

GRAFTON BASIC TEXTS

General Editor:

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**LIBRARIANSHIP AND
DOCUMENTATION**

HERBERT COBLANS

Librarianship and Documentation

An international perspective

Herbert Coblans

Grafton Basic Text

Editor: Evelyn J. A. Evans, CBE, FLA



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*To my assistants
and colleagues in a
number of international
organisations*

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Preface

The subject of this book is part of the history of our culture and thus stretches far back in time. Some of the formal structures described are, of course, recent developments. In trying to show how certain organisational forms are evolving, inevitably one has to limit the field. I realise that my selection may be somewhat arbitrary and even biased towards those in which I have been personally involved. However I think that it might be useful to try and capture some of the spirit of a period, especially since World War I, in which librarianship and documentation have come of age.

Already these stirring years are becoming a fading memory and the character will soon be hard to recapture. Too much of the pioneering work is poorly documented and inadequately written up. Therefore I would plead that serious studies of some of these areas (e.g. the International Catalogue of Scientific Literature, the Institut International de Bibliographie, the Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle) in relation to librarianship, should be undertaken. They certainly should be given fuller historical and critical treatment. In the meantime I hope that students can be stimulated to see our present achievements and failures in the light of a fairly rich past – in other words ‘information science’ did not start with the computer.

In acknowledging many sources of inspiration and help I would start with the great London complex with its incomparable bibliographical resources and bibliothecal riches. It has been a great privilege to be able to work in such a setting. Then I would like to record my debt of gratitude to Edward Carter whose confidence in an obscure colonial librarian made an entry into the world of international librarianship possible. Finally I wish to single out my wife, whose co-operation in the intellectual, linguistic and clerical work, has been of inestimable value.

Chapter 1

Some characteristics of library work and documentation

'Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.'

Unesco Constitution

It is as well to be reminded from time to time that the above words enshrine a profound truth, which is all too easily dismissed by the cynics and the hard-headed. Especially for librarians and documentalists – all those who handle information in some form or other – there is an immediate relevance in the emphasis on 'the minds of men'. For we communicate by language, be it spoken or written, and the record provides that continuity, that accumulated knowledge transmuted at best into wisdom, which has given man his place in the pattern of evolution. The safe-keeping and the proper use of that record is our business and makes our profession difficult, but important and worthwhile.

By its nature librarianship has always looked beyond the narrow group it was serving. In early medieval times in both Christian and Islamic civilisations the dominance of Latin on the one hand, and Arabic on the other, made an international outlook much easier to maintain in practice. But even during and after the Renaissance, with the emergence of the nation state, the book had a universal currency in libraries only limited by the technical problems of printing and paper. By the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries availability had increased enough to make possible the collections which we know today as the great national, but universal, libraries such as the British Museum Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Library of Congress in Washington and rather later what is now called the Lenin State Library in Moscow. (The Vatican Library is a rather special case of such a great universal library.) Furthermore it is these libraries which established the traditions,

Chapter 2

International approaches

For I hold that library service, bibliographic organisation and library classification recognise no national or political boundaries. They are international. The library profession is international. Bibliographers and documentalists are international. As librarian and classificationist, I belong to the world and not merely to any particular country.

Ranganathan.

In Bibliographic organisation^{55(b)}

Once printing had become established in Europe, where scholarly publication was largely in the common language Latin, universal bibliography in that situation was a more natural aim than national bibliography. Within a century the time was ripe for 'a listing of all scholarly publications in the world', as Ralph R. Shaw⁶⁶ puts it in a significant lecture in 1951 on the relationship between machines and bibliography. The man who first gave realistic expression and form to this ideal was Konrad von Gesner (1516–1565), a peripatetic universalist, a near-genius, who in a short life wrote on almost every known subject. Above all he provided a working basis for bibliography and classification and thus can be considered as one of our founding fathers. Born in Zürich, he studied in many centres of learning and subsequently held university chairs in Greek at Lausanne and in physics and natural history in Zürich, where he also practised as a doctor. In 1545 he started publishing his *Bibliotheca universalis*,^{31(a)} a catalogue of Greek, Hebrew and Latin books with critical annotations and extracts, arranged according to a subject classification of knowledge which both represented the medieval consensus and was an important advance as a general system.^{31(b)}

Universal bibliography remained a dream for Gesner, and ever since for that matter. Progressively new complications arose: from the sixteenth century onwards the use of the

Chapter 3

International professional associations

Documenter c'est réunir, classer et distribuer des données de tout genre dans tous les domaines de l'activité humaine.

