photo: Brandenburg Gate in Berlin

Online Resources for the Study of German History

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Introduction

The Internet has ushered in a new age of communication. Computers provide access to a wealth of information quickly and easily. Barriers caused by distance and political boundaries have all but collapsed. The environment has changed to the point that many believe *all* information is available on the Web. But to what extent is this true?

For the non-native student of German history, the Internet appears as a godsend. Not only is secondary research made more accessible, but potentially many primary documents may be accessible without the need for intercontinental travel.

This website attempts to address several areas. What level of research can be done on the Internet in the area of German history? How complete is the information that is available? What recent developments are affecting this status?

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Locating Information about German History on the Web

These sites are a good first step in locating information about Germany. They serve as pathfinders and lead the researcher to other sites containing more specialized and in-depth information.

German Studies Web: History

Part of the WessWeb network of resources on Western Europe, this website provides links for finding history resources for Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. This pathfinder directs the user to primary and secondary historical documents, libraries, archives, and educational societies. This section of WessWeb is hosted at Brigham Young University.

Virtual Library Museums – Germany

The German section of Virtual Library Museum pages charts resources on the web which are provided by museums in Germany, institutions of that branch and other services adjoined to this field.

Digital Historical Maps of Germany and Europe

Access to a selection of maps detailing the political development, economic unification, and administrative development in Germany and in Europe. Maps are available by state/region and by nation. From the Institut für europäische Geschichte (*Institute for European History*) at the University of Mainz.

Geschichte im Internet: Dortmunder Linkkatalog zur Geschichtswissenschaft

In German only. *The Dortmund Catalog of Links for the Study of History*. Very comprehensive pathfinder for all aspects of historical study in Germany. From the University of Dortmund.

Locating Secondary Sources

Secondary sources such as journals and monographs are important in the study of German history. The Internet provides a powerful searching tool in locating these resources. Due to their cumbersome nature, E-books and online monographs have not been accepted by the reading public and publishers have even been withdrawing their support. However, the Internet has greatly facilitated locating through access to bibliographies, online catalogs, and resource guides/pathfinders.

In contrast, journal articles more widely available on the Internet. Many articles are available in either full-text or full-image. Bibliographic databases such as JSTOR, Historical Abstracts, and the Arts & Humanities Search all provide citations to journals relevant to the study of German history with JSTOR providing access to full text materials. Individual journals are also sometimes available on the publishers' websites although access is often available only to subscribers.

Books

Library Catalogs and Other Library Information - from WessWeb

Provides direct links to online catalogs of major academic and research libraries in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

Goethe-Institut Union Library Catalogue

This combined catalog gives information on the holdings of Goethe-Institut libraries around the world. Presently there are about 600,000 records from about 92 libraries and information centers. History is one of the collection strengths of the Goethe-Institut, which also focuses upon the humanities and social sciences, geography, German-language literature of the 20th century, applied and fine arts, German as a foreign language, and Germanica in English translation.
The Goethe-Institut is the largest organization promoting German cultural and educational policy outside Germany. It is financed by the Foreign Office, the German Press Office, sponsors and income from the various institutes at 141 locations in 77 countries, including Washington, D.C.

Journals and articles

[Tables of Contents of Historical Journals and Monographic Series in German](#)

Especially useful for locating articles by journal title or by keyword search from times prior to coverage of Historical Abstracts. From the University of Erlangen.

[German-Language Newspapers and Other News Sources - from WessWeb](#)

Contains links to daily newspapers in the German-speaking world (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland). Also contains links to other daily news sources in radio, television, and the Internet. Has links to catalogs and union lists for newspapers. Useful in tracking current developments and discussion regarding historical events.

[Virtual Library: German History](#)

From the University of Erlangen; with topical, geographical and chronological links.

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Locating Primary Sources

Primary documentation in the study of German history comes in the form of manuscripts, printed documents of edicts, laws, and constitutions. Also to be considered is documentation in audio and visual formats like photography and film.

At this point, Germany is just beginning to digitize many primary materials. Some materials are now available through online access, but the vast majority of primary documents have not yet been digitized. Moreover, although there is an effort to provide translated English texts to some of the more important documents (particularly laws and constitutions), the scholar will need to know German in order to carry out research with this information.

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Online Documents and Images

[The Avalon Project at Yale Law School: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy](#)

The Avalon Project provides access to digital documents relevant to the fields of Law, History, Economics, Politics, Diplomacy and Government. Selected document groups relevant to the history of Germany include:

- [German-American Diplomacy: 1785 - 1847](#)
- [The Versailles Treaty June 28, 1919](#)

- [The Munich Agreement: Documents](#)
- [Germany's Invasion of Poland](#)
- [Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941](#)
- [World War II : Documents](#)
- [The Nuremberg War Crimes Trials](#)

[EuroDocs - History of Germany: Primary Documents](#)

Part of the EuroDocs page of primary historical documents from Western Europe. The section on Germany contains links to online primary documents (either scanned or transcribed). The site is segmented into several historical periods ranging from Medieval Germany to the 1990 reunification. There are also links to constitutions and legal documents as well as local and regional historical sources.

