

*RALF-TORSTEN SPELER*

Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg  
Germany

*The New Natural Science Museum for Martin Luther  
University Halle-Wittenberg*

## **Introduction**

The city of Halle conveniently situated in the middle of Germany is the largest and most densely populated city in the state Saxony-Anhalt, with approximately 240,000 inhabitants. In 2006, the city celebrated its 1,200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which makes it one of the oldest cities in central Germany. It rose to fame through its salt production in the Middle Ages, as the birthplace and early place of work of the composer Georg Friedrich Händel and, of course, as the seat of one of the oldest German Universities, Martin Luther University. The rich history of Halle is reflected in its many significant places of interest and in large variety of architectural monuments and cultural opportunities. Martin Luther University, founded in 1502, is the largest and oldest educational institution in the state Saxony-Anhalt. Currently, more than 18,000 students are enrolled in about 200 different programs. Education of undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students ranges from Medical, Natural, and Agricultural Sciences to Social Sciences and Humanities, Theology and Law. Martin Luther University reaches international cooperation and exchange programs. Interdisciplinary research plays a key role. As a result of extensive research and development, innovative and future-oriented technologies lead to an establishment of new companies connected to the University<sup>1</sup>.

## **Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg Historical outline**

Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg is not only the oldest and largest institution of education in the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, but also one of the earliest

---

<sup>1</sup> W. Freitag *et al.* (Hrsg), *Geschichte der Stadt Halle*, Halle 2006.

universities in Germany. The University derives from three institutions: the ‘Leucorea’ University, founded in Wittenberg in 1502; the Catholic ‘Counter-University’, set up in 1531 by Cardinal Albrecht (1490–1545) in Halle and refuge of humanism which, however, failed to progress beyond its significant beginnings; and from Halle University, founded in 1694, the leading and most modern university in Germany at that time. Through famous individuals like Christian Thomasius (1655–1728), Christian (von) Wolff (1679–1754), Nicolaus Hieronymus von Gundling (1671–1729) and Johann Gottlieb Heineccius (1681–1741), Halle became a centre of the Early Enlightenment. One of the founding professors of the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology, August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), was responsible for Halle’s development into an important centre of Pietism.

### *University of Wittenberg (1502–1817)*

The *Alma mater Vitebergensis* was founded on October 18<sup>th</sup> 1502 by Friedrich III. the Wise (1486–1525) as the State University of the Saxon Electorate. It grew in significance in the sixteenth century as the place of work of famous reformers like Martin Luther (1483–1564), Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560), Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558) and Justus Jonas (1493–1555). The University of Wittenberg was the place where the Reformation started. The dominant basic attitude at the Leucorea was anti-scholarly and humanistic, and within the first one hundred years of its existence, the University developed into one of the best universities in Central Europe. Later the University’s reputation was upheld chiefly by important natural scientists and medics. From 1586 to 1588 Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) published his work ‘Dialectics’ here. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Wittenberg was surpassed by other universities, and above all by Halle. In July 1813, Napoleon (1804–1814/15) closed the University of Wittenberg.

### *University of Halle (1694–1817)*

The *Alma mater Halensis* was officially opened on July 12<sup>th</sup> 1694 as the State University of the Electorate of Brandenburg by Friedrich III. of Brandenburg (1688–1713), who became Friedrich King of Prussia in 1701. The *Fridericiana* emerged from the Knights’ Academy established in Halle in 1680 and other educational institutions. The appointment of Christian Thomasius and August Hermann Francke in 1690 by Elector Friedrich III., and the two scholars’ successful teaching provided the final impetus for the founding of a University in the town on the Saale. Other famous scientists, like Christian (von) Wolff, the founder of German Enlightenment philosophy, the physicians Friedrich Hoffmann (1660–1742) and Georg Ernst Stahl (1660–1724), the philosopher Christoph Cellarius (1638–1707), and the law scholar Samuel Stryck (1640–1710) appointed to Halle from Wittenberg, quickly turned the young university into a respected centre of progressive studies of the arts and sciences and of the German Early Enlightenment and Pietism. At the end of the eighteenth century, the University of Halle lived through a second heyday with the presence of scholars such as the archaeologist Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824), who founded the first Seminar of Philology at the University in 1787, the natural scientist and philosopher Henrik Steffens (1773–1845), the physician Johann

Christian Reil (1759–1813), and the theologians Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and August Hermann Niemeyer (1754–1828). Under Napoleonic rule the University was closed down twice.

