PRODUCTION NOTE

University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign Library
The Purchasing of Books and Journals in Europe

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This paper summarizes the experiences of the writer during the winter and spring of 1952-53, when he spent a sabbatical leave in Europe searching for books. While it may serve as a guide to policy or procedures for the buying of books in England and Europe, it does not attempt to include detail, the assumption being that the reader understands and employs standardized order and acquisition procedures in his library.

Because the article reflects the impressions of one who spent only a few months in travel and observation, its limitations must be clearly acknowledged. Such impressions, in the case of any individual, are shaped by his opportunities and by his personal patterns of observation. The descriptions and conclusions herein constitute a personal report based upon visits to 118 dealers in England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, and Denmark. At the time of these calls, the writer searched particularly for texts relating to the Middle Ages. The paper is divided into four sections, the first relating to the purchase of new books; the second to the acquisition of out-of-print, second-hand books (excluding rarities); the third to the ordering, receipt, and claiming of journal subscriptions; and the final one to the buying of back files of periodicals.

New Books

There are many dealers in Europe prepared to execute the commissions of American libraries for the securing of new books, and Appendix A lists a number of them. Also, several American firms are well equipped to do importing. While the choice of a dealer, and the preference as between an American importer and a foreign agent, must rest with each library, certain major advantages and disadvantages should be considered before making a final choice. In employing an American firm to act as importer, the library can place a single order for books published in several countries, with the benefit of simpler procedures in the handling of invoices, payments, and follow-ups. If the importer uses ocean freight rather than direct mail in receiving his material from abroad, slight savings due to this should be reflected in the final cost. However, the employment of an American importer retards the final delivery of a shipment somewhat, for the dealer must break down the single order into smaller ones which he then transmits to his representative abroad. In case direct mail shipment is not utilized, there also is delay in the assembling of receipts abroad and at the American office for final dispatch. Because of double handling throughout, the final price
of the importer may reflect an added cost. If, on the other hand, a foreign
dealer is employed for each country, the library will have more paper work
and correspondence than with a single importer, although the books will be
delivered more promptly because there is no intermediary. In those instances
where the foreign dealer does not have an American bank for the payment of
his accounts, there also will arise the minor difficulty of making payments
abroad in a foreign currency.

The claim that American libraries should patronize American business-
men and so employ an importer is cogent. A counterargument can be made that
cultural interchange is promoted by direct contact with foreign dealers.
There is no real advantage in considering the foreign agent's special knowl-
edge of the book trade in his country, because the American importer makes
use of such knowledge, to , either in the employment of the same man or firm
as his representative, or of another with equivalent background.

In Europe, as in America, it generally is true that scholarly books
are available to dealers at 20 per cent discount, provided they are issued
by a commercial publisher, and trade books at 33 1/3 per cent discount. It
also is true generally that this margin is retained by the dealer, or im-
porter, and that European imprints are delivered to American libraries at
the published price. Whenever library discounts are offered, it is in the
interest of the buyer to verify the list price as printed in trade bibliog-
raphies, in order to ascertain whether the discount schedule is being applied
to listed figures or to prices that have been adjusted upwards. In view of
the labor cost of complying with export and currency regulations in foreign
countries, it seems not unreasonable that a dealer, or importer, should
retain his discounts as his margin of profit. It goes without saying that
in return a dealer or importer should provide his American customers with
superior service. It also should be noted that some scholarly and scienc-
tific books are hard to find, requiring several inquiries, and are obtain-
able only without discount. For his services in locating these difficult
books, on which he gets no discount, a dealer is entitled to a fair service
charge.

Many foreign books are not published, at least not in the sense that
they are available easily to the book trade. They are the products of
establishments which deliver the entire printing to the agency or author
who has ordered the work and has paid for it. These books are not readily
secured by dealers, even when full information about them has been supplied
by a customer. Without such data, they may be impossible to locate. It
is essential that orders for foreign books be accompanied by all possible
trade information, including that concerning publisher, place, edition,
and date. Careful preparation of them aids the agent greatly and so improves
the probability that they can be filled.

Sometimes books supplied in good faith and in fulfillment of a formal
order are found to be duplicates. It is natural that a library should want
to return these, but that often would mean a loss to a foreign dealer
involving sacrifice not only of his margin of profit, but of the purchase
price of a volume he cannot resell. The matter of returning such items
should be discussed fully, therefore, and an understanding should be arrived
at regarding it. In cases where the duplication is not the result of error on the part of the agent, the library should make an attempt to dispose of the book by exchange or resale.

