
WHEN DID THE LIBRARIAN BECOME A LIBRARIAN?

Bertil JANSSON

Doctor of Philosophy, Library and information sciences

Coordinator, Linnaeus University Kalmar / Växjö - Executive Office

Former Archivist and Head librarian, University of Kalmar

- The article's focus is librarianship and its development from 1475 to 1780, treated in the doctoral thesis, *Bibliotekarien : om yrkets tidiga innehåll och utveckling* (2010). It begins with defining the library as the working place from which librarians created their future profession. During the analysed period three in progress semi-parallel processes form a complex profession from everyday routines to the common values of the concept of library as an institution with certain qualities and from there goes on to discussing theories of librarianship and finally ends in self-reflecting thoughts upon librarianship and characteristics of a librarian, close to a professional code of ethics.
- Cet article s'intéresse à la bibliothéconomie et son développement entre 1475 et 1780, tel que traité par son auteur dans la thèse de doctorat *Bibliotekarien : om yrkets tidiga innehåll och utveckling* (2010). Cette thèse débute par la définition de la bibliothèque comme un espace de travail à partir duquel les bibliothécaires ont créé leur future profession. La période analysée comprend 3 processus semi-parallèles en progrès, qui forment une profession complexe, allant de la routine quotidienne aux valeurs communes du concept de la bibliothèque comme une institution véhiculant des qualités. Ceci forme un point de départ à la discussion de théories sur la bibliothéconomie et se termine finalement dans des considérations auto-réfléchissantes sur la bibliothéconomie et les caractéristiques d'un bibliothécaire, proche d'un code éthique professionnel.
- Het artikel spruit voort uit het doctoraat van de auteur *Bibliotekarien : om yrkets tidiga innehåll och utveckling* (2010) en bekijkt hoe het beroep van bibliothecaris evolueerde tussen 1475 en 1780. Het begint met de bibliotheek als een atelier te beschouwen waar bibliothecarissen aan de toekomst van hun beroep werken. Tijdens de geanalyseerde periode komen drie semi-parallele processen aan bod die aantonen dat een complex beroep met dagelijkse routines toch leidt tot het concept van de bibliotheek als een instelling met bepaalde kwaliteiten. Verder gaat het met het bespreken van bibliotheektheorieën en eindigt in zelf-reflecterende gedachten op het bibliotheekwezen en de kenmerken van een bibliothecaris die de basis zouden kunnen vormen van een professionele ethische code.

The literature of library history describes great ancient libraries established from about 3000 B.C. onwards. Archaeologists have found that administrative, fiscal and legal documents were saved and arranged in certain order, according to the shape and form of the clay tablets, in what we can consider as an early method of classification. Descriptions of how to manage these different collections are missing, although most certainly the arrangements must have been invented by a human mind.

The literature tells us about library founders, owners and book-collectors. We know about scientists, scholars and other learned men who have used documents gathered in private collections for their own research and authorship. Many of these men are called librarians in literature, but they are most certainly authors, compilers, translators or scientists, as for instance at the Library of Alexandria. Descriptions or regulations of the duties of a librarian at the Alexandrian library are nowhere to be found.

We know about magnificent monastic book collections and we know rather well how the books were produced and used. We even know by whom they were guarded and why. Some congregations, though rare, have rules concerning the administration of the documents but we very

seldom meet those who actually worked with the documents as clay tablets, scrolls, codices or even printed books. Very little is written about the work itself.

In the middle of 15th century when the revolutionary printing invention changed the book-market other needs arose and other possibilities were offered. Due to the scientific revolution and the Gutenberg invention important book-collections were assembled. But a book-collection was not automatically transformed into a library. Something must qualify them for that. We can use Gabriel Naudé's enlightening words in his *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque (Advice in erecting a library)* (1627) about book-collections' transformation to libraries¹. The growing needs for information meant an important expansion of growing collections also a need to take care of the collections occurred. Suddenly the amount of information was huge, with consequent difficulties in obtaining it. The information was not physically easily accessible. In her book *Too much to know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age*, edited 2010, Ann M. Blair enlighten us as regards "information overload", certainly not a new phenomenon, and how the scholarly information was managed. How should a collection built for use and consultation be arranged in a way that makes it accessible for

those who need or want to use it? The answer was about to be found.