FID definition^{42(b)}

Originally bibliography and librarianship were all part of the same craft, though not a profession or even an accepted discipline. Embedded in a dominant classical and literary tradition they were almost entirely centred on the book, above all the printed book. It was only in the nineteenth century that the natural sciences, with a growing emphasis on the periodical, the abstract and the subject approach, caused a covert split which slowly led to the emergence of documentalists as distinct from librarians. As we have seen this divergence became overt with the IIB and its evolution into the FID. The controversies were already sharpening when the International Federation of Library Associations was formed towards the end of the twenties. The main issues were well defined and presented by Suzanne Briet of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in her pleas in the early fifties that this complex of crafts had become a profession and that the two warring groups were related parts of the same profession.⁶¹

These controversies, which have certainly done harm to the profession as a whole, began to abate in the sixties. Once again somewhat paradoxically it was technology – the computer – that forced the individualism and the *amour propre* so characteristic of struggling professions into moulds of co-operation. Unesco from the beginning has tried to co-ordinate the work and stimulate collaboration between FID and IFLA.

An important step forward was the joint Congress⁶² of the two Federations held in September 1955 in Bruxelles. This was the most comprehensive meeting of its kind that had ever been held. (It also included the specialist international associations

Chapter 4

International political institutions

Thus the general philosophy of Unesco should, it seems, be a scientific world humanism, global in extent and evolutionary in background.

*Julian Huxley*⁸⁷

While the period between the Wars was a time of growing bibliographical confusion it was in the twenties that one can find the beginnings of a 'politisisation' of academic and professional questions. This trend was to change the whole climate of 'information' realities after 1945. With the activities of the Specialised Agencies of the United Nations as a quarter of a century of background it is easily forgotten that the League of Nations would have no truck with 'intellectual' matters; they were firmly relegated to national jurisdiction or private initiative.

At the formative stage of the League in 1920, the Belgian delegation* had proposed a Commission for Intellectual International Co-operation, 'to undertake for intellectual effort what the International Labour Organisation was to do for manual workers'.⁹² Though strongly opposed, especially by the British delegation, such a Committee was formed in 1921 and as we have seen became the Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle in Paris, largely based on French sponsorship and financial support. It embodied a typically Latin concept, Paul Valéry's *société des esprits*, an intellectual élite, depending on cultural and moral rather than political influence. It was a small consultative body of members (at its largest eighteen) chosen for their personal authority rather than national affiliation, and thus neither subject to governmental instruction nor endowed with money from the League.

It was soon clear that the importance of the book, of bibliographical communication and libraries would be in the forefront. As mentioned in Chapter 2 there were some solid

* Henri LaFontaine was a member.

Chapter 5

Unesco and information services

Ainsi, il faut bien comprendre que la justification profonde de la coopération intellectuelle, c'est bien plus que son utilité intrinsèque, la prise de conscience qu'elle favorise de la solidarité intellectuelle et morale de l'humanité et son organisation progressive en une force contre laquelle les instincts d'antagonisme et de violence ne pourront prévaloir.

*Maheu*⁹³

While library and documentation services are not mentioned specifically in the Unesco Constitution they are implicit in most of what has been discussed in the previous chapter and partly represent the means of achieving the ends for which Unesco is working. The Constitution states quite explicitly that

the Organization will . . . maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge . . . by encouraging co-operation among the nations in all branches of intellectual activity including the international . . . exchange of publications, objects of artistic and scientific interest and other materials of information; by initiating methods of international co-operation calculated to give the peoples of all countries access to the printed and published materials produced by any of them.

In this respect Unesco is unique as no other Specialised Agency has such terms of reference. But it is a tall order and the budget at the time, and even now, was clearly inadequate for so large an undertaking. *Furthermore in the climate of the late forties* librarians, in the eyes of subject specialists, still had limited status, servitors rather than fully accepted professionals. And so the Libraries Division was tucked away in the Department of Cultural Activities, an administrative decision which may have seemed to be justified on traditional grounds (librarianship was usually considered as specially related to literature), but

Chapter 6

Other Specialised Agencies of the United Nations

The unity and complexity of science has grown to such a degree that the library and information service has become a key to conscious progress along the whole front of advancing knowledge.

