Strengthening modern Greek collections

Building U.S./Greek library partnerships

by Beau David Case and Artemis Leontis

This timely conference on modern Greek collections, cosponsored by the Library of Congress (LC) and the Council on Library and Information Resources (with additional financial support provided by the publisher Chadwyck-Healey Ltd. and the Embassy of Greece), allowed us to reflect on the state of modern Greek collections in the United States, and libraries and archives in Greece.

Conference purpose and background

In his letter of invitation to the conference, John Van Oudenaren, chief of the European Division at LC, wrote: "At a time when interest in Modern Greek is growing in the United States, American research libraries have very incomplete holdings of materials that are needed by U.S.-based scholars working on the history, literature, and culture of Greece after 1400. At the same time, many Greek libraries face difficulties as they seek to preserve, restore, catalog, and provide access to their own rich holdings of Greek materials.

"There is thus a strong case for closer cooperation between Greek and American libraries. In particular, there should be ways in which American libraries can augment their research holdings by working with Greek libraries in microfilming, digital access, and other projects."

Conference program: Greek and American perspectives

The first two sessions offered professional assessments of the holdings, as well as the needs and priorities of Greek libraries and archives, and modern Greek collections in the United States.[1] Both groups profiled their libraries and collections, their particular needs, and their national collaboration efforts.

Because conference papers will soon be posted on the LC European Division Web site (http://www.loc.gov/rr/european), we will not duplicate the very useful descriptions of the various Greek collections, but instead will concentrate on recurring themes and specific proposals for collaboration.

Session I—the Greek perspective

Representatives of Greek libraries and archives described a situation where libraries are rich in materials but poor in funding. A first step to bringing these resources to the attention of users is to inform them about collections and archives: what there is, where it is, and how to obtain access.

In order to make the most of existing materials, Greek and American libraries must

About the authors

Beau David Case is head of Western European and Linguistics Collections at Ohio State University Libraries, e-mail: case.42@osu.edu; Artemis Leontis is adjunct professor of Modern Greek at Ohio State University and Secretary of the Modern Greek Studies Association Executive Board, e-mail:leontis.1@osu.edu

> **In order to make the most of existing materials, Greek and American libraries must establish formal exchanges.**

establish formal exchanges. Toward this effort, the National Book Centre of Greece offered to establish a clearinghouse for acquisitions.

The following additional projects would require financial support: the creation of a database of periodicals and books in print; the digitizing and microfilming of endangered brittle materials; and the publication of bibliographies in electronic form.

Participants also spoke of the need to solve cataloging and automation problems, including international standards for library automation and transliteration systems, the creation of authority lists and bilingual information screens, and the need to train Greek librarians in American library science. Finally, it was reported that university libraries are currently seeking to create acquisitions and document delivery schemes.

Session II—the American perspective

There are about a dozen public and university libraries with good, active modern Greek collections. Collectively this assessment looks good, but each library faces several serious problems. First is overall collection weakness—both a lack of Greek imprints and incomplete periodicals holdings.

This is compounded by the second problem—difficulty in finding reliable distributors of Greek books and periodicals or unfamiliarity with the Greek publishing industry.

Even those American libraries that do manage to acquire an adequate number of Greek materials face the third problem of cataloging. There are too few professional librarian catalogers in the United States who know the Greek language—even at the American libraries with major Greek collections.

The fourth major problem concerns American library users. Modern Greek collections are scattered across the continent

and each library has entirely different holdings, many of local interest. Knowledge of these individual collections is not well known.

Proposals for improvements

There was a wonderful working atmosphere in Sessions III and IV of the conference, as participants sought to find manageable ways to take concrete steps. There were some important breakthroughs, too. Ioanna Dimopoulou (Director of the National Library of Greece) announced that the National Library of Greece and LC would begin a program of materials exchange.

Alexis Dimaras (Moraitis School) put proposals on the table for discussion and implementation. The first step was to establish the "Modern Greek Collections Working Group," composed of those present at the conference and others who wish to take part in the group's efforts. Dimaras described this as an ad hoc group, since it just so happened that important groups were not represented at the conference.