[Inventory of primary Web resources in the Distributed Digital Research Library Germany (Retrodigitization)](#)

Hosted at the University of Göttingen and supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG - *German Society for Research*). Contains links to primary Web-accessible resources created by German research libraries and other academic institutions. Projects include digitizing selected exile publications (1933-1945), pamphlets and brochures in connection with the 1848 revolution, a digitized colonial picture archive, and others. Some projects are complete, others are adding to their collections.

[Das Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (bpk) [in German – translation: The Prussian Cultural Heritage Photoarchive]](#)

The Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz (bpk) is the photo agency of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in Berlin with approximately 12 million images covering the themes Fine Arts, Culture and History. Images held by this archive fall into four general categories: portraits; historical images; geography (folklore and topography) worldwide, but with particular interest on Berlin; and cultural history. Searchable through both English- and German-language interfaces, a digitized online archive currently contains 60,000 images selected from the overall collection. New images are added each month.

[German History in Documents and Images Project](#)

A four year initiative sponsored by the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., and undertaken in collaboration with the [Prussian Cultural Heritage Photoarchive](#), the project will make a large number of primary source documents in German history available on the Internet. Currently in progress, the project will feature ten electronic volumes covering the period 1500 to 2000. Each volume will contain a selection of historical documents and visual images representing a particular time period. All documents will appear in the original German and in English translation. When complete, the site will contain thousands of pages of historical documents, many of which are difficult to locate in traditional publications.

Finding Aids

One of the ways the web has revolutionized the work of historians is by the placement of finding aids on the Internet. Previously, scholars had to locate archival materials through printed guides and then contact each institution of interest to obtain copies of their finding aids. Today, repositories are placing finding aids online allowing researchers to quickly determine whether collections would be of use. In this respect, the world wide web is serving not as a source of primary materials but as guide to those sources.

[German Historical Institute Reference guides](#)

The GHI has published a number of reference guides. The most recent (from 1995 to 2003) are available as hypertexts on this website.

[National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized - Records Group 242](#)

Although included in this record group with other seized foreign records (for example, from Italy and Japan after World War II), a wealth of microfilmed materials are held by the National Archives. These records were seized from defeated Nazi Germany in 1945 and were microfilmed prior to the return of the documents to the Federal Republic of Germany. These documents include not only those of the national socialist ("Nazi") regime, but also those of predecessor German governments. Examples include the German Foreign Office (1919-1945) and the economics ministry (1914-1945). The National Archives augmented this World War II collection by accessioning microfilm copies of other seized records from the Department of State, the Department of the Navy, and other sources.

Discussion Forums

The web serves to further scholarly communication through discussion forums that previously could only occur in the hallways of universities or at conferences. Today, researchers and scholars can engage in the exchange of ideas through listservs and chatrooms.

[H-German](#)

H-German is one of the H-Net family of humanities networks sponsored by the Michigan State University. H-German is a daily Internet discussion forum focused on scholarly topics in German history. There are no chronological limits. The primary purpose for H-German is to enable scholars in history and related disciplines to easily communicate current research and research interests; to discuss new articles, books, papers, approaches, methods and tools of analysis; to test new ideas and share comments and tips on teaching.

[H-German (listserv)](#)

This is the main listserv relating to studies in German history. It is an automated email list that educators and scholars of German history can join for academic discussion. The discussion is usually academic and geared toward those teaching college courses on this subject. To subscribe send an e-mail to: LISTSERV@h-net.msu.edu and write: sub H-German first name surname, school

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Major Libraries and Archives in Germany

These institutions are among the richest sources of research materials in German history. Their websites provide an overview of the mission and scope of their activities as well as access to catalogs and finding aids.

[Die Deutsche Bibliothek, Frankfurt, Berlin, Leipzig - *The German national library - English page*](#)

The national library for Germany, created in 1990 by merging together the former West German national library at Frankfurt am Main, the German Music Archive in Berlin, and the former East German national library at Leipzig. The Leipzig library was also the original national library established in 1913. Historical collections are at Frankfurt (including the German Exiles Archive 1933-1945) and at Leipzig (including the Exile Literature Collection 1933-1945 and the Anne Frank/Shoah Library).