### *The University of Halle-Wittenberg since 1817*

As a result of the Congress of Vienna, what had once been the Saxon Electorate district of Wittenberg fell to Prussia in 1815. In 1817, Wittenberg University was merged with Halle's. In the second half of the nineteenth century, natural sciences and medicine experienced a tremendous surge of activity. A large complex of university clinics was built, as well as institutes of agriculture, physics and chemistry. Among their highly regarded scholars physicians like Alfred Wilhelm (1801–1877), Richard (von) Volkmann (1830–1889) and Karl Alfred Graefe (1830–1899); the physicist Hermann Knoblauch (1820–1950), a co-founder of biochemistry; the mathematician Georg Cantor (1845–1918), founder of the set theory; and the agriculturalist Julius Kühn (1825–1910), who was the first to introduce the study of agriculture as an university discipline. After the Nazis rose to power in 1933 and the subsequent 'Gleichschaltung', or forcing into line of the universities, the dismissal of politically and 'racially' unpopular university lecturers, employees and students, as well as the alteration of the university constitution started. On November 10<sup>th</sup> 1933, on the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's birth, the University was given its present name.

In the post-war years, university policy was dictated by the occupying powers and all National Socialists among the teaching staff were dismissed. On February 1<sup>st</sup> 1946 the Alma mater was reopened. The founding of the German Democratic Republic (1949) ushered in socialist policy for the University. Bourgeois professors, employees and students who were not in agreement with the new system were subject to discrimination and were driven away.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9<sup>th</sup> 1989 and the consequent end of the GDR, the University initiated a fundamental process of renewal. In 1990, the Vice-Chancellor and the Senate were freely elected for the first time in half a century. Germany was reunited on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1990.

In 1992, on the occasion of the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the merge of the Universities of Wittenberg and Halle, the opening event for the revival of the old site of the University took place in Wittenberg. In 1993 the University was considerably extended by the integration of the Teacher Training College Halle-Köthen and parts of the Technical University Merseburg. In 1994, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg celebrated the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Halle University. Up to 1994 six interdisciplinary centres for research into the European Enlightenment, Pietism, Schools Research and Issues of Teacher Training, Material Science, Environmental Protection and Biocentre had been founded. The new statutes of the University were also adopted in 1994, thereby providing Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg with a democratic constitution for the first time since 1930.

Marking the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of Halle University, the Vice-Chancellors of the classical Central German Universities of Leipzig, Jena and Halle signed in 1994 an agreement promoting co-operation across regional boundaries in all spheres of

research and teaching. Since the 1989 reform, Martin Luther University has established 22 partnerships with other universities around the world as well as numerous partnerships with other departments or faculties. In 1995, the construction works of the Bio-Zentrum Halle GmbH, a research centre for environmental technology and biotechnology officially began, and the Centre was completed in 1997. The opening ceremony of the Centre for American Studies of the Leucorea Foundation at Martin Luther University in Wittenberg was held on October 31<sup>st</sup> 1995 in the presence of the Ambassador of the United States of America. In the winter semester of 1996/97, the University had 11,352 students, including 529 foreign students from 88 countries. Such a longstanding and great tradition, places Halle, a city of science and art, in an outstanding position in the history of the humanities and natural sciences in Germany and Europe<sup>2</sup>.

### **Academic collections and museums at Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg**

Since it was founded in 1694, the University of Halle has possessed an impressive number of collections and museums of great variety and significance. For centuries, these exclusively used as aids for teaching and learning. Existing collections were considerably extended through the merge of Wittenberg University with Halle in 1817, as well as through the integration of the former Teaching Training College Halle-Köthen and parts of the Technical University Merseburg in 1993. Today, there are 20 scientific museums, collections and galleries which are used to support courses in the University's public relations activities, and in the preservation of ancient traditions.

These extensive University collections, comprising items of value and interest in terms of cultural history are housed in historic and modern buildings at the University's sites in Halle, Halle-Kröllwitz and Merseburg, in the future, some collections will also be housed in Wittenberg again.

