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			Newsletter, published by the Reading Primers Special Interest Group (RP-SIG) of the International Society for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media		

□ Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

scholars with an interest in historical textbooks who search for media published in their own country will often turn to the national library, trusting that this is the place where the great majority of extant copies are kept. Yet the challenge to get access to such items is more complex in countries with historically decentralised school systems and/or systems of decentralised textbook provision – and even more so when it comes to reading primers.

Making a virtue out of necessity in Germany the Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) in Braunschweig started to build up a primer collection in the 1980s. The holdings are not confined to textbooks produced in Germany, but in the meantime cover prints from 180 countries. The essay in RPI 20 provides an overview of this unique collection. Use of prints of the GEI primer collection has also been made for an effort to study patriotic education in primers of the German Empire, 1871-1918, subject matter of a discussion which begins in this issue of RPI.

Please feel free to offer feedback or suggestions by writing to the editorial office.

August 2025

Wendelin Sroka

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□ Essay

The Primer Collection of the GEI Research Library in Braunschweig: History, Holdings and Acquisitions*Anke Hertling*

Access to relevant sources is often a challenge for scholars with an interest in the history of reading primers. Against this background the article introduces the Research Library of the Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) in Braunschweig (Germany), and particularly its international primer collection. Special attention is paid to the development of the collection in the context of the history of the GEI, to acquisition policies and to acquisitions of primers 2024 for the international collection. Finally, advice is provided how to search and detect primers online.

1 Beginnings of the Collection

When the German ethnologist and historian Georg Eckert (1912-1974) became intensively engaged in textbooks after the Second World War, his aim was 'to rid textbooks of stereotypes and portrayals of others as enemies in order to stimulate international understanding and peace' (Fuchs 2022, 10). According to Georg Eckert, textbooks were therefore a political issue, and in his efforts to free textbooks from enemy images and stereotypes, he continued the activities carried out by trade unions, governments, and international organizations during the interwar period (Fuchs 2022, 16-24). Bi- and multilateral work on textbooks in the form of textbook revisions was the focus when the *Internationales Institut für Schulbuchverbesserung* [International Institute for Textbook Improvement] was founded in Braunschweig in 1951. Two years later the institute, renamed *Internationales Schulbuchinstitut* [International Textbook Institute], was affiliated with Kant University (later the University of Education in Braunschweig), now able to build a basic collection of German and international textbooks in the school subjects of history, geography, and social studies/politics, thereby laying the foundations for scholarly debate and research with textbooks. This was possible thanks to the support provided by various actors, including the Textbook Section of the British military administration's Education Branch, the German Foreign Office, and numerous donations from institutions and private individuals, as well as collaborations with German textbook publishers in particular.

Since 1966, after the Council of Europe entrusted the Institute with the establishment of a European Information and Documentation Center for textbooks, the collection has been the Council of Europe's reference library for history and geography textbooks from Council of Europe countries (Council of Europe 1966). This commission was associated with a significant expansion of the library's holdings, which was financially supported by the *VolkswagenStiftung* [Volkswagen Foundation] and the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG) [German Research Foundation]. The development of the collection was stabilised in 1969 when the library was given responsibility by the DFG for the *Sondersammelgebiet für Schulbücher* [Special Collection for Textbooks] in the school subjects of history, geography and social studies/politics.

One year after Georg Eckert's death, the *Georg-Eckert-Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung* (GEI) [Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research] was founded in 1975 as a non-university research institute and the founding law included the maintenance of a library with an international textbook collection. Parallel to textbook revision, textbook research became a second pillar of the Institute's work, as it was assumed that the textbook revisions themselves should be the subject of critical analysis and that textbook research would contribute to a better understanding of the political interests and legitimizations in textbooks (Fuchs 2022, 45). Even though the bilateral and multilateral textbook activities and today's research of Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) continue to focus on its core school subjects of history, geography and social studies/politics, German-language reading books and primers have been a permanent part of the Research Library's collection since the 1980s.

□ Primer Collection / GEI Research Library

It was in particular Gisela Teistler, head of the library from 1980 to 2006, who recognised the significant importance of reading books and primers for research that addresses educational development processes through various interdisciplinary approaches, while also highlighting the influence of politics and society on primers (Teistler 2006). The decision to collect primers internationally presented Teistler and the library team with challenges that are considered specific to a collection of textbooks worldwide. As such, textbooks and primers are not available through conventional booksellers, meaning that the GEI relies on information from textbook publishers all over the world. Primers are also difficult to find, even in times of electronic catalogues. The term 'primer' and authors are often missing from the book title. Not only in many different languages, countries and educational systems, but also historically, primers have different book titles. In German, for example, primers have been published over the centuries among others as *Abecedarium*, *ABC-Buch*, *Namenbüchlein*, *Buchstabier- und Lesebuch*, *Syllabenbuch*, *Fibel* or *Erstes Lesebuch* (Schmack 1960, 47-74). It is often necessary to take a closer look at the book, especially to draw the line between primers and reading books.

A further challenge in collecting primers is that, as textbooks, primers are mass media and many libraries therefore do not consider primers as worthy of a collection. In Germany the *Deutsche Bücherei* [German Library], now the *Deutsche Nationalbibliothek* [German National Library] collects all publications released in Germany since 1913. It is only since the commencement of this late national collection mandate (late in comparison to other European countries) that textbooks in Germany have been centrally catalogued bibliographically. The greater the merit of Gisela Teistler's *Fibel-Findbuch* from 2003 (Teistler 2003). It offers bibliographic details of all primers published in the German language from the beginnings up to 1944 which Teistler had been able to identify, and it includes information about holding libraries, if any. For the *Fibel-Findbuch*, numerous libraries especially in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Poland were searched for primers and bibliographies; in addition, secondary literature, including periodicals, catalogues issued by antiquarian bookshops and exhibition catalogues were evaluated (Teistler 2003, 12).

Especially due to Gisela Teistler's significant commitment the historical collection of primers, which in the GEI includes primers up to publication year 1945, has grown steadily. In addition to requests to textbook publishers to send duplicates from their historical collections to the GEI, Gisela Teistler placed advertisements in newspapers and magazines asking the public to send primers that were no longer in use (Teistler 1989, 316). Thanks to systematic research and contacts established with other libraries she became aware of primers dating back to the 15th century for which copies or reprints were requested or produced for the Research Library. One of these early primers, which is available as a paper copy in the GEI, is a *Azbukvidarium glagoliticum* from 1527. The primer is written in Old Church Slavonic script and its original is held by the Royal Danish Library.¹

The oldest primer in the GEI collection that is not a reprint or reproduction is *Die Sprüche Salomonis, als ein mit abgesetzten Syllaben ganz leichtes Buchstabier- und Lese-Büchlein*, published in Nuremberg in 1710 (figure 1). The 128-page primer is presented in Fraktur typeface and octavo format. It is known that the editor mentioned in the book, Johann Wallwert, worked as a cantor, composer, and teacher.²

¹ https://soeg.kb.dk/permalink/45KBDK_KGL/1pioq0f/alma99122626029105763 As soon as the Royal Danish Library makes the title available digitally, the copy held at the GEI will be withdrawn. Reprints and copies at the GEI will be removed once the originals are acquired by the GEI or made digitally accessible by other institutions, also because the copies have poor reading quality.

² Contrary to the spelling 'Johann Wallwert' noted in the book, various spelling variations of the name exist. The spelling 'Johann Walwert' can be found in: Deutsche Biographie, <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd129489832.html> (29.03.2025), as well as 'Johann Walwert, also Walbert' in: Felix Joseph Lipowsky: *Baierisches Musiker-*

□ Primer Collection /
GEI Research Library

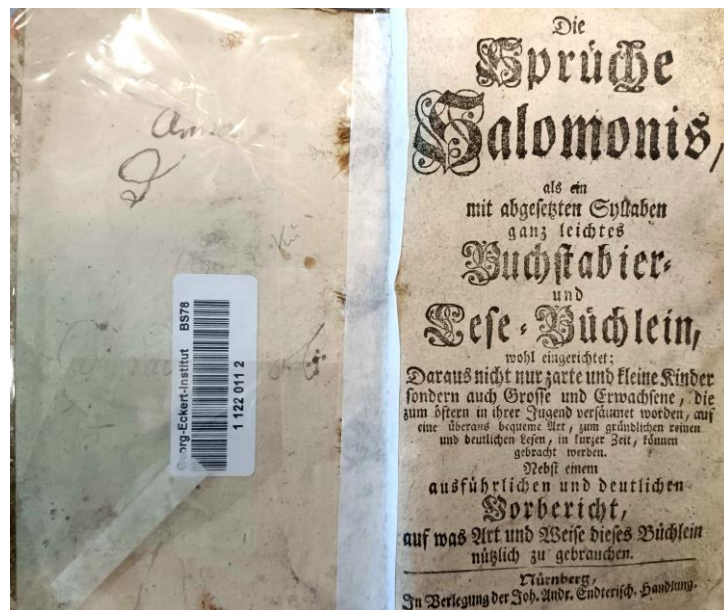


Figure 1: The oldest primer in the GEI Collection (*Die Sprüche Salomonis ...* Nürnberg: Joh. Andr. Endter 1710)

About half of the GEI's historical primer collection dates from the time of the German Empire (1871-1918). The increasing number of primers during this period can be attributed to the introduction of machine printing around 1850, which led to a significant expansion of book production in general and textbooks in particular. Cheaper book prices increasingly enabled poorer people to purchase textbooks and the expansion of the elementary school system, particularly in rural areas, also stimulated the production of primers in Germany in the second half of the 19th century.

After Gisela Teistler's retirement the GEI was unable to systematically expand both its national and international historical primer collection. Historical primers are expensive, and additional resources would be necessary to check antiquarian bookshop offers regularly. Yet the GEI maintains contacts with some antiquarian bookshops, which contact the GEI when they offer primers. A recent example of an acquisition through an antiquarian offer is the *Puppen-Fibel für den ersten Leseunterricht* [*Doll Primer for first reading lessons*], which presumably dates back to 1890. Measuring only 7x5 cm and weighing 2,500g, this 25-page miniature primer is now the smallest book in the collection. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the author or the use of the primer. Size and title suggest that it was intended for children who played school with their dolls.

