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Subject Cataloging in Germany

Lehrbuch der Sachkatalogisierung. Von Heinrich Roloff. Leipzig, Otto Harrassowitz, 1950. xii, 115p.

The problem of subject cataloging is considerably more complicated in Europe than it is in America for the average research library simply because of the age of the holdings and the nature of the cataloging traditions. With a few exceptions, American research libraries began to assume significant proportions only in the latter part of the nineteenth century; and before acquisition rates were stepped up to the present astronomical proportions, widely accepted cataloging codes, classification schemes and subject heading systems had taken hold in America. Precisely the opposite is true in Europe. Moreover, European library systems have never combined attempts to serve scholars as well as the masses, and neither has the European university library ever had to serve undergraduates comparable to ours.

Roloff, librarian of the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin, is thus free to describe a multiplicity of practice in this textbook without feeling obligated to set up inflexible standards or condemn apparently clumsy systems which originated in past generations and have been adapted to peculiar institutional needs. He does not offer a "sachkatalogische Kodifikation" such as Hans Trebst demanded in his article, "Der heutige Erkenntnisstand in der Formal- und in der Sachkatalogisierung," *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, LI (1934), 449; but he does

present a quite complete survey of current cataloging problems in Germany and a number of points of departure for constructive discussion.

The text is divided into four sections: (1) Historical development of subject cataloging together with definitions and a statement of functions; (2) The problems involved in shelving books (formats; shelving in alphabetical order, by *numerus currens*, by groups, by classification; housing new acquisitions; call numbers); (3) Shelf lists in general and for shelving by *numerus currens*, by groups and in alphabetical order; (4) The classed catalog, with discussions of the basis of classification, a description of various classification schemes (with special attention to the basic decimal classification as well as its variants), the logic of form divisions and subdivisions, the shorthand of notation, conspecti (*rotuli*) and subject indices and classed catalogs as shelflists or as subject guides independent of shelving systems; and (5) The rules for a subject catalog with special attention to the form of the headings, filing and a tentative subject heading code. It is particularly interesting in the latter case to note how many common sense rules for the establishment of new headings transcend linguistic and national differentiation and would seem to be well-nigh universally applicable.

For this very reason it is regrettable that Roloff did not cite practices in English-speaking countries more extensively. Except for the section on the decimal classification little discussion is devoted to routines familiar to us; and of the 85 references in the bibliography, all were printed in Europe. On the other hand, this book grew from lectures in a library school and was intended as a textbook for German students of librarianship; and we can only wonder whether anyone doing a similar book in this country would have given equal attention to the European literature of subject cataloging. Nevertheless, a similar book is needed in English, and when it is published, it should refer frequently to the European practices described by Roloff.—Lawrence S. Thompson, *University of Kentucky Libraries*.