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Queen Caroline's Library and its European Contexts

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Queen Caroline's Library and its European Contexts

Emma Jay (bio)

One of the favorite pursuits of George II's consort, Caroline of Ansbach

(1683–1737), was book collecting.¹ The surviving evidence of her extensive library at St. James's Palace ought to be understood in relation to the complexities of her position as an Anglo-German queen. Scholars have shown that after having spent her formative years at a series of German courts, she retained a cosmopolitan European outlook while also developing an active interest in British culture.² This article will survey the origins, development, organization, and functions of her library in context of the other court libraries she knew, both in Germany and in Britain. At one level the collection was a product of her knowledge of, and continuing connections with, the German court library tradition, despite the fact that it contained a relatively small number of German books; but at another level it was clearly a British royal library, symbolizing her desire to absorb her German heritage into the cultural practices of the British monarchy. She ought to be seen as a pivotal figure in the history of book collecting at the British court and an important precursor of that great royal bibliophile, George III.

Caroline was born in Ansbach, a small town thirty miles southwest of Nuremberg, in 1683, the daughter of the margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, Johann Friedrich, by his second wife, Eleonore Erdmuthe Louise of Saxe-Eisenach.³ She had a disrupted childhood: when the margrave died in 1686, she went to live in Eisenach with her mother and her younger brother, Wilhelm Friedrich, and six years later they all moved to the much grander setting of the Dresden court when her mother married the elector **[End Page 31]** of Saxony, Johann Georg IV. The elector died of smallpox in 1694, and the electress and her children moved again, to the Saxon town of Pretzsch, until the electress also died in 1696. Having lost both of her parents and her stepfather, Caroline was invited to Berlin to live with her guardians, Elector Friedrich III of Brandenburg and his wife Sophie Charlotte, who were king and queen in Prussia from 1701. At Sophie Charlotte's summer palace, Lietzenburg (renamed Charlottenburg after the queen's death in 1705), Caroline gained entry into a distinguished intellectual circle.⁴ She was introduced to the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz when he visited the palace in 1704 while working to establish the Berlin Society of Sciences.⁵ In 1705 she moved

to the Hanoverian court upon her marriage to Sophie Charlotte's nephew, George Augustus, electoral prince of Hanover. The match opened up exciting prospects, because George's grandmother and Sophie Charlotte's mother, Electress Sophia of Hanover, had been named in the 1701 Act of Settlement as the heir to the British throne after William III and Anne. Sophia predeceased Anne by a few weeks in the summer of 1714, and Sophia's son George Lewis became the first elector of Hanover to rule Great Britain. Caroline arrived at the British court as Princess of Wales in October of that year, accompanied by three of her children, but leaving the oldest, Frederick, behind at Hanover to continue his education.

This German background is crucial for understanding Caroline's approach to cultural patronage and collecting. It is well known that she followed the example of Sophia of Hanover and Sophie Charlotte of Prussia by befriending and encouraging Leibniz: she tried without success to arrange for him to accompany her to Britain in 1714, and in 1715–16 she facilitated and arbitrated his learned correspondence with the Newtonian philosopher Samuel Clarke.⁶ Similarly, her experience of several German court libraries must be seen as an important factor in her decision to establish her own library at the British court. Her father had expanded the Ansbach court library into what can be termed a "universal library," with space devoted to all the different branches of knowledge.⁷ Both of her parents appear to have cultivated an interest in books, as several of the volumes currently stored at the Staatliche Bibliothek in Ansbach bear her mother's bookstamp.⁸ Although she left...

QUEEN CAROLINE'S LIBRARY AND ITS EUROPEAN CONTEXTS



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