

The Reemtsma Collections and their Subsequent Exploitation at the Museum of Work, Hamburg

The Museum of Work in Hamburg, Germany, took over the collections of the remarkable “Reemtsma Cigarettenfabriken” almost exactly ten years ago. The traditional, internationally operating company had established and maintained a comprehensive cultural-historical collection during their approximately hundred years of trading. The collections include photographic archives, advertisement and product archives as well as the historical tobacco collection with various library holdings. What treasures of our cultural heritage are bound to be discovered? How can we sufficiently document and research collection holdings this complex and varied in a museum?

Reemtsma, one of the most important companies in Hamburg, is one of the biggest cigarette producers in Germany. Founded in 1910 by Bernhard Reemtsma in Erfurt and relocated at Altona-Bahrenfeld (today’s Hamburg-Bahrenfeld) in 1923, Reemtsma held two thirds of the national cigarette production during the 1930s. Reemtsma recaptured their leading position in cigarette production in post-war Germany within only a few years’ time.¹

In 2002, the British Imperial Tobacco Group, which ranks fourth in world-wide cigarette production, took over the company (feat. West, Davidoff and Ernte 23). A year later, Imperial Tobacco sold the Reemtsma premises and headquarters’ buildings. As a result, the Hamburg administration headquarters were closed down as well as the archives of the formerly independent traditional business.

While some parts of the unique, historically valuable collections were at risk to be disposed of, others were to be split into several bundles going to various museums of art or cultural history in Hamburg and beyond or to be sold at auctions.

At this point the Museum of Work, Hamburg, offered to take care of the entire collection including photo archives, advertisement archives and the historical tobacco collection. Indexing and the presentation of the collections in exhibitions, publications and online databases were part of the offer. The Museum of Work received the photo archives (2003) and all other collections (2004) as a gift from Reemtsma Cigarettenfabriken Ltd.² They also

agreed to pay for the start-up financing of a research and indexing project run by two historians for a period of two to three years.

The Photographic Archives

The historical photo archives were established after the company had moved to Altona-Bahrenfeld in 1923. Holding more than 70.000 photographs, they include the Nazi-period³ and lead up to the recent past. The photographs either come as single prints, negatives, slides or prints in a photo album. The Reemtsma advertising department commissioned professional photographers to take photos for the company's documentations and publications.³

The photos show work processes and technical details of the cigarette production as well as the Reemtsma factory sites and staff. Further typical photos for the archives include openings and jubilees as well as visits of important business partners or politicians. Social and recreational facilities for the staff at various factory sites, such as canteens, break rooms, company's libraries and sports clubs were frequently photographed. With these photos the company emphasized their image of a caring employer towards staff and in public.

The so-called 'tobacco-journeys' are a special topic. Renowned photographers and photo journalists travelled around the globe to certain tobacco growing regions to take photos of tobacco production and trade, as well as the country and its people. Their photos give insight into the long tradition of tobacco growing and the processing of the industrial mass product. In advertising campaigns their photos were used to create a fine, fascinating and exotic image of the Oriental and Virginia Cigarettes.

In a number of Reemtsma's advertising campaigns for cigarette brands, photo sequences were a central idea. While advertisements in newspapers and magazines were the most important media, illustrated brochures giving information on cigarette production were published as well. On the one hand the photo archives supplied pictures for specific brand campaigns, on the other hand their photos from advertisements, reports and events helped to represent the company in public.

The Advertising Media Archives

The archives of the advertising department, today's marketing department, hold a nearly complete range of advertising means and other publications produced since 1910. Furthermore they include internal documents of the department's brand and advertising campaigns, as well as the Reemtsma headquarters' specialist library, amounting to as many as 50 removal boxes.

The advertising media archives include approximately 25.000 advertisements, 3.000 advertising posters and more than 50.000 further advertising media, e. g. displays, signs, stickers, films and giveaways etc. In a service contract Reemtsma and the museum agreed to continue maintaining the archives and thus completing them with further advertisements. The very products which were advertised are still there, e.g. 10.000 packs of cigarettes. Besides their own company's advertising means and products, a choice of two and three-dimensional objects of their competitors were collected as well.

