

# THE LIBRARY QUARTERLY

Volume 54

JULY 1984

Number 3

## THE CARTHUSIAN LIBRARY AT BASEL<sup>1</sup>

Barbara Halporn<sup>2</sup>

The late medieval library had to deal with the rapid increase in publication that the invention of printing had created. Suddenly libraries might increase the size of their collections many times over because of the flood of materials made available by the new technology. The administrators of the Carthusian Library in Basel welcomed the opportunity to add to the collections painstakingly built up in the past by hand copying. One enlightened prior not only encouraged local printer-publishers to make gifts of their printed works to the monastery library but also revised and enlarged the classification schemes and improved bibliographic control of the collection to accommodate the new acquisitions. The *Instructions for the Librarian of the Charterhouse at Basel* (my translation of which is provided), a manual of library policies and practices, survives and provides us a clear look at how one medieval library operated in the period of transition from the manuscript to the printed book.

---

There are some who object to the acquisition of books. Let them consider what a monastery is without books:

A monastery without books is like  
A city without wealth  
A camp without a wall  
A kitchen without pots and pans

1. I am grateful to Dr. Max Burckhardt of the Library of the University of Basel for discussing with me and clarifying for me a number of points about the Carthusian Library. My work on this project in Basel was made possible by a grant-in-aid from the Indiana University Office of Research and Graduate Development.
2. E. 1060 Main Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405.

[*Library Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 3, pp. 223-244]

© 1984 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

0024-2519/84/5403-0003\$01.00

A table without food  
 A garden without plants  
 A meadow without flowers  
 A tree without leaves. [JAKOB LOUBER]<sup>3</sup>

### Introduction

Books and libraries seem always in need of defense against the forces of the philistines. Librarians and administrators of institutions of learning are regularly called on to explain, to justify, and to defend the expenditure of time and money that the collecting of books and the organizing of a library requires. The lines above written by Jakob Louber, the prior of the Carthusian monastery of St. Margarethental in Basel from 1480–1501, show that this was also true in the late Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> Louber presented the mission statement of his library in metaphorical terms that strike us as refreshingly free from the bureaucratic language we use to describe the “mission and goals” of our libraries. Yet these 8 lines contain a familiar and fundamental message: an institution without books lacks the power, strength, and sense of purpose necessary to fulfill its goals. In choosing this poetic justification of his commitment to the creation of a rich library collection, Louber was not entirely original,<sup>5</sup> but we can judge the intensity of his interest in books and libraries by the outstanding collection he built and by the organizational and administrative structures he devised to make these books accessible both to the monks of the community and to the citizens of the republic of letters outside the monastery. Louber’s dedication to books and libraries reflected the values of the Carthusian order itself. The commitment of the Carthusians to reading, scholarship, and the making of books as a fulfillment of their holy mission in the world goes back to their code, the *Statuta antiqua*, which enjoins the monks of this silent order to spread the Word of God by copying books since their vows of silence and solitude prevent them from preaching [2, 3:402; 7, pt. 2, chap. 16.9, 10; 8, cols. 631–760, chap. 28.3, 4]. After the Carthusian order was recognized by papal act in 1170, foundations spread rapidly throughout western Europe. The Basel Charterhouse of St. Margarethental, established in 1401, was the newest monastic foundation in the city. By the end of the

3. [1, p. 4]; my translation.

4. A variant spelling of Louber’s name is “Lauber” [2, register; 3] Louber himself spelled it “Loubert” [4, pl. 6]. A contemporary of Louber, Johann Trithemius, abbot of a Benedictine abbey in the neighboring city of Sponheim, was also a zealous book collector. His obsession with enlarging the library came under severe criticism from his monks and was one of the reasons for his removal from office there [5, p. 8].

5. Variations of this string of similes were current in the Middle Ages. An elaborate list in Thomas à Kempis is mentioned in [6, p. 75].

century, however, it had assembled the finest library in the whole Upper Rhine region, and through its connections with early printers and the university community of Basel, the Charterhouse played an important part in the intellectual life of the city in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries [2, 3:458; 9, p. 82; 10, p. 107].

When J. W. Clark called the fifteenth century "emphatically the library-era throughout Europe" [6, p. 245], he had in mind not only the growth of library collections but also the development of systems to organize the collections and the codification of policies and procedures for their care and use. The library of the Carthusian house in Basel is a classic example. Louber, when he became prior at St. Margarethental, could look to sister houses of the same order for some guidance on how they managed their library collections since at least two had set down written rules by 1436.<sup>6</sup> Communication between houses was good, and it is reasonable to assume that Louber knew how other Carthusian monasteries were managing their libraries.

Throughout the Middle Ages, library catalogs or, more properly speaking, library inventories were created and used for management and control of the book treasures of a monastery [14, p. 15]. These inventories in shelfist order enabled the caretaker of the books to keep track of this part of the monastery's property. Although alphabetical catalogs of authors and works held in a collection were unusual in monastic libraries of the period, the Carthusians were among the first to add this additional point of access for their collections [15, p. 34; 16, p. 58]. Through their own scribal activity over a long period of time, some monasteries had built collections large enough to require systems for bibliographic control in addition to the basic inventory lists. The invention of printing in the middle of the fifteenth century enabled monasteries to expand their collections two- and threefold in a short period of time. Such rapid expansion strained the existing systems of library organization and management. When a collection grew beyond two or three hundred books, the library curator, who often was the steward in charge of general supplies for the house, needed more than his memory to provide bibliographical control. In the period under consideration, the library catalog or inventory was intended for the use not of the patron but of the librarian. The Carthusians, because of their scholarly mission, were among the first to devise new strategies to deal with the problems created by the first information explosion and the rapid

