

Müller, Hans-Peter. *Umerziehung durch rote Bibliotheken: SED-Bibliothekspolitik 1945/46 bis zum Ende der 1960er Jahre*. Berlin: Simon Verlag für Bibliothekswissen, 2020. ISBN: 978-3-945610-51-0. Softcover: €22.00.

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Censorship in German libraries has primarily been associated with the Nazi dictatorship. Yet the field of book history has not investigated censorship in the libraries of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the same extent. In *Umerziehung durch rote Bibliotheken* (Reeducation through red libraries), German sociologist Hans-Peter Müller, professor emeritus in the Department of Sociology at the University of Zielona Góra in Poland, explores censorship in communist and socialist libraries in the Soviet occupation zone and the first two decades of the GDR (founded in 1949; dissolved in 1990). This represents a period of Soviet influence, on the one hand, and the formation of East German communist dictatorship, on the other. Propaganda and censorship went hand in hand, especially in the time of the 1950s and following the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961.

Müller focuses on the history of the institutions that controlled public libraries and research libraries. That being said, Müller doesn't aim to write a library history of the GDR. Instead, Müller seeks to show how the leaders of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) reconnected with the ideological aims of the public library movement in the Weimar Republic. Specifically, Müller argues that the concept of *Volkserziehung* (education of the people by selection of the "appropriate" literature) in the Weimar Republic paved the way for censorship in Nazi Germany as well as in the GDR. Yet, Müller also traces the sources of library administration in postwar East Germany to the Soviet Union.

Müller makes use of a wide range of German documents. At the heart of his research are the files of the SED and the Central Committee of the SED. The book also draws on the files of East German ministries, themselves stored in the Federal Archives of Germany today. In addition, Müller uses published pamphlets, protocols and regulations, as well as library history monographs published in the GDR. Müller argues that communist institutions used deeply rooted ideologies of reeducating the readers by providing "appropriate" literature in order to make them citizens in line with the communist and socialist agenda.

Consequently, Müller devotes the first third of his book not to the period after 1945, but rather to the three historical antecedents that shaped East German library practice. He discusses the public library movement in the Weimar Republic as well as the censorship of books and transformation of librarianship under the Nazis. Parallel to this, he also discusses the “cleansing” of libraries in the Soviet Union under Stalin. In doing so, Müller analyzes the writings of the pioneers of the public library movement of the 1920s, such as Erwin Ackerknecht, Paul Ladewig and Walter Hofmann in depth. Further, he stresses that the “Richtungsstreit” that delayed the establishment of public libraries as funded institutions in Germany resulted in a shift in favor of a more nationalistic orientation. In the late 1920s and early 1930s that meant people’s education as national popular education.

Müller’s book raises the interesting question of institutional continuity from the Weimar Republic to the GDR. This continuity can be traced in the orders, regulations, and protocols of the SED. The book convincingly shows how censorship in libraries was a priority of the SED as early as 1946. Further, Müller explains how the gaps in libraries’ holdings created by Nazi censorship practices were filled by the “Red” Soviet literature patronized under the SED.

At the same time, Müller’s strict focus on the institutional history of libraries limits some of the questions that his book can answer. Library patrons and users figure scarcely into his account, leading to the impression of libraries as populated purely by German and Soviet administrators—not readers. Engaging the voices of library patrons could have provided new answers to Müller’s central questions. Did, for instance, users regard post-1945 libraries as starting from a *tabula rasa*? Or did they more strongly perceive continuities between the Nazi era and the *Richtungsstreit* and libraries under socialism?