First and foremost, there are the collections of art and cultural history such as the Central Art Collections, consisting of the University insignia from the time of the University's creation, portraits of professors over five centuries and hand-made objects resulting from teaching or research left to the University by scholars. The treasure of both old universities, consisting of sceptres, seals, two chains of office, keys with cushions, robes and charters can be considered as one of the time-honoured distinctive marks of the university. The Engravings Collection, founded in 1820, comprises 11,000 prints and hand-made drawings from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. The Coin Collection of the Halle Professor of Medicine and Archaeology Johann Heinrich Schulze (1687–1744), one of the leading European scholars of his day, constitutes the basis for the present Archaeological Museum, with its casts of ancient sculptures and small original works. Small special collections like the Papyrus Collection and the Prehistoric Archaeological Collection add a richness to research into earlier cultures by offering the possibility of in-

---

<sup>2</sup> R.-T. Speler, *Die Kunstsammlung. Insignien, Gelehrtenbilder und Portärbüsten. Veröffentlichungen der Akademischen Sammlungen und Museen der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg*, Hrsg. von R.-T. Speler, Bd. 2, Halle 1995.

vestigating original pieces and replicas. The University and State Library Saxony-Anhalt was founded in 1696. Special Collections represent a treasure trove for book-lovers. It is the oldest collection in the University, and it includes more than 100,000 manuscripts and autographies spanning from the eighth century to the present; about 4,000 documents dating from tenth century onwards; incunabula and many rare items. The Library of the German Oriental Society, affiliated to the University in 1846, represents an important international specialist library for Oriental languages and cultures. The School of Theology and the Institutes of Speech Communication and Phonetics also possess comprehensive historical records resulting from research through the centuries.

As far as collections associated with the natural sciences, the Anatomical Collections at Halle are among the most comprehensive of their kind in Europe. Their mainstay is the famous collection of the important German anatomists Philipp Friedrich Theodor Meckel (1755–1803) and Johann Friedrich Meckel the Younger (1789–1833). The scientific material consists of hundreds of anatomical preparations which are exhibited in historic collection cupboards from the nineteenth century. The palaeontological Geiseltal Museum, founded in 1934, has an internationally famous piece: a complete specimen of *Propalaeotherium isselanum* (Cuvier), a 47 to 49 million years old ‘ancient horse’.

The Botanical Gardens were founded in 1698 and therefore the first in Prussia. The population of Halle appreciates visiting the Gardens, which record an average of 100,000 visitors per year. Their Special Collections, intensely used for research and teaching, are among the most diverse in Europe. The Herbarium of the Institute of Geobotany and the Botanic Gardens enjoy international prestige because of their historically valuable collections of numerous types, and they are intensively used through frequent loans.

Other important collections from the field of the natural sciences include the Julius Kühn Museum, established in 1864 by the founder of the university studies in agriculture. It remains as one of the largest collections of skeletons of domestic animals worldwide. The University also includes the Mineralogy and Petrology Collections: the Zoology Collections, comprising a large South America collection from the nineteenth century; and the Collection of Mathematic Models, one of the most important in Europe.

These important teaching collections and resources for documentation and research contribute to the fulfilment of the University cultural and public dimension and constitute an integral part of the European academic heritage<sup>3</sup>.

## Natural Science Museum for Halle University

As said before, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg is one of the classical German universities looking back on a history of more than 500 years. An important component in teaching and research at the University in Halle is the work with its 20 academic collections and museums which are of international significance.

---

<sup>3</sup> R.-T. Speler, (Hrsg.), *300 Jahre Universität Halle 1694–1994. Schätze aus den Sammlungen und Kabinetten. Karlsruhe und Halle 1994*; G. Berg et al. (Hrsg.), *Emporium. 500 Jahre Universität Halle-Wittenberg. Landesausstellung Sachsen-Anhalt 2002*, Halle 2002.

As part of the structural reorganisation of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg to consolidate a modern institution of teaching and research, the University is planning a central university museum of natural sciences. This has been triggered by the relocation of all institutes of natural sciences from Halle's city centre to the modern Weinberg campus on the outskirts of the city. The site for the new University Museum is to be the historical building of the Institute of Physics. It stands opposite to the castle Moritzburg, currently the Museum of Art of the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, due to be reopened in 2008 with a modern extension designed by the Spanish architects Fuensanta Nieto and Enrique Sobejano (Madrid). The new University Museum, on the other side of this square will represent a scientific counterpart to art, in line with the Viennese model.