6. The Carthusian houses in Trier and Mainz by 1436 had set down the rules for their libraries, according to Schreiber [11, 12]. Heinrich Schreiber published the manual of library operations of the Mainz Charterhouse, which survives in draft form in [12, pp. 190-94]. Schreiber [12, p. 40] compares the Mainz document with the Basel rules. Max Burekhardt [13, p. 38] indicates that the *Informatorium* of the Basel Charterhouse differed greatly from those of Trier, Mainz, and Cologne.

growth of their collection. Prior Jakob Louber at Basel, in particular, understood very early on the importance of providing new systems of access to the library at St. Margarethental. Under his leadership, the Charterhouse in Basel assembled an outstanding collection of books, developed an advanced system of bibliographic control and access, and drew up a manual of policies and procedures for the management of the library.<sup>7</sup> During his twenty-year administration of the monastery Prior Louber built the library from "almost nothing" to more than 1,200 volumes.<sup>8</sup> Undoubtedly some of these volumes were acquired by the time-honored method of copying and through exchange and purchase. Many others came as gifts from the numerous scholars who took vows and became members of the community. By far the most splendid collection of books received as a gift came to the Basel Charterhouse library when Johann Heynlin de Lapide, after a long career of teaching and ecclesiastical service, entered the monastery in 1487 [18, p. 329].<sup>9</sup> After receipt of this gift, Louber reorganized the Latin collection into two divisions: the Old Library and the New Library. With a few exceptions, the Old Library contained manuscript books, the New Library, printed books. During his administration of the Charterhouse Louber also cultivated the goodwill of the local printer-publishers by allowing them to draw on the library collection for manuscripts to use in producing printed editions. As a result, the local printer-publishers out of gratitude and piety often enriched the monastery library with gift copies of the works they produced [20].<sup>10</sup>

Louber, like his predecessor Heinrich Arnoldi, discharged the dual responsibilities of librarian and prior of the house. This doubling of offices was unusual in Carthusian houses [10, p. 110] and probably reflects the personal interest these two administrators took in developing their libraries. Louber took charge of cataloging books and directed the course of the library in every detail.<sup>11</sup> The catalog that he prepared has not survived, but two extant catalogs are closely related to it.<sup>12</sup>

7. Thompson [17, pp. 621–22] may be correct in his assessment of the system at St. Margarethental as "the most complete instance of classification," but his understanding of the organization of the library is mistaken on most points.
8. "Igitur bibliotheca, quae ante eundum pastorem quasi pene nulla erat. . . . Igitur ultra mille ducentorum voluminum extendit se numerus" [18, pp. 328–29]. Sexauer [10, p. 110] thinks that Carpentarius underestimated the size and quality of the collection that Louber found when he became prior.
9. For a discussion and catalog of Heynlin's collection, see [19, pp. 15–75].
10. The *Liber Benefactorum* records gifts from the major Basel printers of the period to the library of St. Margarethental [20, pp. 60–66; 21, pp. 217–20].
11. Many of the volumes from the Charterhouse library now in the Basel University Library contain provenance and contents notes in Louber's hand [9, p. 85; 18, p. 328]. A facsimile of such an entry in Louber's hand appears in [4, pl. 6].
12. It is not certain what sort of catalog Louber produced for the collection. Bernoulli [9, p. 85] indicates that Louber made an alphabetical (author) catalog, later updated by

One is an alphabetical author catalog of the Latin collection and selected holdings of the vernacular collection prepared by Urban Moser [22].<sup>13</sup> Moser took on responsibility for the library sometime after he entered the monastery in 1502. Moser's contribution to bibliographic control was to create a systematic index based on Louber's inventory. He arranged the index by author or, lacking that, by title. It included the books in both the Old and the New Libraries and significant titles from the vernacular library of the lay brothers as well. Moser analyzed the many miscellaneous volumes and entered them in the catalog along with their call numbers [10, p. 112]. This catalog served as a finding list for the whole collection. Although the *Repertorium* did not contain every work in the holdings of the monastery, it did represent a major advance in bibliographic control and a step toward a union catalog for the holdings of the cloister.

The other surviving catalog of the Carthusian collection was made by Georg Carpentarius, who succeeded Moser as librarian probably in the second decade of the sixteenth century. Carpentarius's catalog is a shelflist arrangement in 2 slender volumes, one for the Old Library [24], one for the New Library [25].<sup>14</sup> The first volume contains the policy manual for the library, *Instructions for the Librarian of the Charterhouse at Basel*, written by Carpentarius around 1520 as a preface to his new shelflist catalog. The *Instructions* contain information on the cataloging of new books, inventorying, cleaning, mending, binding, and circulation policy. I think it very likely that Jakob Louber was responsible for the original codification of library policies and procedures and that the version that has come down to us in Carpentarius's hand is a revision of Louber's code.<sup>15</sup>

The *Instructions for the Librarian* undoubtedly include a number of rules that had been in effect since the beginning of the library, but it probably owes its formulation and system to the organizing spirit of Prior Jakob Louber. Through it Louber was able to establish mecha-

---

Moser [22]. Sexauer [10, pp. 111–12], following Vischer [23, pp. 236, 329 n. 2], thinks that Louber produced a shelflist catalog on which the extant shelflist of Carpentarius was modeled. The latter view seems most likely since Louber's division of the library into the Old and New Libraries would have necessitated the creation of a new shelflist.

13. Sexauer [10, 113–14] describes the manuscript.

14. Sexauer [10, pp. 115–19] describes the manuscripts.

15. In this view I follow Schreiber [11, p. 12], who sees rule 3 of the *Instructions* (see Text below) as an indication that Louber had written an earlier statement of policies. Furthermore, Louber's division of the library into two sections necessitated the production of a new catalog. It was probably a shelflist catalog much like the revised version that we have from Carpentarius in which the *Instructions for the Librarian* appear. I suggest that Louber, when he reorganized the library, also reviewed and revised old library practices and policies and set down new ones to meet the demands of an expanding collection.

nisms for continuity in the management of the library after he left in 1502 to become prior of the Charterhouse at Buxheim. His breadth of interests and his successful public relations contributed to expanding the scope of the fields represented in the collection. His systems for bibliographic control provided a strong foundation for continuity and a model for future development. He was fortunate in his successors in the library, for both Urban Moser and Georg Carpentarius produced bibliographic tools that derived from Louber's work. Louber was, in effect, the architect of a library organization that Carpentarius and Moser continued and that remained until the dissolution of the monastery during the Reformation and the removal of the library to the Basel University Library in 1590.