Although people were involved in matters concerning books there are no signs or initiatives of "networking" or creating librarians guilds. But using a longer period of time, as in this case from 1475 to 1780, makes it possible to observe several aspects of the development of librarianship and in connection to that, to define the meaning of the library concept. A useful starting point is the bull from the 15th of June 1475, *Ad decorem militantis ecclesiae*, when pope Sixtus IV appointed Bartolomeus Sacchi, known as Bartolomeus Platina (1421-1481), librarian of the Vatican library. Jean-Baptiste Cotton des Housayes (1727-1783), appointed librarian of the Sorbonne in 1780, brings this period to an end with his speech to the General Assembly of the University of Sorbonne in Paris. The speech was originally in Latin, but due to the importance of its content it was translated into French shortly afterwards². Between these two landmark dates official documents and regulations witness a remarkable development of librarianship.

Analysing the content of the librarians' work at different European libraries clarifies and explains the development. The work itself gives the answers to what it is all about. Within the church, at the universities, as well as amongst kings and princes, private individuals and collectors of books important book-collections and libraries were established. Social, political, religious and scientific circumstances raised the need for education, research and access to written knowledge, necessitating order amongst the information sources. This is most certainly one of the reasons why the librarian came into existence.

Library owners and librarians from these various fields with their different needs for information and their different reasons and purposes for establishing libraries create ways of working. Important and most interesting questions are if the librarian's work develops in the same direction, the librarians being unaware of each others methods and demands, and if the librarians have deliberately developed a non-outspoken consensus in the values of their work as well as if it is possible to identify an essence and common value of the work within the examined period.

First aspect: everyday work

In *Ad decorem militantis Ecclesiae* Sixtus IV defined a library as an institution as well as giving the word librarian a meaning and the librarian's work content. Some of his predecessors had had personal librarians but they did not have the

responsibility and the duties given to Bartolomeus Platina. The Pope explains in the bull that he found the existing collections within the church in disorder and they were threatened with being severely damaged or even devastated. Therefore he gives the library special rooms for the collections. He provides financial support to keep the library in order and to maintain an up to date collection, also ensuring that a librarian is paid in order to fulfil these duties. Sixtus IV makes these arrangements because he establishes the library with the purpose of honouring the church, spreading the Catholic faith and giving help, support and encourage learned men in their studies and research.

Library regulations from other spheres of activity describe the librarians' work and duties as shown by these examples from the German ducal library of Duke Julius of Braunschweig-Lüneburg (1528-1589), *Fürstlicher Liberey Ordnung Anno [15]72 am Osterabend aufgerichtet*, from universities as *Articles for the office of keeping the Universitie Librarie*, read and approved on 7 December 1582 regarding the University of Cambridge³, *Sir Thomas Bodley's (1545-1613) first draught of the Statutes of the Public Library at Oxon*⁴ regarding the Bodleian library and from a French university *Ordnung unnd Ampt des verordneten Bibliothecarii de Anno 1616*, University of Strasbourg.

The importance of a librarian is shown from the beginning in the written documents and in the way they are formulated. In general the librarian was responsible for the book-collection, which entailed making a list containing every single volume, taking care of the collection, guarding it so as to prevent volumes being stolen or damaged and to protecting them from decay from mould, moisture or vermin. Besides that the presence of the librarian in the library during his working hours was of utmost importance. Some libraries had very few opening hours and others were accessible all day. In both Cambridge and Oxford for example the presence of the librarian was restricted to four hours a day between 8 to 10 AM and 1 to 3 PM. The need for the presence of a librarian varied of course but the accessibility of the library at certain hours with the possible guidance of the librarian was most important.