The second step was for Beau David Case to create a mail list so that the working group could continue its discussions after the conference. The third step was for LC to create a Web site with working documents, papers presented at the conference, and links to Greek Internet sites.

In the fourth step, participants accepted Dimitris Gondicas's (Executive Director, Program in Hellenic Studies, Princeton University) proposal to include a working session on libraries at the November 1999 Modern Greek Studies Association (MGSA) Symposium at Princeton University.

The session will bring together scholars and librarians so that librarians can update scholars on collections and electronic access, scholars can update librarians on materials essential for collections, librarians can meet to discuss their own collaborations, and publishers and distributors of Greek books and librarians/scholars can interact.

Finally, attendees committed themselves to task forces that would tackle the specific projects listed below.

• *Acquisitions:* to create a list of Greek books and periodicals vendors used by American libraries or recommended by Greek libraries.

• *Archives:* to create a guide to existing archives.

• *Cataloging:* to study library catalog screens and their display of Greek-language and transliterated Greek authority records; possibility for standardization of Greek automated systems; potential cooperative cataloging projects; and study other existing problems.

• *Thomas Jefferson-Adamántios Koraïs Correspondence:* to bring together LC and Hios Library holdings and to consider how, when, and where to exhibit materials.

• *Interlibrary Loan:* to establish a consortium of American and Greek libraries that will lend and borrow Greek-language materials free of charge among themselves.

• *Periodicals:* to create a union list of Greek-language periodicals, including data such as ISSN, price, and publisher; to document American holdings of these periodicals; and to strategize the acquisition of missing issues.

• *Greek-American Holdings:* to create a guide to existing holdings and to assess cataloging and acquisition problems.

Each group will analyze the existing problems and offer suggestions for improvement. Reports will be submitted in September 1999 to the mail list, then plans will be made for a follow-up conference next year in Athens, where the reports will be discussed and projects subsequently implemented.[2]

Notes

1. The conference included attendees who did not present papers.

2. For further information about the conference or about the Modern Greek Collections Working Group, contact Beau David Case, Ohio State University Libraries, Language & Area Studies Department, 1858 Neil Avenue Mall, Columbus, OH 43210, USA; phone: (614) 292-2594, fax: (614) 292-1918; e-mail: case.42@osu.edu. ■

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authorized name headings to locate credible information on the Web.

Conclusion

Today's academic library Web site has matured measurably from its early days. Worthwhile content and ease of navigation are becoming commonplace. As we move towards another generation of Web development, our polished and robust Web sites offer a solid infrastructure from which to build. We should be proud of our efforts.

Notes

1. Rich Wiggins. "The University of Minnesota's Internet Gopher System: a Tool for Accessing Network-Based Electronic Information," *Public-Access Computer Systems Review,* v. 4, no. 2 (1993): 4–60. Available on the Internet at: http://info.lib.uh.edu/pr/v4/n2/wiggins1.4n2.

2. Ibid.

3. Bruce Connolly and Gail M. Golderman. "Schaffer Library Home Page: Structured Access to Library and Internet Resources." *Library Hi Tech,* v. 15, no. 3/4 (1997): 90–100.

4. Louis Rosenfeld and Peter Morville. *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web.* (Cambridge: O'Reilly, 1998).

5. Beth Evans and Wilma Lesley Jones. "Demonstrating the World Wide Web as an academic research tool." *Journal of Computing in Higher Education,* v. 9, no. 2 (1998): 113–134.

6. Corinne Y.C. Laverty. "Library Instruction on the Web: Inventing Options and Opportunities." *Internet Reference Services Quarterly,* v. 2, no. 2/3 (1997): 55–66.

7. *American Libraries,* v. 30, no. 1 (Jan. 1999) and *Online,* v. 23, no. 1 (January/February 1999).

8. Jessica Milstead and Susan Feldman. "Metadata: Cataloging By Any Other Name." *Online,* v. 23, no. 1 (January/February 1999): 24–31.

9. Stuart Weibel. "The State of the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative." *D-Lib Magazine,* v. 5, no. 4 (April 1999). Available on the Internet at http://www.dlib.org/dlib/april99/04weibel.html.

10. The Cooperative Online Resource Catalog is available on the Internet at http://corc.oclc.org/. ■