
Special Collections in an International Perspective

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ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE CONSIDERS the treatment of special collections in libraries in North America and the world. It looks first at issues of providing access for an increasingly broad and diverse readership but with limited resources. Questions of the ownership of unique materials are then considered, with special reference to claims of national heritage and the difficulties confronted by libraries that hold iconic material from other cultures. Finally, the article looks at some implications of the electronic revolution. While digitization can provide worldwide access to unique materials, it also leads to increased demands for access to the originals. The article concludes with this paradox, setting a context for dilemmas that will increasingly face special collections librarians.

INTRODUCTION

Research libraries define their “special collections” in different ways. The term can be a convenient definition for any research materials that fall outside the main collections of current publications, serials, and monographs. It can be used to mean almost any library material that is more than 100 or 150 years old. In some libraries, newspapers also fall within the category. In others, certain electronic materials (for instance in art history and related fields) come under the special collections purview. Area studies collections may be termed “special,” either in their entirety or in respect of the nonstandard materials they contain. Sometimes archival materials are included under the rubric, but in certain libraries they will be distinguished from special collections; and often they will be separated institutionally, with archivists and manuscript librarians belonging to two quite

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distinct professional groups. Beyond the English-speaking world, although often the terms used translate into "special collections," there are yet further permutations. Generally but not always, rare books and manuscripts are brought together as special collections. Beyond that, the term is almost infinitely elastic.

For the purposes of this essay, special collections will be defined as broadly as possible. It is a noticeable feature of the large professional associations such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) that their sections on rare books and manuscripts increasingly take into account materials in other formats and also increasingly share conference sessions with librarians responsible for audiovisual materials, art collections, and newspapers. There are growing numbers of conferences, publications, and Web sites devoted to collaboration among libraries, museums, and archives. The Research Libraries Group (RLG), international in its scope and multidisciplinary in its range of interests, is perhaps the most notable institutional example; and in its turn it has inspired smaller-scale collaborative projects among its members. A strong common concern in all these areas is that of conservation; that is, the special treatment and repair of library materials in order to ensure their long-term preservation as artifacts. Preservation of digital materials and the use of both microform and digital surrogates for the purposes of preservation are also live issues in the community of special collections librarians.

An overview of the ways in which libraries across the world treat their special collections would be instructive in many ways. The issues involved are political and social as well as cultural, and speak to the problems of constrained resources that most world-class research libraries face, but in widely differing degrees. These few pages cannot do more than provide some signposts toward that overview. I consider here three themes from an international perspective: policy and practices governing access to special collections; debates over the ownership of rare and valuable cultural materials; and some of the ways in which the electronic revolution is affecting librarians' and archivists' treatment of special collections.

ACCESS

During the IFLA conference in Beijing in 1996, parties of visiting librarians received a warm welcome at the National Library of China (NLC), one of the largest libraries in the world. We were shown treasures from their special collections, including manuscripts, maps, and scrolls dating from the classical period. On asking who was able to see these collections, we learned that access was restricted to "important people." The International Congress on Archives, meeting in Beijing the following week, received a similar impression of closed collections and limited access. Yet, the number of people employed as librarians and archivists in the People's Republic of Chi-

na is impressive, and they pay careful attention to the care and conservation of their collections, as we privileged visitors learned from our tours of various facilities. And, nearly seven years on, the current Web site of the NLC reveals a series of services based on special collections in the areas of classical Chinese culture and local history and genealogy, open to all those who hold NLC readers' tickets, and that privilege is open to anyone over the age of eighteen. A separate visit to the Institute of Historical Studies in Beijing revealed another interesting division in access policies. At that institute, scholars are free to study original primary source materials and rare printed books from dates up to the mid-nineteenth century. Materials beyond 1850 are treated as "modern," not historical, and I was told that historians do not handle them. I met scholars working at the institute on seventeenth-century taxation records which were a goldmine of social and economic information about the lives of the Chinese educated and business classes in that period. Both the documents themselves and the research based on them seemed closely parallel to materials in European archives, so that for a seventeenth-century historian, access in both China and the West seem to be not so very dissimilar. The picture of access in China is complicated by the vastness of the country and by the widely differing treatment of cultural assets, including libraries, among the ethnic minorities that are now governed from Beijing. A further complication in a swiftly changing scene is the role of cultural diplomacy in opening up great untapped treasures, whose very existence, in some cases, was denied until recently.¹

