

Afterword: Observations on *Stammbuch* Research Past and Present

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The interest in the phenomenon of the *Stammbuch* or album amicorum has a long history. It goes back to the time in which the custom of keeping a *Stammbuch* had not yet found a fixed form. Initially, handwritten entries were often obtained on large single sheets, which were only later bound into valuable books. Commentators were thinking about the meaning and purpose of this new custom and its material form as early as the 1530s and 1540s. There are several surviving versions of a *judicium* attributed to Philipp Melanchthon about this new fashion of collecting inscriptions from friends.¹ He addressed, in a purely functional manner, the ways in which such alba were used in everyday life, and their value as sources from which we might draw insights into the daily lives, contacts, and characters of the collectors. One analysis, long unsurpassed, of autograph collections as an artform, dates back to the early eighteenth century and the pen of the theologian and historian Michael Lilienthal. He not only examined the motivation of those involved in the practice, but also the materiality of the collecting media and their practical use, which he tried to systematize.²

Autograph collections remained the subject of popular academic discussion until well into the nineteenth century. They were often used as part of religious and moral instruction, as well as anecdotally, for their entertainment value or to make an impression on the reader. Only occasionally did scholars address the more unusual collections, or those album entries by famous people that had been published out of their context. Alba were primarily regarded as biographical sources and were mostly used in attempts to reconstruct lives. They were not yet seen as collectible items by large libraries in and of themselves. Rather, it was private enthusiasts who would first recognize the value of the alba, appreciate them as attractive and meaningful testimonies of literary and cultural history, and build renowned collections of this unique collection medium. The gradual process through which alba themselves became collectible items began in German-speaking Europe and the Dutch Republic in the second half of the eighteenth century.³ When libraries began to collect

1 Schnabel, *Stammbuch*, 253-260.

2 Lilienthal, *Schediasma Critico-Literarium*; Schnabel, 'Lilienthal'.

3 Early and particularly active German collectors included Christian Ulrich Wagner in Ulm and Erhard Christoph Bezzel in Nuremberg; Wagner, *Nachricht*; Goldmann, 'Der Poppenreuther Pfarrer'. Christian Ulrich

alba, they initially concentrated on those owned by famous individuals, acquiring less ‘prestigious’ items as a sort of ‘by-catch’ to their purchase of large book or manuscript collections.⁴ With one major exception in 1805, when the Großherzogliche Bibliothek in Weimar purchased Christian Ulrich Wagner’s collection of alba, planned acquisition policies only began in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁵

It took until the 1830s for the systematization once attempted by Lilienthal to resurface, as the ‘classification by morality’ was replaced by a desire to document the surviving sources and query their significance, entirely in the spirit of a positivist approach to material collections. Dutch collectors and researchers played an important role in this process from the very beginning. On the one hand, prominent individual alba were increasingly being exhibited, while, on the other hand, overviews of those held in private collections (and thus not accessible by the public) were being published.⁶ What was new was the approach of treating the testimonies not just as possessions of their former owners, but also as a research object *sui generis*. As a result, efforts were being made to define the peculiarity of the alba with greater precision and to place them within their historical context. The primary focus turned to alba from the Dutch ‘Golden Age’. The alba assembled by women, especially in the Dutch and Low German areas between 1580 and 1620, also began to receive increasing attention due to their distinctiveness. Gradually, the focus turned to the milieu of the poetically active late humanists, writing in the period before and around 1600, who had developed their own form of the album custom with ambitious neo-Latin and Dutch poems.⁷

After a prolonged period of stagnation, during which alba were mainly treated as testimonies to student life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, research into

Temler took his collection with him when he moved to Denmark and, after his death in 1780, it came into the possession of Count Otto Thott: Helk, ‘Nürnberger und Altdorfer Stammbücher’, 217. Well-known Dutch collectors included Cornelis Ascanius van Sypesteyn in Haarlem, Gerard Johannes Beeldsnijder in Utrecht, Frans Alexander Ridder van Rappard in Utrecht, and Hobbe Baerdts van Sminia in Bergum: Rappard, ‘Overzicht’, 4.

4 For instance, the Kongelige Bibliotek in Copenhagen took possession of Otto Thott’s collection at the end of the eighteenth century: Helk, ‘Nürnberger und Altdorfer Stammbücher’, 217. In 1792, the Nuremberg Stadtbibliothek acquired the extensive Norica collection of the Altdorf historian Georg Andreas Will, which would form the initial core of a growing collection of alba amicorum, although it was not actually accessioned to the library until 1816: Schnabel, *Stammbücher*, 1, xix.