The Reemtsma Tobacco-Historical Collection

The Reemtsma group had maintained a museum collection of its own, which used to be located on the site of the administration headquarters right on Elbchaussee, an avenue lined with magnificent mansions in Hamburg's exclusive residential area of Othmarschen. In 2004, the administration department was moved to the district of Bahrenfeld. The tobacco-historical collection was located at the 'Villa Reemtsma',⁴ a representative residential mansion Phillip F. Reemtsma had erected in the 1930s' 'New Building' style, on spacious garden and park grounds.

Called 'House K. in O.', it is known to be one of Hamburg's most spectacular private homes. It is now a listed building and has been sufficiently restored. After 1965, a permanent exhibition showed the tobacco historical collection. Admittance was free, opening hours were Monday through Friday on appointment. Approximately 3.500 objects, 3.000 graphics and final drawings, a library, historical advertising means as well as 3.000 cigarette packets were kept in the exhibition and non-public rooms.

The collection includes objects as well as illustrated and written displays of the cultural history of tobacco from all over the world and a period of over four centuries. Most of the three-dimensional objects are items used for consuming tobacco, such as pipes and pipe cases,

tobacco pouches and snuffboxes, tobacco knives and graters, cigar and cigarette holders, matchboxes and ashtrays.

At the Museum of Work

Had the Museum of Work not managed to obtain additional storage space, it would not have been capable to store the Reemtsma collections for they filled numerous lorry capacities. The fact that the newly obtained storage halls and rooms had neither been organized nor furnished or stocked yet, made it possible to reserve a hall the size of over 500 sqm for the advertising media archives only.

The hall was being equipped with a system of electrical roller-shelves which had originally been used for storing advertising means at Reemtsma's. The shelves were then used as regular shelves in order to reduce maintenance costs. There was no budget whatsoever for furnishing the storage space with new storage equipment anyway. This explains how our enthusiasm and pragmatism sometimes help to accomplish extraordinary projects in spite of continuous underfinancing.

The process of actually passing the collection over to the museum was a major challenge, for the Museum of Work actually is not the biggest of its kind. At Reemtsma's, varied teams of museum staff, students, trainees and volunteers took approximately six months exploring, sorting out, recording, photographing and preparing the collections for transportation.

Indexing and Communication

Our first step was to inspect the entire photo archives and to digitalize and index in the central collection-database of the museum. On the occasion of the Triennale of Photography 2005, the exhibition 'Rauchzeichen. Das historische Fotoarchiv der Reemtsma Cigarettenfabriken' was shown at Kaispeicher A, a warehouse in Hamburg's port. Formerly used for cacao and tobacco storage, it now forms the fundament on which the well-known Elbphilharmonie is being erected. A website published under the same title accompanied the exhibition.⁵

A two-year post-graduate training programme put the academic documentation of the advertising archives to a start. The practical part of this training included the indexing of large parts of the advertisements and posters. A new entry mask for brands was added to the

database in order to gradually set up a scheme of all the brands and advertising measurements of the 'Reemtsma Cigarettenfabriken'. This has also proved to be helpful in the documentation of other companies' collection holdings.

The analysis of further sources of information, such as advertising concepts which had been passed on, made it possible to find out where and when the advertising materials had been used, which campaigns they had been part of and who had designed them. Special data records for persons and corporate bodies hold information on employees, photographers and graphic designers as well as the Reemtsma group, its subsidiaries and contracted agencies etc. Similar to authority records in library cataloguing, these data records can be linked with data records of certain advertising materials.

The second year of the post-graduate training included further training for the information specialist offered by the Potsdam Institute for Information and Documentation.⁶ The final assignment of the training was the conception of an online database of the Reemtsma advertising media archives.⁷ The conception was implemented so that ca. 10.000 advertising media have been accessible for research since 2007 via the Museum of Work's website, and via the common portal of libraries, archives and museums in Germany called 'BAM-Portal' since 2009.⁸

Along with indexing and researching the advertising archives, the museum accomplished a research project called 'Advertising Images, Product Management and Communication of the Reemtsma Cigarettenfabriken 1920 – 1960', because Reemtsma's advertising concepts were innovative, successful and created a style.⁹ The outcome was presented in the Museum of Work's major exhibition 'Werbewelten made in Hamburg' in 2010, on the 100 year anniversary of the company.¹⁰ The exhibition gave insight into the development of the company and its brands by presenting objects from each of the three Reemtsma collections.

