The Future of Latin American Library Collections and Research

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Published by Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials


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This is a brief description of a new two-year grant-funded project that is being undertaken at Yale University Library to catalog and process approximately three thousand titles from our backlogs, which were published in Spain and Portugal but are not in the Spanish or Portuguese languages. The majority of these materials are in Catalan, Galician (also known as Gallegan), Bable (a.k.a. Asturian), Aragonese, Basque, and a number of dialects. How do we identify, locate, begin to organize, and proceed to process this material? What level of bibliographic record will need to be created? Will authority work be created?

Although it is not “Latin American” (unless you count the greater Iberian diaspora throughout Latin America), many SALALM members’ duties, especially during these times of diminishing staff, have come to include responsibility for peninsular materials and studies. In light of many institutions’ budget-driven mandates to reduce or to cease collecting in areas not taught in their permanent curriculum, this kind of non-mainstream library collection may well cease to grow or even to exist in future years, and this may be one of the last specific cataloging projects of its kind for the foreseeable future.

A Description of the Arcadia Grant

In February 2009, Yale University Libraries received a $5 million gift from Arcadia, a charitable foundation based in the United Kingdom. Established in 2001, Arcadia has committed more than $181 million in funding to works that protect endangered treasures of culture and nature. These include international projects to digitize endangered languages, archives, and artifacts, as well as the protection of ecosystems and environments threatened with extinction. Arcadia seeks to ensure that the scholarly resources created are widely available. This gift allows Yale to make the library’s collections of international materials more available through cataloging and digitization. The gift will be paid out over five years, from 2009 to 2013, in million-dollar installments. A portion of the first payment of $1 million is helping Yale to continue its work on cataloging African language materials. With a collection that approaches thirteen million volumes, Yale University Library has long recognized its
responsibility for maintaining and preserving access to the wealth of resources it has acquired during the past three hundred-plus years. One of the library’s Catalog and Metadata Services Department’s ongoing goals is the mission of “Unlocking Hidden Collections” of lesser-known or difficult-to-obtain materials.

As in many other libraries, Yale’s Catalog and Metadata Services Department has seen its staffing levels drop precipitously during this recent decade. For years now, departing staff are not being replaced. However, in a cataloging operation that supports both print and digital programs, we strive to continue to build on the strengths of our remaining staff and take advantage of their deep language, subject, and technical expertise. These are skills that are necessary to fully describe, organize, and provide intellectual access to materials that are often unique or are held in only a few collections.

With that thought in mind, along with a desire to garner some of the Arcadia funding for use in our department and the intention to further reduce our backlog of as-yet-uncataloged materials, our department head, Joan Swanekamp, had a computer query run that extracted the numbers of titles in our backlogs, sorted by language of publication. This is determined by culling the preliminary or provisional bibliographic records of items in the backlog, and sorting by the MARC (MAchine Readable Cataloging) codes for language. The department head compared the list of languages against what she knew to be the linguistic abilities of the original cataloging staff, particularly looking for pockets of lesser-known languages that would be attractive to a request to be granted some of Yale’s Arcadia funding. She noted over three thousand titles published in Spain and Portugal, but which are not in either Spanish or Portuguese. The majority of these materials are in Catalan, followed by Galician (a.k.a. Gallegan), Bable (Asturian), Aragonese, Basque, and a number of dialects (Navarrese-Aragonese, Montañés or Cantabrian, Leonese, Extremeño, Andalusian, etc.). She asked whether I would be able to catalog them. I understand a fair amount of them in writing, except for Basque. I was hoping they would not find any Ladino, which is similar to Spanish but written in Hebrew characters; Aljamia, which is similar to Portuguese written in Arabic characters; or Gitano, because I do not know any of the Romany languages.

The department head’s next step was to apply to the head university librarian for some of the Arcadia funds, in order to hire a librarian to “back-fill” my position as Spanish and Portuguese language cataloger during the time I would be detailed to catalog the “other Iberian” materials. Funding was granted to fill a two-year term position, and we hired a catalog librarian with a good knowledge of Spanish, who was already working at Yale but whose term position was soon to end.