The library owners as well as the librarians expressed by words and by actions the necessity of knowing what books there were in their collections. An initiative to what we can call a bibliographical work-process, containing listing of books, creating catalogues, making bibliographies and classifying by subject, is the first area of action. Primarily the work started in order to get control over the local collection. Secondly the

products of the bibliographical work became tools created as a means of improving and enlarging the collections. Thirdly catalogues and bibliographies became effective instruments for information exchange. Interlibrary loans became possible. Ideas of global catalogues arose by gathering, copying and compiling catalogues from every possible known library. Added to this as a part of the bibliographical work is the classification, which of course is crucial for making subject bibliographies. Furthermore the classification codes were also used as systems for shelving the books in the library room.

Apart from special arrangements as at Trinity College in Cambridge the board of the college made annual inspections of the librarian's activities and of the conditions of the library itself and apart from the ordinary library work as at the University of Strasburg, the librarian Petro Schriessheimer (Pierre Schriessheimer)⁵ had to read and look for Latin sententious phrases and translate them into understandable German for the benefit of the students. Michel Beuther (1522-1587), librarian at the Académie de Strasbourg, was allowed during the winter period, when waiting for visitors to the library, to stay indoors in the heated rooms reading in order to widen his knowledge.

During the first hundred years of the examined period the development of the librarians' work was primarily within the area of practical work, developing administrative routines, bringing order amongst the books, making lists and catalogues, arranging shelving and making the books accessible.

Second aspect: visions of the future

After having organized the everyday work, a new aspect or rather a new level in the development of the librarian's occupation appears. It originates from the librarian's ideological conviction and definition of the library as an idea and his opinion of its purposes. While clarifying what a library really is and what is actually meant by establishing libraries the librarian must ask himself what he wants to achieve as a librarian and what role he is going to play. Not until this is done is it possible to have one's own opinion and decide on a personal position as a librarian and from there create visions for the future library, the library's place and usefulness in society and aims for the library activity. It is an area within which several important and demanding questions are discussed.

In 1627 Gabriel Naudé published his book *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*⁶ introducing his

thoughts on establishing libraries. He wrote the book with one purpose which was to be asked by Henri de Mesmes (1595?-1650) to take care of his library. During his medical studies in Paris and Padua Naudé encountered both the libertarian philosophy and learned teachers with important libraries. As a libertarian he was open to all opinions and he was eager to let them be discussed. Openness and far-sightedness were fundamental positions in his thoughts on librarianship. He discusses libraries and librarianship ideologically and theoretically. He describes and proposes in depth routines for everyday work in the library. More important is that he discusses methods as to how to execute the work, he gives reasons why libraries are necessary and explains the librarian's role for this development. He discusses goals and he tries to answer why libraries are useful and why librarians are needed, which leads to ideological platforms.

Gabriel Naudé had visions and he is followed by Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716), whose ideas are very much like those of Naudé's. Leibniz, however, is prescriptive in his thoughts and writings about libraries. In *Bibliotheca Universalis Selecta* from 1689 Leibniz points out what books there should be in a library. He doesn't discuss, he decides. Naudé does the opposite, he discusses but he doesn't give authors and titles except as examples of subjects and opinions. Leibniz, however, has some radical ideas, *Nucleus librarius* and *Myriobiblion*⁷, on how to make science spread and at the same time how to make libraries useful. Leibniz meant it to be the librarian's work to edit and publish the publications mentioned. This implies a demanding role for the librarian and a widening importance of the library. *Nucleus librarius* and *Myriobiblion* indicate what qualifications Leibniz ascribes to a librarian. The librarian is preferably a multilingual polymath. Another important topic for Leibniz was the financing of the library. His success is not apparent, but implementing thoughts on the necessity of financing emphasizes the importance of library activities and keeps the discussion of library ideas alive. Leibniz, as well as Naudé, is anxious to improve the professional status of the librarian. They are both visionary librarians and as such discuss libraries in society, in science and in everyday life as universal, encyclopaedic and public.

