

4-1993

Review of Bibliographic Access to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts: A Survey of Computerized Data Bases and Information Service

Fred W. Jenkins

University of Dayton, fjenkins1@udayton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/roesch_fac



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#), and the [Medieval Studies Commons](#)

eCommons Citation

Fred W. Jenkins (1993). Review of Bibliographic Access to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts: A Survey of Computerized Data Bases and Information Service. *Library Resources & Technical Services*, 244
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/roesch_fac/35

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Roesch Library at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Roesch Library Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.

Bibliographic Access to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts: A Survey of Computerized Databases and Information Services. Ed. by Wesley M. Stevens. New York: Haworth, 1992. 196p. \$22.95 (ISBN 1-56024-224-8). LC 91-32322. Also published as *Primary Sources & Original Works*, V.1, nos.3/4, 1991.

This volume comprises a number of papers originally presented at a special session of the Eighteenth International Congress of the History of Science (Hamburg and Munich, 1989). Its title is somewhat misleading; it is not so much a survey of databases of medieval manuscripts, although several are described, as it is a discussion of methodologies and standards for creating such databases. The contents fall into two parts. The first is a series of descriptions of six individual databases, each written by a scholar involved in its design and/or compilation. These databases include *Benjamin Catalogue for the History of Science*, *MEDIUM (Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes)*, *Zentralinventar-mittelalterlicher Handschriften bis 1500 in den Sammlungen der DDR*, *International Computer Catalogue of Medieval Scientific Manuscripts*, *Hill Monastic Manuscript Library*, and *Corpus of Greek Medical Manuscripts*. Most of these databases are established, although *Corpus* is still in developmental stages. The descriptions of these are valuable for insights into current methods of describing early manuscripts and the problems involved in this task.

The picture that emerges from these reports is one of a cottage industry with little in the way of common standards or methodologies. These databases tend to be designed locally and use a variety of relational database programs. The actual descriptions of manuscripts contain largely the same type and volume of information, but no standard format is used in presenting it. The access points provided also vary with each database. Remote access is not available for most of them at the present time. Only *MEDIUM* is now available for consultation through online networks; the others can be consulted only through their staffs.

The second part consists of four general

discussions of the computerized cataloging of manuscripts. Mayo's paper on machine-readable cataloging (MARC) of medieval manuscripts is of exceptional interest. It presents a balanced account of the benefits (international standardization, integration with other types of library materials) and disadvantages (lack of accommodation for certain types of information) of using the MARC AMC format for early manuscripts. Mayo also gives both machine-readable cataloging and a full scholarly description of two sample manuscripts so that readers might compare them. (Those interested in the topic should also consult *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship*, V.6, no.1 [1991], a special issue on MARC for medieval manuscripts that Mayo edited.) Warren Van Egmond's contribution rejects use of the MARC format for medieval manuscripts and insists on special and separate treatment, which would almost certainly limit access to such materials. Other papers by McCrank and Amos offer a more conciliatory viewpoint, suggesting that machine-readable cataloging of manuscripts be used as a first level of access. This type of record, which would be widely available and easily integrated with existing library catalogs, could then serve as a guide to more detailed scholarly descriptions.

This volume provides a good overview of current issues in providing bibliographic access to early manuscripts. It especially shows the need for establishing international standards for describing early manuscripts and deciding on a standard computer format for the resulting records. Both medievalists and special collections librarians will find much of interest in the book.—Fred W. Jenkins, *University of Dayton, Ohio*.

Cataloging Heresy: Challenging the Standard Bibliographic Product. Ed. by Bella Hass Weinberg. Medford, N.J.: Learned Information, 1992. 217p. \$35 (ISBN 0-938734-58-X). LC 92-9374.

During the more-than-I-care-to-admit years as a member of various committees working on cataloging standards and guidelines, and especially during almost a decade as the Canadian representative on the Joint Steering Committee for Revision