The *Instructions* tell us a great deal about the organization of this late medieval library and how it met the needs of the community it served. How that community was defined is a question that the *Instructions*, along with a surviving loan book for the period, can illuminate. The library primarily served the members of the community of Carthusians at St. Margarethental. The community of approximately thirty-two men was about equally divided between monks who spent their lives in solitude, silence, prayer, the holy offices, spiritual study, and manual labor, and the lay brothers who lived under somewhat milder restrictions and had greater contact with the outside world in order to take care of the material needs of the monks. Generally speaking, the monks were better educated than the lay brothers. The language of their spiritual and intellectual activities was Latin; that of the lay brothers was German. Literacy was essential for all members of the order. Any novice who could not read and write on entering the monastery was to be taught these skills [7, pt. 2, chap. 17.8]. The larger community served by the library at the Charterhouse of Basel included members of other orders, schoolmasters, professors at the university, and book publishers [26, pp. 28–36].<sup>16</sup>

It will be helpful in understanding the *Instructions* to have in mind the several divisions and locations of the total book collection within the cloister of St. Margarethental. The Old Library and the New Library, which consisted almost exclusively of Latin works, occupied two rooms on the floor above the sacristy and the chapter office; the collection of works in German for the lay brothers was located near their dormitory room; a small reference collection relating to the divine services as well as works for reading at meals was located in the choir of the church.

16. Burckhardt [13, pp. 44–48], using the loan book of the Charterhouse as a point of departure, describes the wide and diverse connections of the Charterhouse with the intellectual community of Basel.

The *Instructions* are written in straightforward Latin to give the curator of the book collections specific guidelines and rules for the management of the library. Although the language of the document is generally clear, the terminology is often elastic and difficult to translate into comparable modern terms. The words *registrum* and *registrare*, for example, appear frequently, meaning variously “catalog,” “inventory,” or “record.” I have therefore translated the same word in different ways, depending on the context. *Bibliotheca*, *bibliothecarius* and *libraria*, *librarius* are used interchangeably for “library” and “librarian,” although the forms *libraria* and *librarius* appear more frequently. I have used Sieber’s edition of the *Instructions* [1], which appeared in 1888, and have taken into account Carpentarius’s additional notes published by Schreiber [11, pp. 14–15]. Sieber prefaced his edition with Louber’s verses. These do not appear in the manuscript of Carpentarius’s shelflist catalog but were in Louber’s catalog, which disappeared from the Basel University Library sometime in the nineteenth century [10, p. 111]. Since I presented a translation of these lines at the beginning of this article, I will not repeat them here.

## Text

### Instructions for the Librarian of the Charterhouse in Basel

We are advised to give every care and attention to our books to prevent them from being soiled by smoke and dust or any other kind of dirt (Guigo, *Statuta*, pt. 2, chap. 16.9). Our *Statutes* further advise:

Certainly we want books produced with great devotion and then guarded very carefully as if they were eternal food for our souls; thus we can spread the word of God through copying since we cannot preach. We have copied so many books that we seem to turn the heralds of truth to our advantage in our hope for reward from God because of all those who will be turned from error or advance in universal truth and because of all those who feel remorse for their sins and error or are kindled with desire for the Heavenly Father as a result of our books. [Pt. 2, chap. 16.10]

Therefore, let it be abundantly clear how much attention we owe to our libraries and how much care the person charged with responsibility for the books must take. The *Statutes* assign these particular duties to the sacristan as the following rules indicate:

We should ask for and receive books for reading or for copying from the sacristan. [Pt. 1, an. chap. 34.9]

The sacristan should write it down when books are borrowed; he should get and keep a pledge [*pignus*]. [Chap. 41.31]

If the responsibility for keeping the books is given either to the sacristan or to someone else, he can and should operate according to the following rules and policies in order to fulfill properly the will of the order and the practices of the house.

*Rule 1*

The librarian shall frequently and dutifully inspect each library to see that individual books are located in their proper cases. When he finds books lying about out of order, he should collect them together, arrange them in order, and then examine them to see if their outside leaves are glued or not or if the text has fallen out or some other external damage has occurred. Furthermore, if he finds that the clasps on the books are broken or have been torn off, he should have them fixed as soon as possible.

*Rule 2*

The librarian should diligently read and reread the catalogs [*registra*] of each library. By making frequent reference to the union catalog of the whole library [*Repertorium universale totius librariae*] or the large [shelflist] catalog [*magnum Registrum*] in which particular areas are recorded, he is thus able to know quickly what is missing or to answer the requests of particular individuals, whether members of the community or outsiders.

*Rule 3*

The librarian should carefully observe the time when the library is to be cleaned, inventoried, and cataloged. He can find that information from a certain special record book that was recently made concerning these matters, called the general record [*Registrum usuale*]. Nevertheless, whenever he sees that bookworms are many and dust or mold excessive, he should first inform his superior about this, and, on instructions from his superior, he should then take remedial action. Although Jakob Louber, the former prior of this house, wrote in the old register that an inventory [*registratio*] should take place annually, it does not always seem necessary, especially in the Old Library, whose volumes are very rarely taken out. It seems adequate to have a regular inventory of that collection every four years. It should, however, be cleaned more often and the books shaken out to remove any insects that may appear. The New Library, on the other hand, if there are no new books to be entered in the catalog, should be reviewed at least every two years because the volumes in it are more frequently taken away to cells or are lent elsewhere.