The lack of regional or even inter-German comparisons is another limitation to the book. As mentioned, the question of influence stands at the center of Müller’s account. Were libraries in the Soviet Occupation Zone and East Germany above all influenced by the *Richtungsstreit* and the legacy of library administration under the Nazis? Or was the influence of Stalinist methods of censorship that arrived with the Red Army more decisive? Clearly, both of these factors played a role. Yet, looking at comparative cases like postwar Poland or indeed the American, British, or French occupation zones of what would become West Germany could have yielded fresh insights. Western Poland inherited the physical library infrastructure (if not the personnel) of Germany and was subjected to Stalinization, while the other foreign occupation zones

of Germany were subject to American, French, and British influences. If the influence of the *Richtungsstreit* really was so great, we might expect to see continuities between library practice between the other occupation zones and the Soviet Occupation Zone/GDR; if Stalinization was the key factor, we might expect to see greater continuities between the GDR, Poland, and other Eastern Bloc regimes, in spite of their very different non-Communist legacies. Müller's focus on the institutional history of libraries, commendable though it is on its own terms, prevents him from adopting this wider view.

A comparison of Müller's approach with that of other works on the history of libraries and reading in the GDR offers a broader perspective on the opportunities and risks of such an institutionally focused approach. As a 2009 essay by Christoph Links reminds us, libraries in the GDR did not exist in isolation but rather belonged to a larger "reading landscape" that included bookstores, publishers, and not least the Leipzig Book Fair. Any study of censorship or other themes in public libraries in the GDR ought, therefore, to explain how these different institutions interacted with one another. Müller's approach leaves this question largely unanswered. A 1997 article by Christine Ferret likewise highlights the surprising amount of agency and flexibility that librarians and library users had in getting around censorship rules laid down by the SED. Ferret's work reminds us that histories of libraries can be told from multiple perspectives: not only that of administrations, but also individual librarians, users, and even books themselves. The library administrations at the center of Müller's story had considerable power to shape users' access to books and information, but they were not the only actors. More broadly, Ferret's work demonstrates just how slippery a concept like "censorship" can be.

In short, Müller's impressive work in German archives lays a helpful foundation for scholars of public libraries in the rest of the communist bloc. Given that Müller's account draws nearly exclusively from German sources, it sets the table nicely for future historians to work in Russian sources to explore the relationship between Soviet and East German authorities. However, it also shows how the seeming completeness of the archive of socialist states like the GDR can itself become a trap for historians. State and library archives contain reams of information about the practice of library administration and censorship, but an approach that focuses on them to the exclusion of other sources will be incomplete.

The book will appeal to library historians and historians of the Cold War who are specifically interested in the organization of censorship in post-war libraries in Germany. The book doesn't provide any images, maps, or

appendices that would have helped to digest the rather dense institutional history. With its focus on the institution's history, it doesn't target an audience outside historians with a strong interest in East German library history or institutional history.

**Mizruchi, Susan L., ed. *Libraries and Archives in the Digital Age*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. ISBN 978-3030333720 (paper), \$29.99, ISBN 978-3-030-33373-7 (e-book).**

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This edited volume is a tightly organized and consistently stimulating foray into the implications of technological changes for libraries and archives. The contributors do an excellent job taking what is by now the well-established cliché of the book's title—the “digital age”—and reminding us of its manifold meanings. Why, after all, do we speak so much of the “digital age” rather than, say, the “computer age” or the “Internet age”? Interestingly, the Google Books Ngram Viewer shows within its corpus that “computer age” still appeared slightly more frequently as late as 1996, only after which point in time did “digital age” genuinely begin to skyrocket in usage. Even the clunkier “age of digital” has exceeded the frequency of the “Internet age” for the past fifty and more years. Clearly, we are drawn to the language of the “digital.” Reading this collection of essays helps to establish why: as an adjective, “digital” describes an extraordinarily wide and ever-dynamic range of things and processes. It had never been as apparent to this reviewer, at least, why “digital age” always seemed the more apt reference, and it is only the most obvious of many take aways from this book that the digital age remains full of both challenges and opportunities for the world of libraries and archives.

The volume originated in the inaugural conference of Boston University's Center for the Humanities, co-sponsored by the Boston Public Library and the Boston Athenaeum. As editor Susan Mizruchi writes in the introduction, the gathering was conceived as a “forum” in the classical sense, but also as something more inclusive: “The divergent life experiences, professional training, and approaches of our contributors will, we hope, result in a volume that is unique to the field” (1). The collaboration of three distinct institutions—academic research center, public library, and independent library—was an intentional effort to create a partnership to spark and support far-reaching