In many cases historical primers come to the Research Library through donations or acquisitions of collections from private individuals or institutions. For example in 1988, the purchase of textbooks from the Ferdinand Hirt publishing house, which was dissolving at that time, was successfully completed. Among the approximately 2,400 books taken over by the GEI were 101 historical German primers (Teistler 1989, 316). In the last year, 240 historical reading primers and 90 maths textbooks for beginners, in German in parallel to the equivalent of 'primer' often designated as 'Rechenfibel', were acquired from the *Süddeutsche Lehrerbücherei* [South German Teachers' Library], a collection which originally had been established by the Bavarian Teachers' Association and (Reithmeier 2024) and will be integrated into the GEI collection in 2025.³

² (continued) Lexikon. Munich 1811, p. 376. [https://personenlexika.digitale-sammlungen.de/Lexika/Walwert,_Johann_\(GND_129489832\)](https://personenlexika.digitale-sammlungen.de/Lexika/Walwert,_Johann_(GND_129489832)) (29.03.2025)

³ Mathematic primers are not yet part of the GEI collection. It is currently being considered whether they can be integrated into the GEI. If the primers are not integrated into the collection, the GEI will offer these books to other libraries.

□ Primer Collection / GEI Research Library

The GEI also responds to the needs of researchers to supplement its historical holdings. Purchase recommendations are received and checked to see whether an acquisition is financially viable. In 2024, there was a research need for so-called 'colonial primers', and two offers by antiquarian bookshops were pointed out. Colonial primers were specifically published for teaching in the colonies, and some of these primers are already part of the GEI collection. The *Fibel ja kishambala* primer from 1904, acquired in 2024 and already digitised, was published by the *Evangelische Missionsgesellschaft für Deutsch-Ostafrika* [Evangelical Mission Society for German East Africa], later the Bethel Mission, in Gross-Lichterfelde (near Berlin) as part of the Shambala Primer series. Shambala or Kishambala, a Bantu language, is spoken in the northern part of Tanzania, in the region around Mount Kilimanjaro. The second colonial primer acquired and immediately digitised by the GEI in 2024, *Ewegbe-‘gbale-hehlena Gomedzelawo*, written in Ewe (Evegbe), was published in 1905 by the North German Mission Society in Bremen. The primer shows the work of missionaries who established the Ewe language, a Kwa language spoken in the south of Ghana and Togo, as a written language in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and contains numerous illustrations, including images of the family of Emperor Wilhelm II.

The genesis of the historical GEI primer collection shows that the collection of educational media is shaped by numerous actors and motivations (Hertling 2022). Based on Georg Eckert and his political ambition to improve textbooks, various funding agencies, publishers, and private individuals have contributed to establish the collection, initially focusing on the school subjects of history, geography, politics, and social studies, while state institutions have legally enshrined the maintenance and access to an international textbook collection. While the systematic development of an international collection of primers and German-language reading books was initiated in the 1980s, the GEI expanded its collection once again in 2011 to include textbooks for the school subjects of ethics and religion, thereby responding to the high social and educational policy relevance of these subjects and the increasing research demand (Georg-Eckert-Institut 2011; Chen 2012).

Collecting at the GEI should be also understood as a social process that addresses political, scientific, and educational historical developments (Carrier & Hertling 2022, 7ff.) and is influenced by economic conditions and, as demonstrated by the example of primers, by genre-specific challenges. The GEI has been documenting its principles of collection since 2012 in an acquisition profile. The second chapter of the article aims to further disclose these principles to help understand the selection and curation practices of the GEI collection and to enable users of the Research Library to reflect on their own research bases within the meaning of collecting literacy. Collecting literacy, writes Peter Carrier, 'entails the interpretation of a system of encoded knowledge in relation to the people, institutions and forms via which knowledge is mediated. Collecting literacy, in this respect, involves learning about knowledge via learning about our relations with the modes of gathering, storing and disseminating educational media' (Carrier 2022, 221). When scientists are increasingly called upon to confront their own biases, such as Eurocentrism, and to critically examine the social and historical origins of their resources, the approach of collection literacy can serve as a bridge between science and collecting institutions, enabling them to collaboratively question collection concepts and explore new perspectives. In the third chapter, the virtual merging of textbook data worldwide is presented, making it possible to overcome the limits and gaps of collecting and to find primers as international important research and collecting objects centrally.

2 From all over the world to Braunschweig

The GEI Research Library currently provides access to 183,000 educational media in the subjects of history, geography, social studies and politics, ethics and religion, as well as German-language readers and international primers from a total of 180 countries. With approximately 6,000 titles, the primer col-

□ Primer Collection / GEI Research Library

lection accounts for about 3% of the entire textbook holdings. The collection of current primers is systematically complemented according to the Institute's acquisition and collection policy. In the policy, genre-specific conditions for identifying a title as a primer are recorded. A textbook relevant to the GEI primer collection is a textbook:

- for the first school year or for pre-school
- with included alphabet and / or
- a classification / combination of letters and / or
- syllabic or word exercises included

Language and exercise books, editions exclusively for teachers, blackboards, charts, ABC games, and titles designated as 'hornbooks' are not collected. The acquisition policy also regulates the scope of the collection and its quantity. The systematic development of the primer collection follows the acquisition policy of the GEI textbook collection:

- German primers and textbooks are collected according to the principle of completeness.

First of all, the collection principle of completeness for German primers means that all primers published in the Federal Republic of Germany over the course of a current year are relevant for the GEI. A primer is finally included in the collection if it is approved for schools. Approval lists from the German federal states are an important reference for this, as they regulate the use of teaching and learning materials in schools. Some federal states dispense with approval procedures for their educational media. In these cases, the GEI purchases all primers published and available for these federal states. To expand the German collection, the GEI maintains long-standing contacts with German textbook publishers, who send their new releases to the GEI.

Regarding the international collection, a differentiation is made:

- Primers and textbooks from European countries are collected according to the principle of completeness.

In order to achieve this ambitious goal, the library staff check textbook offers from all member states of the Council of Europe as well as from Russia, Belarus and Kosovo. Every country is evaluated in a cycle of five years, and all textbooks and primers that are approved at this time are collected. If there are no approval procedures, all available textbooks and primers are purchased. Large suppliers such as *Schweitzer Fachinformationen*, which also offers textbooks from Finland or Denmark, make the work easier, as research and purchasing processes can be centralised. The supplier MIPP International is a solid partner for textbooks and primers from the Eastern European and post-Soviet region as well as from China and Mongolia. The acquisition policy of the non-European GEI collection is:

- Primers and textbooks from non-European countries are collected based on research needs.

The need and thus a possible purchase of primers from non-European countries arises from research projects at the GEI. If an academic project such as the 'International Terrorism Discourses Project'⁴ is analysing textbooks from different countries, the Research Library acquires the relevant resources and at the same time checks the primers on offer from these countries. Scientists who do not work at the GEI can also suggest primers for purchase for their research projects. In this on-demand acquisition, the GEI is financially supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) as part of the *Fachinformationsdienst (FID) Erziehungswissenschaft und Bildungsforschung* [Specialized Information Service for Educational Science and Educational Research].⁵

⁴ <https://www.gei.de/en/research/projects/international-terrorism-discourses> (23.03.2025)

⁵ <https://www.fachportal-paedagogik.de/en/literatur/produkte/fachinformationsdienst/fachinformationsdienst.html> (23.03.2025)

Primer Collection / GEI Research Library

In comparison to the acquisition of resources from European countries, where large suppliers are very helpful, the GEI increasingly relies on researchers with strong global networks to locate primers and other textbooks or to establish contacts with local providers for non-European resources. In general the Research Library works closely with the Institute's fellows and guest researchers and the collection benefits from their research. A country from where it is absolutely impossible to obtain textbooks is North Korea. There is only one textbook from North Korea in the GEI, which was made available only through the dedicated efforts of a researcher who was in the country with a delegation. The table below gives an overview of primers acquired for the international collection in 2024.

Table: Primers acquired in 2024 for the international collection of the GEI Research Library

Title	Author	Published	Year of Publ.	Country of Use	Language	Call Number GEI
Unterwegs mit Spatz Kiko	Schwendimann, Maria	Zürich: LMVZ	2022	Switzerland	German	CH D-266 (1,2022)2,2
Starten mit Maus Molli	Schwendimann, Maria	Zürich: LMVZ	2022	Switzerland	German	CH D-266 (1,2022)1,1
Unterwegs mit Maus Molli	Schwendimann, Maria	Zürich: LMVZ	2022	Switzerland	German	CH D-266 (1,2022)1,2
Bukvar', Čast' 1	Curacițchi, Angela	[Chișinău]: Univers Educational	2022	Moldova	Russian	MD MD-17 (1,2021)1
Bukvar', Čast' 2	Curacițchi, Angela	[Chișinău]: Univers Educational	2021	Moldova	Russian	MD MD-17 (1,2021)2
Abecedar, Partea 2	Buruiană, Maria	[Chișinău]: Știința	2021	Moldova	Romanian	MD MD-16 (1,2021)2
Abecedar, Partea 1	Buruiană, Maria	[Chișinău]: Știința	2021	Moldova	Romanian	MD MD-16 (1,2021)1
Darasa la kwanza	Wallah bin Wallah	Nairobi: Longhorn Publishers	2013	Kenia	Swahili	EAK EAK-13 (1,2013)1
Kitaaba qube afaani Borana 1A	Shongolo, Abdullahi A.	Marsabit, Kenya: GTZ/MDP	1995	Ethiopia, Kenya	Borana	ETH ETH-4 (1,95)1A
Kitaaba qube afaani Borana 1B	Shongolo, Abdullahi A.	Marsabit, Kenya: GTZ/MDP	1995	Ethiopia, Kenya	Borana	ETH ETH-4 (1,95)1B
Herge d-qeryānā: qlidā	Qarahbaš, 'Abd Mšihā Na'ma'n	[Glane]: St. Ephrem the Syrian Monastery	1984	Syria	Syrian	SYR SYR-11(1,1984)

Among the works integrated into the GEI collection the primers written in the Borana language, *Kitaaba qube afaani Borana*, from the 1990s stand out (Figure 2). They are intended for use in education in Ethiopia and Kenya, where the Borana community is estimated to comprise around 4 million people. These two primers were acquired by the GEI through a donation from a private collector. Also, the primer *Herge d-qeryānā* from 1984 is a special addition to the collection. It was published by the St. Ephrem the Syrian Monastery and is printed in Syriac, a minority language spoken by Syriac Orthodox Christians (Figure 3).

