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Two Views on the Increasing Importance of Library Access in the Seventeenth Century: Gabriel Naudé and Claude Clement

By Erin Grant

A push and pull between the preservation of materials and the accessibility of those materials by library users, including the provision of navigable systems of organization, has seemingly always existed in libraries (Wiegand 2007, 531; Lor 2007, 193). Preservation includes the custody of an aggregate of library materials, including such activities as collection development and management and the physical storage, treatment, and reformatting of materials (Cloonan 2001, 232). While one of the fundamental purposes of modern libraries is to facilitate discovery of textual material by users, often including what Umberto Eco calls “items whose existence we hadn’t even suspected and yet which turn out to be of extraordinary importance to us” (quoted in Winter 1994, 125), an unfortunate side effect is the secreting of this very same material “by labyrinthine default if not design” (122). The larger any collection of items becomes, the more important it becomes to have a way to navigate through it to find individual items. Although we might assume the privileging of access over preservation is a relatively modern concept following the rise of the public library movement in western Europe and America in the nineteenth century, the championing of library access by providing a usable organization to its collection has its roots in two seminal library treatises published a year apart in seventeenth-century France by Gabriel Naudé and Claude Clement.

Prior to the printing press, books were expensive to produce and valued as prized assets by early medieval libraries, resulting in the privileging of preservation of library material over user access. In addition to difficult or uncomfortable access to books in medieval libraries, finding a specific book could be

laborious as shelf arrangements of even small collections of books was not always easily understood. Catalogs of library holdings generally functioned only as administrative inventories, sometimes listing books in order of perceived value, in chronological order, or in entirely inscrutable organization schemes. With the lowered production cost of books after the invention of the printing press, the general trend in library administration has been to increase user access to library material (Lor 2007, 193; Rovelstad 1991, 179; Wright 2007, 91). Easy accessibility and navigation of library materials by users has certainly been a fundamental precept of library policy in the last two centuries with the creation of the modern public library and of the library catalog as an organizational and finding aid. In 1979, well before the digital revolution, Gordon Williams, then director of the Center for Research Libraries, repositioned the purpose of the library from the previous objective of building a collection of books as only a means to an end of the library’s true purpose, which he envisioned as providing access to information (Williams 1980, 71). The changing form and ease of transmission of information in the digital age has only served to reinforce access over preservation in this discourse as the most recent online library catalogs strive to function as integrated discovery tools, enabling users to find relevant information from a library’s collection of both physical items and digital content. Although mention of early modern libraries is often neglected in the history of libraries and in library literature in favor of the libraries of antiquity, the growing concern in the seventeenth century with the necessity of access to library materials illustrated by Naudé and Clement informed both the creation of later national libraries open to the public and

the modern library's emphasis on user access over collection preservation.

It is useful at this point to briefly review the development of European libraries prior to the seventeenth century. Growing wealthy from pious gifts and remaining relatively free from regulation by kings, bishops, and a weak and remote papacy, monasteries of Western Europe during the high Middle Ages were in general able to adopt a new role of serving society through education. However, European society was becoming increasingly complex, and the growing necessity of instruction for future government and economic leaders prompted a shift in education from rural monasteries to urban cathedral schools. At the same time, mendicant religious orders were establishing colleges to train preachers to spread their faith and to combat anticlerical movements springing up as a reaction to perceived clerical wealth and corruption. The development of sophisticated curricula in mendicant colleges that included grammar, rhetoric, Scripture, and theology encouraged monastic library development as mendicants were discouraged from owning personal possessions including books.

Mendicant library collections became working collections of books that supported studying, writing, and preaching and served as models for later university libraries (Lerner 1998, 80-82). In France, the rise of scholasticism as an intellectual movement during the tenth and eleventh centuries demanded large collections of previous and contemporary religious and secular literature. This trend first affected cathedral and cloister schools before French university libraries saw an equivalent change beginning in the thirteenth century (Christ 1984, 238-39).

As the largest French library of the medieval era, the Sorbonne typifies the nature of the fourteenth-century French university library. Listing over one thousand titles in its inventory of 1289, all but four works were in Latin; growth of the collection was steady as a supplanting catalog in 1338 listed around seventeen

hundred titles. The *libraria magna* contained approximately 330 books essential to the curriculum that were chained to reading desks, although access to these books inside the library was open to anyone. The primary users of the library were students and faculty, but other users had borrowing privileges from the *libraria parva*, the circulating collection containing duplicates and lesser-used literature, if they left a monetary deposit equal to the value of the borrowed book. The 1338 Sorbonne library catalog indicates that books were arranged in major subject classifications including the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and logic) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music), divisions derived from university curricula plus the additional subjects of theology, medicine, and law. Unlike the catalogs of the Sorbonne library from 1289 and 1338, which functioned as little more than inventories, two additional analytical Sorbonne catalogs from 1321 represent one of the earliest known attempts to help users find individual works hidden in manuscript volumes containing multiple works. These catalogs include call numbers for works in the *libraria magna*, which consisted of two letters, the first representing the reading desk containing the volume and the second the first letter of the author's last name (Johnson and Harris 1976, 118; Christ 1984, 241-43; Besson 1980, 36-48).