Alongside the already existing 'Theatre Island' in Halle, a new 'Museums Island' will this come into being. The new University Museum will host three collections of the natural sciences are to be brought together under one roof: i) the famous palaeontological Geiseltal Museum; ii) the systematic Zoological Collections and iii) the Julius Kühn Agricultural Museum of Domestic Animal Science.

The federal government of Saxony-Anhalt discussed the planned site for the future University Museum on 6 February 2007 and agreement was reached on the University plans at the suggestion of the Minister of Finance. The total estimated cost of refurbishment for the building is around 5 million euros and raising this sum was placed on the list of construction priorities in the higher education sector by the federal Ministry of Education and Culture. The Minister of Finance, Jens Bullerjahn and the Minister of Education and Culture, Jan-Hendrik Olbertz, welcomed this decision, which provides the University with the indispensable certainty for planning, and at the same time guarantees that this significant historical building dating from 1890 will have a permanent use. Furthermore, the city of Halle will have another attractive museum in the old town centre. The future University Museum will have an exhibition area of 1,400 m<sup>2</sup>, corresponding to the present area occupied by collections. The building extension to include exhibition areas, offices and working space, an admissions area, cloakroom, museum shop and cafeteria amounts to 2.2 million euros.

After the reorganisation of university sites, campus and locations in 2008 Halle's academic museums will have two centres: one at the square Universitätsplatz (Central University Museum and Archaeological Museum) and the other at Friedemann-Bach-Platz (Natural Sciences Museum of the University). These museums and collections are intended to function as a scientific forum and to be integrated into the European network of university museums.

A project team, 'University Museum', has been established to co-ordinate the planning. It consists of a representative from the university administration, a representative from each of the museums involved, the Central Curator and the manager of the adjacent federal Museum of Art. This project team met for the first time on 28 June 2007. In 2009, the reconstruction work will begin on the historical building to convert it into the new University Natural Sciences Museum. The opening is scheduled for 2011/2012.

## Concluding remarks

– These museums and collections of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg are intended to function as a scientific forum and to be integrated into the European network of university museums.

– The new University Museum will host three natural science collections under one roof: i) palaeontological Geiseltal Museum; ii) the systematic Zoological Collections; and iii) the Julius Kühn Agriculture Museum of Domestic Animal Science.

– The University Natural Sciences Museum in Halle is scheduled for 2011/2012 it is a similar idea like in Berlin. The German Bundestag decided after the reconstruction of the Palace (Berliner Schloss) in 2014 under the name “The Humboldt Forum” to create a centre of museums especially with a scientific collections of the Humboldt University.

## STRESZCZENIE

### *Nowe Muzeum Przyrodnicze dla Uniwersytetu im. Marcina Lutra Halle-Wittenberga*

Uniwersytet im. Marcina Lutra Halle-Wittenberga jest jednym z klasycznych niemieckich uniwersytetów mogących sięgać swą historią ponad pięćset lat wstecz. Ważną częścią nauczania i badań uniwersytetu w Halle jest współpraca z dwudziestoma akademickimi zbiorami i muzeami o międzynarodowym znaczeniu. Jako część strukturalnej reorganizacji uniwersytet planuje otwarcie centralnego Muzeum Przyrodniczego. Zostało to rozpoczęte przez przeniesienie wszystkich instytutów nauk przyrodniczych z centrum Halle do nowego kampusu Weinberg na obrzeżach miasta. Miejszem nowego muzeum uniwersyteckiego będzie historyczny budynek Instytutu Fizyki, stojący naprzeciwko zamku Moritzburg, Muzeum Sztuki związkowego kraju Saksoni-Anhalt. Powstałaby w ten sposób w Halle „wyspa muzealna” obok „wyspy teatralnej”. Pod jednym dachem w nowym muzeum znajdą się trzy kolekcje nauk przyrodniczych: 1) sławna paleontologiczna Muzeum Geiseltal 2) ogólna zoologiczna i 3) unikatowa rolniczego muzeum hodowli zwierząt „Julius Kühn”. Powierzchnia wystaw przyszłego Muzeum Uniwersytetu będzie wynosiła 1400 m<sup>2</sup>. Otwarcie zaplanowano na rok 2011/2012. Akademickie Muzea w Halle będą miały dwa centra, jedno na Universitätplatz (Centralne Muzeum i Muzeum Archeologiczne) i drugie na Friedemann-Bach-Platz (Uniwersyteckie Muzeum Przyrodnicze).