While e-books are playing an increasingly important role in school subjects such as history, geography, politics/social studies, and ethics/religion, with educational ministries in countries like Mongolia, Poland, Afghanistan, and Colombia often providing textbooks digitally for free, primers are less frequently published as e-books. In this area of teaching printed books still dominate. An exception is Uzbekistan, which offers an app through which all primers are also accessible digitally (<https://kitob.uz/book/3061>).

Looking at the years 2019 to 2024, the GEI acquires an average of around 35 primers per year. In 2025 several primers have already been purchased, which will be catalogued and made available for use throughout the year. Among the titles currently in the library's processing stage are primers from South Africa in ten different languages or dialects, primers from Cameroon, Namibia, Ukraine, the Czech Republic and as well as primers in Crimean Tatar and Buryat language.

□ Primer Collection /
GEI Research Library

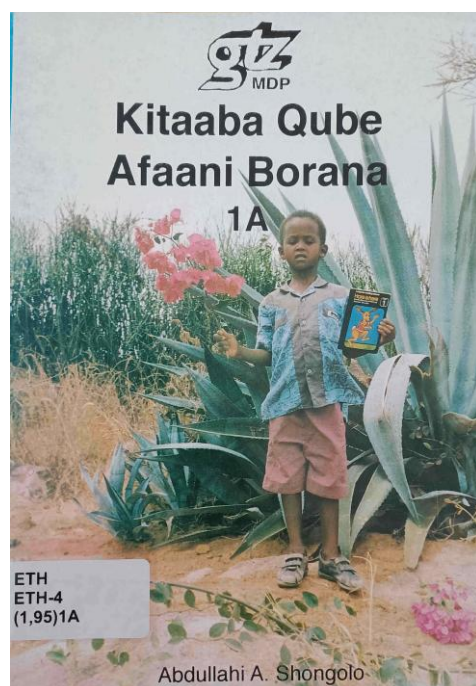


Figure 2: A primer in the Borana language (*Kitaaba qube afaani Borana 1A*. Marsabit, Kenya: GTZ/MDP 1995)

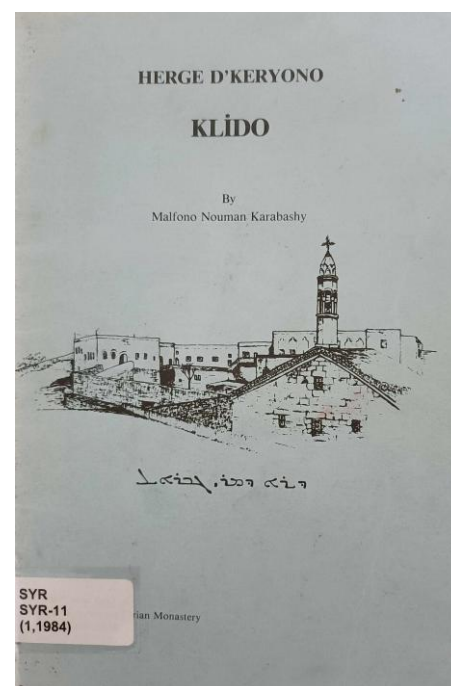


Figure 3: A primer for Syriac Orthodox Christians (*Herge d-qeryānā: qlidā*. [Glane]: St. Ephrem the Syrian Monastery 1984)

3 Searching and Discovering Primers

The textbook collection of the GEI is fully catalogued and also the primers can be located digitally through the OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) <https://opac.lbs-braunschweig.gbv.de/DB=6/LNG=DU/>. Search is possible, amongst others, for persons, titles, and call numbers. The individuals involved in the publication of a primer, such as editors, authors, and illustrators, are recorded by the GEI as comprehensively as possible and can be searched for accordingly. For primers, the subject term 'Erstleseunterricht' is assigned according to cataloguing rules in Germany and you can find primers in the OPAC using this German subject term.

In addition to the OPAC which exclusively includes primers and textbooks from the GEI collection, the GEI, in collaboration with international partners, has set the goal of bringing together all textbook collections worldwide into a central catalogue. As part of the Global Textbook Resource Center (GLOTREC <https://www.gei.de/en/knowledge-resources/glotrec>) title data from textbook collections of the cooperation partners are merged in the GLOTREC|Cat. In addition to the holdings of the GEI, the GLOTREC|Cat currently allows to search and discover primers from the EDISCO database of the University of Turin, the LIVRES database of the Faculty of Education at the University of São Paulo (FEUSP), the database of the *Biblioteca Nacional de Maestros y Maestros* (BNM) in Buenos Aires, as well as primers from the MANES database of the *Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia* (UNED) in Madrid, which includes textbooks from Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Latin America. In contrast to the GEI's OPAC, which allows to search for people, titles, and call numbers, the GLOTREC|Cat features a multilingual search interface and users can browse through the collections and search criteria which are specially designed to aid research into textbooks. This includes the use of the search criteria *country of use, school subject, and level of education*. Interfaces and export functions allow direct processing of the data using digital tools. In addition to information on the media's location, digitised and full texts will be provided where available.

With the long-term goal of making all textbook collections worldwide searchable through GLOTREC|Cat, the challenge lies in describing the titles available in the collections in an international standard in order to enable searching across

□ Primer Collection / GEI Research Library

multiple languages and education systems. For this purpose the GLOTREC|Cat uses the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) of UNESCO (UNESCO 2015). According to this classification, primers can be found under the search facet 'School Subject' in the selection 'Generic programmes and qualification' in GLOTREC|Cat.

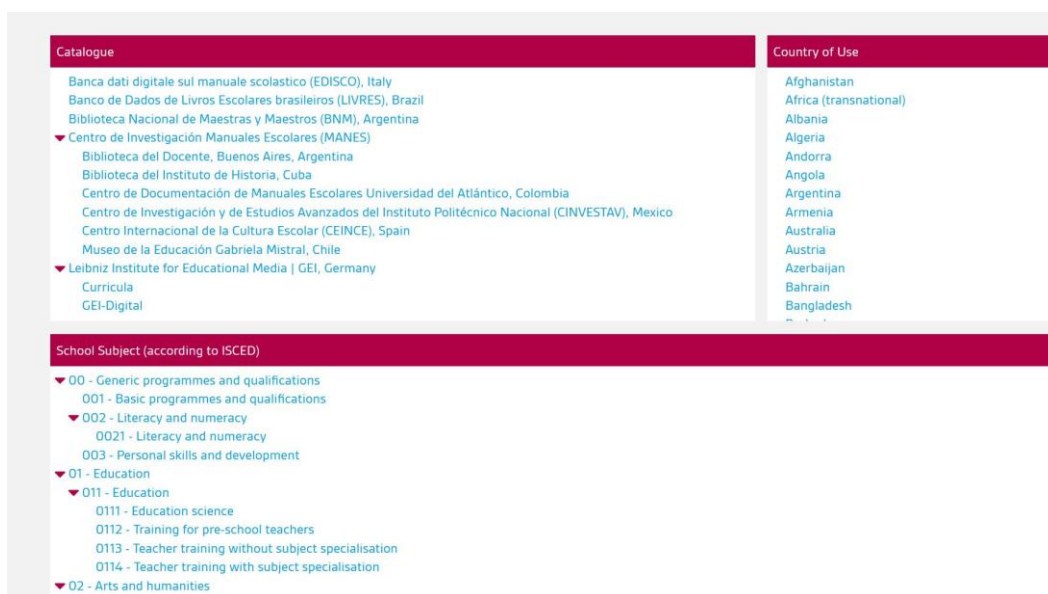


Figure 4: GLOTREC|Cat selection for searching in the GEI collection

The homepage of GLOTREC|Cat (<https://itbc.gei.de/>) offers the possibility to select in the 'Catalogue' facet which of the mentioned databases one would like to search for primers. You can select 'Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | GEI, Germany' in the 'Catalogue' facet (Figure 4) to access the textbook collection of the GEI. To see all primers available at the GEI, select the facet 'School Subject (according to ISCED)' and choose 'Literacy and numeracy'. You can further narrow your search by selecting the menu on the right. Through the 'Country of Use' facet, you can select countries for which the primer is intended for use in education. The 'Year of Publication' facet allows you to search by the publication year. The 'Language' facet enables you to search for primers in a specific language. For example, selecting 'Japanese language' will show primers in Japanese at the GEI. The Japanese titles demonstrates that the GEI records its books in their original script (Figure 5), allowing you to search in the original script within GLOTREC|Cat.