During the fifteenth century, European cloister and church libraries in particular made their books available to a larger portion of the public rather than just the immediate users they served, although university libraries remained more exclusive to users (Christ 1984, 315). There is evidence that sixteenth century monasteries allowed wide circulation of their books and some, including the Augustinians of St. Victor and the Benedictines of St. Germain des Prés, even opened their doors to the public on certain days of the week (Setton 1960, 377). The effect of the printing press in driving down the production cost of books was seen more in the proliferation of private collections of books by monarchs and nobles as an expression of

wealth and power than in the expansion of monastic and university library collections in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The sinking estimation of scholasticism in Europe during this time weakened support for monastic and university libraries, and the unintended consequences of the Protestant reformation included the destruction of many monastic and church libraries (Lerner 1998, 100-106; Saunders 1985, 2). By the seventeenth century, European nations were only in the beginning stages of supplanting private individuals and religious organizations as supporters of cultural and scholarly institutions including libraries. Consequently, only three seventeenth-century European libraries allowed access to their collections by unaffiliated scholars: the Bodleian at Oxford, the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana in Milan, and the Angelica library in Rome. Other libraries required scholars to present letters of reference justifying the nature of their work to librarians who discouraged the public with complicated usage restrictions, often necessitating scholars' reliance on private collections of books (Clarke 1969, 333-34). It is within this period in the seventeenth century of relatively limited access to large collections of books by scholars that Gabriel Naudé and Claude Clement published their treatises on libraries, both of which represented crucial arguments in the tension between access and preservation.

Born in 1600 to a family of moderate means, Gabriel Naudé was an accomplished student greatly influenced by the new humanistic learning, earning a master's degree in the liberal arts in 1620. While halfway through further studies in medicine at the University of Paris, Président Henri de Mesmes, a councilor to King Louis XIII, invited Naudé to take charge of his family library of over 8,000 volumes. Accepting the position in order to finance his studies and to benefit from de Mesmes' influence and reputation, Naudé continued his medical studies part time and published *Avis pour dresser une bibliothèque* in 1627, which consisted of rules for operating a library

combined with advice for wealthy collectors (Clarke 1970, 3-22). Frustrated by the difficulties of scholars lacking satisfactory recommendations or prominent connections to access what he saw as small book collections that were physically scattered throughout Europe and too specialized in subject matter to be of broad use, Naudé hoped his publication would encourage wealthy book collectors to establish general library collections encompassing a wide range of material that could be devoted to public use (Clarke 1969, 333-34). Printed in French to reach a wider audience than the smaller educated elite using Latin, Naudé's text advocates the creation of a library collection that represents all available areas of knowledge in order to satisfy the expanding interests and needs of a public including "the humblest of those who may reap any benefit thereby." Representing a break from the contemporary religious orientation of existing library collections, Naudé excluded only the genres of popular romances and light poetry, which he felt were without merit. Material to be collected also included controversial, disputed, and faddish literature, which Naudé felt contained useful information and aided in stimulating readers' imaginations as well as heretical works since the arguments in those books needed to be known and studied in order to be disproven (Clarke 1970, 18-19; Rovelstad 2000, 549-55).

In addition to detailing the kind of books libraries should collect, Naudé also discussed recommendations to make libraries more accessible to the public, in terms of both physical access and the organization of books. Modeled on the practices of the three libraries of the time open to general scholarly research, Naudé recommended that libraries establish routine daily hours open to the public with known users meriting two-week book borrowing privileges and strangers limited to in-library use of materials. The librarian must also create and maintain two separate catalogs of library books: a list of books within individual subjects and an alphabetical author catalog,

both of which would serve library administrative purposes as well as provide general information for users. Naudé did not specifically mention these catalogs as serving as finding aids in the location of specific books, appearing to rely on the physical organization of books on the shelves to allow users to retrieve books on a particular subject. Naudé preferred an arrangement of books that reflected the simplest and most prevalent organization of knowledge at the time into the fields of learning taught in universities. Similar in arrangement to the organization of books at the University of Padua, this consisted of seven basic divisions: theology, medicine, jurisprudence, history, philosophy, mathematics, and the humanities. Naudé further suggested the subdivision of these seven broad divisions into specific centuries or nationalities. Within each subject division, oldest and general books were shelved first, followed by interpretations, commentaries, and special treatises with each book assigned a fixed location on the shelf according to its size (Rovelstad 2000, 552-54; Clarke 1970, 20-22).