The Reemtsma Libraries

A few of the volumes from the Reemtsma historical tobacco collection's library and individual works of art which had been kept on the Reemtsma site and in the administration buildings were not donated to the Museum of Work. They were put up for auction twice in 2004 but failed to be sold,¹¹ so that eventually they became part of the museum's collection. The eldest of those literary works is a travelogue published in 1505. The historic non-fiction

titles include topics such as tobacco growing or the use of tobacco in medicine and as a stimulant.

Almost 1.000 volumes have been catalogued at the museum's library since 2005. They partly came from Reemtsma's historical tobacco library and from the advertising department's library, which included many company publications. The eldest of the volumes dates back to 1622, the youngest to 2003. All of them are available for research in the museum library's OPAC.¹² The content indexing in the local data of the union database follows a list of ca. 20 subject keywords that match the German National Library's "SWD", the German normative file of subject headings. The list contains headings such as health hazards, chewing tobacco, disease, brand, non-smoking, smoking utensils, tobacco industry, tobacco pipe, advertising, cigarette.

Current Prospects

The Hamburg cultural authorities currently provide special funding for the city's seven major museums to implement a common inventory project. In retrospective, additional staff make the museum collections involved digitally accessible over a period of ten years. At the Museum of Work, the externally funded project includes objects and illustrations as well as cigarette packages from the historic tobacco collection. To provide cross-museum access, all inventory-data – including digital reproductions – are gradually exported to a common intranet-database. In the future, data will be forwarded to the 'Museen Nord' database – provided they are of sufficient quality and comply with the general rights of personality and the right of use. Here museums in Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein present their houses and collection data in cooperation with 'digiCULT' (a multiple communication channel focusing on digital art and culture).¹³ Libraries, archives and museums have long been responsible for making their cultural heritage digitally accessible.

The museums in Hamburg have maintained a common collection database for their museum libraries' holdings since 1997. It is similar to the database installed by digiCULT in 2009. By now, the libraries of nine institutes which preserve cultural heritage cooperate and share access to their common online-catalogue, because all of them are members of the GBV (library association).¹⁴ In the future, the two systems shall be linked even closer.

The Museum of Work was opened in 1997 to be a museum of social history. From the very start, the conception of the museum's collection has been based on the reciprocal relations between objects and the objects in relation to their former users in particular. As a result the collections hold bundles rather than single objects, including actual workspaces, products and machines from small businesses and trading offices. Biographies – and of course the Reemtsma collections – are also included. Three-dimensional objects, archival documents, photographs, AV-materials, books and magazines form typical ensembles of relating historical contents to be recorded.

Since 1993, the museum has maintained a collection database which provides data fields and records particularly designed to display the multifaceted relations between objects. Switching to a new database-software in 2000 facilitated linking datasets.

Datasets of parts of a bundle are linked with the datasets of the actual bundle. Or, for example, a machine manual and the machine itself are linked. This is similar to an electronic library catalogue where an essay from a compilation would be linked with the compilation. Corporate and personal records from the museum's database can now be linked with the integrated authority file (GND) in the www.

Furthermore we would like links with the copy datasets which our library has set up in the GBV's PICA-database. While our museum's library's references can be linked now with GBV catalogue data records (PPN), they cannot yet be linked with the copy datasets (EPN). If that were the case, we would be able to link bundle records in the museum's database with copy records of books which belong to the bundle. This applies to the bundle 'Historical Tobacco Collection Reemtsma' and corresponding copies of the Reemtsma historical library.

Everything has always been linked – in real life and in many museum collections as well. Owing to the structure of the internet and corresponding concepts for data exchange and organisation,¹⁵ it is much easier today to record and depict interrelations of objects in a differentiated manner. This applies for scientific documentations of a museum's linked object data as well as for cultural-historical research of collections in the museums and beyond.

Currently the Museum of Work participates in the "PolitCIGs" project, a research collaboration of scientists from Hamburg and universities at Jena and Vienna. For the first time scientists research the substantial, sociological and political culture in 20th and 21st century Germany and Austria, based on the cigarette as an example.¹⁶ We look forward to their first results!

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