*Bernal*¹⁴⁰

While Unesco has a statutory responsibility for libraries and documentation in general, it has in practice also acted in certain subject fields where the need has been urgent, as for example in education and the social sciences. Also the Science Sector has always had a strong interest in subject documentation though certain aspects have been delegated to ICSU. Traditionally the other Specialised Agencies, above all the older ones, have not attempted to contribute directly to the international control of their 'subject' literature. This could be considered to be somewhat paradoxical as over the years such organisations as ILO, FAO, WHO and WMO have built up large and truly international collections in their libraries and much unique documentation in their special areas of competence. Of course they do produce bibliographies, multi-lingual vocabularies, international directories of institutions and lists of periodicals.

Two of them have actually gone further and taken responsibility for abstracting services in very highly specialised areas. Thus since 1950 FAO has been publishing 'World fisheries abstracts' and ILO since 1959 an 'International occupational safety and health' service (CIS) in the form of abstracts of the world literature. These presumably fill a need which no commercial or professional organisation has been prepared to meet. They have another typical international advantage, they are available in a number of language editions (English, French, etc.). Both ILO and FAO have also been pioneers in using computers to process publications and documents for bibliogra-

Chapter 7

Subject approaches: national, multi-national and regional

A society which has accepted public responsibility for supporting the libraries which collect, preserve and make available the records themselves, but which is unwilling to support the machinery which would maximize the usefulness of those records, is minimizing the return on its already heavy investment.

Egan^{55(c)}

The bibliographical elements which are used for the identification, storage and retrieval of documents fall into two groups, which can be broadly designated as 'author, etc.' and 'subject'. The former includes personal or corporate author, affiliation of personal author, title, data, form and name of publication (periodical, report, patent, etc.). The latter is far less precise, but probably the commonest way in which the user presents a request for information retrieval. Computer processing has rather blurred this traditionally sharp distinction as increasingly in searching any bibliographical element or combination of elements can be effectively used. None the less the distinction is worth maintaining, as it is relevant to many other aspects of the documentation process.

What I have called the 'author, etc.' criterion has become clearly identified as a national responsibility. Partly by the various Unesco initiatives, international control is increasingly achieved by exchange and sharing through good national bibliography. Early examples of this sort of co-operation are the development of the 'machine-readable catalog' (MARC) format by the Library of Congress and the British National Bibliography.⁵⁹ The standardisation which will really make this essential international exchange possible now depends on the success of IFLA in getting general acceptance for the International Standard Bibliographic Description (see Chapter 3).

Chapter 8

UNISIST

To promote the study of bibliographical method and of the classification of information, to secure international unity of bibliographical procedure and classification and to foster the formation of comprehensive and specialist bibliographies of recorded information.

OBJECTS OF THE BSIB*

With due regard to the change in terminology in more than forty years, the BSIB seems to have anticipated UNISIST in a number of ways. This is not really surprising as the international element has always been basic to librarianship and documentation. The difference is that we now have the political will and organisation, and the technology to proceed to action.

Actually the genesis of what has come to be called UNISIST can be traced to the growing feeling of unease among scientists, which becomes acute from time to time. In the sixties it was the computer which proved to be a sort of catalyst. Thus the 13th Pugwash† Conference on Science and World Affairs held in 1964 at Karlovy Vary was concerned that 'abstracting services and "systems for machine coding and indexing" were covering limited areas of scientific information, and that they were being developed independently so that information stored in one of them was not really exchangeable with that stored in others.'¹⁵⁴ Shortly afterwards in 1966 ICSU and the Department of Natural Sciences of Unesco found that they were both involved in proposals to study the feasibility of a world scientific information system. Early in 1967 they agreed to combine in this project

* The British Society for International Bibliography was formed in 1927 and became the British National Committee for the FID. In 1948 it amalgamated with the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, which then became Aslib.

† These meetings, which started in 1957, brought scientists and statesmen from the East and the West together in a non-governmental setting to face the great dangers of nuclear war.¹⁵³

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Chapter 9

Trends and possibilities

Nam et ipsa scientia potestas est.

