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Rare Books Department

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

« Opening up private and religious libraries to scholarship »
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« Library management workshop: security, conservation,
cataloguing, digitization, and funding »

Tuesday, 21 March 2017

Auditorium Cotsen Hall, The Gennadius Library,
American School of Classical Studies at Athens

*Cataloguing Greek printed books of the XVth and XVIth Centuries: a study on the
practices of great libraries in the world according to their online catalogues*

Context

First of all, a few words on the context of this study.

Last year, we set up an important project to improve the cataloguing of the Greek collections from the Rare Books Department in the online catalogue of the National Library of France. It concerns in priority the integration of the titles in Greek characters with their transliteration in the bibliographic records. All the collection of the Greek books from the Rare Books Department is covered by this project. I would remind that this collection of Greek printed books is one of the richest and finest in the world, at least for the XVth and the XVIth Centuries.

As it is a systematic project on a large collection, I have thought useful to conduct first a methodological reflection, based on the knowledge of the practices of the great libraries in France and the world. Our main preoccupation was, indeed, to avoid isolation from the other libraries as regards our cataloguing practices. In this context, I have studied the online catalogues of the great libraries that own a remarkable collection of rare Greek printed books, particularly of the XVth and the XVIth Centuries. Three cataloguing issues emerged in this study: the transliteration system, the capital letters transliteration and the diacritical marks conversion, the position of the title in Greek characters in the displayed record. I would like to share with you the conclusions of this study and this methodological reflection.

ISO transliteration system (ISO 843:1997)

The system for the transliteration of Greek characters into Latin characters we are supposed to use at the National Library of France is the standard developed by the ISO, the International Organization for Standardization, the standard called ISO 843:1997, « Information and documentation - Conversion of Greek characters into Latin characters ».

The main feature of this international system is that it applies to the characters of the Greek script, independent of the period in which it is or was used. So it applies to monotonic and polytonic scripts from all periods of Classic or Modern Greek. The principles of the standard come from the standard ELOT 743, Greece's official format for romanization of Modern Greek.

The principles of the ISO standard entails divergencies with the Erasmian pronunciation which aims the reconstitution of the pronunciation of the Classical Greek and which remains, outside Greece, the standard in use for the pronunciation of Classical Greek.

Three letters are concerned by those divergencies: *béta*, *êta* and *phi*. According to the ISO standard, the letter « *béta* » is transliterated by the letter « *v* », the letter « *êta* » by the letter « *ī* », the letter « *phi* » by the letter « *f* ». The ISO standard establishes also the conversion of the diacritics: the acute and the grave accents, the circumflex, the rough and the smooth breathings.

Methodology

The study focused on the concept of usage, with the most pragmatistical approach. It consisted in constituting a sample of Greek editions of the XVth and the XVIth Centuries and, based on this sample, in examining the practices of cataloguing of these great libraries. I point out that Greek libraries are not taken into account in this study, because the main cataloguing issue relates to the transliteration and that the principles of the ISO standard come from Greece's official standard for romanization of Modern Greek.

31 editions have been selected, from 1476 (the first book printed in Greek) to 1600, with various places of publication: Basel, Geneva, Florence, Frankfurt, Heidelberg, Milan, Paris, Rome, Strasbourg, Venice, Zurich.

For each of those 31 editions, I made enquiries in the online catalogues of libraries owning a collection of rare Greek printed books, in France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, the United-Kingdom, and in the United-States, with a focus on the great libraries owning the most remarkable Greek collection. I paid particular attention to the practices of the British libraries (Bodleian Library, British Library, Cambridge University Libraries, John Rylands Library, Oxford University Libraries), the German libraries (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin), and the Italian libraries (Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Biblioteca Marciana, Biblioteca Vaticana). In France, I studied particularly the practices of the Library of the Castle of Chantilly, the Mazarine Library, the

Sorbonne Library, the Lyon Public Library, the National Library of Strasbourg, and the Sainte-Geneviève Library.

To those catalogues must be added the following meta OPAC: for France, the CCFr and the SUDOC; for Germany, the Inkunabelkatalog INKA, GVK - Gemeinsamer Verbundkatalog, the Katalog der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek, the SWB Online-Katalog des Südwestdeutschen Bibliotheksverbundes, the VD 16; for Italy, the SBN of the ICCU and the EDIT16; for the UK, the COPAC; for Switzerland, the GLN15-16. Inquiries have been made in the catalogues of other countries, in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Spain. As regards Greece, we made inquiries only in the catalogue of the Gennadius Library.

Following this methodology, we obtained and took into account a total amount of 466 responses of those catalogues for the 31 selected editions.

Conclusions

From this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

(1) Firstly, except for some isolated cases found in the catalogue of the ICCU, **the ISO standard (ISO 843) is not applied**, absolutely not.

