

Introduction: MARC Cataloging for Medieval Manuscripts

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The four articles published in this issue were originally delivered as seminar papers at the Thirty-First ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Preconference, held in Minneapolis, June 19-22, 1990. Since the preconference topic was "The Next Decade: Issues, Strategies, and Opportunities for Special Collections in the 1990s," the subject of computerized cataloging—and in particular MARC format cataloging—for medieval manuscripts seemed a timely one. It was also timely in that these topics have been much discussed among medievalists in recent years, and the Minneapolis preconference—which included a field trip to the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library—offered itself as an appropriate occasion for presenting the results of these discussions to American rare book and manuscript librarians.

My own interest in the question of MARC cataloging for medieval manuscripts grew out of my experiences as a medieval historian and paleographer, as the author of a traditional book-format catalog of medieval codices, as a cataloger of early printed books into the OCLC and RLIN databases, and as a member of the RBMS Bibliographic Standards Committee. Since very few librarians have much knowledge of or experience with medieval manuscripts, and very few medievalists know how library cataloging standards are developed, I began to think about how these perspectives could be integrated with one another and the MARC format and Anglo-American cataloging rules adapted to meet at least some of the needs of scholars who study medieval manuscript books. In the summer of 1989, I (and Thomas L. Amos) participated in two conferences held in Germany, one on the subject of computer access to medieval sources and the other on the use of computers in cataloging medieval and Renaissance manuscripts. These meetings introduced me to five projects which are actively compiling non-MARC databases of manuscript descriptions, and at almost the same time I learned that the Index of Medieval Medical

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Images at UCLA had begun using the MARC Visual Materials format to record and index descriptions of drawings and illuminations in manuscripts.

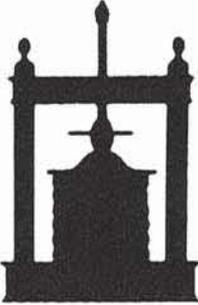
Thus was born the idea for the series of papers presented in Minneapolis and published in this issue of *RBML*. In "Medieval Manuscript Cataloging and the MARC Format," I characterize briefly the present state of medieval manuscript cataloging in traditional forms and comment on the potential advantages and actual difficulties of using the MARC format to organize and communicate the kinds of information needed by students of medieval manuscripts. Thomas L. Amos, in "Non-MARC Databases and the Census Level Record," describes the currently active non-MARC databases of medieval manuscripts, with particular reference to the one he developed for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, and he outlines the effort presently underway to create standards for a census level (or summary) record for medieval manuscript descriptions. In "MARC Format for Medieval Manuscript Images," Sara Shatford Layne discusses her work with the Index of Medieval Medical Images and explains how she has adapted an OCLC-like implementation of MARC to the needs of this project. Finally, Alexandra Mason comments on "Using MARC to Catalog Medieval Manuscripts" from the perspective of a curator responsible both for cataloging and for reader services in a collection that includes a significant number of medieval manuscripts.

MARC for medieval manuscripts is a subject with many ramifications and one that raises many questions. The articles presented here should stimulate discussion on a variety of topics, such as the suitability, present or potential, of the MARC format for computerized cataloging of medieval manuscripts; whether full descriptions of medieval codices can or should reside in MARC databases; how to describe complex codices and how to relate records for wholes and parts of manuscripts, including images in manuscripts, in computerized cataloging (issues far more complicated than in the case of printed books); standards for description and indexing in computerized manuscript catalogs; the problem of name authorities for early names; the level of description needed for minimal access to medieval manuscript texts; the suitability or adaptability of MARC format for census level cataloging; the character and role of non-MARC databases; access to non-MARC databases; relations between the non-MARC databases and the bibliographic utilities; the role of RILIN and OCLC in medieval manuscript cataloging; whether manuscript descriptions should reside in general files or special databases within the utilities; the effect of format integration on MARC cataloging for medieval manuscripts; and the potential for using the bibliographic utilities to update Seymour De Ricci's *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*. Traditional manuscript cataloging, independent efforts to computerize manuscript descriptions, standards work in library cataloging, MARC implementations, and library systems all stand at points of development where informed discussion could lead to closer cooperation among the representatives of these various interests and to creative solutions for

problems that concern both medieval scholars and librarians in the computer age. It is hoped that the information and points of view presented here will contribute to these ends.

One final note on contemporary history: These papers were prepared and presented before the reunification of Germany in October 1990, and thus they refer to several projects or publications developed in the German Democratic Republic or the German Federal Republic as East German or West German. These references have been left intact in the interest of accurate identification, since it is not yet clear just how these aspects of scholarly life will be reorganized in the new Germany.





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