**Identifying and Locating the Materials**

Once we knew there were over three thousand uncataloged titles in what we have come to call “other Iberian languages,” the question was how to
retrieve them from the backlogs. Yale library’s general backlog alone numbers around 150,000 volumes, or, roughly as much as a small college library, and it is located in several areas within the main library building. Each volume or piece is tagged with a barcode that allows the item to be tracked through the various stages of processing and, finally, circulation. An SQL (Structured Query Language) formula was written and run, asking for a list of all items in our backlogs with the following MARC language codes:

- ARG (Aragonese)
- AST (Bable or Asturian)
- BAQ (Basque)
- CAT (Catalan)
- GLG (Galician or Gallegan)

We took into account the possibility that the MARC language code in the provisional or preliminary bibliographic records could be incorrectly tagged or left blank. We could not think of a mechanical way to separate these kinds of records, so we hope that during the course of the two-year project, they will be identified through human intervention as they are retrieved from the backlogs and pass through the periodic searching workflow.

The report listing the three thousand titles was given to the person overseeing student workers, so that the students could begin to pull the items from the various backlogs for me to catalog. This list can be manipulated and sorted by language, title and author, our local database’s bibliographic ID number, location and the date tracked, and barcode number. Staff members were also alerted to give me any backlogged or recently received items in these languages that they might come across. We have experienced the occasional human error, such as a book whose title and text was in French, the MARC language code was correctly tagged as French, but the author’s name, Ignacio Catalan, caused some confusion!

**Project Housekeeping: Tracking and Workflows**

Once I had gathered a few other Iberian items, I requested some shelving be set aside and requested a separate patron status to which these items could be charged, so that we could isolate them from the regular workflows and keep track of their location within the processing function. I created a detailed Excel spreadsheet to record cataloging statistics by month, separating the numbers of both titles and pieces by language or dialect and also by format (monographs, serials, DVDs, CD-ROMs, etc.). Both tasks allowed me to keep track of how much of the project had been accomplished and also to provide periodic updates to my department head, the head of the library, and to the organization funding the project.
Many of the other Iberian language items have been in Yale library’s backlog since the 1970s or 1980s, so the department head made the decision that, once cataloged, they would be sent to Yale’s off-campus shelving facility, rather than housed in our main library, since there has not been a high demand for them. Items housed in the shelving facility can be retrieved within twenty-four hours.

Cataloging Decisions

The vast majority of the titles cataloged so far have been single-volume monographs. There have been several serials and a few items in other formats such as CD-ROMs and DVDs. Bibliographic records are produced at either the full level or at PCC (Program for Cooperative Cataloging) core level. Library of Congress subject headings and full LC call numbers are assigned.

I am creating authority records through NACO (the name authority component of the Program for Cooperative Cataloging), in accordance with national standards and Yale’s local policy. Most often this involves authority records for persons with compound surnames. A few series authority records have been created. The bibliographic records are being exported to OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) for use in cataloging by other libraries and to allow intellectual access to Yale’s collections. Our department head has decided that all of the bibliographic records within this project should have a Language Note variable field (a 546, even when the language was noted in the General Description or Fixed Field). This would allow for identification of the dialects, for many of which there are no MARC language codes. The language name itself can be searched by keyword, allowing us to identify items cataloged through this project.

I have been qualifying the country of publication in the imprint field (260, delimiter “a”), and supplying a translation into Spanish for the locations when the place names in the vernacular are not well-known. For example, the place name Uviéu, appearing as the place of publication on an item would be transcribed as 260 \a Uviéu [i.e., Oviedo, Spain]. Other examples include the following:

Lleida [i.e., Lérida, Spain]
Alcoi [i.e., Alcoy, Spain]
Arboç [i.e., Arbós, Spain]
Ourense [i.e., Orense, Spain]
Gasteiz [i.e., Vitoria, Spain]
Donostia [i.e., San Sebastián, Spain]
A Coruña [i.e., La Coruña, Spain]
Iruña or Iruñea [i.e., Pamplona, Spain]
Bizkaia [i.e., Vizcaya, Spain]
Eivissa [i.e., Ibiza, Spain]
Xixón [i.e., Gijón, Spain]
Vic [i.e., Vich, Spain]

While this may be considered to be unnecessary, or even “boutique” cataloging treatment, I think it provides a service in helping to better identify the item in hand. Additionally, it is useful if there is future need to replace the item.