Likewise, the library of the lay brothers should also be inventoried at least every two years or at least examined completely because its volumes



are not yet marked by location as are the Latin books. Consequently many books may disappear or get lost unless they are looked for rather often, as the general record book and the catalog of vernacular books suggest. Just how these works should be cataloged will be explained below.

*Rule 4: Cleaning the Library*

Although the library ought to be cleaned, inventoried, and cataloged on the same schedule, these activities should not take place simultaneously—namely, cleaning should not take place at the same time as the inventorying/cataloging process. This places too great a burden on the community; the jobs should be done at alternate times in each of the libraries as the opportunity arises. What was done, what books were missing, what changes are to be made should be recorded in the general record book. It is not necessary to recall books from the cells when the library is only being cleaned. They should be recalled only at the time of the inventory.

*Rule 5: How to Clean the Library*

When it is time for the library to be cleaned, proceed in the following way. After the prior gives the order for the library to be cleaned by the combined effort of the whole congregation, the librarian will set out water, old rags, cloths, small brooms, et cetera. Then with the assistance of the members of the congregation working in groups as large as can be accommodated at individual bookcases, first take the books from their bookcases in order and place them on a table or the floor in call-number order so that they can be returned quickly to their proper places afterwards. Then gradually wet down the individual shelves and compartments with the rags and cloths. Dry the washed shelves immediately. Meanwhile shake out the books to remove insects and any dirt settled on or in them. Afterwards when the shelves are dry, replace the books in order from top to bottom. Finally, clean the whole floor, although it ought to be sprinkled frequently throughout the process in order to settle any dust that has been stirred up. The rest—what is appropriate and what is not—is clear from custom. Furthermore, the brother who is in charge of the library for the lay brothers should clean it as often as necessary.

*Rule 6: The Procedure for Inventorying and Cataloging*

1. When it is time for the library to be inventoried and cataloged, see that library paste is provided for good strong gluing.
2. All books that are kept in cells should be returned; those in particular that belong to the second library, that is, if the New Library is to be

inventoried, all those books belonging to it should be returned. It will be more convenient to do this before the communal tasks on the seventh day or at least on a single day in order to take care of this chore efficiently.

3. Books on loan according to the charge record [*registrum recognitionum*] should be recalled so that all books are at hand. The note of surety [*recognitio*] should be returned to the borrower with an indication that the loan has been discharged.

4. When all books are shelved in their proper bookcases, the catalog of the library that is being inventoried should be read. Carefully observe if any book is missing and immediately note it on a sheet and afterward look for it. In addition, if the back leaves of books are missing or loose and falling out, et cetera, it should be noted so that they can be fixed immediately before the books are again loaned. Further it should be noted that sometimes among the small books, particularly in the bookcases E and I, the titles have not been marked in full on their covers in the same way they appear in the catalog because the covers are so small. If there is any question, look inside at the headings of the treatises where the titles appear in a form more consistent with the catalog.

5. Examine thoroughly the empty spaces on the shelves that might be filled with other books in the same classification. Bring out all unclassified books. Then after considering them, decide where each unclassified book should be placed. Special care should be taken to see that they are not assigned to the wrong bookcases. It is better to leave some spaces empty than to classify books incorrectly. In addition when such books are classified as described, the title and call number should be written inside and they should be marked on the leaves or covers immediately to prevent them from getting lost afterward because of forgetfulness.

6. The librarian should see to it that no books are taken away until he knows that everything has been fully, properly, and permanently marked and processed, in order to avoid taking up an unbearable task later because something was overlooked through carelessness in the process of cataloging. He should not allow new books to be taken out but should take them with him to his cell until they are marked inside and outside and are recorded in the catalog like the rest. Meanwhile he should also have any missing books looked for while the books are still in the bookcases. He should check, if necessary, even the cells as the fathers used to do in times past because some books are kept in the cells out of forgetfulness.

7. After these things have been properly carried out, the librarian should in due course report to the prior that books can now be taken out with his permission according to the regular custom, that is, that individ-

uals may receive books they want, starting in order from the older members to the younger members. They may take as many as they want, but one at a time, up to, but not more than, thirty books in accordance with the policy of the house. But in case some members have special permission to take particular books that they were already using, the librarian can allow this at the earliest opportunity before the communal distribution takes place. He ought not, however, be seen releasing these books because of the grumbling that may occur as a result of the exceptions made by the prior. For information on the inventorying and cataloging of vernacular books, see the note at the beginning of the catalog of that collection.

*Rule 7: The Loan of Books*

The *Statutes* say that when books are loaned the sacristan gets and keeps a pledge; if the library is not in the charge of the sacristan, the librarian should do this. Furthermore, he should not lend books to outsiders or anyone without the special permission of the prior. Then he should require from them a note of surety written by their own hand, which the librarian shall keep separate in his own possession in the box for notes of surety. Then he should immediately write down the books borrowed in the charge record so he will not forget, recording the name of the borrower, day, and year along with the letter and number of the volume. It should also be noted that it was the decision of the community, and the prior agreed, that books not be loaned indiscriminately to anyone on the outside unless he is of such a sort that the prior could not refuse. Books should certainly not be loaned to students or unknown priests. The same is true in the use of the vernacular books. Furthermore, no member of the house should lend any book to any outsider without the permission of the prior and without the knowledge of the librarian, even if the book is to be returned within three days.

*Rule 8: Books in the Vernacular*

The vernacular books [that is, those in German] have been entrusted to the steward [*cellerarius*], who keeps them near the lay brothers in a special separate cupboard beside their sleeping room. To prevent the loss or deterioration of the books due to his neglect and carelessness, the librarian ought to advise him from time to time to examine the books carefully and occasionally to shake the dust from them. He should not make books available indiscriminately to individual brothers, except those that seem useful, and with the approval of the prior. He should carefully record what books he made available or loaned so that, if some member of the congregation happens to ask for any of these, they can be found quickly and returned. Nor should he ever lend to any outsider

without the permission of his superiors or without the knowledge of the librarian, who regularly keeps the special record of these loans in his possession. Further, concerning those vernacular books that belong to the Latin library, the steward is not allowed access, et cetera.