As the archives of eastern Europe have been opening up since 1989, an almost unmanageable flood of hidden archives and rare and unique collections of papers, books, works of art, and other materials has become available, or at least known to scholars, for the first time since the era of the second world war. Access to these materials is sometimes constrained in the countries of eastern Europe by dire problems of preservation caused by disasters such as the floods of autumn 2002 along the Danube and the Balkan wars of the 1990s. An international community of scholars could do nothing to protect the great National and University Library of Sarajevo from destruction by bombing in August 1992. With it were lost many priceless manuscripts and incunabula documenting the history of one of Europe's great cultural and religious crossroads, from the later middle ages to the late twentieth century.² Tragedies of this kind have been known throughout history, since the fire that destroyed the ancient library of Alexandria. They illustrate pointedly the truism that there can be no access without preservation.

Similarly, access to special collections may be denied not by the destructive forces of war or by secretive political cultures, but simply by shifts in the fortunes of a nation or region over a long period of history. The contents of the caves at Dunhuang, on the silk road in central Asia, are now the subject of intensive documentation, digitization, and research, thanks to the

efforts of the British Library, the National Library of China, Northwestern University, and the Mellon Foundation, among many others. For something like a millennium, these treasures remained sealed in their caves, overlooked as the silk road trade diverted to other routes and the monastery that had inhabited the caves ceased to exist. It took the competition among Russia, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan, while their agents engaged in what has been called "The Great Game," struggling for power in the near east and central Asia, to trigger the early twentieth-century expeditions to the region. Trophy-hunting scholars like Aurel Stein uncovered these documents and took them away for study in scholarly institutions across the globe. Intensive work by scholars of many nationalities has gathered pace during the past ten years and now provides a model for worldwide collaborations on rare materials.³ Much more recently, the growth of interest in African studies has led both African and American scholars to work on ancient documents of the Tuareg people in sub-Saharan Africa in ways that may change profoundly the accepted chronology of African civilization. If history and climatic change had taken some different turns, and Timbuktu⁴ had held its own as a center of trade and civilization, these collections might now be well-preserved symbols of international learning; or, they might have suffered a similar fate to that of the manuscripts in Sarajevo in some bitter war such as is all too familiar elsewhere on the African continent.

In those parts of the world where libraries and cultural materials have been relatively protected, the questions surrounding access may have less to do with war, upheaval, and decline and more to do with the agendas of local and national governments, and those of freestanding organizations of learning. These questions can be virtual battlefields nevertheless. Within any one society, expectations of access to special collections will vary enormously. A state historical society in the U.S., or a local history library or county record office in the United Kingdom, or a communal library in France may have more in common with each other than they have with national or university libraries in their own respective countries. In these and many other countries, direct public funding from local taxation provides the basic imperative to give the widest possible access to rare or unique historical resources. Since the 1960s at least, changes in the amount of leisure people have to spend and the way they spend it have led to an explosion of interest in genealogy and local history, placing huge demands on collections that were not made for such heavy use. Often, shortage of staff leads to restricted opening hours, but it is rare to find libraries of this sort limiting the use of their special collections by demanding letters of introduction or proof of scholarly standing.

The public entitlement to access extends also to most dedicated archival repositories in the public domain, certainly in the English-speaking parts of the world. Public records, whether defined as the records of central or federal government or more locally, are governed by the public responsi-

bility to ensure that they are preserved in an ordered way and made available to the public without undue restrictions. Librarians, archivists, and curators may try to deflect overuse of the collections, or unrealistic service expectations on the part of members of the public, by various means. Special exhibitions satisfy a large part of the requirement for public access; specialist bibliographies, worksheets for school classes, and referral services to professional researchers—these are some of the common devices for managing a demand that can be unpredictable and, in its nature, often underinformed. It is the common experience of most professionals managing reference services in public library special collections and public archives, anywhere in the world, that most enquirers will be using the service for the first and probably only time. No basic level of knowledge can be assumed, and although many queries will be similar (“How can I discover the history of my family? My house?” etc.), each will require separate research.