While Naudé's treatise represented the views of a practicing librarian, Claude Clement's treatise reflected his scholarly background and viewpoint as a member of the Society of Jesus. Entering the Jesuit novitiate in his teens, Clement studied the classics and rhetoric, later becoming a professor of rhetoric and publishing works in Latin and French before his transfer to the Imperial College of Madrid to teach Greek and Latin literature and history. Inspired by the nearby Escorial library's collection, arrangement, and decoration, Clement first published his *Musei, sive Bibliothecae tam privatae quam publicae extractio, instructio, cura, usus...* in four volumes in 1628, a year after Naudé's treatise was published. The first volume discussed the various purposes of libraries and outlined suggestions for the artistic embellishment and decoration of libraries. For Clement, the primary purpose of a library was to share books and ideas between an educated elite that was capable of reading and

appreciating Greek or Latin texts, a scholarly view echoed in his use of Latin rather than French to publish his treatise. Underlying the main scholarly purpose of the library was the importance of moral instruction and the preservation and renewal of Catholic tradition. Clement's concept of the library user as part of the educated elite was more restrictive than Naudé's vision of the user as anyone who would reap any benefit from the library's collection, although the assumption that this user is a member of the well-educated bourgeoisie is implicit in Naudé's definition (Rovelstad 1991, 176-78; 2000, 545-49).

The first volume of Clement's treatise also detailed the supportive role the library building and its decoration played in enhancing the collection itself, including instructions and guidelines for creating elaborate visual embellishments of portraits, emblems, statues, and murals for the library. These allegorical pictorial elements were designed to morally instruct and inspire library users in the pursuit of knowledge and incorporated religious imagery reflective of Clement's Catholicism. While allegorical paintings were already popular in Renaissance library decoration, Clement codified and fixed detailed written guidelines in a prototype of the design document for artists creating these images, including sources of inspiration; overall appearance of images; the placement, facial expressions, and proper clothing of figures; and particular location of types of images within the library. In addition to the morally didactic allegorical images, Clement's program of author portraits was intended to help users locate books in the library's collection by placing images of authors next to their works on the shelves. Author portraits as finding aids had been used in antiquity and to some extent in medieval monastic libraries, but the monastic use of portraits in this manner was limited and usually restricted to authors in the particular order overseeing a library. Clement compiled a list of 180 standard author portraits corresponding to his 24 subject divisions of books, representing

an attempt at comprehensive illustration of the world of knowledge as a whole (Rovelstad 2000, 543-47; 1991, 179-82; Masson 1981, 1-7).

Clement's second volume treated the organization of library materials and included lengthy bibliographic essays that described the current world of learning divided by subject matter corresponding to bookcases marked with the same subject heading. This resulted in a subject arrangement of both books and bibliography that is a clear forerunner of the modern library subject catalog. Clement's classification system, based on the Escorial's arrangement of books devised by Benito Arias Montano, divided literature into twenty-four major disciplines including the traditional faculties of theology, law, and medicine as well as recently emerging subject areas in the liberal arts. These major divisions represented either a general subject or a group of writers and were not subdivided in order to preserve simplicity. Mathilde Rovelstad describes Clement's classification system as an invitation to learning through elucidating the order of knowledge while his proposed system of pictorial library decoration serves to make this ordering of books even more comprehensible to library users. The third and fourth books of Clement's treatise had little to do with access but dealt with preservation, detailing the physical care and handling of books as well as outlining their advantageous use (Rovelstad 1991, 176-85; 2000, 547-48).

Both Naudé and Clement were concerned with increasing user access to contemporary libraries, although their conceptions of intended library users differed from each other and from the modern library's definition of user, which is more inclusive than either definition. In emphasizing the user's access to library holdings, both men recommended specific

classification systems that sought to make the physical organization of books more apparent than what was currently available, enabling users to find needed information with more ease. Naudé emphasized the necessity for large and broad library collections open to the public organized by a sophisticated and logical arrangement of books that facilitated user discovery and the creation of an author and subject catalog that could function as finding aids. Naudé was able to implement many of his recommendations in his later position as administrator of the Mazarin Library, the first public library in France. In addition to his classification system, Clement promoted the systematic and codified decoration of libraries as a way to inspire users in the pursuit of knowledge and to facilitate the retrieval of specific books by providing visual guidance. Painted panels in the Strahov library in Prague and murals at Schussenried in Germany from the eighteenth century indicate that Clement's ideas were later used as a source for inspiration in library decoration (Rovelstad 1991, 184; Masson 1981, 17-35). Although not often accorded significant importance in library history or literature, the treatises of Naudé and Clement illustrate the rising importance of user access over the historic privileging of collection preservation in library discourse during the end of the early modern period.

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