As regards the SBN of the ICCU, the fact remains that according to the tests performed, the ISO standard is not applied in the large majority of the bibliographical records, when the official cataloguing rules of the ICCU stipulate that the transliteration of Greek characters into Latin characters must respect this standard. The isolated cases seem coming from a single library, the National Library of Venice. It is important to note that in all the cases examined, in all the tests performed, the diacritics are never converted according to the standard. The only case we have found is in our catalogue of the National Library of France.

Another point must be stressed: if the standard ISO 843 is not applied, it is particularly the case of the great libraries owning the most remarkable Greek collections: for Germany, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin; for Italy, the Biblioteca Ambrosiana and the Biblioteca Vaticana; for Spain, the Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial; for the UK, the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the Cambridge University Libraries, the John Rylands Library, the Oxford University Libraries; for the United-States, the Huntington Library, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Yale University Library (Beinecke Library). It is the same situation in France: no example of the application of the standard have been found in other libraries than the National Library.

Lastly, I remind you that the ISO standard has been created in 1997, twenty years ago: the argument of the necessary delays of implementation cannot, therefore, be invoked.

(2) The second conclusion we can draw from this study: **transliteration practices follow the principles of the Erasmian pronunciation**. Unanimously, the letter *bêta* is transliterated by the letter « b », the letter *êta* by the letter « ē », the letter *omega* by « ō », the letter *phi* by « ph ».

On the other hand, practices differ for the transliteration of the rough breathing, of the diphthong « ou », of the letter *rho* and the letter *upsilon*.

One observes that the rough breathing is not transliterated in the online catalogues of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, the Biblioteca Vaticana, the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek and the Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial.

Certain libraries transliterate diphthong « ou » by the letter « u »: the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the Mazarine Library (but accidentally according to the information I got from the library), the National University Library of Strasbourg, the Copenhagen Royal Library, the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, the Oxford University Libraries, the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

Otherwise, the letter *rho* is transliterated by the letter « r » in the online catalogues of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, the Biblioteca Vaticana, the Mazarine Library, the Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo del Escorial, in EDIT16, in the GVK - Gemeinsamer Verbundkatalog and in the VD16.

Lastly, we can note that the letter *upsilon* is transliterated by the letter « u » in the online catalogues of the National University Library of Strasbourg, of the Bodleian Library and the John Rylands Library.

(3) Another conclusion we can draw is about **the state of progress of the online catalogues as regards cataloguing Greek collections**.

It turns out that libraries scarcely offer in their online catalogues complete bibliographical records of Greek books, with both the title in Greek characters and transliterated.

The British Library catalogue presents this special feature of offering in its bibliographical records the title in Greek characters without any transliteration. Besides, its Greek titles have no diacritics, except the breathings. The other libraries that offer Greek characters in their records are the following: the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (but not systematically and without transliteration), the Mazarine Library and the Sainte-Geneviève Library (but without all the accents and transliteration), the Geneva Library (with transliteration), the Gennadius Library (but without transliteration), the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (without all the accents but with transliteration), the GLN15-16 (with transliteration), the VD16 (but without accents and transliteration).

Complete bibliographical records with both the title in Greek characters with the diacritics and the transliterated title, are to be found only in the catalogues of the Bodleian Library, the Geneva Library and the GLN15-16. We can add the catalogue of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, which nevertheless doesn't offer all the diacritics in its records.

As regards the great collections of Greek printed books, it turns out that the Bodleian Library is the most advanced library for the achievement of its online catalogue. First, about the completeness of its collection, we can note that the Bodleian Library owns 29 of the 31 editions of the sample. Now, except in one case, all the records of those 29 editions give not only the transliterated title but the title in Greek characters.

But the Bodleian Library did not use the ISO 843 standard for the transliteration of Greek characters into Latin characters: its transliteration is conformed to the Erasmian pronunciation.

The current cataloguing policy at the Bodleian Library is to use for the processing of Greek books the system approved by the American Library Association and the Library of Congress ("ALA-LC Romanization"). However, from 1996 to the early 2000s, the transliteration system which has been used could present variations compared to the "ALA-LC Romanization" table, for example, the transliteration of the letter *upsilon* by the letter "u". I owe this precision to our colleague of the Bodleian Library, Nathalie Schulz.

The « ALA-LC Romanization » system

An important feature of the « ALA-LC Romanization » system is that it distinguishes, within the same table Greek, texts written before and after 1453: texts before 1454 are considered Ancient or Medieval Greek and texts after 1453 are considered Modern Greek.

In this system, the rough breathing is romanized by the letter « h ». When it appears with a vowel or a diphthong, the « h » precedes the romanized vowel or diphthong; when it appears with rho (Ρ, ϱ), the « h » follows the romanized *rho* (Rh, rh). Other diacritical marks, such as the smooth breathing, the coronis, acute, circumflex, and grave accents, and the diaeresis, as well as iota subscript and adscript, are omitted in romanization.