Libraries that have been established expressly for scholarly purposes approach the question of access to special collections rather differently but often provide a similar level of service in the end. The rarity and fragility of many of their collections require that there should be restrictions on access. Few people make direct use of these collections compared with the users of general, current collections. The result of these two factors is generally to reduce the number of staff that any institution feels it can devote to the provision of a public service. Opening hours in the special collections reading rooms of research libraries are shorter than in the main body of their parent libraries. Even though these primary sources are the raw material of new knowledge, and through the published work of scholars feed into the bloodstream of learning and popular culture, they do not command the attention of library administrators in the same way that heavily used serials or current monographs do. A vicious circle is set up, whereby the relative inaccessibility of the collections removes them further from the main agenda of their parent libraries, and the shortage of resources leads special collections librarians to impose further limitations on access. Manuscripts, maps, graphic materials, and all kinds of evidence from a vibrant human past are consigned to the realms of *arcana*.

OWNERSHIP

Special collections, however, often include publicly treasured relics. The very rarity that makes them difficult to handle and awkward to fit into the policies of busy libraries gives them also a potential glamour. Exhibitions, glossy publications, and television programs feast on special collections. Leading research libraries take pride in the great names attached to their collections, from the mandatory Gutenberg Bible or two, to the papers of statesmen, authors, musicians, and other renowned figures. Concentrations of archives from particular subject and geographical areas open up important new fields of research. As these collections become known through the

work of scholars, different nations or regional groups contest the ownership of archives and of single items which may be seen as cultural icons. And, as the public promotion of special collections gathers pace, the attachment of people representing the places of origin to the materials they have lost will only increase.

There has long been tension between North American collectors and learned organizations and European governmental policies that are designed to protect cultural heritage within its original context. Export licensing laws within the European Union differ from country to country but are governed now increasingly by common practices and agreements. Export of certain cultural artifacts is prohibited absolutely in some countries. In the United Kingdom, the export licensing system is governed by the "Waverley Criteria" that define the importance of the material concerned to the national heritage. Manuscripts are "zero rated" for export purposes, meaning that any manuscript material more than fifty years old, whatever its monetary value, must be accompanied by a license before it is exported, and the purchaser may be required to deposit microfilm copies with the British Library. In the case of rare books, a value is specified, above which material may not be sent out of the country without a license. The granting of an export license may be deferred, normally for not more than three months, in order to give a national institution the chance to raise funds to purchase the material at the price that it fetched when sold for export. Although only about 1 percent of all material to be exported is subjected to such deferral, the few cases can cause diplomatic difficulties and occasionally become *causes celebres*.

Further tensions exist within Europe, where definitions of cultural value vary, and the interests of the trade are sometimes seen as inimical to national interests. It will be interesting to watch how the common practices of the EU may be affected by its enlargement to include countries of eastern Europe from which cultural property has hemorrhaged until very recently. Will those countries become more restrictive in their approach to retaining cultural heritage? And if so, how will they enforce their restrictions? With London serving as one of the hubs of the international trade in works of art, rare books, and manuscripts, other European nations keep a particularly close watch on material passing through Britain. Meanwhile, reflecting a trend that is identifiable in other western countries including the U.S., there is evidence within Britain that the value attached by government to library materials, as compared with works of art in museums and galleries, is increasing. During the past few years, a growing proportion of export license deferrals imposed by the British government's Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art has related to archives and manuscripts; and a similar increase is noticeable in the proportion of grants for manuscript and archival acquisitions given out by the Heritage Lottery Fund since it was established in 1995. A trend can also be discerned toward more

recognition of certain sorts of archives: those of architectural, engineering, and construction companies, most recently.⁵

Government regulations and intergovernmental agreements form only part of the picture of contested ownership. Centuries of private enterprise by scholars and connoisseurs transported special collections around the globe, long before the development of a mature trade and its regulation. Additionally, rare and precious items have featured in the war booty of marauding armies since ancient times. While at one time it was mainly museum objects that attracted attention and became the subject of claims between governments or cultural groups, now manuscripts, archives, maps, and photographs are all subject to claims of illegitimate ownership.⁶ At the British Library, a paper presented to the board in 2000 identified nineteen separate items or collections that were then subject to claims for restitution, or potentially so.