The Basque Question: Cataloging What You Cannot Read

Even though spoken and published in the Iberian Peninsula, Basque does not have any known linguistic relatives. It is a pre-Indo-European language geographically surrounded by Romance languages. Basque language library materials were included in the project due to geographic proximity. As with most SALALM members, I know Spanish and Portuguese, but not Basque. I found myself having to ponder the question: how does one catalog what one cannot understand?

My initial response to the question is “very slowly.” It is easy for our unaccustomed eyes to overlook and misread or mistype the unfamiliar combinations of vowels and consonants found in Basque. The second part of the response is: look for a “hook,” anything that looks familiar or that can serve as a key into the Basque text. Fortunately, a few of the items that I have cataloged were bilingual Spanish/Basque editions or had summaries or blurbs in Spanish. This helps immeasurably. Lacking those, I search the item looking for recognizable cognates.

Besides searching in OCLC (where so far I have found very little useable copy), I also try searching Basque titles, authors, or series in the online catalog of the Basque Library at the University of Nevada in Reno. There I have been able to find some brief records for some of the fiction titles and rarely have found another edition of a title that I could use as a basis for original cataloging for Yale’s holdings. Finally, I look up keywords in titles or tables of content, in either a hard copy or an online dictionary. This can be somewhat tedious, but not impossible. At times this has given me the satisfaction of solving a puzzle. I have also learned that Google Translate can be somewhat helpful, even though significant amounts of imagination must be used to come up with accurate parallels.

It seems that, for the most part, Yale Library owns titles that are not in the Basque Library in Reno, so in exporting the bibliographic records that are cataloged during this project to OCLC, we are providing a service to the broader library community that will be able to use these records for their own not-yet-cataloged holdings or to request them through interlibrary loan. Therefore, I would like to suggest that in about two years’ time, my cataloger colleagues
might want to research in OCLC any Basque materials that they may have sitting in their backlogs. You may get lucky!

*Just Do It: The Swoosh of Cataloging*

Sometimes the easiest way to begin conceiving of and organizing a project is simply to get started and to develop it as you go. That is certainly the cataloger’s philosophy when we are faced with a large pile of unprocessed library materials. “Divide and conquer” in this particular case means to sort the materials by language (which sometimes takes a bit of time to correctly identify) and to try to do several titles within the same language at one time, in order to avoid confusion and to develop a pattern or rhythm in cataloging the materials.

Prior to beginning the project, I reviewed the LC language and literature schedules (the P class) for these languages. That did not help when I needed to classify a book of poems by a single author in Aragonese. There is a problem with where to class fiction works in underdeveloped LC schedules. The PC subclass is clearly for linguistic works, so the call number for “Texts” would not apply.

While there are LC subject headings established for several of the other languages, there are no subjects for Aragonese fiction. There is “Spanish language—Dialects—Spain—Aragon,” but that subject is intended for philology, linguistics and literary studies in general, and not for a specific work of fiction. There is “Spanish language—Spain—León,” but that is for the regional variation of the Spanish language spoken or written there. There is within the PQ subclass “Spanish poetry (or literature)—Spain—Aragon,” but this is for general regional literature of the area.

- **PC4781–4784** Navarrese-Aragonese
  Called codialect by Leite de Vasconcellos in distinction from Portuguese dialects proper
- **PC 4781.A1–.A5** Periodicals. Societies. Serials. Collections (non-serial)
- **PC 4781.A6–Z** General works. Grammar
- **PC 4782** Dictionaries
- **PC 4783** Texts
- **PC 4784.A–.Z9** Local, by dialect name or place, A–Z
  For language groups use local number for works too general to be classed with an individual language or separately classed smaller group
- **PC 4784.A–.Z9** Translations into foreign languages. By language, A–Z.
  Subarrange by date.

Fig. 1. Library of Congress Class P schedule, subclass PC: PC4781–4784. *Classification Web*, http://classificationweb.net/ (accessed May 22, 2010).
The solution is to class the Aragonese poet as one would a Spaniard, under “Spanish literature—Individual authors,” within the appropriate time period. However, this does not take into account that the individual author may be writing in a language other than Spanish! The time constraint of this project has not afforded me time enough to propose to the Library of Congress that a few subject and class changes be made.