Another visionary librarian is John Dury (1596-1680), an English Puritan reformer and an advocate for the spread of general education. He discusses the librarian and the library in his *The Reformed Library Keeper* from 1650. His visions are complementary to those of Naudé's. For Dury, who talks of general education as a means of increasing and improving the common knowl-

edge, the library is a necessary institution and tool and the librarians are the apostles, working actively in tandem with teachers. Dury means that librarians make available to teachers what they can not easily get without help. Consequently pupils and students have the opportunity of having access to more profound and up to date knowledge as members of society.

From the first line of development the three above mentioned examples give a complementary picture of the librarian and move the librarian's work to another line or rather a new level. There are already developed everyday routines. The librarians have found principles for the organisation of the internal structure of work and have elaborated tools. Having done this they do not stop thinking. They have begun discussing what libraries are for and for whom. They have begun discussing methods for establishing libraries and how librarians should handle the growth of book-collections, their organization and accessibility, how to spread and make science known and how librarians could participate in improving social conditions and in supporting educational efforts. Librarians with ideas and visions for libraries and librarianship are now at the forefront.

Third aspect: a new dimension

A third aspect, another new level or in this case even a new dimension, appears rather early but is not really in focus until the middle of the 18th century. Librarians begin to look at themselves and their situation and, occasionally and as far as we know, people outside the sphere of the library communicate their opinions about librarians. This aspect is beyond everyday work and it is not about visions or ideas for the future. It is about the librarian as a librarian, as a person and a human being. The librarian thinks in depth of his concept of his work and his duties, his attitudes and behaviour towards his employer, towards the users of the library, towards knowledge and research and how not only he, himself, fits in the profession but also how others look upon librarians.

The anonymous document, estimated origin the middle of 16th century, *Officio del bibliothecario*⁸ lists the desirable characteristics of a librarian. According to this document a librarian should be a learned man, a man of integrity, multilingual, humble, polite and helpful when receiving visitors and meeting their requests. He must know his library thoroughly and the subjects represented in it.

In two highly emotional documents⁹, Gabriel Naudé gives a very personal view of his librarian-

ship. He talks personally and emotionally of his experiences and opinions when cardinal Mazarin's library, the library he had created, was confiscated and sold in 1652. In *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque* Naudé stresses the importance for a librarian to show appreciation when it comes to already existing knowledge and science as well as to different opinions expressed in all matters and subjects. He is also very clear about the integrity of the librarian and his ability to reject inappropriate pressure from authorities. A strongly developed broadmindedness is important for a librarian.

This dimension becomes conspicuous during the 18th century with an anonymous article in *Mercurie Suisse* (1736) entitled *Lettre sur l'Office de Bibliothécaire* together with *Wie ein Bibliothecarius beschaffen sein müsse* written in 1748 by Johann Mathias Gesner (1691-1761) and the speech of Jean Baptiste Cotton des Houssayes, *Discours sur les qualités et les devoirs du bibliothécaire*, made in 1780 which concludes the period with the embryo of a librarians' code of ethics combined with defining the demands, which a librarian has to fulfil.

In *Mercurie Suisse* the anonymous writer congratulates the new librarian, Mr Enguel, in Bern, Switzerland, with the encouraging and demanding description of the importance of librarians and implicitly the necessary characteristics of the librarian commencing his duties. The author's opinion is that *"nothing contributes more to the utility of sciences than public libraries"*¹⁰. He is of the opinion that *"the office of librarian is the most honourable office a learned man can get"*¹¹. He is very determined when it comes to whom he thinks could call himself a librarian and who cannot. Those who are just keeper of the keys to the library, showing and shelving the books should not be allowed to call themselves librarians. They should more likely be called beadles¹².

