Universität Hamburg
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CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPT CULTURES

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
announces a Lecture

by

Dr. Paola Molino
LMU Munich

"Uno oculorum intuitu cognoscere": on the Structure and Utility of Libraries and Archives' Manuscript Catalogues in Early Modern European Courts.

This lecture attempts to look at changes in the structure, content and aim of manuscript catalogues of dynastic libraries and archives in Europe, between 1550 and 1650. By sketching some hypotheses on the relationship between catalogues and the political setting in which they were conceived, I will first tackle the question of the " utility" and use of the library, for the ruler, the court, and the public. Starting from the 17th century many court libraries gained a representative function, and were increasingly presented as repositories, in which books should be well ordered, thus information retrievable. However, how catalogues could actually guide users in accessing this knowledge and for whom these were conceived, was a much more complex question. Furthermore, the narrative of the "useful library" often contrasted with that of the "secret archive", in which relevant documents were generally stocked in the very moment in which they ceased to fulfil a practical, administrative function, and started a new life as legal or historical sources. Archivists felt often compelled to draw up summaries of the most relevant of these sources, in order to limit if not avoid the direct access to the original documents, whereas librarians attempted to compile encyclopaedic catalogues aiming to display the universality of the holding, suggesting thus a broader use of the library. Being both institutions at the core of a real explosion of written texts in the early modern times, this lecture ultimately will propose to rethink their intersecting histories, on the basis of different classification criteria, the practices of knowledge management, and their actual "utility" in the pre-modern societies.

Thursday, 14 January 2016 at 6 pm
Room 0001, CSMC