Small libraries, submitting a minimum of foreign orders, will be best advised to consider seriously the employment of an American importing firm. It generally is the practice of large American libraries to utilize a number of dealers, including American importers, for the transaction of their foreign business. As to quality of service, both foreign agent and importer can be satisfactory. Comparative costs can be examined easily, by checking the charges of an importer with those of a foreign dealer, referring, of course, to trade bibliographies for listed prices.

Out-of-Print Books

To find out-of-print books in Europe takes time and patience. A librarian either can order such books on a quotation basis from a reputable antiquarian dealer, send out a want list, read second-hand catalogs, or employ an individual to make a personal search of the stores. Personal searching in the bookstores of Europe, such as may be done by a librarian or faculty member, is not recommended unless as much as $15,000.00 is available for the buyer, or unless a library is embarking on a new field and can use quantities of material, preferably without the preliminaries of searching each title for possible duplication.

Want lists often are useful. Each out-of-print or other item represented on such a list, however, should have won its inclusion only after very careful consideration by faculty and librarian. For most libraries, a want list should contain only those titles which are indispensable to the future of a collection, being needed for the completion of furtherance of some serious purpose. A item required immediately either should be sought through interlibrary loan or copied in microform.

By no means should an unfilled order be added automatically to a want list. In many cases, an original order simply means that a book is desired for some reason. If it cannot be supplied because it is out of print, the reason for the order needs further investigation. If the title was recommended because a patron wanted it badly at the moment, he should be informed that the prospects of getting it are not good and that he should attempt to secure it for immediate use through interlibrary loan. If his need also is a long-term one, he should be provided with a microcopy, in which case the question arises as to whether the volume is necessary. Also, action on a book which was originally ordered because the "library ought to have it" may be reconsidered. If it goes on a want list, this should be because it is an item the library must own and whose acquisition warrants added labor and a premium in price.

Not only should each title on a want list be regorously screened, but it should have full bibliographical description. All relevant details of its make-up should be recorded, including information as to plates, number of volumes, and such notes on its peculiarities as may be found in available bibliographies. The data may be useful when a quotation on the item is received, and when
questions about condition, completion, and reasonable cost must be faced. Brunet's Manuel du libraire is invaluable for descriptions of older books.

In giving a want list to a dealer, certain procedures are recommended. Best results will come from placing it with an established dealer in each country whose language is represented on the list, and on a quotation basis. The agent not only should be expected to search his own stock for the titles but should be instructed to advertise for the unlocated items not more than twice in the ensuing two months, preferably by means of a want list of his own preparation and distribution. He should be allowed exclusive rights to the want list for a reasonable length of time, though not more than a year, at the end of which period the want list probably should be revised and perhaps handed to another dealer.

The reasons for the procedure just recommended have been proved through experience. In the first place the want list should be broken down by language because, with notable exceptions, no foreign dealer has extensive international connections or contacts. Moreover, few agents specialize in other than their native languages. It is almost impossible, for example, to find German books in France. Second, the list must be circularized by the dealer because he cannot be expected to find all the items in his own stock. It will bring better results if it is distributed to a mailing of fellow-dealers with whom he has been doing business over many years. It will be less successful if it merely is printed in the antiquarian book-trade journal of his country, for the want lists of established dealers are more carefully read than the want list journals.

The first listing of a book may be disregarded by a fellow-dealer who does not want to take the time to quote on an item he feels is commonly available, but a second may stimulate him to submit a quotation. Not more than two listings should be authorized, however, lest they create an impression that the book is exceedingly scarce and worth a premium price. It is for this latter reason, too, that a list should not be given to two or more dealers at the same time, each with authority to advertise. Such a procedure sets up artificial competition. During the year in which the dealer has the exclusive right to advertise the want list, it may be expected that he will exhaust his normal sources. The list can be offered to another agent for the next year, but unless it has been enriched by addition of items, the new dealer hardly can be expected to be as successful with it as was his predecessor. It may be better, therefore, to let a list lie fallow a year or two.