5 Wagner, *Nachricht*; Raffel, *Galilei*, 161. The Großherzogliche Bibliothek (now Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek) now holds more than 2000 alba, making it the most extensive collection in the world. It was only in the 1840s that the well-financed British Library began purchasing alba. It acquired, for example, the collection of the Nuremberg theologian Erhard Christoph Bezzel, which had previously been offered for sale in Germany without success. The library has since purposefully expanded its collection. The Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague began its collection of more than 700 alba when it acquired the Beeldsnijder collection in 1887: see <https://www.kb.nl/onderzoeken-vinden/bijzondere-collecties/alba-amicorum> (Accessed on 30 January 2022).

6 Examples of early documentation include Frast, ‘Echzell’; Beeldsnijder, *Das Stammbuch des Joannes Narsius*; Lebrün (ed.), ‘Schröder’s Stammbuch’; ‘Aus dem Stammbuche Schrenckher’; *Blok Toxens Stambog*; Havemann, ‘Stammbuch von Herzog Georg von Braunschweig-Lüneburg’; Mittendorff, ‘Verzeichnis’; Schiefner, ‘Das Stammbuch von Adam Olearius’, Kist, ‘Voetius’; Gollmert, ‘Stammbuch der Herzogin Anna von Meklenburg’. Overviews of alba held in private collections: Vulpius, ‘Über Stammbücher’; Rappard, ‘Overzicht’; Sminia, ‘Ver slag’; Sminia, ‘Overzicht’.

7 Schnabel, *Stammbuch*, 524–544.

alba amicorum experienced a revival in the 1960s. The interest in the literature of humanist authors also drew attention to the *philotecae* in which their poems had found expression. The often very elaborate illustrations and musical contributions now also began to attract more attention. In addition, interest in popular culture made researchers turn to the later manifestation of the *Stammbuch*, the so-called poetry album (*poëziealbum*), which for a long time was not considered an object worthy of research interest.

Nevertheless, the alba amicorum preserved in numerous libraries, archives, museums, and private collections were still difficult to find. Because these manuscripts rarely featured in the catalogues of the major publicly-accessible libraries that held them, a considerable amount of research was necessary simply to locate them. Initially, it was those libraries with larger collections that gave more detail about their holdings in the catalogues they began publishing in the 1980s, some of which comprised multiple volumes.⁸ Nowadays, local databases accessible via the internet are predominantly used for the purpose of locating the original album.⁹ In addition, however, many small collections and individual alba are also presented in the form of essays – though these are not always easily accessible, and rely on a wide range of methodologies that make comparisons between alba difficult.¹⁰

Since the 1980s, however, interregional and even international indexing efforts have begun to ameliorate the effects of poor cataloguing such alba had fallen prey to. As early as 1984, a provisional list of pre-1800 Dutch alba amicorum was compiled, documenting widely scattered holdings in and across numerous libraries. By 1986, this milestone inventory allowed for easier access to the sources and provided a completely new basis for the analysis and classification of older Dutch holdings.¹¹ The systematic listing of pre-1800 Dutch alba amicorum has since undergone considerable expansion.¹² In addition, in 1988 a complete list of all internationally known sixteenth-century alba in print was published, which provided considerable impetus for further research.¹³ The Repertorium Alborum Amicorum (RAA) database, based in Erlangen, has been making use of new technologies since 1998.¹⁴ Its records of more than 26,000 alba held in more than 800 libraries worldwide do not end at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but instead extend to

8 Extensive printed catalogues, albeit with frequently divergent indexing methods, are available from the Kongelige Bibliotek in Copenhagen (Helk, *Stambøger*), the Staatsarchiv Oldenburg (Schieckel, *Findbuch*), the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (Kurras, *Die Stammbücher*), the Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart (Krekler, *Autographensammlung*; Krekler, *Stammbücher*), the Stadtbibliothek Nuremberg (Schnabel, *Stammbücher*), the Kungliga Biblioteket Stockholm (Kurras and Dillman, *Stammbücher*), and the Latvijas Universitātes Akadēmiskā bibliotēka in Riga (Taimiņa, *Album Amicorum*). In other libraries, such as the British Library and the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, the alba are inventoried in various manuscript catalogues organized by accession numbers, which makes systematic research considerably more difficult.

9 For example, the collections of the Universitätsbibliothek Giessen, the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt in Halle, the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek in Weimar, and the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague.

10 Currently, the most extensive bibliography on the subject is that of the Repertorium Alborum Amicorum (RAA): <https://raa.gf-franken.de/de/literatur.html> (Accessed on 10 May 2022).