Johann Mathias Gesner gives us his opinion of librarianship in *Wie ein Bibliothecarius beschaffen sein müsse* and confirms there, that there are different types of libraries and, consequently, different kinds of librarians are needed, implying that a librarian has to be interested in and dedicated to his task and loyal to his employer. The librarian must be able to communicate in the language they use with scholars, officials, students and ecclesiastical members and representatives depending on the type of library he is working in, as well as having a profound knowledge of the literature in the library. Gesner is anxious to emphasize in detail the appearance and the behaviour of the librarian. Furthermore Gesner insists that the librarian must have sound judgement and not be easily led astray.

Jean-Baptiste Cotton des Houssayes expresses in his *Discours sur les qualités et les devoirs du bibliothécaire*, how difficult it is to describe the qualifications of a librarian because they are numerous and very demanding. The librarian must be a learned man in all possible ways. He must know how to express himself with obvious ease in many languages and show politeness towards visitors in order to evoke mutual esteem. Cotton des Houssayes emphasizes that the quality and usability of the library is introduced and shown through the knowledge, behaviour, appearance and courtesy of the librarian. He is the official representative of the library, with a deep and unerring loyalty to his employer or institution. The characteristics which the librarian has to pay heed to are his behaviour, his appearance, his language, his loyalty to his task and to his employer, his independence and broadmindedness as well as to his own actions, dedication and humility.

Conclusion

From the above examples of three parallel ongoing processes which took place between the years 1475 and 1780 regarding the librarian's work, aspects contributing to the creation of a profession and the essence of librarianship are discernible. These two dates are most important as landmarks for the history of librarianship. The profession developed between 1475 and 1780 for both institutional and individual motives. An essence of the profession is possible to describe as well as common values.

Once the library was defined as an institution with a purpose, it was discussed and explained. With financial possibilities to provide for a library, as a place to keep documents, and a person, the librarian with special knowledge recruited to manage these documents, the prerequisites for librarianship were there. The practical work started. After that the librarians created their visions as a continuum of the experiences from their practical work. Thoughts about the role of the librarian, the goals for the library itself and the librarians as the executors and pathfinders for the future became a natural part of librarianship. There was the need for a code of ethics and a dimension of a self-reflecting attitude important to the librarians themselves arose.

The essence of librarianship consists of several factors. It is related to the document both as object and as source of information. It is also related to the user of the library, meaning that it is essential for librarians to meet users, giving them access to the library, to guide them and explain to them what documents there are in the

library, show the documents and briefly educate visitors and possible users in using the library. Doing this the librarian is convinced of the role of the library as a public right for everybody to have access to documents. Another part of the essence of librarianship is the librarians' own conviction and understanding of studies and research.

It shows during the period 1475 to 1780, that librarians have, probably partly unaware of each other, developed a set of common values. Two different aspects are identifiable. One of them concerns the library and the other one the librarian.

During these three hundred years the library concept has developed to see the library as a public library, open to those who wish or have the need to use it. It is of encyclopaedic character with all subjects represented and encourages all opinions to be expressed and making them available for comparisons and studies. The library also has a universal character, meaning that opinions from all times and all regions are available there. Cataloguing and classification of the libraries' collections are tasks of utmost importance. The library's role is to collect and preserve, follow, introduce and make known what is happening in science and research as well as in society.

Beginning 1475 the concept of the professional librarian develops to see him as a well-educated academic, with knowledge in several areas, having faith in general development as well as in sciences. The librarian is firm and sure of his judgement and not easily influenced by authorities. The librarian allows all opinions and is not partial to any of them. The librarian meets the users and visitors of the library with humility, courtesy and respect. His professional life is characterised by strong loyalty to the employer and the library concept.

Alphonse Karr's (1808-1890) words in *Les Guêpes*: "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*" show the timeless character of the librarian's profession and we can in order to reach the very heart of the profession, apart from the development of different techniques, also quote William Goode (1917-2003) saying that librarians primarily have to "*reduce the anonymity of books*"¹³.