An agent who handles a want list is very likely to know much about the books on it. Some of them he may be seeking for other customers. On some of them he may have information that would be of value to a purchaser. For this reason a library will find it profitable to raise questions with its dealer on those books which cannot be completely or satisfactorily identified in the process of securing full bibliographical information. These questions include: What is the reputation of this book? What is a complete copy? What is the possibility of finding a complete copy? What would be a fair price to pay for it? Armed with information on such points, a library sometimes may be able to instruct a dealer to buy the first sound
copy he can find under a given price. By so doing it may secure an item that otherwise would be lost to a rival buyer during the period of quotation and acceptance.

The prices placed on books by a dealer normally will be fair and based on what he knows to be the market values. Because the men who supply him also are aware of the values, there will not be much margin for an agent on most of the pieces for which he quotes. He frequently gets 10 per cent from his source of supply, however, and he is entitled to an additional percentage on low-price items. If a customer feels that the price on any item is high, there should be no hesitation about questioning it. The dealer is dependent upon the good will of his clients and will not knowingly risk endangering his reputation for fairness. If the price cannot be adjusted, the customer can confidently expect an explanation and justification of the quoted figure.

Wherever possible, it is recommended that one person in an order or acquisition department be in charge of the want-list files. Special knowledge and attention pay dividends here. If the cards for want-list titles are included in the current files, they should be marked somehow for easy identification and for yearly revision. After an item has been actively searched by the want-list technique for five years, it is recommended that it be reported back to the original selector as not likely to be securable. Unless it bears unusual trade or bibliographical information, and if there is need to reduce the files, the card itself can be returned to the one who submitted it. As by this time it has been incorporated in the want-list files of several dealers, there is a chance that it still may be offered; but in most libraries this does not necessitate a file of want-list cards, either separate or in the current file. In case the order department lacks a record of an item being quoted, it should be simple to refer the question of purchase to the department or person most concerned. If, for want of a file of old cards, a title finds its way anew into the active want list, no great harm has been done.

The catalogs issued by dealers in antiquarian or second-hand books are an indispensable source for locating materials. In addition, they frequently give useful bibliographical information, as well as prices. Libraries that are actively searching for out-of-print or scarce items should request that their names be put on the mailing lists for these publications, and provide for the prompt reading of the catalogs by the persons responsible for book selection. In return for the privilege of receiving good catalogs, a library should make some effort to buy from their issuers. The expense of preparing and printing catalogs is high, and dealers are businessmen who expect some return.

Second-hand catalogs are read for two major reasons. The first is to make a selection of materials that are needed in the development of collections. The second is to locate items for which a library is searching and for which there may be a local want list. For both of these uses the following observations apply.

Because catalogs generally are distributed according to a mailing list which is arranged alphabetically and not geographically, they will be
received first by customers who live in the same region as the dealer. In the large European cities, and particularly in Paris, the catalogs are read very promptly by fellow-dealers. Within a week from its issuance, a catalog will have been stripped of most of its best items. After a month, the chances of getting anything from it are poor. For this reason, a library that would like to have at least a 50 per cent chance in its ordering should request either advance or air-mailed copies of the catalogs desired. When these arrive they should be checked immediately for selection and, if possible, an order should be air-mailed within twenty-four hours. To expedite matters, the library can safely postpone the searching that must be done and ask the dealer to hold the items selected pending a formal order. Before sending the formal order, a day or two later, the library can search its records carefully for the items and in the letter accompanying the formal order release those which were reserved as a result of the "holding" request but which are found not to be needed. This procedure ordinarily will not embarrass the dealer, who is apt to receive more than one order for his material. As a rule he can sell the released items with little difficulty.

Because the entries in second-hand catalogs do not always conform to those in libraries, and because series notes frequently are not given, a library should search its records for second-hand items thoroughly before committing itself to purchase. The nuisance of returning books abroad and adjusting invoices is annoying enough for a library. The irritations are even greater to the foreign dealer who is enmeshed in governmental regulations on export trade. In those cases where only the information in the book itself can resolve the question of entry and the possibility of duplication, the privilege of receiving the books on approval may be asked.

It already has been recommended that want-list items be prepared carefully and supplied with bibliographical information. This suggestion must be re-emphasized for pieces ordered from second-hand catalogs. Unless there is valid need for certain parts, no library should engage lightly to purchase an incomplete set or series. The chances are not good that the missing units ever can be found by themselves. If one is searching for Doumergue's Calvin, the first five volumes can be discovered easily, and bought very reasonably. The last two volumes probably can never be found separately, since an owner probably will sell them to a dealer who, in turn, will use them to fill out a set of which he has the first five volumes. An incomplete set or series is never a bargain regardless of the price, unless one needs only certain parts or volumes. On the other hand, a full set of a scarce item often is harder to obtain than anyone knows, and its cost may be arbitrary. Bargain prices cannot be anticipated for good second-hand books, even though they may be found unexpectedly and some dealers set more moderate charges than others. However, such prices are apt to be attached to incomplete sets, to books which are in poor condition and will need rebinding, and to superseded editions. All of these factors must be considered in purchasing.

