

## German-Language Book Production in Central Europe (1840–90)

### Abstract

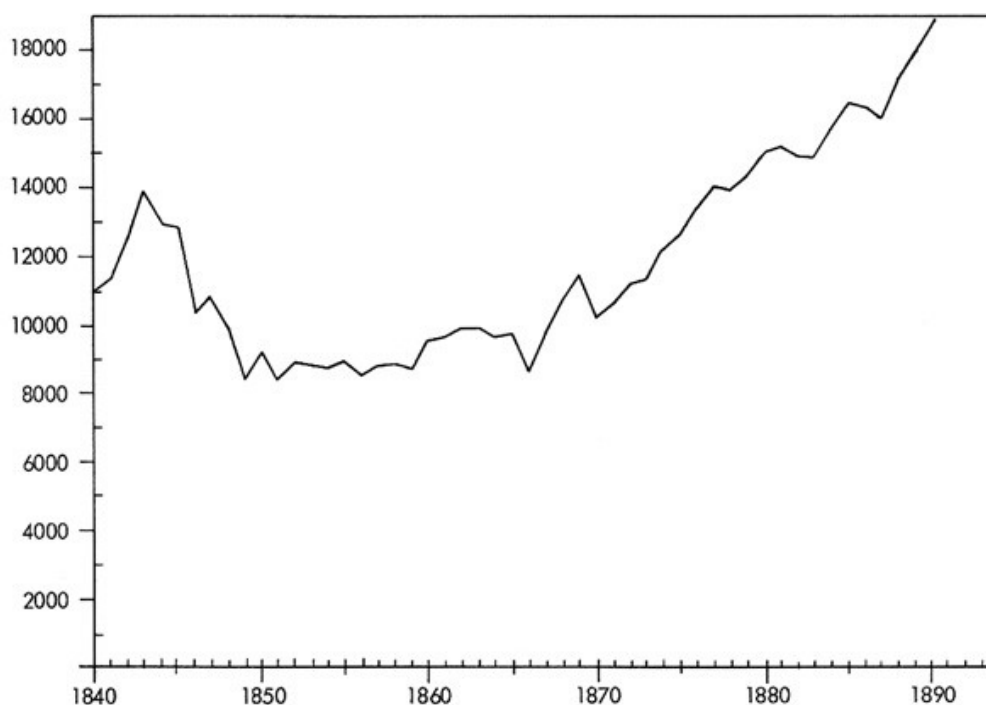
---

After the Revolution of 1848/49, book production in Germany dropped sharply. The emigration or incarceration of many revolutionary publishers contributed to this decline, as did the vigilance of German censors. For many years, newspapers were more important than books for the politically educated public. As this graph shows, it was only in 1879 that book production once again reached its 1843 level (approximately 14,000 new books per year). Between 1880 and 1913, book production roughly doubled. In the 1850s, theological books predominated. These works lost some of their importance in the 1870s, as pedagogical literature came to the fore. Fiction represented about 8–10% of book production. Among non-fiction works, encyclopedias grew in popularity. Throughout this period, Germany's publishing industry was centered in the Saxon city of Leipzig, although Berlin grew in reputation and influence after 1871. The number of German bookshops also rose rapidly in these years, especially in larger Protestant cities. Still, books remained beyond the financial reach of a large majority of Germans, who thus borrowed their reading materials from lending libraries.

### Source

---

#### German Book Production, 1840–1890



Obviously, the book trade experienced a serious slump in sales between 1848 and 1880: Only in 1879 did the level of new publications match and surpass the level already attained back in 1843. Even in the years immediately preceding the revolution, the decline in production numbers seems to have laid the groundwork for what the events of 1848/49 meant for reading behavior.

[...]

While the economy in the reactionary period experienced a first “founder’s high,” the book trade was only able to recover very slowly: Over the entire decade that followed, production hardly increased at all. Authors’ royalties and print runs, especially of fiction, were accordingly low. The more rapid expansion of the market during the New Era in Prussia was first halted only by the Austro-Prussian War, which once again proved the susceptibility of book production to crisis, “hurling back the excellent organization of our profession, laboriously developed over decades, to the primitive state of affairs of the previous century.” As early as the following “year of the classics”—1867—the rise began again, however, and even the war of 1870/71 appears to have impeded it only slightly.

According to the number of published titles, fiction took fourth place among the individual branches for the entire period, amounting to 8–10 percent of the entire book market: In the 1850s, the dominance of theological and devotional literature still remained uncontested—works in this branch accounted for almost one-sixth of all published titles.

[...]

Between 1865 and 1880 alone, the number of actual book publishers increased from 668 to 1,238. In 1869, there were 99 retail booksellers in Berlin, 88 in Leipzig, 36 in Hamburg, 35 in Vienna, 26 in Breslau, 24 each in Dresden and Prague, 22 in Frankfurt am Main, 20 in Munich, and 19 in Stuttgart. That year, there were 1,515 German retail booksellers overall: of them, 826 (54.5%) were in Prussia, 207 (13.6%) in the Kingdom of Saxony, and 152 (10%) in the Kingdom of Bavaria.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Fiction</b>	<b>Popular writings</b>
1840	10,808	–	–
1841	11,080	993	–
1842	12,509	–	–
1843	14,039	–	–
1844	13,119	–	–
1845	13,008	–	–
1846	10,536	–	–
1847	10,684	–	–
1848	9,942	–	–
1849	8,197	–	–
1850	9,053	–	–
1851	8,326	829	167
1852	8,857	844	175
1853	8,750	908	171
1854	8,705	848	158
1855	8,794	887	168
1856	8,540	945	134
1857	8,699	950	135
1858	8,672	888	135
1859	8,666	913	209
1860	9,496	–	–
1861	9,566	–	–

---

1862	9,779	-	-
1863	9,889	-	-
1864	9,564	971	196
1865	9,661	935	212
1866	8,669	704	165
1867	9,855	852	212
1868	10,563	958	237
1869	11,305	999	335
1870	10,108	739	271
1871	10,669	950	236
1872	11,127	998	209
1873	11,315	948	205
1874	12,070	912	388
1875	12,516	1,061	471
1876	13,356	1,070	547
1877	13,925	1,126	540
1878	13,912	1,181	715
1879	14,179	1,170	642
1880	14,941	1,209	657
1881	15,191	1,226	639
1882	14,794	1,260	654
1883	14,802	1,207	724

By comparison, Federal Republic of Germany, including West Berlin:

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Fiction</b>	<b>Popular writings</b>
1971	42,957	8,165	

Note: Data from 1860–1863 was not available. These figures also include German-language book production in Austria-Hungary and Switzerland, insofar as these titles were distributed in the German Empire (by way of Leipzig) after 1871.

Source: “Systematische Übersicht der literarischen Erzeugnisse des deutschen Buchhandels,” published annually in the financial newspaper for the German book trade by J. C. Hinrichs’schen Bookstore; German data reprinted in Max Bucher, Werner Hal, Georg Jäger, and Reinhard Wittmann, eds. *Realismus und Gründerzeit: Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1848–1880*, 2 vols. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1975, vol. 1, pp. 166–69.

Translation: Erwin Fink

---

Recommended Citation: German-Language Book Production in Central Europe (1840–90), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/forging-an-empire-bismarckian-germany-1866-1890/ghdi:document-1777>> [May 03, 2024].