After successfully finding primers from the GEI, you can order them via inter-library loan through your home library, as the Research Library participates in

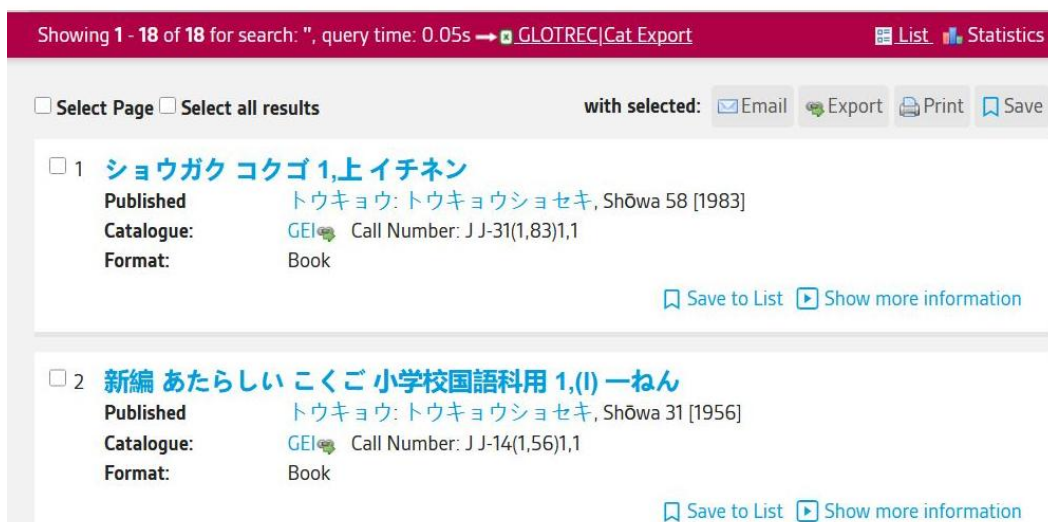


Figure 5: GLOTREC|Cat metadata (title) in original script (Japanese)

□ **Primer Collection / GEI Research Lib- rary**

international interlibrary loan services. However, to use the historical primer collection, you must come to Braunschweig, as interlibrary loan is not available for this valuable and often fragile collection. During your visit to the GEI, you will find German and international primers on the ground floor of the Research Library, under the following call number groups: DB I for primers up to the year 1870, DB II for primers from the period 1871 to 1918, DB III for primers from 1919 to 1932, and DB IV for primers published between 1933 and 1944. All these primers are specially protected in a locked glass cabinet, and can be accessed with proof of specific research interest.



Figure 6: The German Collection in the GEI Research Library

German primers from 1944 onwards are also located on the ground floor of the Research Library. They are freely accessible under the subject 'German lessons' (call number group D). The international primer collection can be found on the upper floor of the library. The collections are arranged by country and, within each country, by school subjects. Primers are listed under the respective country in the category 'Mother Tongue Education.' You can take the primers directly from the shelves and use them for your research. On the lower floor of the Research Library, you will find scientific literature with numerous titles on primer research. For your visit, the newly built library, opened in 2021, offers a reading room and workstations, which you can use like an office. The staff of the Research Library will be pleased to assist you with your research and the use of the primers.

References, part 1: Primers published in Germany (in chronological order)

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□ Discussion

Historical Investigations into Patriotic Education in Textbooks: The Case of Primers Published in the German Empire, 1871-1918 (Part 1)

Wendelin Sroka

In 1906 Kaspar Dieckmann, a teacher trainer in the Prussian province of Westphalia, released a review of primers for Catholic schools, issued by Crüwell Publishers in Dortmund (Dieckmann 1906). These textbooks were available in two versions: one compiled according to the writing-reading and the other according to the normal-word method, with each version consisting of two volumes. One of the weaknesses Dieckmann identified in volume 1 of these primers is the inclusion of several prayers, among them the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary, as reading exercises. As Dieckmann argues, 'prayers do not fit into the primer' because a pupil 'will know these prayers by heart at the end of grade 1' and thus 'may deceive the teacher at every step' (ibid., 470).¹ Instead, Dieckmann adds, 'a reading passage which deals with the person of the emperor would be a useful complement' (ibid.). And indeed, some years later revised versions of the Crüwell primers, volume 1, offer even two passages as requested by the reviewer: one a prose text about the emperor, his family, and the celebration of the emperor's birthday at school, the other lyrics in three verses addressing the emperor: *Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann ...* [The emperor is a dear man ...] (Anon. 1912, 71).

References to the *Kaiser*, especially to Wilhelm II, German Emperor and King of Prussia from 1888 until his abdication in 1918, are frequently found in reading primers published in the German Empire. Relevant images and texts in German-language prints have been noted and to some extent discussed so far by scholars with a focus on various areas of Germany's history such as schooling



Figure 1: '128. To the emperor's birthday' / *Esener Fibel*. 2. Teil. Essen, 49th ed. 1913, 87 [□ private]



Figure 2: '23. Kaiser Wilhelm II and his wife' (Google Translation from Kinyarwanda) / *Ifiberi Rya Urungarwanda – Fibel der Ruandasprache*. Bethel bei Bielfeld 1914, 88 [□ Braunschweig, GEI Research Library]

¹ As far as not indicated otherwise quotes from sources originally written in languages other than English are provided as translations by the author of this contribution.

□ **Discussion:
Patriotic education ... (cont.)**

(Wulf 1998; Geißler 2023, 252), textbooks (Pöggeler 1985), literature (Rölleke 2022) and music (John 2004). In addition, the matter has been dealt with in descriptions and comments published in catalogues of exhibitions dedicated to the history of Germany's primers. For example, Hermann Havekost and Klaus Klattenhoff, summarizing this history from around 1900 to the First World War, suggest that in this period 'the state, the emperor and the military are introduced into the primer' (Havekost & Klattenhoff 1982, 41).

In more detail Gisela Teistler compared *Personenkult* [personality cult] in German-language primers of the German Empire, the Nazi period, and the GDR (1999; 2002). In this context she identified one or more elements of *Kaiserverehrung* [veneration of the emperor] in about one third (N = 107) of a sample of some 300 primers issued between 1871 and 1918 (2002, 139). Considering the places of publication of relevant items, according to Teistler all primers published prior to 1901 appeared in North German territories, whereas in the period from 1901 to 1918 occasionally also places of publication in Germany's South come into play (ibid.). Finally, as regards content, Teistler identified and discussed five *Motivgruppen* ['groups of motives']: poems for the emperor (N = 68), pictures of the emperor or the imperial couple (N = 39), prose texts about the emperor (N = 32), the term 'Kaiser' to learn 'k' or 'ai' (N = 24) and pictures and texts about the empress (N = 16) (ibid.).

As it happens I have since last year repeatedly come across textbook content related to the German emperor, and, more generally, to patriotic education in primers in two ongoing projects: One is work for an article about primers in Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to be published in an edited book about primers in Europe c. 1700 to c. 1900 (see RPI 19, 26). The article in preparation will include a brief outline of characteristics of these textbooks in three periods: around 1700, 1800 and 1900 respectively, including the change of these characteristics over time. Patriotic education in primers released around 1900 in Germany is a widespread phenomenon, yet unknown in corresponding textbooks published one or two hundred years earlier.

The other project (African Colonial Reading Primers; AfriCoRP) deals with primers produced for use in Africa in colonial times, usually by the colonisers, with a focus on producers, but to some extent also considering content (see Ibid.). Again, data identified in this project reveal that such textbooks may include elements with remarkable similarities to those promoting patriotic education in European countries, among others with reference to the emperor or king in the respective colonial state, even though with a specific transcontinental and colonialist meaning (see Figure 2). These observations have stimulated my interest to investigate patriotic education in primers published in the German Empire more closely.

To start with I argue that this subject matter is anything but fully explored, especially as regards a systematic and in-depth analysis of the books in question and a consideration of the historical context. This requires close reading of primary sources and criteria-led comparative analyses, but also the study of other contemporary sources such as teacher's guides, book reviews, discourses in teacher's journals and official documents. I also suggest that the inclusion of primers published in the German Empire which have been written in languages other than German, per se documents of a history shared with other nations, may offer added value. Finally, the subject matter has also great potential for comparative (international) analyses.

In an ideal world a research project on patriotic education in primers of the German Empire as discussed here would involve scholars from a great variety of research disciplines and areas: general history, school history, book history, textbook history, history of literature, music history, linguistics, visual studies, cultural studies, Jewish studies, colonial studies, African studies ... It would moreover include colleagues from neighbouring countries whose history to some extent was shared with Germany from 1871 to 1918: shared in the sense that territories of these neighbouring countries once were part of the German Empire, clockwise from Denmark, Russia, Lithuania, Poland and the Czech Re-

□ Discussion: Patriotic education ... (cont.)

public to France and Belgium. Yet aware of the conditions of historical research on the textbook genre in question the purposes of this contribution are confined: To draw attention to an interesting field of research and to put up for discussion preliminary conceptual considerations and findings. These considerations among others refer to the knowledge base concerning the body of items in question.

The first part of this discussion addresses three issues: the definition and delimitation of relevant primary sources, conceptual considerations on the study of patriotic education in primers and the reuse of *Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann*, a prominent text of patriotic education in primers of the German Empire. So far 77 primers published in the German Empire have been inspected, plus two prints issued in Germany prior to 1871. The plan is to extend the existing sample, with more items on the waiting list and with advantage taken of relevant holdings in the GEI Research Library in Braunschweig, of a private collection and of digital reproductions available online.

1. Relevant primary sources

In the introductory chapter of the book *Learning to Read, Learning Religion* a reading primer is understood as 'an educational medium that is published in book form, developed, produced, and disseminated as a tool for early reading instruction of novice readers in one or more languages, and based on a specific method of teaching' (Juska-Bacher et al. 2023, 9f.). The working definition taken up here is inclusive in the sense that it does not limit relevant prints to those for explicit school use ('school primers') or those written in a particular national or state language, and in conclusion all primers published in the German Empire between 1871 and 1918 are classified as relevant primary sources. As will be explained below, this also refers to various versions and editions of a work.

As for Germany, historical investigations into primers usually are confined to German-language textbooks.² However, if we consider 'primers published in the German Empire' in the full sense, two more groups of textbooks turn up as part and parcel of this body: A first group is made of textbooks for use in the German Empire to teach reading in languages other than German, including, for example, Hebrew for Jewish schools, Polish and Lithuanian in Prussia's Eastern provinces or Danish in the Schleswig part of the Prussian province of Schleswig-Holstein. Even though earlier traditions in Prussia to offer school education in the latter three languages were finally abolished in the 1880s because of Germanization efforts, primers especially for home schooling were still published. A second group of relevant textbooks is represented by primers published in Germany and exclusively destined for use outside the country. In the period of the German Empire this applies to the 'colonial primers', i. e. primers destined for use in a colony and either directly mandated by a central state authority or published by a Christian missionary society, often with state support. An example of the latter is the primer in the Atlantic-Congo language Kinyarwanda, issued in 1914 by the Evangelical Missionary Society for German East Africa (see Figure 2).