Although second-hand catalogs are useful sources for locating and ordering books, a library should not place complete reliance on them. They are not good for finding items on a want list. The time spent in reading the catalogs, and in writing the orders, is lost more often than not because an
item is sold before an order reaches a dealer. For titles on want lists, a library is better advised to place its requisition in the hands of an agent.

Journal Subscriptions

Subscriptions for foreign journals can be entrusted safely to the foreign dealers listed in Appendix B or to American magazine agencies, including Stechert-Hafner, Faxon, and Moore-Cottrell. Once a reputable dealer has been selected, there probably will be no reason to consider a change. This is not to suggest that there may not be difficulties in receipts and claims. These seem to be inevitable, but generally they arise from the mails rather than from an agent.

Journals are sent to library customers directly by the publisher, or from the publisher to the dealer, who in turn forwards them to the libraries. In the first instance, the intermediary obviously has no way of knowing whether the issues are reaching their destination unless he gets word regarding the matter from his client. When he receives a claim, he can only relay it to the publisher. Because of the number of subscriptions he represents, the dealer should be able to get satisfaction on these claims, but unfortunately this is not always true. Sometimes the journal issue has been exhausted and there are no replacements available. In most cases, too, the records of the publisher show that the issue was sent to the library which claims nonreceipt. This leads both dealer and publisher to wonder whether the issue has not been lost, or misappropriated, in the receiving library. Because sending a claim to an agent who does not serve in the collecting and reshipment of journals normally requires its retyping and remailing, and also because it may be lost or mislaid by the dealer, a better method is to transmit a claim directly to the publisher, sending a copy to the agent for follow-up.

A dealer who receives the journal issues in his office and reships them to a library invariably keeps a checking record. He is likely to make claim for issues himself, often before receiving them from his clients. Where such an agent is used, he obviously is the one to whom claims should be sent, rather than the publisher.

The advantages and disadvantages of direct and indirect mailing should be studied by each library. For some countries, direct mailing may result in continued loss, as is likely to be true in the case of material from Italy. If losses persist among the receipts from any country, direct mailings might be authorized only for those journals which are in constant, pressing demand.

American agencies rely upon direct mailings. With the possible exception of Stechert-Hafner, they cannot collect issues in a foreign office and reship. A library employing an American dealer should have a thorough understanding about claiming procedures. In general, American agencies give good service on missing issues. If necessary, they will purchase copies from the publisher in order to complete files.
Some European dealers favor the indirect method of delivery. They prefer to assemble single numbers in their offices and to relay them. Shipments normally are made every week or two, and are accompanied with packing invoices. While this method perhaps provides safer delivery, it delays receipts. It also is more expensive, for while there is no charge for labor costs, the cost of remailing must be paid by the customer.

In the postwar years unstable rates of exchange and increasing prices have rendered bidding on subscriptions almost meaningless. A reputable agent cannot be expected to present a firm estimate on a journal list. He must be permitted to make additional charges to cover price increases and such extensions as extra issues and supplements. Libraries which are obliged by law to secure bids on foreign renewals should examine the reputation of dealers with more care than the estimated costs.

**Back Files of Journals**

By circulating their want lists and by reading catalogs, librarians are constantly searching for journal files, complete or incomplete, to strengthen their periodical holdings. There is no question that this widespread search has reduced the supply and greatly increased market prices. Major dealers in Europe are looking and advertising actively for journals, either as a result of inquiries from libraries or in building up stock for the future. Dealers who specialize in supplying earlier items enjoy a profitable business.

The desire of libraries to complete their journal runs is understandable, and many have special funds for this purpose. On the other hand, there is an increasing shortage of available files. In view of the seller's market that is thus created, each library should weigh carefully the necessity for securing back numbers. With the easy availability of microfilm copies and the privileges of interlibrary loan, perhaps there is less reason now to complete files of periodicals than formerly. Even large libraries which need such materials for research purposes or graduate study may find it possible to save money by extensive filming.