Just one item on the British Library's list was the entire India Office Library and Records, the potential subject of complex claims to ownership. These collections include archives created by servants of the British government, many of them working in London, as well as the logs of British ships, the records of births, marriages, and deaths of British citizens overseas, the service records of British soldiers, and so on. Such materials might seem to be objectively at least as much at home in a library in London as they would be in South Asia. But some other treasures of the collections derive from the private collecting activities of generations of scholars and amateurs who adventured throughout Asia for some three and a half centuries. Their admiration for the civilizations whose materials they collected was palpable, and the records and library collections of the East India Company and the India Office contain great treasures of mixed ancestry: drawings by Asian artists commissioned by the British and by British artists traveling in India; diaries and paintings that document harmonious interchange and intermarriage as well as conflict. Some of the scholars whose activities left legacies in these collections founded schools of Asian studies, like the great orientalist Sir William Jones (1746–1794), some of whose manuscripts traveled from Asia to Britain and then back again to join the collections of the Bengal Asiatic Society, which he founded. It was Jones who established an understanding of Sanskrit as parent of the Indo-European family of languages and whose many interests contributed enormously to a worldwide tradition of scholarly work on Asian civilization. Such legacies will continue to be subject to debate, but the question of where Jones's manuscripts, and those of many others, "belong" will always be complex.⁷

Another history complicates the question of the Ethiopian manuscripts and many other treasures seized by British troops from the palace of the emperor Tewodoros after the battle of Magdala in 1868. Tewodoros himself had been gathering early Christian manuscripts together from monasteries all over his empire. But, their capture by the British army removed

them altogether from the region of origin, and they still reside in the British Library, where they are consulted by scholars and examples are seen by hundreds of thousands of visitors to the public galleries. The history of Ethiopia and the region since 1868 suggests that these important materials would be more vulnerable to the accidents of war and climate there than in London; and there is some reason to believe that Ethiopian authorities are glad to have copies rather than the responsibility of caring for the originals. Yet, who could claim that the original theft was justified, and who would condone similar captures now?⁸

Additional attention focused on the provenance of the special collections in European and North American library holdings with the development of an international movement in the later 1990s to identify works of art and other valuable material that had been taken from their rightful owners during the Holocaust period, roughly 1933 to 1945. About a year of meticulous bibliographic research and trawling through the British Library's archives revealed no material that had been wrongfully taken from Jewish owners, as far as it was possible to establish. This fact is less surprising if we bear in mind that several committees, under the auspices of several national governments, had devoted huge efforts during and just after the second world war to identifying and restoring stolen treasures.⁹ The indignation meted out to previous generations by present-day journalists and campaigners for neglecting the issue did less than justice to the efforts of war-time museum curators and librarians. Nevertheless the campaign focused usefully on the obligation of each generation to pay the most meticulous attention to the provenance and proper ownership of the materials in its care. The Web sites that now exist listing works of art and special collections acquired in the 1930s and 1940s, for which provenance cannot be established with total certainty, stand as a reminder to the consciences of us all. And the movement for return of World War II looted material continues, with one notable landmark being the return of the Smolensk Archive from the United States to Russia in the fall of 2002.¹⁰

Meanwhile, the medieval Tuareg manuscripts mentioned above are the subject of strenuous efforts to maintain the cultural autonomy and pride of the people to whom they belong. The World Amazigh Action Coalition issued a press release in June 2002 announcing that the Timbuktu High Commission, mayor, and religious leaders authorized Isa Ag Mohammed, Amazigh of Mali, "To retrieve, confiscate, and return all ancient manuscripts which have been scanned or photocopied from the libraries of Timbuktu by US private concerns, without specific authorization of the Mali government or the local authorities of Timbuktu to use these manuscripts."¹¹ The text goes on to plead for awareness that funding should be provided for the preservation of Malian cultural heritage, and asserts that African scholars understand better than Americans the cultural context of Timbuktu's literary heritage. It includes a call to "the University membership of our US

community” to promote awareness of the Amazigh heritage of Timbuktu and Mali. These special collections remain in their place of origin, but the dilemmas of those who care about them have much in common with others. The attention of the international scholarly community is courted and needed; but foreign scholars nevertheless are expected to maintain an intellectual distance.