*Rule 9*

When the librarian wants to change or transfer some books from their first bookcase (which is usually not done without great effort), the reason why it is to be done ought to be reflected in a section of the general record. Even though it may seem useful, he should transfer books rarely and only when there is a pressing need. This is not simply because of the labor and difficulty of correcting and changing the catalog but also because of the displeasure and aggravation of the congregation for whom this creates an opportunity for suspicion and complaint about trifles. Insofar as it is possible in all future cataloging, books should be allowed to remain in their usual places especially in the union catalog of both libraries. For when any book has been transferred, the number and letter will have to be changed too. Since it often happens that many works are contained in the same volume under the same number and letter, it would certainly be very troublesome to make the changes in the union catalog. Some think that many books should be transferred [that is, reclassified] since their contents are not consistent with or reflected in the headings of the bookcases in which they are located—a situation that is considered improper and disorganized. Although some books could be put in different bookcases because of the variety of subject matter in them, it has not been done because of the amount of work involved, as outlined above. It seems best, therefore, to wait until the New Library is full. That will be a convenient time to make necessary changes and to separate the old and rarely used books from each library and to take them to a special location, or to place them in a special new bookcase built for that purpose, and to locate the more useful and valuable books in the New Library; then manuscript books and other less-used books will be kept in the Old Library and a new catalog will be made. Nevertheless all these things cannot be done without immense effort. This business should be put before the congregation; then at certain times of the year surely by a common effort, it should be carried out, one change at a time (not all at once), God willing, for whose honor and glory all these things are to be done for each library.

*Rule 10: New Books*

Whenever new books come unbound, the librarian, if he is instructed to do so, should look through them immediately to see that they are complete. If he finds a defect, he should immediately notify the person

who supplied the books. Then he should write down their titles separately in a list. Afterward he should have them assembled, rubricated, and bound as time is available. Then either he or the prior should write the provenance in the book and assign a [class] mark as is the common practice in the other books, although the book is not yet assigned a shelf number in the library. It seems useful first to write in notes together with letters for appropriate bookcases so that they can afterward be cataloged more easily. Finally he should let no book be shelved until it has been fully processed.

*Rule 11: New Books*

If the new books are slender or small or of diverse subject matter (that is, suitable for different bookcases [classes]), the librarian should not have them bound together or have them bound too thin but should wait and hold them until more works on related subjects are collected. The same practice should be observed in the case of vernacular books, unless the prior orders them to be bound immediately. Unless the prior gives permission, the librarian shall not lend unbound books to the members of the community or to the lay brothers, in order to keep them from being torn apart, soiled, or returned for binding in poor condition.

*Rule 12: The Books of the Choir*

Although these books are the responsibility of the sacristan, the librarian should, nevertheless, look after them carefully to see if, for example, something needs repair, particularly among those books used for the celebration of the divine offices. The librarian should see to it that these books are kept clean and in good condition, in case the sacristan is careless. Further, if anything in them needs to be repaired, he should refer the matter to the mender. In addition he should pay particular attention to those books that belong to and are marked for the library but that are housed in the choir bookcase. They are only kept there so that we are not always forced to run back to the library when any question or doubt about terminology or diction or ecclesiastical ceremonies arises, but we have them immediately at hand. The following books that belong to the library are shelved in the choir bookcase:

*Vocabularies*

*Catholicon*

*Breviloquus*

*Mammaetractus*

*Predicantium*

*Rerum*

*Ex quo.*

*Valde bonum*

*Opus pacis*

*Sermons*

Sanctus Bernardus (frequently read at meals)

Capitulares

S. Augustinus

*Lives of the Saints*

Lombardica

B. Sylvester papa

B. Bruno

Rationale divinatorum

Ludolphus *De vita Christi*

*Statuta antiqua*

Glosa statutorum scripta

It is necessary to keep these and similar works in the bookcase of the choir, or at least some of these that are located beneath the lectern<sup>17</sup> of the procurator in the choir next to the entrance, as they are the ones from which we regularly read at meals. They are always kept nearby, so that it is not necessary to chase around here and there for them. No one is permitted to take them to his cell unless he returns them immediately. Although some of those are marked as belonging to the library, they are particularly useful in this location; they have on their covers alongside their own call numbers the letters "ly" to distinguish them from others of the choir collection.<sup>18</sup> There are, in addition, many other books that are kept sometimes in the choir, sometimes in the cells, which the librarian has no access to unless ordered specifically. For example, the printed statutes, the manuscript book of the Gospels, funeral rites, chapter sermons, et cetera, are kept in the small bookcase of the pulpit of the choir. The following works are kept in the cells as meets the need: *diurnalia*, *breviaria*, *psalteria*, *cursus*, *ordinaria*, et cetera.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the newly printed statutes (1510) are in each cell. Concerning these, the person in charge of empty cells or the master of the novices must make inquiry so that he knows whether the essential books for individual cells

17. Perhaps a lectern like that illustrated in [27, s.v. "Pult"].

18. "ly (chori)" probably stands for "liber c." As Max Burckhardt writes [28], this interpretation is much better than "libraria," for that term almost always refers to the main library collection and "armarium chori" is the term for the choir collection. His own examination of all the books from the choir collection still in Basel that have the old call numbers on the spine shows that such a mark is nowhere to be seen, even in those cases where the title label still exists on the spine. On the other hand, in some five cases the additional note "chori" is found inside the volume. His hypothesis is that those additional shelf marks mentioned by Carpentarius never existed. The "Informatorium," he adds, at least in part must be interpreted not as the representation of an actual situation but as a program of an ideal condition for the Basel Carthusian Library.