Institutions that prefer to complete their journal files in original form should understand clearly that they are competing in a market characterized by steadily rising prices. For the time being, there may be some advantage in employing dealers who are not specialists in back-file journals to advertise for desiderata. Second-hand book agents who reach a number of small bookstores by means of want lists may be able to locate needed items at moderate prices. Also, there are in Europe a few dealers possessing large stocks of journals who are not well known in America, such as Slatkine in Geneva, Nardeochia in Rome, and Moorthamers in Brussels. Inquiries addressed to second-hand bookshops may uncover additional sources.

Nothing in the above paragraphs should be construed to the discredit of the specialists who have rendered a great service to American libraries in helping to build great files of journals. It takes much time and labor to uncover such materials. It is also true that the agents are obliged to pay high prices for what they can find. The present market has not been created by the dealers, but by the competition of American libraries.
Two further recommendations can be made. (a) Caution is urged in the purchase of broken back files. An incomplete run is not improved greatly by additional scattered volumes. (b) All libraries should be vigilant in checking the fullness of back files offered or purchased. Any delivery which proves to be less perfect than the description indicated at the time of order should not be approved for payment until corrected. If it cannot be completed, the price should be adjusted to the satisfaction of the library—in view of the probability that the missing parts will never be supplied—or the shipment should be returned at the dealers' expense.

APPENDIX A: DEALERS EMPLOYED BY FIVE OR MORE LARGE AMERICAN LIBRARIES IN THE PURCHASE OF FOREIGN IN-PRINT BOOKS (1).

FRANCE

Marcel Blanchet, 12 Rue d'Aguesseau, Paris, France.

GREAT BRITAIN


GERMANY

Otto Harrassowitz, 6a Beethovenstrasse, Wiesbaden, Germany.
Koehler & Volckmar, 16 Leninstrasse, Leipzig C.1, Germany.
Swets & Zeitlinger, 47 Keizersgracht, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

SWITZERLAND

Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 40 Freie Strasse, Basel, Switzerland.
Herbert Lang & Co., Anthausgassee, Berne, Switzerland.

NETHERLANDS

E. J. Brill, 33a Oude Rijn, Leiden, Netherlands.
Swets & Zeitlinger, 47 Keizersgracht, Amsterdam, Netherlands.
APPENDIX A. (continued)

BELGIUM

Librairie Encyclopedique, 7 Rue du Luxembourg, Brussels, Belgium.
Office Internationale de Librairie, 184 Rue de l'Hotel-des-Monnaies,
Brussels, Belgium.
Swets & Zeitlinger, 47 Keizersgracht, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

ITALY

Ulrico Hoepli, 13 Via Nameli, Milan, Italy.
Libreria Liberma, 100 Piazza Capranica, Rome, Italy.
Libreria Gia Nardecchia, 25 Piazza Cavour, Rome, Italy.
Soc. Ed. Sansoni, 46 Via Mazzini, Florence, Italy.

APPENDIX B. SUBSCRIPTION AGENCIES EMPLOYED BY FIVE OR MORE LARGE
AMERICAN LIBRARIES IN THE PURCHASE OF FOREIGN JOURNALS (1).

FRANCE

Marcel Blancheteau, 12 Rue d'Aguesseau, Paris, France.

GREAT BRITAIN

Edward G. Allen & Son, Ltd., 10/14 Grape St. Shaftesbury Avenue, London W.1,
England.

GERMANY

Otto Harrassowitz, 6a Beethovenstrasse, Wiesbaden, Germany.
Walter J. Johnson, 125 E. 23rd Street, New York 10, N.Y., U.S.A.
Koechler & Volckmar, 16 Leninstrasse, Leipzig C.1, Germany.

SWITZERLAND

Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 40 Freie Strasse, Basel, Switzerland.
Herbert Lang & Co., Amthausgasse, Berne, Switzerland.
APPENDIX B. (continued)

NETHERLANDS

Swets & Zeitlinger, 47 Keizersgracht, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

BELGIUM

Swets & Zeitlinger, 47 Keizersgracht, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

ITALY

Ulrico Hoepli, 13 Via Nameli, Milan, Italy.
Libreria Liberna, 100 Piazza Capranica, Rome, Italy.
Libreria Gia Nardoccia, 25 Piazza Cavour, Rome, Italy.

FOOTNOTE

1. Libraries are members of the Association of Research Libraries, a group of forty-five large university and research libraries.

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