Some of the relevant works published in the German Empire had a life cycle of several decades, often with one or more revisions. And while the first edition of some of them appeared prior to 1871, others were reprinted with revisions after 1918. For pragmatic reasons for the time being the life cycle of works published up to 1918 will be considered, allowing to study the eventual pre-history of the subject matter in question. Therefore a primer published prior to 1871 is included in the sample provided that at least one reprint was issued in 1871 or later.

² See, for example, Paul Gabele's study *Pädagogische Epochen im Abbild der Fibel* [Pedagogical eras as reflected in the primer] (Gabele 1962) and the edited volume *Geschichte der Fibel* [History of the primer] (Grömminger 2002). A noteworthy exception to the rule is a summary of the history of Jewish elementary school books in Germany, which includes descriptions of selected Hebrew primers (Hinz & Topsch 1998).

□ Discussion: Patriotic education ... (cont.)

Returning to German-language textbooks, another issue which needs to be addressed is the consideration of primers in two parts: This phenomenon turns up in Germany more often in the second half of the nineteenth century, and it is closely linked with the challenge to delimit the primer from the reading book which is meant to follow. An examination of relevant prints reveals that there was no consensus at all among textbook producers in those years about the duration of the *Fibelphase* [period during which pupils use the primer], and hence what should be included in the book called *Fibel*: Whereas some contemporaries saw the primer basically confined to a reading course, introducing letters, syllables, words, short sentences and perhaps a few simple continuous texts, for others this book additionally and necessarily included an elaborated set of reading exercises and texts of various types and literary genres, structured according to certain themes such as the four seasons or the construct of a child's perception of the world from near (family, school) to far (universe, God).

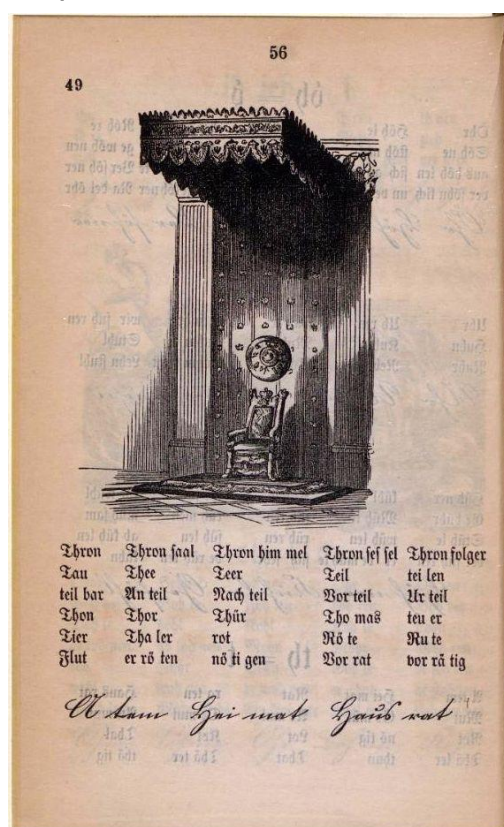


Figure 3: 'Our dear king's throne', presented as a picture in volume 1 and explained in detail in volume 2 of a 2-volume primer / Hubert: *Preußische Hand-Fibel mit sechzig Bildern*, 1. Theil. Berlin, 21st ed. 1877, 56
[□ Braunschweig, GEI Research Library]

Producers in favour of this latter approach often choose one of two options: either to create and market primers in two volumes or to publish a 'primer and reader'. In the first case producers in a way saw the two parts as a unit, and content offered in both parts may directly be related to each other. For example, volume 2 of Hubert's primer offers a detailed comment on the royal throne in Berlin, with explicit reference to the picture of the throne in volume 1 (Hubert 1856, 80; for volume 1 see Figure 3). In conclusion in diachronic analyses only systematic consideration of both parts can provide of full picture of the concept of patriotic education as implemented in or proposed for a primer. Therefore in the case of two-volume primers both parts are considered.

The inclusive notion of 'primers published in the German Empire' applied here no doubt increases the challenges to do justice to the enormously large body of relevant prints. Already the landscape of German-language works published in the German Empire is enormously diverse, with many primers produced for regional or local

markets. Moreover, in works which have seen several editions relevant content may or may not have been adjusted over time, so that in principle each edition is worth to be inspected. Finally, a good-quality analysis of primers written in a great variety of languages requires not only appropriate language skills, but also familiarity with the context. Having in mind these limits the task may nevertheless be worth a try.

2. Conceptual considerations

The investigation of patriotic education in primers published in the German Empire is led by basic considerations. Special attention is paid in this first part of the discussion to (1) Patriotic education and identity formation, (2) Patriotic education in primers of the German Empire over time, and (3) Patriotic education in primers of the German Empire across constituent states.

□ Discussion:
Patriotic education ... (cont.)

2.1 Patriotic education and identity formation

Patriotic education in primers is understood here as part of efforts by adults in power to exert influence on children's identity formation. The traditional catechism primer had been designed to prepare young learners for catechesis in accordance with the doctrine of a Christian denomination and thus to educate loyal subjects of a Christian church. In contrast, patriotic education serves purposes of political education, in particular the purpose to educate loyal subjects of a given political entity. In the case of the German Empire such entities encompass first and foremost monarchies, in German-language primers the monarchy of the German nation state and/or that of a constituent state; in a primer written in a language other than German this entity may also be another nation. Closely linked with this is the definition of the group of those who belong to 'us', and therefore implicitly or explicitly also the distinction of 'us' and 'them'.

In certain cases, patriotic education in primers of the German Empire aimed at building multiple identities by propagating several affiliations, from the national to one or more sub-national levels and thus addressing member-state, regional and/or local patriotism (see Figure 3). In such cases the construct of patriotism as offered in the textbook may indicate how such affiliations are related to each other and whether one affiliation may be superior to others.

Be it a narration about a good deed of the emperor or his wife, a picture of the emperor dressed in uniform, a poem to be memorized and recited in class, or a picture-text unit about children attentively watching soldiers, wishing to follow in their footsteps: An important feature of patriotic education in primers of the German Empire is the prominent role of emotions. Even though to some extent factual information is provided as learning content, starting e.g. with the name of the emperor and the place where he lives, priority is usually given to arouse and reinforce positive feelings about the monarchy, its leading representatives, and the armed forces.

Patriotic education as visible in primers of the German Empire has been produced and used with a view to several contextual factors. One is that such textbook content has been embedded in curricular and extra-curricular activities at school, the later comprising, for example, the celebration of the 'Sedan-day' to commemorate the German army's victory over French armies in the decisive Battle of Sedan, September 1-2, 1870, or the emperor's birthday (Wulf 1998). In return, numerous descriptions can be found in primers how the emperor's birthday is celebrated at school, with varying details and therefore one of the manifestations of patriotic education which is worth a closer study. The other factor is that patriotic education in primers only represents the first step of a comprehensive political program which was elaborated further in the middle and upper grades of elementary schools, documented not least in reading books and history textbooks.

How did patriotic education find its way into a particular primer in the German Empire? In an essay on politics in primers, published in 1985, the German educationalist Franz Pöggeler stated that, except for textbooks produced in the Nazi period and in the socialist countries, 'in most cases content of political relevance has not been included into the primer with a conscious political intention, but has flowed in [*hineingeflossen*] more or less functionally and without reflection' (1985, 21). I argue that this interpretation underestimates the role of those who had the power to decide about textbook content in the German



Figure 4: Speeding through Palatinate and passing by Speyer Cathedral / Ferber: *Erste Lesefreude für kleine Pfälzer Leute*. Speyer 1913, 27, cutout [□ private]

□ **Discussion:**
Patriotic education ... (cont.)

Empire. A closer investigation into patriotic education in primers which also considers public discourse about the subject matter suggests that such content was in each case the result of deliberate – and in way political – decisions by the person or persons who compiled these materials.

2.2 Patriotic education in primers of the German Empire over time

When the German Empire was established in 1871, patriotic education in elementary schools and in primers was not a new phenomenon in Germany. For example, already in 1856 Johann C. F. Hubert, a Protestant pastor in Prussia's Brandenburg province, compiled *Preußische Hand-Fibel mit 60 Bildern für Christenkinder* [Prussian hand primer with 60 pictures for Christian children] in two volumes which saw numerous reprints until 1885 (Teistler 2003, No. 1791). As already the book title suggests, Hubert's patriotism refers to Prussia. In volume 2 of the primer, quoted here from the 3rd edition (Hubert 1856), three of 19 sections address the Prussian monarchy: 'XI. The royal castle und the king's throne' (79-80), with a commented description of the picture of the throne as offered in volume 1 (see Figure 4), 'XII. King Friedrich Wilhelm IV' (80-86) and 'XIII. Histories from the Prussian History' (86-92). Manifestations of this kind, even though prior to 1871 still exceptions to the rule in the textbook genre in question, must be considered as predecessors of patriotic education in the German Empire. For this reason in this project editions of primers published in Germany prior to 1871 are taken into account as those of 'Period 1' as long as reissues appeared after 1870.³

The German Empire was founded in 1871 when the states of Baden, Bavaria, Hesse-Darmstadt and Württemberg joined the North German Confederation, with Wilhelm I, King of Prussia since 1861, proclaimed German Emperor. Organised as a federal constitutional monarchy, Berlin became the capital of the Empire, with Prussia the largest and the most influential constituent state, containing about two-thirds of the Empire's territory and population. Patriotic education in schools, and to some extent also in primers, now encompassed both national (German) and member-state patriotism [*'einzelstaatlicher Patriotismus'* (Winkler 2020, p. 216)]. But it was only in 1889 when Wilhelm II, German Emperor since 1888, confronted the school system with new challenges and thus underlined the importance of patriotic education: In a Royal Decree concerning public schools, issued on the 1st of May, he stated:

For some time now, I have been preoccupied with the notion of making use of schools and their individual grade levels to counteract the spread of Socialist and Communist thinking. First and foremost, the school will have to lay the groundwork for a healthy view of state and social conditions by cultivating the fear of God and the love of the fatherland. (Royal Decree 1889)

The decree postulated political education of elementary school pupils in Prussia, aimed at promoting patriotic attitudes strongly linked with the monarchy and the monarchy's lasting beneficence for the entire population. The decree played a major role for the establishment of school-based political and patriotic education well beyond Prussia in what became known as Wilhelmine Germany, that is Germany between 1890 and 1914, and it also had an impact on patriotic education in the lower stage, including textbooks (Geißler 2022, 252-254). The decree's implementation provisions did not explicitly require that patriotic education was included in reading primers, but these provisions stipulated, among others, that 'the name of our emperor and king must be made known to children from entry into school by use of existing pictures and monuments' (Anon. 1900a, 150). This and similar task descriptions for elementary school teachers, supported by growing German nationalism in society, contributed to the inclusion of patriotic education in reading primers.