19. Service books for conducting the regular prayers and offices.

are there or not. Missals, antiphonaries, homilaries, and biblical volumes and collections are the responsibility of the sacristan.

*Final Note*

Obviously the librarian has general permission from the prior to leave his cell, in order to discharge his responsibilities in the matter of opening the windows of both libraries when the skies are clear and to close them when storm and rain clouds threaten in the winter. For just as rainy winds are very bad for books, so clear breezes are good for them.

Commentary

The *Instructions for the Librarian* clearly establishes the authority of the librarian over the main collections of books in the monastery, regardless of their location or their immediate caretaker. Originally the *Statutes* of the order gave the sacristan responsibility for the books and other property belonging to the monastery. Although this assignment made sense in the early period of a cloister, when the library consisted of a small basic collection of service books provided to each new monastery by its sister houses, it was no longer satisfactory by the end of the fifteenth century for the library at St. Margarethental. The library there had grown large enough to require regular and full-time attention. Responsibility for the library collection at St. Margarethental probably passed out of the hands of the sacristan during the priorate of Heinrich Arnoldi (1449–80). The *Instructions* makes due note of this transfer of responsibility to the librarian, who is to supervise the steward's management of the vernacular collection (Rule 8) and the sacristan's management of the books shelved in the choir in addition to his duties in the library itself.<sup>20</sup> The only books that lie outside of the librarian's purview are some shelved in the pulpit, standard works placed in each cell for the use of the occupant, and copies of service books for which the sacristan remains responsible (Rule 12). The librarian reports directly to the prior of the house on just about every matter. The definition of the librarian's position, as distinct from those of both the prior and the sacristan, and the establishment of clear lines of authority between these offices represent an important advance for the management of the library. This step placed books in a different category from other property of the cloister and acknowledged the special treatment that this particular treasure

20. Buzás [16, p. 137] indicates that it was a new step in library development to establish a separate position for the librarian.

required. The importance of making the position of librarian a separate office became clear shortly after Louber left the priorate in 1501. His successor, Hieronymus Zscheckenbuerlin, apparently did not want to be personally involved in the daily operations of the library to the degree that Louber had been. Zscheckenbuerlin turned library tasks over to the librarian shortly after taking office [23, pp. 361–62]. He recognized that the library needed regular attention and placed responsibility for it in the hands of Urban Moser and later Georg Carpentarius, both well-educated and scholarly librarians. The *Instructions* defines for the librarian the limits of his authority and responsibilities. It delegates considerable responsibility to him but also keeps the library under the close control of the prior. All important library transactions, whether cleaning, cataloging, inventorying, or lending, require the authorization of the chief administrator of the monastery.

According to the *Instructions*, the librarian has responsibility for the physical maintenance of the collection, the inventory and cataloging process, loans and circulation records, and a rudimentary form of reference service. It gives no clue, however, about how books were acquired or if aggressive efforts were made to collect certain types of materials or specific titles. Yet the document does allow us to draw a number of conclusions about the organization and management of the library in this monastery of the late Middle Ages. Perennial library problems occur: books out of order, pages falling out, books deteriorating from hard use, dirt, and insects; cataloging, binding, lending, and keeping records of a variety of transactions. The *Instructions* addresses these problems and introduces one of the most important elements of library management, regular and systematic attention to all aspects of the maintenance of the library.

#### *Arrangement of the Library*

The main collection, made up mostly of works in Latin, was divided into two sections, the Old Library and the New Library. These two divisions were arranged in a series of bookcases in rooms set aside for the library above the chapter office. Each division had its distinct alpha-numeric call-number system. Indirectly, the *Instructions* tells us that the books were not fixed to the bookcases by chains, a common security practice in many libraries of the period,<sup>21</sup> since Rule 1 advised the librarian to look

21. Clark [6, p. 172] regards the chained library to be the norm for the period. Streeter [29, p. 1] considers a number of practices for housing and securing books in the Middle Ages. His book is, however, for the most part limited to England with only occasional reference to Continental examples. The Carthusian Library at Basel seems not to have been fitted out as a reading room but to have been set up to receive accessions, to catalog, to house, and to loan books.



for books that are out of order and to arrange them properly. Such instructions would be unnecessary if the books were chained to their bookcases. Because solitary study and copying were part of the daily activities of the Carthusian monk, he needed to be able to take books from the library to his cell for extended periods of time. The library was thus set up to meet these special needs.

In addition to maintaining order within the library collections, the librarian was to see that the books and shelves were cleaned thoroughly on a regular schedule. At Basel apparently all members of the community took part in the job of cleaning and reshelving in order to finish the task quickly and efficiently. These routine procedures provided an opportunity for the librarian to check on the condition of the books, remove any bookworms,<sup>22</sup> and make any needed repairs. The librarian was to remind the steward, in charge of the vernacular collection, and the sacristan, in charge of the choir collection, to clean and repair the books in their care.

#### *Inventory and Cataloging*

The periodic inventory was closely related to the cataloging of new books at the Basel Charterhouse library. Before conducting the inventory, the librarian called back all books out on loan so that every book was either in its appointed place on the shelf or accounted for. Carpentarius notes (Rule 3) that some changes had been made in these procedures since the time of Jakob Louber. By the second decade of the sixteenth century, the inventory no longer took place every year, but every four years in the Old Library and every two years in the New Library. At this point, few manuscripts were being added to the Old Library, and few books were borrowed from it, an indication that the printed book had begun to supersede the manuscript book. The change from an annual to a biennial inventory and cataloging period for the New Library may reflect a slower rate of growth in the collection than had been the case during Louber's administration. The cataloging of

22. Carpentarius (Rule 3) uses the word *blattae* (insects), which he further qualifies as *vermes librorum* (bookworms). The common insects that attack the paper, glue, wood, and leather bindings of books are cockroaches, termites, silverfish, book lice, and bookworms (actually the larvae of the many species of beetles that eat books). The evidence of their existence is clear in the damaged books. The pests themselves, with the exception of bookworms and book lice, would also be visible when books were opened and shaken out. The librarian at St. Margarethental apparently did not advise the use of a powder of cedar or oil of cedar to repel insects, remedies that had been in use to control these pests since antiquity, preferring instead thorough cleaning and fresh air as both a preventive and a remedial measure. Plumbe [30, introduction] surveys the damage done to books by insects and the remedies used from antiquity to the present day.

