

BAM - A German portal for cultural heritage as a single point of access for users¹

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Abstract

BAM – the joint portal for libraries, archives, museums in Germany intends to become a single point of access for cultural content and serves users who do not want to search several different databases at different servers using different search interfaces and vocabularies for access. In addition to combining different information services from different institutions in one point of access, BAM can also serve as a portal for a single institution's libraries, archives, museums and media centres. BAM also tries to increase the visibility of the digital objects in the collections of the participants by cooperating with Wikipedia Germany and enriching articles with a link to content in BAM.

Keywords

Cultural heritage, portal, museums, libraries, archives, access

1. Introduction

When looking for digital cultural heritage information, users do not care whether the information they require is stored in a library, an archive or a museum [1, 2]. In the digital realm it is no longer relevant whether the original materials that are now available in a digital form were stored in a library or a museum or an archive [3]. The current development of libraries, archives or museums goes towards a digital memory institution where the information of all institutions is available online. BAM – the joint portal of Libraries (in German: Bibliotheken), Archives, Museums intends to set up such a digital memory institution for Germany providing a single point of access to users who do not want to search several different databases at different servers using different search interfaces and vocabularies. Such a single point of access is a major improvement because in Germany does exist a lot of digital resources but they are scattered all over the Internet like islands in the sea. In order to find these materials, the users have to know that these islands of digital materials exist, where they are located and what kind of resources they hold. So the users have to do

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some island hopping in order to find the information they are looking for. In addition, to access such a treasure island, they need to know the magic words *Open Sesame* as in *Ali Baba's* tale in *One Thousand and One Nights*, i.e. they must understand the various interfaces, know the right terminology and the underlying indexing structure for the database for each and every information resource. From the users' perspective it would be more effective and convenient to have one platform where they can stop and search all the available online databases - a single point of access.

2. BAM – A Joint Portal for Libraries, Archives, Museums

BAM (Fig. 1)[4] started as a project funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) in 2001. Since 2007 a consortium of library, archive and museum institutions hosts the BAM portal, among them the Bibliotheksservice-Zentrum Baden-Württemberg (BSZ), a library service centre that hosts the portal. At the moment BAM contains more than 40 million digital records contributed by several major German academic libraries, by sixteen museums and museum networks, and several major archives (cf. Table 1).

BAM total number of digital records	41 195 322
Libraries	37 175 528
Northern German Union Catalogue GBV (some 330 scholarly libraries)	~20 M
Southwestern German Union Catalogue SWB (some 1200 scholarly libraries)	~13 M
State Library of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Berlin	~3 M
Central Index of Digitized Imprints (ZVDD)	~0,5 M
Archives	2 905 652
State Archives of Baden-Württemberg	1,7 M
State Archives of Hesse	0,8 M
Federal Archive of Germany	88 K
Municipal Archives (Freiburg, Heilbronn, Reutlingen, Mainz)	86 K
Museums	291 563
Architecture Museum of the TU Berlin (collection of technical plans and drawings)	69 K
Historical Museum of the City of Leipzig	141 K
The Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Berlin	11 K
digiCULT Schleswig-Holstein	18 K
Foundation Haus der Geschichte, Bonn / Leipzig	6,5 K
German Historical Museum, Berlin	6,5 K
Other sources (Kalliope portal)	822 708