11 Heesakkers and Thomassen, *Voorlopige lijst*.

12 See <https://www.kb.nl/zoeken/jsru/alba-amicorum-nederland> (Accessed on 10 May 2022).

13 Klose, *Corpus Alborum Amicorum*.

14 Repertorium Alborum Amicorum, <https://raa.gf-franken.de/de/> (Accessed on 10 May 2022).

the present day. It also contains details of individual entries (totalling more than 307,000 individual contributions), references to secondary literature, and occasional links to other catalogues. Although the RAA remains the only systematic, inter-library index, digital copies of alba have recently been made more accessible online by institutions both large and small. Hyperlinks to digitised collections give researchers direct access to alba and inscriptions which would otherwise only be viewable in the holding libraries' reading rooms and subject to multiple restrictions. The RAA often also provides additional information on Dutch alba. More recently, Hungary has also begun a large-scale and detailed recording of Hungarian alba and entries that have been preserved across Europe.¹⁵

The considerable progress in the documentation of alba amicorum has also promoted research into the *Stammbuch* as a genre in its own right, and how alba were used by those who created and collected them. This has led not only to a significant increase in the number and frequency of relevant studies, but also to new research topics. After the long domination of mostly shorter and often popular academic essays that used alba in studies of heraldry, family history, or student life in earlier times, since the 1970 scholars have become more interested in studying the genre itself. A major catalyst for this development was the organizing of two international *Stammbuch* conferences, held at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel in 1978 and 1986, both of which resulted in oft-cited proceedings that have had a big impact on the field of alba amicorum studies.¹⁶

For example, the emblematic depictions in alba of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came into focus, as well as aphorisms and poems as meaningful entries. Alba were also subjected to approaches from different disciplines, such as philology, cultural history, network analysis, art history, and music history.¹⁷ The album entries were treated as mixed-media fragments, and examined together with the accompanying images as cultural-historic sources, in order to explore the ways of thinking, values, and goals of the creators and collectors, as well as their milieu and time period. The continued impact of the humanist legacy in the literary canon and the changing system of literary references were also addressed. Research, however, was not limited just to those who created the content, nor to the content itself; it also began to address the nature of the medium. The inclusion of handwritten song collections and prints in alba amicorum, the use of pictorial materials and coloured papers, and the change from the *Stammbuch* to 'poetry album' became legitimate objects of inquiry.

Lastly, the album practice itself became the object of in-depth study. The album owners' frequent claims of heartfelt and personal friendships are now being questioned and relativized, given the alba (semi-)public nature and their function as testimonies of self-representation. The intentions of those who created the inscriptions have also recently received attention, not only with regard to the respective individuals, but also with regard to their class, milieu, and gender.

15 Inscriptiones Alba Amicorum, <http://iaa.bibl.u-szeged.hu/index.php> (Accessed on 10 May 2022).

16 Fechner (ed.), *Stammbücher*; Klose (ed.), *Stammbücher*. See for a list of other relevant conferences: <https://raa.gf-franken.de/de/tagungen.html> (Accessed on 10 May 2022).

17 Worth mentioning from this period are numerous well-founded studies on Dutch alba by Hans Bots, Leonard Forster, Chris Heesakkers, and Kees Thomassen, which have been influential far beyond Dutch studies.

Over the past few decades, research on *alba amicorum* has also been synthesised and received a fresh impulse thanks to more extensive examinations.¹⁸ Numerous exhibitions have introduced these fascinating objects to a wider audience.¹⁹ The papers included in this special issue reflect this internationally flourishing research context. They not only take up proven research perspectives and test their application to Dutch *alba*, but also develop new perspectives that impressively underscore the cultural significance of the social practice of *alba amicorum*.

It has long been known that *Stammbücher*, especially those that were kept over a longer period of time, are a rich source for the reconstruction of biographies. They allow conclusions to be drawn about the compilers' social circle, standing, and context, as well as how these things changed over time, which becomes evident not just in the names of contributors, but also in their profession and interests, and not least in what they write and the images they include. Contributions in *alba* – whether text or image – can only obtain a clear meaning when viewed in relation to the social and cultural situation of the contributor and the contribution's recipient. The analysis of an album amicorum must therefore always include a fundamental prosopography that can potentially reduce the complexity of what are often ambiguous texts, by situating them into the interpersonal context necessary for their understanding. This can be equally determined by the ideologies and socio-cultural environment of those involved. Only when these are understood can one gain insight into what the contributor, the recipient, and their circle might have been thinking.

