



# The reference function of the Lamont Library

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the School of Athens, from Raffaele; both masterly performances.<sup>14</sup>

If the imagination of a painter is

<sup>14</sup> *Works*, I, xix-xx, n. 12. See also A. Graves and W. V. Cronin, *A History of the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (London, 1899-1901), IV, 1661: 'A sketch from the celebrated School of Athens of Raphael, 27 inches by 5 ft. 6 inches,' listed as no. 40 in the second day sale of the Marchioness of Thomond's collection, Christie's, 18-19 May 1821.

aroused and controlled by curiosity, which was habitually the case with Reynolds, the reading of a book may become a decisive aid in removing impediments of perception. In his estimation of Raphael, it is not unreasonable to suspect that his change of mind was hastened by Bellori.

EDGAR WIND

## The Reference Function of the Lamont Library

THE establishment of a library at Harvard specifically for the undergraduate has carried with it special developments in three major aspects: book selection, circulation, and reference. The general design and function of the Lamont Library have already been described in the HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, and future articles will deal with the particular features of the book collection and of access and borrowing. It is the purpose of the present note to discuss the reference service of the Library.

The Lamont reference collection was selected in the following manner. A librarian on the staff of the Harvard College Library compiled a list of recommendations, making a selection from Mudge's *Guide to Reference Books* and its *Supplements* through 1946. This selection was revised by the Senior Reference Assistant on the Harvard College Library staff and approved by a committee consisting of the Librarian of Harvard College, the Head of the Processing Division of the College Library, the Head of the Lamont Library, and the two staff members previously mentioned.

What is a reference book? There have been various definitions, none of them entirely satisfactory. The term is a loose one referring in general to encyclopedias, dictionaries, manuals, handbooks, yearbooks, atlases, bibliographies, indexes, and outlines. It may be extended to include any general systematic treatment of a subject. Hence, many of the books found in the general collection in the Lamont Library would, in another library, become a part of the reference collection. The division is a matter of judgment based upon the purpose of the reference function, and the use to which the library is put by its patrons.

The principles governing the selection of materials for the collection in the Lamont reference room were both general and specific. 'Usefulness to undergraduates' was believed to limit the collection of encyclopedias and atlases to those in French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Russian but dictionaries for additional languages were included. Encyclopedias and dictionaries of special fields were restricted to those which supplemented curricular areas of learning, such as history,

philosophy, physics, or chemistry. In the same way handbooks, manuals, yearbooks, and systematic treatises of particular fields were strictly limited. American and English biographical dictionaries and Who's Whos are represented. Bibliographies have been included very sparingly, since most of the materials listed would be available in Widener or the Departmental or Special Libraries rather than in Lamont. This does not exclude, however, the general book and periodical bibliographies, lists, and indexes so indispensable to all reference work. These types suggest the scope of the reference collection.

Alcove reference collections consisting of an encyclopedia, language dictionaries, and reference materials in the fields of the part of the collection located on that level are shelved adjacent to each of the three main reading areas. These alcove collections, facing the first, third, and fifth level reading areas, bring basic reference tools closer to the students in the reading areas, or the stacks, than would be possible if the reference collection were shelved entirely in the reference room on the third level. This arrangement also provides a segregated reference area for books that should not leave the building, yet permits these reference tools to be shelved near those parts of the general collection to which they are related.

A further word concerning the principle of selection may be added. The Lamont Library is one of some eighty libraries in the University, most of which are in the vicinity. As one of many, the undergraduate library may provide the general treatises and the fundamental works in special fields and rely on the special library

to supply the specialized materials of its field. This principle applies likewise to the reference collection. When a student's need falls beyond the scope of the collection, he is directed to the appropriate library where he may obtain satisfaction. This makes for economy as well as efficiency.

The reference collection that has resulted from this selection consists largely, therefore, of what are usually called the 'ready reference' tools. These serve as springboards to the general collection. They introduce the student to a field as a whole, give him a general grasp of a subject or point, or answer a specific question. They supply information or they lead to sources of more complete or more specific information.

The classic writings, important treatises, basic texts, and representative authors are to be found in the general collection. A student upon entering the Lamont Library sees books around him. He cannot go to a reading area or from one part of the building to another without passing through a part of the book collection or seeing it at one side. The emphasis in this building is upon exposing the student to the book, and it is hoped that his first contact with this library will be with the books on the shelves. Staff members and card catalogues do not stand in his way as necessary preliminary hurdles, but are provided as assistants when he is in need of help. Herein lies the important departure of the Lamont Library from the past experience of the Harvard student. Never before has he had free access to a general collection of books, a collection selected, housed, and administered for his use. And here it is that the reference staff plays its most



important role. As an interpreter of the collection and as a guide to its proper and efficient use, this staff functions in a way that has not previously been entirely possible.

A student interested in fine arts, for example, will find the histories, biographies, dictionaries, and the more important current periodicals in this field in Lamont, together with the texts on the theory of art and the various arts. These materials will support the general course work and the student's immediate interest resulting from his lectures or assigned reading. When he is preparing for term papers or an honors thesis, he will have become thoroughly familiar with the foundations of his field by seeing and using the books on the shelves. From these he may learn of more exhaustive works as listed in footnotes and bibliographies. The reference staff will direct him to these works and others in the Fogg Museum Library and in Widener. The student thus will be saved the trouble of making a new research effort in the more specialized and complete collection of the University, since he will know specifically what he is seeking and where it is to be found. Students in history, literature, government, and economics, likewise, will be just as well prepared upon going to Widener since the reference work necessary to decide what to use may frequently be done in Lamont, and a student may then be sent directly to the stack locations where his materials are to be found. One important aspect of the referring of students to another library is that the reference staff sends the student to a specific library, to a particular person in that library and for specified material, and telephones the library to prepare that

person to receive the student. This reference preparation is possible for all curricular areas and for any of the Departmental and Special Libraries in the University.

The primary concern of the reference staff is to aid students in the use of the library. The whole staff joins with the reference staff in implementing this principle. The reference staff is available throughout the time the library is open to assist students in locating the materials they require for course work, for collateral reading, for special reports or term papers, or for leisure time enjoyment. As one means of self-help, the staff has posted throughout the building outlines of the classification scheme and subject indexes thereto. A student with a specific subject in mind is directed to the point in the book collection where that subject is represented. The subject cards of the card catalogue supplement the classification scheme. This direct approach to the book stock should provide the solution for most students. The reference staff is available for those who do not find what they want.

The reference staff as well as the other sections of the professional staff constantly work through the collection to eliminate superseded or unused materials. At the same time, the staff systematically reviews the needs of the undergraduate as reflected in assigned and collateral reading and in special assignments, and selects materials from the current and second-hand book market to recommend for acquisition. An essential working collection and a reference staff thoroughly acquainted with its content are thus achieved.

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