Lessons and Findings (So Far)

Searching over three hundred backlogged items in OCLC, in two months I have found a total of six full-level LC records for some of the items, with LC subjects and call number. Fewer than 10 percent of the items have had records created by other English-speaking institutions, many with incomplete copy or requiring authority work. Many titles have had preliminary vendor records in Spanish, such as those from Puvill Libros, or bibliographic records from the Biblioteca Nacional de España. These vernacular records require the creation of a parallel record with English language subjects and description, which will be exported to OCLC for other English-speaking libraries to use and to record Yale’s holdings for interlibrary loan. Everything else so far, or about 88 percent, has needed original cataloging, which I am doing at either the “Full” or “Core” levels.

Less than two months into the project, I have fully cataloged 212 titles (225 volumes) and created thirty-five NACO authority records. Far and away the largest number of items cataloged have been in Catalan (which is good for me since I find it easiest to read), and I think it will most likely remain that way throughout the duration of the project. Galician is next, then Basque, followed by Bable (Asturian), and the others. I have not received anything in an Iberian dialect yet, but then we have not gone through the entire backlog.

As someone who had cataloged only Latin Americana for several decades, I have been finding that many of the titles are taking me longer to catalog than I am used to, certainly longer than it would take me to do a similar Latin American imprint. I attribute this to my unfamiliarity with some sections of the LC class schedules for these areas and also my unfamiliarity with the history of Catalan, Galician, and Basque literature, famous persons, and local politics. Sometimes a little additional research is required, and I am particularly enjoying this aspect of the project. I am learning a fair amount about the
autonomous regions of Spain and recent politics and economic trends. I am also getting good at using Viquipèdia (the Catalan language “Wikipedia”).

I have been mildly surprised to find that so far only about 40 percent of what I have cataloged has been *belle lettres* or fiction titles. The remaining 60 percent have been in a wide variety of subject areas, including labor relations, audiovisual use in education, dubbing and translating for films, Internet information security, maxims, handmade wooden toys, and stone crucifixes. Percentage spreads have been fairly consistent across the several languages included in the project. They are also similar to percentage spreads across subject areas that I have observed during years of cataloging Latin American materials.

**El Dinosaure Català: When Budget Shortfalls Force Us to Forego Collecting Esoteric Titles**

In a posthumously published article by our dear friend and colleague Scott Van Jacob, Scott writes: “Spain ranks among the top publishing countries in the world…with Barcelona alone being home to at least 278 publishers including Planeta, which is among the ten largest publishing conglomerates in the world.” In 1983, Spain legislated the use of its regional languages as the primary language of education within those regions, ensuring that year after year, more and more students graduate who are proficient in both their regional language as well as Spanish. The end of Spanish censorship in all languages during the last century, along with the government’s elevation of the regional languages to co-official status in tandem with Spanish, promotes a continuous increase in the numbers of people able to speak, read, and write their regional tongues. Additionally, the Spanish government provides subsidies to publishers that produce titles in the regional languages, so it is no wonder that the publishers that Scott interviewed are confident about the future of Catalan language publishing. The same benefits accrue for the other regional languages due to government support and an ever-increasing potential readership. Therefore it is not surprising, as Scott noted, that between 2002 and 2007, publications appearing in Catalan increased by 5 percent. It is good that there are more and more Spaniards proficient in Catalan who will be potential purchasers of this increasing catalog of titles, because it appears as though the market in the United States for “minority” language materials may well be drying up.

A recent internal Yale library document on collection development policy for Spanish and Portuguese languages and literatures states:

In addition to the extensive collection of Spanish and Portuguese literature, the Sterling Library houses a rich array of resources related to the Basque Language and Romance languages in the Iberian Peninsula, including reference works, bibliographies, works on origin and history of language, lexicographical works, and comparative language studies. The collection includes
all languages and literatures of the Iberian Peninsula, including Basque, Catalán-Valencian-Balearic, Galician (Gallegan), and even Bable, Occitan and Leonese.2

