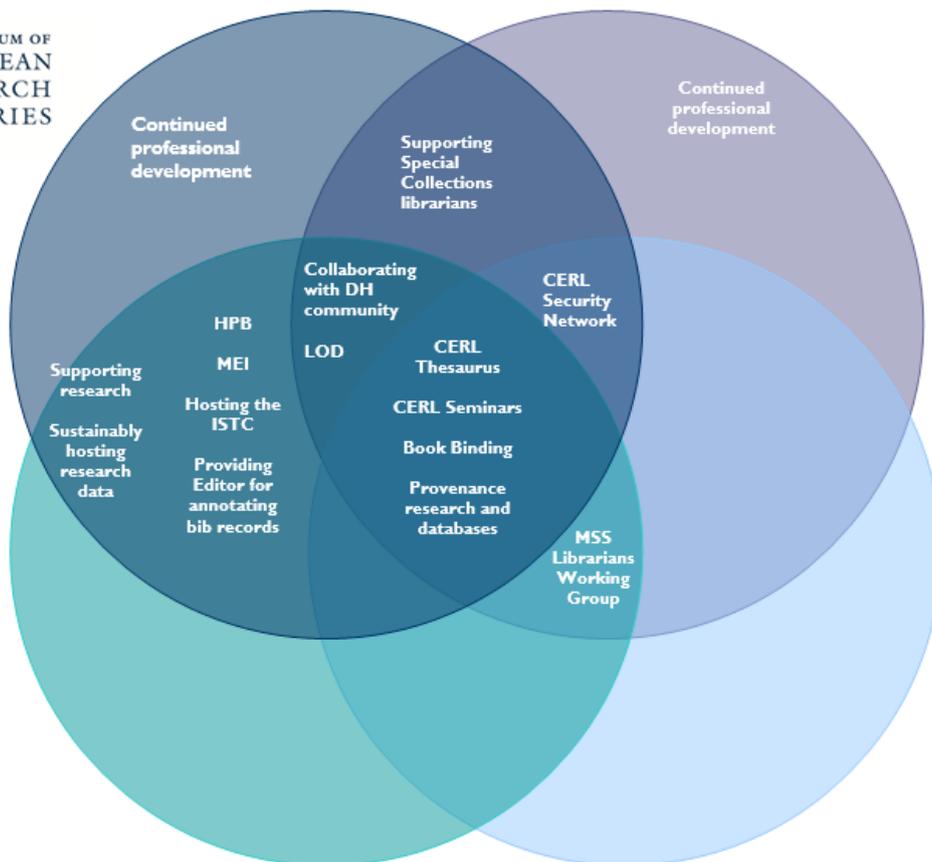
A list of members is available [here](#), and an overview of our organisational structure is available [here](#).



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CERL 40 Bowling Green Lane, EC1R ONE, United Kingdom
www.cerl.org T + 44 20 7415 7000 (Switchboard) Twitter @cerl_org
 FB <http://www.facebook.com/groups/99706868239/>
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