Introduction to Res Gestae, libri manent

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Introduction

Ann M. Blair

I am delighted to have been asked to moderate this symposium which is remarkable on so many counts. It is remarkable for the rich papers it has elicited from our five speakers, each well known internationally as curator of rare books at a major institution, who will share of their expertise and experience on the principles and practices of collecting antiquarian books for institutional libraries. This symposium is remarkable too for the impressive audience it has drawn. We have gathered here today many seasoned professionals of the rare book trade and library profession, as well as users and lovers of rare books like myself. This symposium is remarkable, finally, for the person in whose honor it is held—Roger E. Stoddard, Curator of Rare Books in the Harvard College Library.

Roger Stoddard is exemplary of the Harvard Library in general and of the prestigious Houghton Library in particular—"a local institution with an international audience," to borrow the expression that Richard Ovenden applies to the Bodleian at Oxford. This expression carries some anxieties, these days especially, at the difficulties of securing funding to continue to develop the collection with the same depth and range as before; but it also conveys pride of place and of purpose. Roger Stoddard is very much a Boston man, a quintessential New Englander, following on the tracks of other humanistically inclined Stoddards, including Richard Henry Stoddard, nineteenth-century poet and critic. Raised in nearby Needham, Mass, our Stoddard received his BA at Brown University and apprenticed himself, as he describes it, to William A. Jackson, the founding Librarian of the Houghton. After a stint in the Harris collection of American poetry and plays at Brown he was called back to Harvard in 1965 by Jackson's successor William H. Bond and he has been here ever since. This was a period of great growth for Houghton, which had been given independence within the library system in the 1940s and grew by some sixty-five thousand acquisitions during Roger's tenure. Roger Stoddard's specialty in this growth was the European book buying tour, with stops in France, England, Italy and, after the retirement of James Walsh, also Germany and Switzerland.

Roger cultivated an impressive range of antiquarian booksellers, the large and famous as well as the small and obscure, and was willing to move fast, including on books still not fully unpacked in a back storeroom for example. He cherished both the process and the results, as is clear from his description of some of his most memorable successes as well as a few frustrating missteps, and from his repeated thanks to the booksellers themselves who made the acquisitions possi-
ble. As our speakers attest in their papers, antiquarian book buying is subject to many uncertainties and to the constraints of time and an ever-diminishing supply: when might another copy of a work come along? in what condition? at what price? against what competition? Roger entered the fray and brought back to his New England institution books of great value to users from all over the world. These include the classics of collecting—books exceedingly rare of which Houghton’s copy is one of a handful of known copies or sometimes the only one, first editions, first books of famous authors, books that were landmarks in printing history. But Roger also collected off the beaten path with academic needs in mind: he did not scorn the ephemeral and cheap print or the ordinary production of the European handpresses generally poorly represented in American collections; and he paid special attention to the connections between books and to the ways in which our understanding of a book is changed by being set beside a comparable one. Roger carefully constructed many fine clusters of books—successive editions of a work, different works on a same event. These are collections within the collection around which innovative interpretive research can be built.

Roger Stoddard is exemplary too of a figure which often goes unrecognized in the history of scholarship—that of the learned curator, of which many representatives are gathered here today. Learned curators are responsible for example for the painstaking work of untangling the complex web of printing histories; they bring essential expertise and unique insights to the task. I dearly hope that the attention that the history of the book is garnering in academic circles will generate a greater awareness and support of the scholarly work that happens in library settings. The learned curator is to my mind all the more essential today, in the digital age, as more and more aspects of book selection move toward automation. There is no substitute for *judicium*—the qualities of judgment formed from the experience of handling vast numbers of books with attention to the uniqueness of each copy. Roger Stoddard was a pioneer in particular in drawing attention to the annotated book, the printed book made unique by manuscript annotations. His Houghton exhibit catalog of 1985, *Marks in Books*, has become a classic point of reference for scholars in the history of the book who use annotations to shed new light on how books were used and perceived by contemporaries. I am especially lucky to be able to follow up right here on Stoddard’s analysis of a number of fascinating annotated books in Houghton, both in my research and with my students, graduate and undergraduate. My favorites include the student notes in a 16th-century Sammelband of school texts, the censorings in a Spanish translation of Voltaire’s history of king Charles XII of Sweden, and the wide range of markings, sometimes mysterious, in Lucius Fenisetella’s *De saecrotibus et magistratibus Romanorum* (1509)—two of these being Roger’s acquisitions. But while I specialize in a particular time and place in the fashion of the academic historian, the range of the learned curator is positively dazzling. Roger’s numerous publications range from American poets to the Enlightenment materialist Julien Offray de la Mettrie to the intricate international printing history of the Egyptian-born French-language author Edmond Jabès, with many generous tributes to rare book professionals and colleagues along the way.