Two days after this was written, a Town Hall meeting for Yale library selectors was held, at which our interim university librarian “explained that one of the ways in which the Library will comply with the budget reductions mandated by the University is by taking an additional $3 million from the Central Library collections funds. This is to be implemented strategically rather than across the board.”3 He further went on to state:

if the measures undertaken so far by the University achieve the intended results—we will face a flat budget for the next two to three years, followed by slow endowment growth. However, we have to keep in mind that the general economy will recover at a faster pace than the endowments of large academic institutions. Therefore, we have to think in the long term—five years or more—and accept the fact that we are experiencing a major shift in collection development expectations.4

The interim university librarian presented a list of “Formats and Types of Materials to Be Eliminated or Reduced,” which was drafted in order to provide tangible guidelines for budget proposals that target certain areas rather than impose an across-the-board reduction. Two of those categories of materials whose acquisition will be eliminated or reduced are

very low use materials that would go to LSF [the off-campus Library Shelving Facility] because of infrequent consultation [and] Materials that can’t readily be processed—[due to] quantity, language, formats. More than before, selectors should think twice (and consult with each other, as well as with other departments potentially involved, such as Cataloging or Preservation) before purchasing materials that require a lot of work because of their complexity, processing, or preservation needs.5

Since the materials covered in this “other Iberian languages” project are destined to be shelved off-campus, and because they require a lot of work due to language and scarcity of useable copy cataloging done by other institutions, these are exactly the kinds of materials whose acquisition will be targeted to be eliminated or reduced.

In response to a question from an area studies curator about whether selectors should consult with faculty members in regard to reducing materials in their specific areas, the interim university librarian was quoted in the minutes as having replied: “The Library is going to collect materials in new areas of curricular growth related to permanent faculty positions; it is not going to support scholarly programs or research interests tied to temporary positions. The question we should ask academic departments is: Do you anticipate new permanent positions that will require the Library to collect materials in specific areas?”6
Yale does not offer classes in Catalan, Galician (Gallegan), Bable, Basque, or any other languages of the Iberian Peninsula except for Spanish and Portuguese. Therefore, in order to deal with a diminishing annual budget for new library materials, while trying to support new areas of curricular and research growth, Yale will be buying far fewer, if any, materials in these other Iberian languages. I imagine that Yale is not the only institution employing this strategy in trying to cope with a rapidly dwindling acquisitions budget. This situation raises some questions.

Do major research libraries like Yale risk compromising our mission when budget shortfalls force us to forego collecting esoteric titles or to stop collecting in areas where the current curriculum does not offer any classes? What will the consequences be when university libraries no longer purchase the very things that make our individual collections unique?

In the article entitled “Rethinking Research Library Collections: A Policy Framework for Straitened Times, and Beyond,” our fellow SALALM colleague Dan Hazen offered some general principles to guide academic libraries as they move towards the future. He writes: “As budgets decline and priorities shift, many academic libraries will steer their acquisitions toward the basic texts and sources required for curricular support. These holdings will be heavily redundant across different institutions. Conversely, more and more noncore materials may be entirely missed.” How do we then, as collectors and organizers of the global cultural record, address “missing” those kinds of materials? How much does it matter, to my university and to others, that we may no longer be purchasing anything by or about Galician linguist, journalist, and historian Manuel Murguía (who was the husband of the romantic movement poetess Rosalía de Castro), or building a small collection on a timely subject like the social and educational problems assimilating recent immigrants to Spain within the regional culture of Catalonia?

Hazen suggests that “cooperative activities will become increasingly central to library programs and strategies.” Libraries have been engaged in cooperative activity for decades, but these recent economic times are the worst that I can recall in the past thirty-five years. We are trying to manage with the twin curse of diminishing library budgets for both staff and acquisitions, while dealing with a graying profession, especially within the area studies collections. Could there be some other strategy that we can investigate? I do not know enough about acquisitions work to begin to suggest solutions for our collections. Catalogers organize and provide intellectual and physical access to whatever items selectors purchase. But this leaves me wondering, will I be the last librarian to read Leonese in New Haven? More importantly, will I be the last to read and organize Leonese and its fellow Iberian languages if major research libraries are no longer able to purchase these materials?
NOTES


2. Lidia Uziel, “Collection Development Policy for Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literatures at Yale” (internal Yale University Library document, March 13, 2010).


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.


8. Ibid.