Heynlin's gift of some 300 volumes in 1487 must in itself have required a vast effort on Louber's part. He may have revised the classification scheme at that time to accommodate disciplines and fields not well represented in the collection previously.

The classification scheme of the library divided the books into the following categories: (a) liberal arts, philosophy, and medicine; (b) law; (c) history and poetry; (d) sermons; (e) inspirational writings; (f) Bible; (g) church fathers; (h) Scholastics; and (i) inspirational books in small format [9, p. 86]. The class letter combined with a Roman numeral in the Old Library or an arabic number in the New Library to provide a call number for each volume. Cataloging was not a continuous process but was done at fixed intervals. Nevertheless, as new acquisitions came into the library some preliminary processing was done (Rule 10), which consisted of noting the provenance in the book and assigning a provisional class number. The book might then be rubricated and bound if necessary, or might be held for binding later (Rules 10, 11). This left the assignment of a shelf number and recording in the catalogs for the scheduled cataloging period. Much in this method of organizing a library collection seems very familiar to the modern reader, but it is, nevertheless, basically medieval in its approach [11, p. 12]. What is most striking to the twentieth-century eye in the cataloging process is the concrete nature of the classification scheme. The classification scheme is not an abstract and expandable concept but an allotment of space limited by the specific dimensions of specific bookcases. Before classifying and cataloging can begin, all previously cataloged books must be in their proper places on the shelves. Then the new books are considered with the empty spaces in the bookcases (that is, empty spaces in the class) in mind. The rules suggest that it is important to find the proper subject slot for each book, but they do not directly address the problem of a full classification (that is, bookcase).<sup>23</sup> In discussing the difficulties of transferring books from one classification, the *Instructions* suggests that a number of books may not have found their proper niche but that changes are too cumbersome to be undertaken lightly. Carpentarius holds out the possibility of creating a third division of the library in the future, which would enable the librarian to consider recataloging. The criterion for the assignment of a book to a particular library seems to be according to its use (Rule 9). In this section of the *Instructions*, Carpentarius seems to be responding to a number of complaints that have reached him about the inadequacies of the current system. He defends the status quo with reasons that have served librarians well over the

23. The only solution was to stack books on top of each other [11, p. 15, n. 9].

centuries: recataloging is difficult, costly in labor, and often confusing to the user familiar with the old arrangement.

#### *Loan and Circulation*

The main users of the collection were the members of the monastery. The periodic recall of books for the inventory and cataloging process theoretically had the effect of making the whole collection available again for loan. In actual practice the prior might give renewals, and the librarian had to handle these exceptions as discreetly as possible to prevent ill will among the monks. The monks made their choices in order of seniority, and the number of books allowed to a single person was thirty. Presumably the books might be kept until the next inventory, unless asked for by someone else. The librarian was to keep records of the books in circulation. Loans to outsiders were strictly regulated (Rule 7). The borrower had to get the permission of the prior, to inform the librarian, to offer his assurances in writing, and to put down a sum of money equal to the value of the book as security. The rule was strict, but the loan book of the library at St. Margarethental demonstrates that the application was generous and enlightened. Priors Louber and Zscheckenbuerlin made books available to members of other ecclesiastical orders within the city, to Carthusian monks from other houses, and to schoolmasters, university professors, and printers. The university, which had been founded in 1460, had not yet developed a significant collection of books, and the professors who taught there relied heavily on the resources of the Charterhouse and other monastic libraries in the city [16, p. 61]. The Charterhouse library, which had traditionally been strong in liturgical and theological texts of late-medieval scholarship, grew through the gifts of Heynlin and the Basel printers to reflect the new movement of humanism.<sup>24</sup> With its large and diverse collections, the Carthusian library became the major resource for scholars in the city and the Upper Rhine region [21, pp. 213–20].

#### *Public Service*

The *Instructions* advises the librarian to read and reread the catalogs of the libraries in order to be familiar with the collection. This knowledge will enable him both to know what is missing and to answer queries about any book that is asked for. The catalogs serve not as a guide to the user but rather as an aid for the librarian, who is, in turn, the guide to the collection. The situation at the Charterhouse library is typical of the

24. Burckhardt's catalog [19] shows the range of contemporary humanist writers and classical texts that this gift brought to the library.

period.<sup>25</sup> The Carthusians in a number of houses had gone beyond the shelflist catalog, useful primarily for inventory control, to develop alphabetical author lists and subject indexes to their collections. The library at St. Margarethental is representative of the foresight and organizational skill of the Carthusian order in its efforts to promote learning and in its commitment to intellectual and spiritual life.

### *Conclusion*

The library at St. Margarethental remained intact after Protestantism had been officially established in Basel in 1529. The monks were allowed to remain in the cloister, provided no new members were admitted (Carpentarius lived until 1531). After the last monk died, the monastery and all its goods became property of the city. In 1590 the library collection of nearly 2,000 volumes was transferred to the University Library, where it has remained ever since. Because of the relatively peaceful nature of the Swiss Reformation and the measure of tolerance it practiced toward the old order, the Old and New Libraries reached the University Library in good condition and almost intact. The choir library and the vernacular library did not fare as well for a number of reasons.<sup>26</sup> They were located in more exposed sites than the Latin library was. Furthermore, the liturgical works in the choir library were of little interest after the Reformation, and many were cut up for use in bindings of other books [10, p. 124]. The preservation of a medieval collection as complete as this along with its shelflist and union catalog is very unusual. This accident of history allows us to examine how the attitudes of these scholarly monks toward books and learning led them to build a large library and then to expand and develop bibliographic systems and organizational patterns to manage the collection for the best use of the community.