Table 1: The total number of digital records in BAM

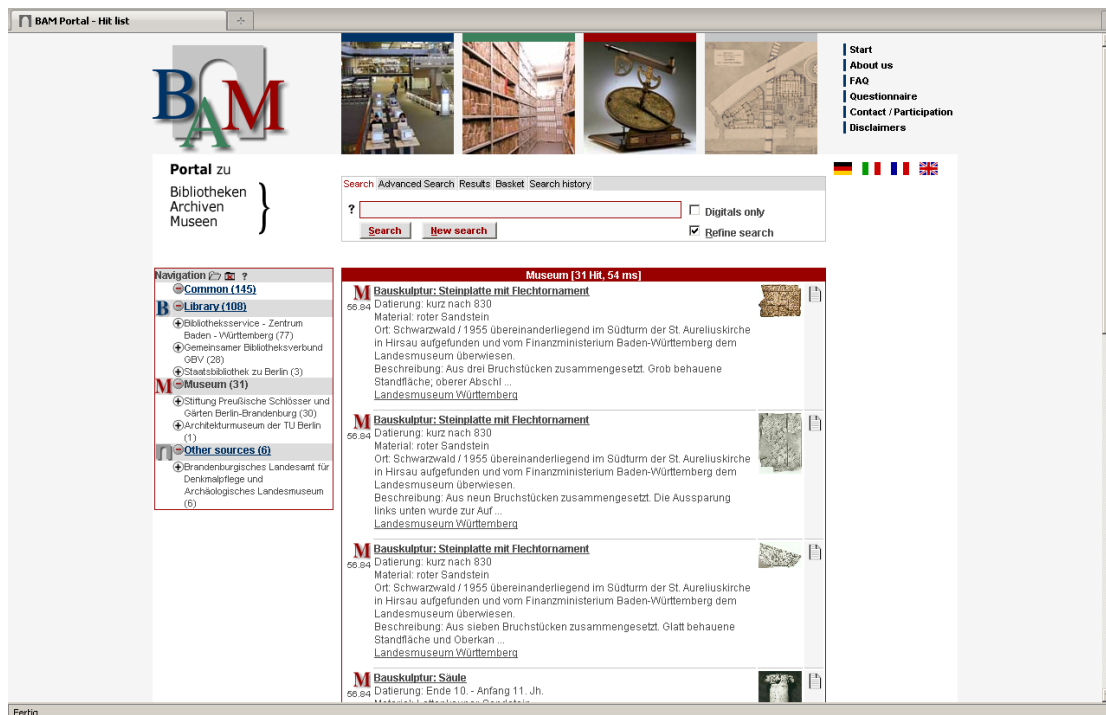


Figure 1: The BAM portal

The BAM portal offers the participating institutions a joint cross-institutional platform for digital catalogues, repertories, and inventories. Therefore, metadata of the participating institutions are collected, stored, indexed and made searchable on the BAM server, while the media content, i.e. the digital materials such as images and – in theory also text, audio and video, is stored in the online databases of the participating institutions who keep full control over and responsibility for their digital materials using BAM only as a gateway and as a means to increase their visibility on the Web by contributing to large digital collection that attracts user traffic. For smaller institutions without an online database of their own, a hosting service is offered by BAM. Such smaller institutions can store both the metadata and the media content of their digital collections in the BAM database which allows them to present their content on the Internet without having to maintain a complex web presence including an online database. As a bonus for sharing their content via BAM, these institutions can include a search form on their websites in order to present their own content on their own homepage. This option is important for institutions with limited resources.

To the present day, BAM is the only German cultural heritage portal on a national level as the German Digital Library (Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek, DDB) is still under construction and is not going online before the end of 2011. Therefore, BAM is currently a single point of access for all users who are searching items of cultural content on the German Web. As a consequence, the potential range of users is very broad, the major target audience being scholars, students, but also a general public of interested laypersons. As it is considered a central educational and scientific resource, access to the portal and the content of the participating institutions is free of charge.

3. BAM Local – Uniting Different Branches of an Institution in one Portal

Apart from serving as a portal for different institutions, BAM is also applicable for an individual institution or a city or region who wants to make accessible its digital collections from different branches such as libraries, archives, museums, photo libraries and media centres at a single point of access. The so called “BAM local” presents a single institution’s or city’s or region’s collections from different sources in a single portal and in this way creates a single point of access for potential users.

The advantage of a “BAM local” application is obvious: most institutions or cities or regions maintain different information services which can only be accessed from individual Web-based applications such as Online Public Access Catalogues in one or many libraries, from search engine interfaces of different Web-based database applications in museums, archives and media centres. With “BAM local”, all these different content providers can unite their collections in one metadata database with a single index and interface. The “Google slot” of BAM can be integrated into almost any Web design by a simple HTML form and the user will be transferred to the BAM results page which can also be adapted to the institution’s or city’s or region’s corporate design. In this way, “BAM local” is applicable for many purposes.

4. Increasing Content Visibility by Collaborating with Wikipedia

In addition to serving as a central point of access, BAM tries to increase the visibility of the digital content of all participating institutions by collaborating with Wikipedia Germany. In August 2007 an alliance was formed that allows Wikipedia users to connect the encyclopaedia’s web links section to a predefined query in BAM using a specific BAM Template (Fig. 2). Both information services can take advantage of this alliance: Wikipedia Germany offers its users a wide range of sources to investigate and BAM increases the visibility of its partners’ digital content and draws traffic to their Web sites. Until December 2008 more than 900 BAM links have been created in Wikipedia and the process goes on, continually increasing the number of links.