³ The begin of this period will be defined as soon as a sufficient body of relevant works has been identified.

□ Discussion: Patriotic education ... (cont.)

For the investigation into patriotic education in primers published in the German Empire three periods are defined: Period 1 (before 1871), Period 2 (1871-1889) and Period 3 (1890 – 1918), the latter period covering Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War. Again, for the said purpose in Period 1 only German-language primers are considered, in Periods 2 and 3 also primers in other languages for use in Germany, and in Period 3 also primers in other languages for use in the colonies.⁴

2.3 Patriotic education in primers of the German Empire across constituent states

The German Empire consisted of 22 monarchies (kingdoms, grand duchies, duchies, and principalities), three city-states organised as republics and, since 1873, the imperial territory of Alsace-Lorraine [*Reichsland Elsaß-Lothringen*], this latter region ceded by France in 1871 after the Franco-Prussian War. Schools and education systems were controlled by the authorities of the constituent states, but German nationalism supported efforts to promote political education and not least patriotic education in elementary schools on the national level. But did conditions in the constituent states influence patriotic education in primers, and can differences in this area be determined, for example, between textbooks issued in Prussia and those of other states? To allow an approximative spatial classification a primary source is assigned to the state in which its place of publication is located or to the state for which it was destined.⁵

In sum, three perspectives have been combined for an ex-post structuring of the sample of 79 items inspected until June 30, 2025: a) publication period, b) language/group of languages and c) spatial origin or destination (see Table 1).

Table 1: 'Patriotic education in primers of the German Empire' - Primers inspected until June 30, 2025 (N = 79) according to publication period, language and constituent state*

	state / language	Period 1 (before 1871)	Period 2 (1871-1889)		Period 3 (1890-1918)		
		German	German	ol-G	German	ol-G	ol-C
1.	Bavaria (K)	---	---	---	2	---	---
2.	Brunswick (D)	---	---	---	3	---	---
3.	Bremen (CS)	---	---	---	---	---	1
4.	Hesse (GD)	---	---	---	2	---	---
5.	Prussia (K)	2	5	---	46	3	4
6.	Saxony (K)	---	1	---	6	---	---
7.	Saxe-Coburg & Gotha (D)	---	---	---	3	---	---
8.	Saxe-Meiningen (D)	---	---	---	1	---	---
	total	2	6	---	63	3	5

* state before 1871: predecessor state

Abbreviations: CS = City State; D = Duchy; GD = Grand Duchy; K = Kingdom; ol-G = primers in other languages for use in Germany; ol-C = primers in other languages for use in the colonies.

The overview reveals a preponderance of textbooks produced in Prussia and of primers issued in Period 3. Efforts will be made in the next step to add more items to the sample which have been published in Period 2 and/or in non-Prussian territories of the German Empire.

⁴ The 'German colonial empire', with colonies in Africa and Oceania, existed from 1884 to 1918, with all relevant primers published in Germany and destined for use in the colonies identified so far released in Period 3. In general it is hoped that at a later stage the sample will allow a more detailed periodization to answer specific research questions.

⁵ Some major textbook publishers maintained two headquarters in different states, such as Velhagen & Klasing Publishers, with combined publishing places in Bielefeld (Prussia) and Leipzig (Saxony). Moreover, some publishers located in one constituent state also issued versions of a primer for use in another state (see, for example, Göbelbecker 1912). A textbook released by a publisher with dual headquarters in two constituent states is classified according to the first place of publication, whereas a primer destined for use in another state is allocated by considering its destination.

□ Discussion:
Patriotic education ... (cont.)

3. Case study: *Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann* in German-language primers



Figure 5: Say it with flowers: A child offers a bouquet to the German Emperor. / *Niederdeutsche Fibel für das erste Schuljahr*. Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger c. 1908, 64 [□ private]

Gisela Teistler's research on personality cult in primers of the German Empire includes the finding that one text plays an extraordinary role in the sample she examined: About two thirds of the prints with any reference to the emperor offer the poem *Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann* [The emperor is a dear man] (Teistler 2002, 140). Designed as lyrics of three verses the text expresses thoughts of a child who would wish to go and see the emperor in Berlin on the same day if only this destination was not so far away. The child would have liked to give him 'the most beautiful flowers found in the garden', saying to him that they represent 'faithful love', and then 'would quickly run away to be back home soon' (see Figure 5).

While Teistler provides a qualitative interpretation of the lyrics, highlighting the construction of both 'hierarchical distance' and 'emotional intimacy' (ibid.), Eckhard John, a musicologist with a specialisation in popular music, has studied the history of this song in more detail (2004). According

to John the song's origins cannot be precisely established, but it is first found in songbooks of the 1850s in Prussia as *Der König ist ein lieber Mann* [The king is a dear man] and thus originally meant to address the Prussian king. For this reason John seriously doubts that the lyrics have been written by Carl Trog (1838-1913), a German teacher who after the foundation of the German Empire published patriotic literature and is often presented as author of this song (for an assignment of the lyrics to Trog in a primer see again Figure 5, last line). With reference to the text tradition of the song John notes that this has 'remained largely stable' (ibid., 1). As exceptions to the rule he mentions a religious version in which the flowers for the emperor are sent by God and versions which came in use in the Austro-Hungarian Empire addressing the Austrian Emperor (ibid., 2). John also demonstrates that 'the school was the central parade ground on which patriotism and fixation on the political leader were practiced with this song' (ibid., 3).

Building on these findings additional investigations in three areas may shed more light on this element of patriotic education: references to the lyrics in primers over time and across constituent states, the perception and evaluation of the song in school administration and society at large and modes of reuse of the lyrics in German-language primers.

3.1 References to '*Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann*' in primers over time and across constituent states

An examination of the existing sample of items reveals that in 33 prints – all of them German-language works – reference is made in one way or the other to the lyrics. These prints were published from 1888 (Anon. 1888, 80) to 1918 (Pade et al. 1918, 63). As Table 2 reveals in terms of constituent states next to items in the Kingdom of Prussia so far corresponding primers in five more states of the German Empire have been detected: the Kingdom of Bavaria, the Duchy of Brunswick, the Grand Duchy of Hesse, the Kingdom of Saxony and the

□ **Discussion:**
Patriotic education ... (cont.)

Duchy of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha – a remarkable preliminary result, considering the handful of primers from constituent states other than Prussia which have been inspected so far. Furthermore, the Bavarian case is special in that the primer in question provides a revised version of the well-known lyrics, now in favour of the Bavarian King (for details see section 3.3).

Table 2: Number of identified references to 'Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann' in German-language primers published in the German Empire according to publication period and constituent state (in brackets: number of inspected prints), provisional data, June 30, 2025

	constituent state / period	Period 1 (before 1871)	Period 2 (1871-1889)	Period 3 (1890-1918)
1.	Bavaria (K)	---	---	1* (2)
2.	Brunswick (D)	---	---	1 (3)
3.	Hesse (GD)	---	---	1 (2)
4.	Prussia (K)	0 (2)	1 (5)	26 (46)
5.	Saxony (K)	---	0 (1)	1 (6)
6.	Saxe-Coburg & Gotha (D)	---	---	2 (3)
7.	Saxe-Meiningen (D)	---	---	0 (1)
	<i>total</i>	0 (2)	1 (6)	32 (63)

Abbreviations: D = Duchy; GD = Grand Duchy; K = Kingdom; * = version revised in favour of another monarch.

3.2 Perception and evaluation of the song in school administration and society at large

In Prussia the song in question was listed occasionally in regulations on the district level concerning the school curriculum. For example, in March 1891 the Royal Government in Arnsberg in the province of Westphalia issued regulations 'concerning the folk songs and popular songs [*Volks- und volkstümliche Lieder*] which have to be taught in the elementary school' (Regierung Arnsberg 1891, col. 495). In these regulations, *Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann* is referred to under number 10 in the mandatory list of songs for the lower stage, between a Christmas song [*Ihr Kinderlein kommet*, no. 9] and an evening song [*Bald ist es wieder Nacht*, no. 11] (ibid., col. 496). Some twenty years later this learning topic seems to have lost its privileged position: In 1912 it was categorized by the neighbouring Royal Government in Düsseldorf as a 'song for replacement and choice [*Ersatz- und Auswahl lied*]', preferably for girls' schools for years 3 and 4 (Regierung Düsseldorf 1912, 625). Yet already in 1900a a review of the songbook *Der Liedgarten*, a collection of songs for preparatory and lower grades of grammar schools, recommends to leave the song in question off because of its unartistic nature [*als unkünstlerisch wegzulassen*] (Anon. 1900b, 248).

Among the harshest critics of the lyrics in the 1910s was Friedrich Gallwitz, a protestant superintendent in Prussia. The 'naive song', so Gallwitz states, has once been created to honour 'the unpretentious personality of the civil king' Friedrich Wilhelm III, but cannot properly be transformed into a hymn about the present emperor (1913, 246). Gallwitz offers two arguments in support of his judgement. One is that 'the position of his majesty the emperor cannot and may not be based on the feelings of piety, which has connected the husband of queen Luise (i. e. Friedrich Wilhelm III; W.S.) to his Berliners and Potsdamers. The powerful, versatile and tirelessly active personality of our emperor, who clearly comprehends and prudently evaluates the most complex conditions, does not tolerate the simple tone of the children's song.' (Ibid.) The second argument refers to a contradiction between the birthday of Emperor Wilhelm II on January 27 and an important detail in the story of the lyrics: In late January 'no German garden provides us with a flower arrangement' (ibid.).