Bertil Jansson
Linnéuniversitetet
Universitetsledningens kansli
391 82 Kalmar
Sweden
Bertil.jansson@lnu.se

July 2013

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Notes

- 1 "Je dis dauantage, que sans cét ordre & disposition tel amas de liures que ce peut-estre, fust-il de cinquante mille volumes, ne meritoit pas le nom de Bibliothèque, non plus qu'une assemblée de trente mille hommes le nom d'armée, s'ils n'estoient rangez en diuers quartiers sous la conduite de leurs Chefs & Capitaines, ou vne grande quantité de pierres & matériaux celuy de Palais ou maison, s'ils n'estoient mis & posez suiuant qu'il est requis pour en faire vn bastiment parfait & accompli". In: Naudé, Gabriel. *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque*, p. 128. For an English version see: Evelyn, Jo, *Instructions Concerning Erecting of a Library*, 1903, p. 123.
- 2 *The translation is titled Discours sur les qualités et les devoirs du bibliothécaire prononcé dans l'assemblée générale de Sorbonne, le 23 décembre 1780 par J-B. Cotton des Houssayes; traduit de latin en francais par un bibliophile.*
- 3 Oates, J. C. T. *Cambridge university library: a history from the beginning to the copyright act of Queen Anne*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-52111833-0.
- 4 Published in *The Life of Sir Thomas Bodley written by himself together with the first draught of the Statutes of the publick library at Oxon*; transcribed from the original copy, written by his own hand, and repositied in the archives of the said library (1906), p. 63-116.
- 5 Both the names, without dates, Petro Schriessheimer, on p. 52, and Pierre Schriessheimer, on p. 161, are given in Fournier, Marcel; Engel, Charles *Les statuts et privilèges des universités françaises depuis leur fondation jusqu'en 1789*. Tome 4. Réimpression de l'édition Paris 1890. Scientia Verlag, 1970. ISBN 3-511-04504-5.
- 6 In English 1661 by Evelyn, Jo, *Instructions Concerning Erecting of a Library*. Reprint from 1903, cited above. In 1950 corrected and a new edition by Taylor.
- 7 The two projects, *Nucleus librarius* and *Myriobiblion*, are described in Schmieder, Anke; Stäber, Peter. Der Bibliothekar Leibniz im Urteil der Zeit. *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, 1989, vol. 103, p. 586-496, and in Widmann, Hans. Leibniz und sein Plan zu einem "Nucleus libraries". *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*. Frankfurter Ausgabe. 1961, n° 77a, p. 1627-1634.
- 8 *Officio del bibliothecario*. Anonymous. Vatican Library. Urb. Lat, 1248, p. 58-59.
- 9 Naudé, Gabriel. *Remise de la bibliothèque de Mgr le cardinal Mazarin par le sieur Naudé entre les mains de M. Tubeuf; Advis à nosseigneurs de Parlement sur la vente de la Bibliothèque de Mgr le card. Mazarin*. In Franklin, Alfred. *Histoire de la bibliothèque Mazarine et du palais de l'Institut*, Réimpression de l'édition de Paris 1901. Slatkine reprints, 1969.
- 10 *Mercure Suisse*: "Rien ne contribuë plus à l'utilité des Sciences, que les Bibliothèques publiques".
- 11 *Mercure Suisse*: "La Charge de Bibliothécaire est un Office des plus honorables don't on puisse charger un Home des Lettres".
- 12 *Mercure Suisse*: "Tous ceux qui sont chargez du soin de quelque Bibliothèque, ne méritent pas également le nom de Bibliothécaires. Ceux qui se contentent d'en tenir les Clés, pour l'ouvrir & la refermer dans certains jours, & à certaines heures; qui montrent les Livres aux Curieux; qui trouvant les Livres arrangez les tiennent nets, & ne font plus rien après cela: Ces Gens, dis-je, ne doivent être apellez simplement que Gardes de Bibliothèques".
- 13 Goode, William J. "Professions" and "Non-Professions". In Vollmer, Howard M. (ed.); Mills, Donald L. (ed.). *Professionalization*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966.