### REFERENCES

1. Sieber, Ludwig, ed. *Informatorium bibliothecarii Carthusiensis Domus Vallis Beatae Margarethae ex autographio fratris Georgii Carpentarii*. Basel: Ex Typographia Schweighauseriana, 1888.
2. *Handbuch der Bibliothekswissenschaft*. Edited by Fritz Milkau. 2d ed. Edited by Georg

25. For an unusual catalog designed with the library user in mind, see [31, 289].

26. Sexauer [10] attempts to identify the surviving German works from Carthusian monasteries. In fact, his work is much greater in scope than the title suggests. Max Burckhardt is currently attempting to reconstruct the Latin library of the Basel Charterhouse, which was not kept together when it was transferred to the University Library.

- Leyh. 3 vols., register. Register edited by Renate Bellmann. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1950–65.
3. *Dictionnaire historique et biographique de la Suisse*. 7 vols., suppl. Neuchâtel: Administration du Dictionnaire historique et biographique de la Suisse, 1921–34.
  4. Roth, Carl, and Schmidt, Philipp. *Handschriftenproben zur Basler Geistesgeschichte des 15. u. 16. Jahrhunderts*. Basel: R. Geering, 1926.
  5. Arnold, Klaus. Introduction to *In Praise of Scribes*, by Johann Trithemius. Lawrence, Kans.: Coronado Press, 1974.
  6. Clark, John Willis. *The Care of Books*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901.
  7. Guigo Carthusiae Prior (Guiges du Chastel, 1083–1137). *Statuta Ordinis Cartusienensis (Consuetudines)*. Basel: Amerbach, 1510.
  8. Guigo Carthusiae Prior (Guigues de Chastel, 1083–1137). *Consuetudines*. In *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J.-P. Migne. Vol. 153. Paris: Garnier Freres, 1880.
  9. Bernoulli, C. Chr. "Ueber unsere alten Klosterbibliotheken." *Basler Jahrbuch* (1895), pp. 79–91.
  10. Sexauer, Wolfram D. *Frühneuhochdeutsche Schriften in Kartäuserbibliotheken*. Europäische Hochschulschriften, Ser. 1, Dt. Literatur und Germanistik, vol. 247. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978.
  11. Schreiber, Heinrich. "Quellen und Beobachtungen zur mittelalterlichen Katalogisierungspraxis besonders in deutschen Kartäusern." *Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen* 44 (1927): 1–19, 97–118.
  12. Schreiber, Heinrich. *Die Bibliothek der ehemaligen Mainzer Kartause*. Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen. Beiheft 60. Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1927.
  13. Burckhardt, Max. "Bibliotheksaufbau, Bücherbesitz und Leserschaft in spätmittelalterlichen Basel." In *Studien zum städtischen Bildungswesen des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, edited by Bernd Moeller, Hans Patze, Karl Stackmann, and Ludger Grenzmann, pp. 33–52. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983.
  14. Derolez, Albert. *Les Catalogues de bibliothèques*. Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, fasc. 31. Turnhout: Brepols, 1979.
  15. Loeffler, Klemens. *Deutsche Klosterbibliotheken*. 2d ed. Bücherei der Kultur und Geschichte, 27. Bonn: K. Schroeder, 1922.
  16. Buzás, Ladislav. *Deutsche Bibliotheksgeschichte des Mittelalters*. Elemente des Buch- und Bibliothekswesens, 1. Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1975.
  17. Thompson, James Westfall. *The Medieval Library*. 1939. Reprint. New York: Hafner Press, 1967.
  18. Carpentarius, Georg. "Continuatio chronicorum Carthusiae in Basilea minori, 1480–1526." *Basler Chroniken* 1 (1872): 307–56.
  19. Burckhardt, Max. "Die Inkunabeln aus der Bibliothek des Johannes de Lapide." In *Für Christoph Vischer, Direktor der Basler Universitätsbibliothek, 1959–1973, von seinen Mitarbeitern*, pp. 15–75. Basel: Universitätsbibliothek, 1973.
  20. *Liber Benefactorum Carthusiae*. Pp. 60–66 in Stehlin, K. "Regesten zur Geschichte des Buchdrucks bis zum Jahre 1500 aus den Büchern des Staatsarchivs, der Zunftarchiv und des Universitätsarchivs in Basel." *Archiv für Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels* 12 (1889): 6–70.
  21. Gilbert, W. "The Culture of Basel in the Fifteenth Century." Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1941.
  22. Moser, Urban. *Repertorium universale*. University of Basel Library MS AR 14<sup>a</sup>.
  23. Vischer, W., ed. "Die Chroniken des Kartäuser Klosters in Klein-Basel, 1401–1532." *Basler Chroniken* 1 (1872): 230–591.
  24. Carpentarius, Georg. *Registrum pro antiqua bibliotheca*. University of Basel Library MS AR 12.

25. Carpentarius, Georg. *Registrum pro nova bibliotheca*. University of Basel Library MS AR 13.
26. Schweizer, Julius. "Aus der Geschichte der Basler Kartaus." *Neujahrsblatt* (Basel) 113 (1935): 3-56.
27. *Meyers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon*. 25 vols. 9th ed. Mannheim: Bibliographisches Institut, 1971-79.
28. Burckhardt, Max. Letter to author, March 21, 1983.
29. Streeter, B. H. *The Chained Library: A Survey of Four Centuries in the Evolution of the English Library*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1931.
30. Plumbe, Wilfred J. *The Preservation of Books in Tropical and Subtropical Countries*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
31. de Ghellinck, J. "Les Catalogues des bibliothèques médiévales chez les chartreux et un guide de lectures spirituelles." *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 25 (1949): 284-98.