May such criticism of the lyrics also have influenced the presence of *Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann* in primers especially in the 1910s? A longitudinal study of respective works from 1890 to 1918 would at least provide more information about the career of these lyrics in primers over time.

□ Discussion:
Patriotic education ... (cont.)

3.3 Modes of reuse of 'Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann' in German-language primers

For the time being the sub-sample of German-language primers with reference to the song in question as described above, supplemented by a corresponding print published in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1867-1918, has been used as a starting point for an examination of different modes applied by textbook writers to bring the lyrics to the attention of young readers in a primer. Ten such modes have been identified so far (see Table 3).

Table 3: Modes of reference to 'Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann' in German-language primers (provisional data, July 15, 2025)

no	mode of reference	source (sample)
A: 'A dear man': the German Emperor		
<i>'Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann, er wohnt in Berlin ... [The emperor is a dear man, he lives in Berlin ...]'</i>		
1.	Prose text with reference to song + reproduction of song text, secular version, 3 verses as parts of picture-text unit	Anon. 1916b, 66
2.	Prose text with reference to song + reproduction of song text, secular version, 3 verses	Göbelbecker c. 1912, 121
3.	Reproduction of song text, secular version, 3 verses as part of picture-text unit	Anon. 1910, 56
4.	Reproduction of song text, secular version, 3 verses	Anon. 1912, 71
5.	Reproduction of song text, secular version, verses 1 and 3	Fischer 1913, 68
6.	Reproduction of song text, verse 1	Pade et al. 1918, 63
7.	Prose text with reference to song	Anon. 1916a, 63
B: 'A good man': the German Emperor		
<i>'Der Kaiser ist ein guter Mann, er wohnt in Berlin ... [The emperor is a good man, he lives in Berlin ...]'</i>		
8.	Reproduction of revised song text, secular version, 4 verses	Keihl 1896, 62
C: 'A dear man': the Bavarian King		
<i>'Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann, er wohnt in München drin ... [The emperor is a dear man, he lives inside Munich ...]'</i>		
9.	Reproduction of revised song text, secular version, 3 verses	Ferber c. 1913, 110
D: 'A dear lord': the Austrian Emperor		
<i>'Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Herr, er wohnt im schönen Wien ... [The emperor is a dear lord, he lives in beautiful Vienna ...]'</i>		
10.	Reproduction of revised song text, secular version, 3 verses	Bielig & Czerny 1907, 94

The findings allow some preliminary conclusions: First, regardless of the quantitative prominence of versions addressing the German Emperor, two more monarchs could be identified as 'dear men' because of adaptations of the lyrics in German-language primers: the Bavarian King in Munich and the Austrian Emperor in Vienna (for references see the Table, column 3). Second, references to the lyrics in the 'German Emperor' group of primers range from reuse of the full text embedded by prose text and by a picture to a mere mentioning of the song in a prose text. Such prose texts often report about children singing the song at the occasion the emperor's birthday.

Third, a revised version of the lyrics is offered on the last page of a primer published in the 1890s in Leipzig (Kingdom of Saxony) which not only addresses the German emperor as 'a good man' – rather than 'a dear man' – but also extends the original third verse to two verses: '3. And then I'd say "Out of true love I give you the flowers. O may you live long, you good lord, you, adornment of all Germans [*aller Deutschen Zier*]". 4. Then I'd run away quite quickly and would soon be here again, and I'd rejoice with all my heart that I have seen the emperor.' (Keihl 1896, 62) In doing so this revised version explicitly mentions the national dimension of the intended patriotism ('you, adornment of all Germans'), and it replaces the child's somewhat unpatriotic thought as expressed in the last line in the original version (happy to be home again finally after this Berlin experience ...) by the child's lasting sense of pleasure about the encounter with the emperor. Forth, the existing list of modes of reference to the lyrics does not include some modes which might be expected, such as lyrics accompanied

□ Discussion: Patriotic education ... (cont.)

by musical notes or the religious version of the text, for which historical evidence of its use in the German Empire exists otherwise.⁶

Fifth, the investigation of modes of text reuse of *Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann* in primers may serve as an example to demonstrate the potentials of historical studies on content reuse in primers. As indicated on p. 28 of this newsletter RPI will in Issue 21 start a new section on transnational content reuse.

Part 2 of the contribution on patriotic education in primers, also to be published in Issue 21 of RPI, will take up this subject matter. It will furthermore examine manifestations of patriotism in primers in a systematic perspective: national, constituent-state, regional and local patriotism on the one hand and dynastic and military patriotism on the other; it will to some extent also consider primers in languages other than German. In the meantime readers are kindly invited to get involved into this discussion and share their ideas by giving feedback.



Figure 6: A poem for the emperor, but two verses must do ... / Fischer: Schreiblese-Fibel. Ausgabe B: Für höhere Schulen. Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 12., revised ed. 1913, 68, cutout [□ private]

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- Anon. (1910). *Ferdinand Hirts Schreib- und Lesebibel für den Regierungsbezirk Bromberg*. Neubearbeitung von 1910. Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 80 pp.
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- Anon. (1913). *Essener Fibel. 2. Teil*. Essen: G. D. Baedeker, 49th ed., 96 pp.
- Ferber, O. (c. 1913). *Erste Lesefreude für kleine Pfälzer Leute*. Speyer: Verlag der Zehnerschen Buchdruckerei, 110 pp.
- Anon. (1914). *Ifiberi Rya Urunyarwanda – Fibel in der Ruandasprache*. Bethel bei Bielefeld: Verlag der Evang. Missionsgesellschaft für Deutsch-Ostafrika, 2nd ed., 96 pp.
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- Anon. (1916a). *Ferdinand Hirts Neue Schreib-Lese-Fibel*. Nr. 3: Für mittlere und höhere Schulen (mit Buntdruckbildern). Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 2nd ed., 108 pp.

⁶ The religious version of *Der Kaiser ist ein lieber Mann* is quoted, for example, by Herta von Schwerin, born in 1901 in Hamm/Westphalia, in the memories of her childhood in the German Empire, published in the 1980s under the heading *Wir feierten Kaisers Geburtstag* [We celebrated the birthday of the emperor] (Schwerin 1987, 148). Schwerin adds that 'this was the first poem which I learnt as a five-year old' (Ibid.).

□ **Discussion:
Patriotic education ... (cont.)**

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□ Notes

□ Denmark / U.S. Virgin Islands

Studies on Dutch Creole Primers for Use in the Danish West Indies, 1770-1825

Two articles written by scholars from Aarhus University, published in 2024 in the journal *Scandinavian Studies in Language* and available online offer new insights from a variety of perspectives about five primers produced by Danish (Lutheran) and German (Moravian) missionaries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the Virgin Islands Dutch Creole language:

Charlotte Appel, Peter Bakker & Joost Robbe (2024): Initiating reading in Creole: Contents and contexts of primers in the Danish West Indies, 1770-1825. *Scandinavian Studies in Language*, 15 (2), 198-239.

<https://doi.org/10.7146/sss.v15i2.152274>

Joost Robbe & Peter Bakker (2024): A grammatical and graphematic comparison of five Creole primers from the Danish West Indies (1770-1825), with a preliminary phonemic inventory. *Scandinavian Studies in Language* 15(2): 240-288. <https://doi.org/10.7146/sss.v15i2.152275>

□ Estonia

6th Baltic Sea Conference on Literacy in Tallinn, October 4 – 7, 2025

„Literacy Environment - Environmental literacy“ is the theme of the 6th Baltic Sea Conference on Literacy, hosted by the Estonian Reading Association (EstRA). Mare Mürsepp, Tallinn, long-standing member of the Reading Primers SIG, acts as a member of the Local Organizing Committee:

<https://onlineexpo.com/en/6bscl/>

□ Germany / The Netherlands

Blog entry 'Hahnenfibel' and glossary entry 'Rooster primer'

A German-language blog entry 'Hahnenfibel' [rooster primer], written by Andrea Langner, was published by Erfurt University Library in 2024. With a focus on the history of educational media in Germany and highlighting a copy now held in Erfurt, *Hahnenfibel*n are characterised as low-cost alternatives to more extensive textbooks for learning to read:

<https://www2.uni-erfurt.de/bibliothek/blog/tag/hahnenfibel/>

The entry 'Rooster primer' is part of the *Glossary of Early Modern Popular Print Genres*, edited by Jeroen Salman and Andrea van Leerdam, Utrecht University, 2023. Considering the history of the rooster primer in Early Modern Europe, three basic types of the rooster primer are described, namely the German-North European type, the Bohemian type, and the Dutch type:

<https://popular-print-glossary.sites.uu.nl/glossary/rooster-primer-2/>

□ Poland

Study on Polish Primers of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

The Polish book historian Stanisław Siess-Krzyszowski, Cracow, has examined in detail all extant copies of Polish reading primers of the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Major conclusions of his study refer to the fragment of a print of *Nauka krotka ku czytaniu Polskiego*, held by the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow and so far thought to be printed in the Lazarus Printing House of Jan Januszowski in Cracow. Siess-Krzyszowski not only identified fragments of a woodcut depicting feathers from a rooster's tail on the last page of the print. From the fact that the frame of the title page of the said primer is the same as that used by Kryspin Scharffenberg in Breslau/Wroclaw in 1564 for the German-language prayer book *Feuerzeug christlicher Andacht* the author also argues that the primer has been printed in Breslau and that 'the printing year of the primer can be cautiously determined to be around 1565-1570'.

Stanisław Siess-Krzyszowski: Polish primers (textbooks for learning to read) of the 16th and 17th centuries. Translated from Polish by Małgorzata Kisilowska-Szurmińska. *Z Badań nad Książką i Księgozbiarami Historycznymi* 2024, t. 18, z. 2, 235-255.