*Francis Bacon**

In the preceding chapters the somewhat chaotic situation of the first half of the twentieth century was described and the trends towards a more controlled and less inefficient pattern of bibliographical arrangements were indicated. These developments, often brutal realities, have come about both from governmental action in national situations and as international plans and achievements arising directly from the growing financial constraints of both industrialised and developing countries. A number of accommodations have been made and partial solutions applied and one must ask what are the dangers inherent in these arrangements for sanity and progress in documentation.

In the last five years there has been a monopolistic centralisation of abstracting services for the English language, typically in such disciplines as chemistry and physics. Nevertheless, since the scanning of the world's literature for relevant material and processing it in large computer systems is costly on any reckoning, there are bound to be attempts to broaden the services being offered for sale.† At the same time, partly to reduce costs, these services must avoid overlap and wasteful duplication. On the other hand this need conflicts with the common plea of users that they would like to have all *their* relevant literature reported from one service. A few figures show how considerable is the overlap in such a field as bio-medicine. Thus according to Biological Abstracts 50% of their abstracts are relevant for medical research and a further 25% cover bacteria and viruses. On the other hand it is estimated that half of the references in the MEDLARS store are duplicated in Biological Abstracts. Similarly it was noted above (Chapter 7) that Biological Abstracts

* Knowledge itself is power. 'Religious meditations. Of heresies.'

† Thus as already mentioned (Chapter 7), INSPEC is now providing the ISMEC Bulletin for mechanical engineering.

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List of acronyms

AAAS	American Association for the Advancement of Science
ACS	American Chemical Society
AEC	Atomic Energy Commission. (USA)
AGRIS	International information system for agricultural science and technology. (FAO)
Aslib	(Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, until 1948)
ASIS	American Society for Information Science
BIOSIS	BioSciences Information Service. Philadelphia
BSIB	British Society for International Bibliography
CAB	Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux
CAME	Conference of Allied Ministers of Education
CAS	Chemical Abstracts Service. (American Chemical Society)
CID	Centre for Information and Documentation. Luxembourg
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Moscow
CNRS	Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
COM	Computer - Output Microfilm
DBA	Documentation, Bibliothèques, Archives. (Unesco)
EEC	European Economic Communities
ENDS	European Nuclear Documentation Service. Luxembourg
ESRO	European Space Research Organization. Paris
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization. Rome
FID	Fédération Internationale de Documentation
GES	Growing Encyclopedia System
IAALD	International Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists
IABC	Advisory Committee on Bibliography. (Unesco)
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency. Vienna
ICA	International Council on Archives
ICCP	International Conference on Cataloguing Principles. Paris
ICSU	International Council of Scientific Unions
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations

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IIA	Information Industry Association. (USA)
IIB	Institut International de Bibliographie. Bruxelles
IICI	Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle. Paris
ILO	International Labour Organization. Genève
INIS	International Nuclear Information System. (IAEA)
INSDOC	Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre. Delhi
INSPEC	Information Service in Physics, Electrotechnology, and Control. (Institution of Electrical Engineers, London)
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. Paris
IPG	Information Policy Group. (OECD)
ISBD	International Standard Bibliographic Description. (IFLA)
ISDS	International Serials Data System. (UNISIST)
ISIS	Integrated Scientific Information Service. (ILO)
ISO	International Organization for Standardization. Genève
ISSN	International Standard Serial Number. (UNISIST)
MARC	Machine-readable Catalogue
MEDLARS	Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System. (USA)
NAL	National Agricultural Library. (USA)
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration. (USA)
NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Paris
SDI	Selective Dissemination of Information
SDS	Space Documentation Service. (ESRO)
SRC	originally Standard Reference Code now Subject-field Reference Code. (FID)
TA	Technical Assistance. (United Nations)
UBC	Universal Bibliographic Control. (IFLA)
UDC	Universal Decimal Classification. (FID)
UKCIS	U.K. Chemical Information Service
UN	United Nations. New York and Genève
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
Unesco	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Paris
WHO	World Health Organization. Genève
WISE	World Information Synthesis and Encyclopedia
WMO	World Meteorological Organization. Genève

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