THE ELECTRONIC REVOLUTION

The opportunities and hazards of the electronic environment constitute an inescapable context for custodians of special collections in all parts of the world in the twenty-first century. In theory it is now possible for libraries to provide digitized access to unique materials for all, via the Internet. Practical problems are triumphantly surmounted in some cases: the Library of Congress *Memory of America* Web site with over 7 million items now in digital form¹² and the British consortium for digitizing historic materials, formed more recently under the auspices of the New Opportunities Fund, a distributor of lottery money,¹³ are just two examples of wide-ranging national projects. Other collaborative projects based on particular themes proliferate. Most large research libraries have their own programs to digitize materials to be mounted on the Internet. Online catalogs including at least collection-level descriptions of special collections and often far more detailed finding aids are now the norm. In the archival sphere, great strides have been made to create searchable databases from multiple sources.¹⁴

Ownership, it might seem, must be a less important issue when access can be shared so readily. Of course there are problems, but the Internet environment constantly invites new solutions. It is worthwhile to pause at this point, however, to consider some of the serious underlying problems, which make progress toward the goal of shared access slow and painful. Prohibitive costs, not only in the technical accomplishment of this goal, but far more in the editing, sorting, and preserving of the original materials before and after they are digitized, create an obvious barrier. A number of familiar and traditional difficulties underlie the costs.

Rigorous standards of description are part of the responsible librarian's or curator's job, as much in the virtual world as in the physical. Every librarian who has run a project to digitize materials knows that common descriptive standards are still in their infancy, even though great strides have been made with the adoption of “Dublin core” and “Encoded Archival Description”; and the Open Archives Initiative and other new initiatives increasingly enable organizations to share their metadata. Without adequate description, digitized text and images are of little value to researchers, be they scholars or people with a more general interest. Creating those descriptions is laborious. There are fundamental tensions in research libraries and archives between the desire to give an electronic life to some of their more

lustrous special collections, already described and available on-site, and the need to produce primary catalog descriptions of material that nobody even knows they have. In the U.S., the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) is now drawing attention to this problem through a Special Collections Task Force.¹⁵ The dimensions of the problem are unknown, however, and only a few of the member libraries have as yet surveyed their uncataloged collections.¹⁶ In the United Kingdom, the Access to Archives (A2A) project focuses on the need for basic, first-generation cataloging as well as on providing Web access to existing nonelectronic finding aids. Meanwhile, international projects to create shared standards of description and, in some cases, common "authority files" to identify the names of persons, places, and organizations lead in yet another promising direction, with yet more implications for the use of resources. Several European initiatives led by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin illustrate the possibilities.¹⁷

If cataloging represents one major problem, preservation is another. Manuscripts, rare books, and fragile materials in other media cannot be digitized without being opened and placed on scanning machines: and all too often that means pressing on fragile bindings or risking some other kind of damage. Once digitized, the library then faces the fundamental problem, can this material be preserved in the long term? At present, international research libraries continue to rely on microfilm as a preservation medium, even though acetate microfilm itself has a tendency to deteriorate and in some cases has become unusable. The whole issue of digital preservation is the subject of intensive study in the research library and publishing communities. Several pilot studies have been financed in the United States by the Mellon Foundation. To date no dependable solutions to the problems has been found. This is an issue for librarians in all fields. Serials, government Web sites, digitized course materials, and expensively purchased databases all pose the fundamental question of whether libraries can keep these materials for use by subsequent generations of readers. In all cases there are difficult decisions to be made about the costs of preserving material in both paper and electronic formats, continuing access to electronic "ephemera," and almost innumerable additional problems. For special collections the question arises, is it worthwhile to digitize materials for shared public access if we cannot guarantee long-term access to the electronic version? It is right to ask whether scarce resources are not better devoted to providing descriptions of material that has not yet been cataloged.