Before the founding of the first German national library at Leipzig in 1913, there was no such institution and no national retrospective collection. In an effort to fill in the gaps in library holdings, several libraries have taken responsibility for acquiring older materials, according to century of publication. Links provided are to the English-version of the institutions homepage except as noted:

1913-present	[Deutsche Bibliothek, Frankfurt am Main *(Main page - in German)*](#)
1871-1912	[Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz](#)
1801-1870	[Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek, Frankfurt am Main](#) **In German only.**
1701-1800	[Niedersächsische Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek, Göttingen](#)
1601-1700	[Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel](#)
1450-1600	[Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, München](#)

[Bayerische Staatsbibliothek - *Bavarian State Library - English pages*](#)

Founded in 1558 by Duke Albrecht V as the Wittelsbach court library (for the rulers of Bavaria). The library took its present name in 1919. The library holds more than seven million volumes, outstanding

older collections including precious incunabula, numerous special collections (such as maps, literary remains, autographs, bookplates, portraits, the portrait and photograph archives, painters' books) as well as one of the most important manuscript collections worldwide. With its more than 40,000 current periodicals and newspapers the Bavarian State Library is second in Europe only to the British Library.

[Archive in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland - *Archives in the Federal Republic of Germany*](#)

Introductory pages in English - otherwise in German only. A website listing archives in Germany. In German, but text is mostly addresses and literature citations. A glossary that translates important terms into English is available on the site. Archives listed include church, private, and government archives, including the Federal Archives of Germany.

[Das Bundesarchiv - *Federal Archives of Germany*](#)

In German only. The website for the Federal Archives in Koblenz, Germany. Unfortunately, this site is entirely in German. An English webpage for the site is under development.

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Museums and Research Institutions

These websites are among the most comprehensive and useful web sites for accessing information about German history. Museum sites are of interest to all user groups as they contain basic information, teaching resources and information about archival holdings. Sites sponsored by research institutions are also of use to the research scholar.

[German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.](#)

The GHI was established in April 1987 as an independent non-profit foundation. It receives its main support from the government of the Federal Republic of Germany but also seeks grants and accepts support from other sources. The Institute is part of a tradition of German research institutes abroad. Sister German historical institutes are located in [Rome *(Italian/German language)*](#), [Paris *(French/German)*](#), [London *(English)*](#), and [Warsaw *(English/German/Polish)*](#).

[American Institute for Contemporary German Studies (AICGS), Washington, D.C.](#)

AICGS is a center for nonpartisan, advanced research, study and discourse relating to the Federal Republic of Germany: its politics, economy, culture, and society. Associated with Johns Hopkins University, AICGS provides a comprehensive program of public forums, policy studies, research, and study groups.

[Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin - *German Historical Museum - English page*](#)

Established in 1987 by the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the State of Berlin, the museum contains artifacts and documents of German history that can be seen in as varied a frame of reference as possible. German history is presented within its European context and its regional diversity.

[Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn - *House for the History of the Federal Republic of Germany - English page*](#)

Dedicated "to the history of our State and of the divided Nation" (German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on 13 October 1982), the Museum was founded to acknowledge the historical significance of the first stable and liberal German state. The Museum has devoted special attention to the internal development of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) as well as current issues stemming from reunification in 1990.

[The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)

The national institution for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history. The museum also serves as this country's memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust. The website contains information about exhibits, library and archival holdings, resources for students and teachers, and the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies.

[FES Net Source: History and Politics](#)

Online source documents (some with English translation) and a digital library of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a foundation sponsored by the Social Democratic Party in Germany (SPD). *Note:Click on "FES Net Source" button on left side of screen.*

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Evaluating the Web as a Resource

The Internet has made research in many fields much easier in terms of access. This is indeed true for the study of German history.

The Internet has brought many benefits. It can provide access to documentation across distance, which can be very helpful to an American researcher who now can access more information without travel to Germany. Even when travel is required, more preparation work can be done prior to departure so that the time in Germany may be focused more directly upon research goals. Access to secondary sources is also improved. Bibliographic catalogs and information can be accessed and searched remotely; finding relevant books and articles wherever they might be is enhanced greatly through the Internet and computer networks. Direct access is even available in some cases through full-text/full-image articles and digitized documents and images that have been placed on the web.

However, there are some drawbacks to depending on the Internet for historical studies. Everything is not online. This includes *most* primary documentation since it is older and often pre-dates the computer era. Large efforts are now underway to retrospectively digitize large collections in Germany and make them available on the Internet. Two of the largest are those associated with the University of Göttingen and the Prussian Cultural Heritage Photoarchive. But much work needs to be done and several years will pass before the full results of these efforts are realized.

In the near term, traditional research methods will still be necessary to conduct studies in the field of German history. The Internet can currently provide some of the resources necessary to conduct historical research. However, due to cost and technical considerations, the volume of information, especially of primary documentation, is still not available online. The Internet instead provides a useful and important tool that needs to be used in concert with traditional research practices.

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