I don’t even know how often I have used books purchased under Roger’s aegis. I only know in a general way how crucial it is for both scholars and stu-
udents to be able to count on finding a vast array of rare books in the catalog, then on the reading room table, and again on the hold shelves whenever we need them. It takes generations of librarians and dozens of librarians in each generation, and the continuous and very substantial financial support of a major institution to make possible the access to rare books that I take for granted here and in all the other rare book libraries I have used—including the libraries we will hear about today. I am deeply grateful to the library profession for pursuing the elusive goal of bibliographic control, with ever increasing success and sophistication since the days of Gabriel Naudé’s 1627 *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque (Advice on erecting a library)*. Long may the love and care of books as physical objects continue alongside the other media clamoring for our attention!

In closing I would like to thank Roger Stoddard specifically for some special contributions to my life. A few years ago he came to the rescue of my current research project on early modern reference genres with the purchase of the 1565 *Theatrum humanae vitae* of Theodor Zwinger, 1500 folio pages compiling examples of all human behavior. I interpret this work, with its complex system of organization and of indexes which evolved through successively bulkier editions, as a response to the problem of information overload in its time; to have the first edition at Houghton is a real boon to my research. More than twenty years ago Roger was also curator when I was hired as a freshman by Dennis Mannon—the first female book fether at Houghton, I was told, and the beginning of a long friendship with Houghton, which I share with my students by taking my classes there every semester. But even 20 years before that, Roger and Helen Stoddard were instrumental in arranging a blind date between two people who went on to become my parents—so I can safely say that I wouldn’t be here without their help. I am most grateful to both of them!*

*Roger informs me that my father had introduced him to Helen, also on a blind date!*

The papers which follow appear in alphabetical order. Librarians are well placed to appreciate the virtues of alphabetization, despite its arbitrariness. Gerd-Josef Boette is director of the Sammlung Deutscher Drucke at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Boette studied History, English and Philosophy at the University of Göttingen and pursued his professional training in librarianship at Hanover and Cologne. He headed the “Sammlung deutscher Drucke 1701–1800” at the Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen from 1990 to 2001 before moving to the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin where he is Deputy Director of Early Printed Books. He is the author of a number of publications, including a two-volume bibliography of German-language imprints in the United States, and articles on German imprints in the early American republic.

Antoine Coron is Director of the Réserve or rare book collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. He studied at the Lycée Henri IV, then at the Sorbonne and the Ecole des Chartes in Paris, where he wrote a thesis on Justus Lipsius’s *Politicon libri sex* (1589). He was immediately appointed to the Réserve des Livres Rares of the Bibliothèque Nationale where he has been ever since. Since 1993 Antoine Coron has been head of the Réserve which became a department of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in 1995; under his supervision the Réserve’s collection has grown from 150,000 to 200,000 volumes by selection and transfer out of the general collections of the Département des
Imprimés, during the move from the old site on the Rue Richelieu to the new Tolbiac building.

Antoine Coron began by cataloging incunabula when he was invited to prepare an exhibit of the most recent French livres d'artistes. This opportunity directed him toward the modern period and from 1979 to 1993 he was in charge of modern and contemporary books at the Réserve, organizing exhibits on painters like Dubuffet, on the poet René Char, as well as on modern printer-publishers and the bookdealer Lucien Scheler. Today he maintains his interest in recent or contemporary artists and authors without abandoning his former interest in late humanists—he continues to gather material for a general study of the library of Jacques-Auguste de Thou, who stood at the center of late humanism in Paris. Long general secretary of the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie, Antoine Coron is currently one of its vice-presidents, and a member of the Société des Bibliophiles Français.

Claudia Funke is Curator of Rare Books, at the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library of Columbia University. She received her B.A. in Art History from Bryn Mawr, and an M.A. and M.L.S., with concentrations in Rare Books and Archives, from Columbia University. She first worked in manuscripts and archives, then in rare books at the New York Public Library where she became curator of exhibitions in 1994, before moving to Columbia in 1999. She is active in the Bibliographical Society of America, the Grolier Club, and the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries.

James Green is Associate Librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia. He holds a B.A. from Oberlin College, an M.Phil. from Yale in English and American Literature, and an M.L.S. in Rare Books from Columbia University. He started off as curator of rare books at the New England Historic Genealogical Society, then was rare book bibliographer at the University of Chicago Library, before moving to the Library Company in 1983 where he has been ever since. He is also a Master Lecturer on the history of the book at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Jim Green is a very active speaker and author, with a special focus on the history of book publishing, the book trade and libraries in the American colonies. His articles include innovative studies of Benjamin Franklin as publisher, bookseller and bookowner and contributions to the first volume of David Hall and Hugh Amory’s *A History of the Book in America* and Ken Carpenter and Thomas Augst’s *The History of Libraries in the United States*, forthcoming from the University of Massachusetts Press.

Richard Ovenden is Keeper of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. He received his B.A. in History from the University of Durham, and higher degrees from University College London. His first appointment was in the Library of the House of Lords, London, followed by a succession of positions at the National Library of Scotland then at Edinburgh University Library, where he was Director of Collections before moving to Oxford in 2003. The five conferences he has organized and the numerous articles he has published attest to his wide-ranging interests and expertise, including 19th century photography and “the twentieth-century book,” but his special focus is on early printed books, through the Renaissance. He is currently working on a study of the book collecting and antiquarian pursuits of Lord William Howard of Naworth, 1563-1640.