I remind that this transliteration system was published in 1997, the same year of the publication of the ISO 873 standard. I don't know the story of the elaboration of the American standard but we can suppose that it is the result of a disagreement with the ISO standard.

Following this study, the transliteration system we have eventually adopted at the Rare Book Department of the National Library of France is the same as the system adopted by the Bodleian Library, the « ALA-LC Romanization » system.

(4) Capital letters transliteration and diacritical marks conversion

In Greek early printed books, we often find Greek capital letters without diacritics, on the title page, in the incipit, or the colophon. The general usage we observed in the online catalogues is to convert the capital letters in lower case letters, except the first letter of the first word in each descriptive field.

However, in some catalogues, we find the practice of keeping all the capital letters: the British Library (for the Greek title, one case observed), the Mazarine Library (for the Greek title), GVK - Gemeinsamer Verbundkatalog (for the transliterated title), Landesbibliothekenverbund Österreich / Südtirol (for the transliterated title), Katalog der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek (for the transliterated title), Universitäts- und Forschungsbibliothek Erfurt/Gotha (for the transliterated title), VD16 (both for the transliterated title and the Greek title).

Transliteration of capital letters without diacritics is an issue that concerns both words in Greek characters and words in transliteration: must we supply the diacritical marks that don't appear in the Greek text? I remind that according to the «ALA-LC Romanization» system, the rough breathing is supplied when it does not appear in the Greek text in capital letters.

Now, referencing the last French recommendation for cataloguing antiquarian books, issued last year, the case of the Greek book is not specified: according to this French recommendation, «Diacritical marks are always transcribed. They are never supplied by the cataloger». About the current Anglo-American cataloguing rules for treating the rare books, it is the same situation: here is the recommendation of the DCRM(B), the «Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Books)», published by the Association of College and Research Libraries of the American Library Association, rules approved by the Library of Congress: «In general, transcribe letters as they appear. Do not add accents and other diacritical marks not present in the source». It is in the paragraph «0G1.1. Letters and diacritics».

In the transliteration practices we have observed, diacritical marks are never converted, except the rough breathing. Therefore, as regards the practices, the issue relates to the transcription of the Greek capital letters. Now, as I have already said, it turns out that libraries scarcely offer in their online catalogues bibliographical records of Greek books with the title in Greek characters, especially with the diacritics. This is only the case of the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (but not systematically), the Bodleian Library, the Geneva Library, the Gennadius Library, the GLN15-16.

On this issue, the choice made by the Rare Books Department of the National Library of France has been to follow the example of the Bodleian Library: Greek words written in capital letters without diacritical marks are transcribed in lower case letters and diacritical marks are supplied. The restitution of the diacritics is indicated in the note fields.

(5) Position of the title in Greek characters in the displayed record

In the case of complete bibliographical records, that is to say with both the Greek characters title and the transliterated title, the question raised is about the position of the two titles relative to each other.

According to the current cataloguing rules in INTERMARC at the National Library of France, the field of the transliterated title must always precede the field of the title in Greek characters. The records displayed in our online catalogue keep this title order: the transliteration of the Greek title appears in the first position.

Now, if we want to reconstitute the title page of the book as much as possible, we have to make the title in Greek characters appear in the position it holds.

On this point, the Bodleian Library is again a model. In SOLO, the online catalogue of the libraries of the University of Oxford, the Greek titles in Greek characters appear in the bibliographical records of the Bodleian Library in the first position, and in bold, before their transliteration.

However, if we look at the record in MARC 21, we can note that the field of the transliterated title, field 245, precedes the field of the title in Greek characters, field 880.

The position of the two titles in the online catalogue SOLO results therefore of a normalization rule of display in the online catalogue, as our colleague of the Bodleian Library, Nathalie Schulz, pointed out to me.

Regarding our cataloguing project at the Rare Books Department of the National Library of France, we have thought it would be better to avoid to change the cataloguing rules and we have asked for a new display rule of titles in the online catalogue.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to make the following remarks:

The first relates to the state of progress of the online catalogues. This study has shown that libraries scarcely offer in their catalogues complete bibliographical records of Greek books, with both the title in Greek characters and the transliterated title. Therefore, a lot of work remains to be done in that field for the great libraries of all countries.

Secondly, specific characteristics of the Greek early printed books are not taken into account in cataloguing recommendations, at least for the French and the American recommendations, as the question of the capital letters transliteration and the diacritical marks conversion. Cataloguing recommendations should include precisions on the case of the Greek book.

Lastly, as regards the international standard for the transliteration of Greek, it turns out that the present situation is highly confusing: on the one hand, an international standard exists, the ISO 843 standard, but it is not applied; on the other hand, one observes that the great libraries owning a remarkable collection of rare Greek printed books follow a common standard, without any consultation. I would like to add that the fact that this standard has been established without any cooperation or any consultation is highly significant: it proves that the practice in question is deeply and strongly rooted and it shows the necessity of a pragmatical approach to this issue.

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