

German manuscript collections

Sir, – I was shocked, as most of your readers were, I am sure, to learn, from Nicolas Barker's account earlier this year, about the demise of the Macclesfield Library (Commentary, June 23). A similar fate is currently being contemplated for one of the most prestigious manuscript collections in Germany, which has been in the care of Karlsruhe's Badische Landesbibliothek for over a century. This collection comprises a large number of very early manuscripts, many from the monastery of Reichenau (founded circa 720), where they were first catalogued in the ninth century.

It appears that the princes of Baden still have some claims – legally rather dubious, if one cares to take a close look, something they and

their advisers are actively discouraging – to large portions of the province's cultural treasures, even though 1) they were stripped of their politically pre-eminent position in the wake of the First World War and 2) said treasures were secularized in the Napoleonic era and not, strictly speaking, given to the Grand Dukes. The cash raised by auctioning off the manuscripts would pay for repairs at Schloss Salem on Lake Constance, which the impecunious Badens call home.

In the mind of its author, Herr Oettinger, minister-president of Baden-Württemberg, this barbaric scheme would settle once and for all any outstanding claims by the former dynasts, who have already spent their way through the

proceeds of the sale of their main schloss at Baden-Baden (including contents). All the federal authorities have done so far is to rule out foreign bids for the Karlsruhe manuscripts, as if that could prevent them, once in private hands, from leaving the country! I can't help but think that if the EU had a meaningful cultural mandate, with matching human and financial resources, this would be the perfect wrong for it to set right by preserving as a public concern what is indubitably a treasure of supranational significance.

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