This applies not only to the self-representation of the album contributor to a potential readership and the intended effects they associate with it, but also to the role of the album owner, as June Schlueter and Robyn Radway have shown in this volume. It is especially true in the case of *alba* kept in foreign cultural circles, as it can allow for the verification or modification of assessments made on the basis of other, often sparse information. The inclusion of personal perspectives, as also expressed in the album entries in the sense of 'self-fashioning', further supplements and relativizes the supposed 'neutrality' of administrative sources, which, in turn, can only ever reflect a certain perspective. One can therefore develop an appropriate description of the reality by taking into account multiple perspectives; the early modern *philotecae* also offer impressive starting points for this kind of research. Their analysis still offers many possibilities, but is necessarily dependent on a methodically conscious approach, which must also take into account the secondary meaning of what has been written (and sometimes deliberately concealed) as well as pay more attention to the context of the inscription and interests of the participants. These can be determined not least by the use of a certain amount of leeway in placing very different and meaningful accents within the conventions prescribed by the *Stammbuch* tradition.

Alba amicorum have been repeatedly used as an important resource for research into songs. However, a systematic examination of the melodies included in the song contributions has remained a mere desideratum, since it requires a broad set of data that would be

¹⁸ Thomassen (ed.), *Alba amicorum*; Schnabel, *Stammbuch*; Ryantová, *Památníky aneb stambuchy*; Schlueter, *The Album Amicorum*; Reinders, *De mug en de kaars*.

¹⁹ An international, though certainly incomplete, list of exhibitions can be found at <https://raa.gf-franken.de/de/ausstellungen.html> (Accessed on 10 May 2022).

difficult to assemble. The results of the attempt made in this special issue by Carla Strijbosch are of great interest – and not just for alba research. The results will also provide important new information for musicologists, because the evidence presented in these alba can often be better classified historically and sociologically than other sources. It becomes evident that the boundaries between alba amicorum and song collections are too fluid for a clear demarcation between an album-with-songs and a songbook. Moreover, an appropriate assessment of the evidence reveals certain methodological problems which absolutely must be taken into account when evaluating the findings.

The difficulties inherent in the classification of alba are revisited throughout the essays in this special issue. One should definitely pay heed to warnings against blanket categorizations when analysing collecting practice in the early modern era. On the basis of the material analysis of existing alba, there are overlaps between collecting interests and forms, for which common terms such as album amicorum or *Stammbuch* offer only an inadequate description. Marika Koblusek's article in this volume shows that an interest in the materiality of the medium (an aspect that was long ignored, especially by those doing philological research), can help provide a more precise determination of objects and their presumed purposes. In addition, it draws attention to the fluidity of categories, a problem of which alba researchers must always remain aware. Insights such as these can certainly be extended to other fields in the future; however, such research always requires starting with meaningful individual alba, which each have to be analysed in detail and in relation to the context in which they were created.

The fact that the *Stammbücher* remain a fertile area of research for literary studies is clearly evident from the essay by Ad Leerintveld and Jeroen Vandommele in this special issue. They demonstrate that Dutch-language sonnets not only found expression in album practice, but were actually propagated via this medium. The early users belonged to an exclusive circle of people who wanted to establish Dutch as a literary language. They were trying out and introducing new possibilities for poetic forms, especially in the alba amicorum, which found a 'semi-public' distribution and were thus suitable as a means of communication within their circles. It was especially the later Dutch humanists who brought about certain developments that would only be observed at a much later date in the wider German-speaking world. Alba amicorum are carriers of literary texts that can be precisely identified as to location, date, and the personalities involved, together with their intertextual references and cross-media interaction, and as such deserve increased attention in the future. No other set of sources provides so much detail with reference to specific social groups and milieus for researching the change in literary fashions and the corpus of canonical texts, the attention to new authors and trends, and the disappearance of older authorities and references as these alba amicorum.

Finally, the statistical analysis of album holdings and entries, examples of which are discussed throughout this volume, points a way forward for future research. Until recently, the chronological distribution of surviving alba amicorum – which reached a peak in the decades before and after 1600, only to decrease significantly thereafter, especially from the 1650s – received little attention. As Manuel Llano points out in his article for this volume, the album practice in the Dutch Republic seems to have been supported for a long time mainly by German students, who often pursued quite practical intentions. Further

exploration of this, perhaps differentiating sources by milieu or location, would be an interesting project, and one for which the existing databases will provide a rich and still growing source of material.

Overall, it becomes very clear in the contributions presented here that the collection and comprehensive documentation of the public holdings of alba amicorum, their detailed cataloguing, discerning the contexts of individual alba, and attempts at creating an overarching perspective are all mutually dependent. Through the development of innovative technical and methodological approaches, the articles in this volume demonstrate rather impressively that the *Stammbuch* genre remains a fertile source for new questions, while simultaneously highlighting ample opportunities for future research in the broad field of cultural history.

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