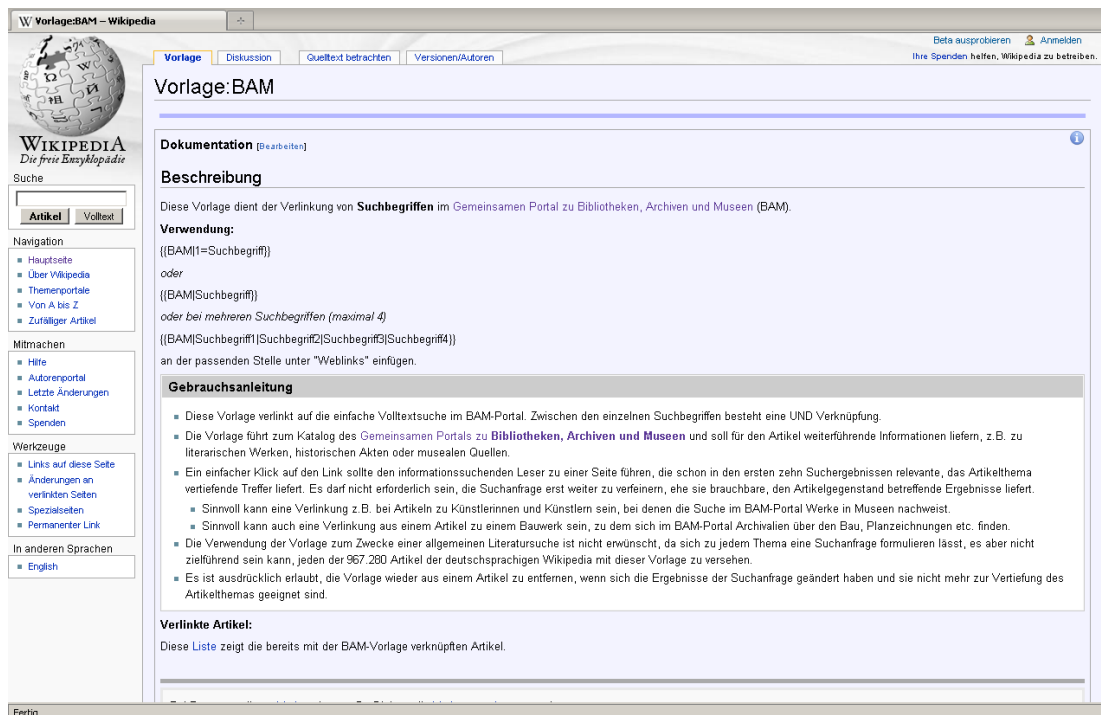


Figure 2: The BAM template in Wikipedia

5. BAM and its Users

A detailed analysis of log files has not yet been carried due to lack of time and personnel. Hence the above mentioned target audience of the BAM portal has to be investigated further. The results of a preliminary examination of the BAM log files shows that there are more than 1 000 visits per day or around 30 000 visits per month (from June 2008 to May 2009). These numbers are small compared with those of major search engines, yet it is a reasonable start and a point from which to continue to build a stable and large BAM community. Especially the link to Wikipedia has increased the traffic considerably as the current examination indicates.

6. Conclusions

BAM – the joint portal for libraries, archives, museums in Germany intends to become a single point of access for cultural content on the German Web. In this way, BAM serves users who do not want to search several different databases at different servers using different search interfaces and vocabularies for access. To do so, BAM combines the different online information services from different institutions in one point of access. In addition, BAM can also serve as a portal for a single institution's libraries, archives, museums and media centres by combining their digital collections in one index under one search interface that can be integrated into the institutions corporate design. Apart from this, BAM also tries to increase the visibility of the individual digital objects in the collections of the participating institutions by cooperating with Wikipedia Germany. A Wikipedia template containing a predefined query to BAM can be added to any Wikipedia article and enrich it with a link to media

content in BAM. Therefore, from our perspective, BAM is a successful tool to empower users who are looking for digital cultural heritage content on the German Web.

6. References

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