<https://doi.org/10.33077/uw.25448730.zbkh.2024.869>

□ **RP-SIG:**
New Members

We are pleased to welcome colleagues from Latvia, Germany and the United Kingdom who have recently joined the Reading Primers Special Interest Group:

Dr **Pauls Daija**, Riga (Latvia), is head of the Research Unit at the National Library of Latvia. In addition, he holds research positions at both the National Library of Latvia and Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia. He is author of articles focusing on topics such as the cultural transfer studies in East-Northern Europe, Enlightenment in Germany and Latvia, the social history of literature of Baltic Germans in the 18th–19th centuries. Daija has published also on history of popular education in the Baltic provinces during the 18th and 19th centuries. He is author of a monograph 'Literary History and Popular Enlightenment in Latvian Culture' (2017) and he has co-edited the volume 'A New History of Latvian Literature: the Long Nineteenth Century' (2022). His most recent book is 'Apgaismības starpnieki: vācbaltiešu mācītāji latviešu rakstniecībā, 1815–1848 [Mediators of Enlightenment: The Baltic German Pastors in Latvian Literary Culture 1815–1848]' (2025, in Latvian; to be published in German in 2026). Email: pauls.daija(at)gmail.com



Dr **Anke Hertling** is head of the department Information Centre for Educational Media at the Leibniz Institute for Educational Media | Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) in Braunschweig (Germany). She studied German, cultural studies and communication and media studies in Leipzig and Brussels. She completed her doctorate at the University of Kassel with her thesis on women in the history of automobiles. She then went on to

train as a librarian at the Berlin State Library. Before joining the GEI in July 2015 as head of its research library, she was a researcher at and deputy head of the Theodor Fontane Archive in Potsdam.

Andy Smart, United Kingdom, is a former educational and children's publisher. Since 2000 he has worked on educational materials policy in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and has increasingly specialised in approaches to early grade reading. He is currently part of a team working with the Ministry of Education and Training in Tonga in the South Pacific, co-developing scope and sequence, textbooks and teachers' guides for grades 1-6. He has published on the teaching of Arabic in early grades (in Arabic) as well as on teachers' guides and on competency-based curricular approaches in LMICs. He is a co-founder of [NISSEM.org](https://www.nissem.org), which seeks to embed social and emotional learning and SDG Target 4.7 in educational materials, and he is also vice president of the International Association for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media (IARTEM). Email: andinadia(at)gmail.com.

□ **RP-SIG:**
Members' News

On August 1, 2025, the Traderson Foundation, Estonia, has awarded the commemorative Votic Cross VAÐÐA RISSI MEDAL to **Juris Cibuljs**, Riga, for his contribution to the preservation of the language of the Votic people. The award honours the laureate's initiative in creating the first Votic primer in history, VAÐÐA SÕNAKOPITAJA, authored by Tatyana Borisovna Agranat and Zinaida Andreevna Savelyeva, planned to be published later this year.

□ RP-SIG

RP-SIG: Developments and Plans

Britta Juska-Bacher, Wendelin Sroka

September 2024: RP-SIG Panel at IGSBi Conference in Augsburg

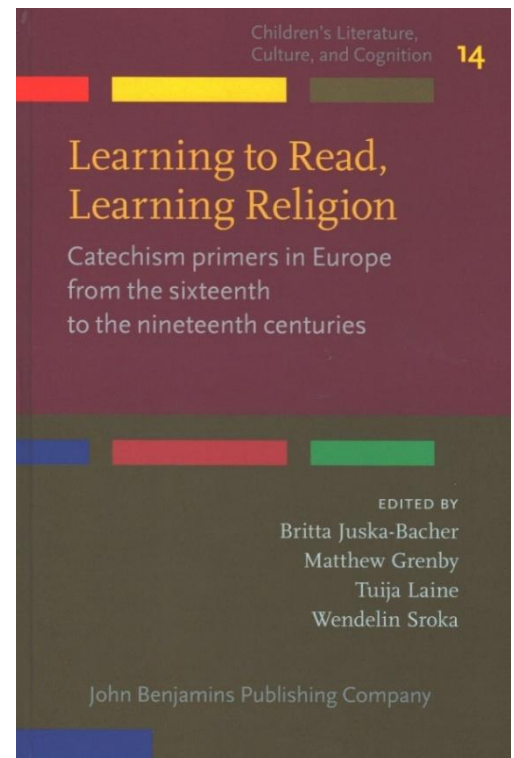
The Annual Conference of the International Society for Historical and Systematic Research on Textbooks and Educational Media (IGSBi), held at the University of Augsburg from September 27 to 29, 2024, focussed on the topic 'Sustainability and Educational Media'. As part of the conference the RP-SIG organised a panel under the heading 'Historical Primers and Sustainability'. Contributors of the panel included *Charlotte Appel*, Aarhus ('Sustaining, Supplementing, or Substituting Traditional Textbooks in the Late Enlightenment? Danish Primers and Readers in a Period of Educational Reforms, c. 1785–1815'), *Britta Juska-Bacher*, Berne ('Aspects of Sustainability of Historical Reading Primers: Methods of Teaching Written Language, 18th to 21st Centuries'), *Aivar Põldvee*, Tallinn ('On the Genealogy of the Primer Rooster') and *Wendelin Sroka*, Essen ('Sustainability of Reading Primers: A Collector-Researcher's Perspective'). The conference proceedings, edited by Eva Matthes, Péter Bagoly-Simó, Britta Juska-Bacher, Sylvia Schütze und Jan Van Wiele, will be published in 2025 by Klinkhardt Publishers, Bad Heilbrunn.

June 2025: Children's Literature Association recognizes *Learning to Read, Learning Religion* as 2025 Honor Book

Results of an initiative of the Reading Primers SIG have gained prominent recognition: The Edited Book Award Committee of the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) unanimously voted for the volume *Learning to Read, Learning Religion. Catechism primers in Europe from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries* to be recognized as an Honor Book for this year's Edited Book Award. The honoured book, edited by Britta Juska-Bacher, Matthew Grenby, Tuija Laine and Wendelin Sroka, has been published in 2023 by John Benjamins, Amsterdam. All editors and many authors are members of the RP-SIG network.

The Edited Book Award is presented annually by the ChLA to recognize the contribution of outstanding collections of essays to children's literature scholarship and criticism. The award was presented by Peter C. Kunze, Grants and Awards Coordinator for the ChLA, during the award ceremony on June 11, 2025, part of the ChLA 2025 Virtual Conference. In a message to the editors of *Learning to Read, Learning Religion* Naomi Lesley, professor in the English department at Holyoke Community College and Edited Book Award Committee Chair of the ChLA, wrote: 'Each of the committee members noted the unique contribution this volume made to the field, and recognized the thoughtfulness of its editorial design as well as the impressive archival work and coordination involved. Thank you for your efforts to bring this book into the world!'

The award provides additional impetus for the preparation of the planned follow-up volume on primers in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see RPI 19, p. 26). A sample article on primers in Denmark has already been written by Charlotte Appel, and other contributions are in progress. With support provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation the editorial team will meet in Berne in January 2026.



□ RP-SIG: Developments and Plans (cont.)

September 2025: RP-SIG Panel at IGSBi Conference in Vienna

The [International Society for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media e.V.](https://www.igsbi.org/) will hold its next Annual Conference from September 26 to 28, 2025 at the University of Vienna on the subject 'Educational Media as a Case of Political or Social Conflict'. The RP-SIG will once again organise a panel, now with English and German as working languages, scheduled for Sunday, September 28, 9:00-12:30. For this panel the conference organisers have accepted the following six papers: 'Primers as Tools and Tokens of Territorial Identity? The Change from Danish to Swedish Primers, Catechisms, and Textbooks in the Scania Region 1658–1720' (Charlotte Appel, Aarhus); 'A Primer and the Estonian "Spelling War"' (Aivar Põldvee, Tallinn); 'Der „Kirchheimer ABC-Buch-Krieg" (1777): Akteure, Positionen und Erzählungen [The „Kirchheim ABC Book War" (1776): Actors, Positions and Narrations]' (Wendelin Sroka, Essen); 'Challenging Official Primers in Pre-Unification Northern Italy, 1770s–1850s' (Elisa Marazzi, Milano); '„Lesen durch Schreiben" – Wie eine Methode der Schriftsprachvermittlung in Gesellschaft und Politik die Gemüter erregt [Reading through writing' – How a method of teaching written language is causing a stir in society and politics]' (Britta Juska-Bacher, Berne); 'Vom „Schreiben nach Gehör" zur „Recht-Schreib-Katerstrofe"? [Phonetic Writing – A Spelling Disaster? The Socio-Political Ideologization of a Didactic Issue in Early Education in German Primary Schools]' (Verena Stürmer, Würzburg).

The programme of the IGSBi 2025 Conference in Vienna also includes a meeting of the RP-SIG, scheduled for Friday, September 26, 2025, at 6:15 p.m.

RPI: New Section 'Transnational Content Reuse'

The volume mentioned above about catechism primers in Europe has to some extent pointed to parallelisms of text, pictures or even entire books across national borders – phenomena which point to content reuse. This has caused us to plan a new section for RPI, moderated by Britta Juska-Bacher, Berne. The purpose of the new series is to encourage international exchange and cooperation aimed at investigating transnational content reuse or enhancement in primers.

The starting point of each contribution in this series shall be the presentation of an individual primer or major textbook passage for which evidence exists that transnational content reuse has taken place. Authors of contributions are invited to present their findings and draft specific questions concerning reuse of content (text, picture, picture-text unit, translated text, content modified otherwise ...). Readers are invited to comment the contribution and respond to one or more of the questions raised by the author. Depending on the feedback and general interest next steps may include an online meeting to discuss the issues in question further or another contribution which sums up the results of the exchange.

The first contribution in the new section, written by Britta Juska-Bacher and to be published in RPI 21 (spring 2026), will focus on the features and the pre-history of *Neues ABC und Bilderbuch für die Jugend*, a print issued 1836 in Berne by S. Oppliger. It is characterised by a colour picture of the rooster on the title page, an otherwise unusual pictorial motif in Swiss primers. The article will demonstrate that traces of the history of this book lead to Zurich and finally to a centre of book production and book trade in Germany ...



Neues ABC und Bilderbuch für die Jugend. Bern: J. Oppliger 1836
[□ Berne, Berne University Library]