Practical questions about the feasibility of producing electronic versions of special collections, and the desirable aim that first they should be adequately described, present librarians with enough dilemmas to occupy innumerable meetings and budgetary discussions. Behind these questions there lies also a set of philosophical and ethical dilemmas. From an international perspective, some of these are particularly important. First of all, can we ever "solve" problems of ownership and access by creating mass

access to catalogs and digitized versions of text and images? Early evidence suggests that the electronic revolution may in fact be producing the reverse effect. As members of the public all over the world become far better informed about the cultural materials that are derived from their heritage, their desire to see the originals increases. Librarians are finding that mounting a digitized version of a rare manuscript on the Internet leads to noticeable increases in visits to see the original. As with microfilm, so with electronic reproductions: the viewer will not necessarily trust that the version seen on the screen is a faithful representation of the original. This perception is objectively right. Although digital versions of inaccessible materials can hugely increase the number of people who benefit from seeing them, and often the quality of reproduction is so superb that the viewer may see details better than in the original, there is no full substitute for seeing original materials personally.

The same may well be true, though the evidence is harder to collect, with demands for restitution or repatriation. Then comes the question, can a responsible library consider restoring original materials to a legitimate claimant and keeping the digital surrogate instead? That depends on numerous conditions: whether scholars will have access equally in the region to which the original has been restored, whether the region of the original is able to provide adequate care and security, and whether there is in fact one single region or nation with a legitimate claim to ownership. In the realms of scholarship and cultural identity, which are in themselves two widely differing areas of human experience, what are the borders of an international community of learning and civilization, and where are the borders of national identity? What is common heritage, and how is its definition shifting?

Librarians who have charge of special collections will find themselves ever more often at the center of these and some other profound dilemmas. While, increasingly, solutions seem to lie in collaborative partnerships between libraries at regional, national, and international levels, such projects are in themselves difficult to sustain. Librarians need a shared ethic to guide them and to guide the organizations that employ them to care for the shared inheritance of human experience. Within the next decade, the technological potential for both exacerbating and meeting these dilemmas will develop ever more rapidly. It is to be hoped that we can between us develop with commensurate speed a framework in which to meet the challenge.

NOTES

1. The Jesuit library in Shanghai, created by Jesuit missionaries to China from the seventeenth century onwards, is one example.
2. For an accessible short description of the collections as they were before their destruction, see the Bosnia page on <http://www.geocities.com>.
3. A voluminous literature now exists, both electronic and in print, relating to current research on the silk road and to the Dunhuang caves in particular. The British Library Web page, <http://idp.bl.uk>, describes the work of the B.L.'s International Dunhuang Project

- established in 1992, which is now collaborating with the National Library of China, and contains links to numerous other sites. *The British Library Studies in Conservation Science* is a continuing series of scholarly papers on Dunhuang manuscripts. Volume 3, *Dunhuang Manuscript Forgeries* (2002), edited by Susan Whitfield, is the most recent. See also Susan Whitfield (1999). The Mellon Foundation's sponsorship of a comprehensive scholarly investigation of the Dunhuang caves is described at <http://www.mellon.org./programs/otheractivities/ARTstor/> and a press release describes the work of art historian Sarah Fraser, at Northwestern University, at <http://www.northwestern.edu/univ-relations/observer/stories/02-08-02/exploration.html>.
4. The complex history of Timbuktu, a city founded by Berber people in about 1100 A.D., is briefly described in the campaign literature of the Tazzla Institute for Cultural Diversity (<http://www.tazzla.org>).
 5. See tables in *Export of Works of Art 2000–2001. Forty-seventh Report of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art* (2002).
 6. A special session of the standing committee on Copyright and Other Legal Matters considered "The Legal Challenges in Repatriating Library Materials" on 19 August 2002 at the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) conference in Glasgow, beginning with an overview by James G. Neal on "The Background to the Repatriation of Cultural Materials." See <http://www.ifla.org/search/search.htm>.
 7. For a biography of Jones, see G. H. Cannon (1964); for a brief description of his collections, see S. C. Sutton (1967).
 8. The Association for the Return of Magdala Ethiopian Treasures, led by Dr. Richard Pankhurst, the distinguished historian of Ethiopia, has a Web site at <http://www.afromet.org>, which includes text of an address made by Richard and Rita Pankhurst to the British House of Commons.
 9. The papers of the British committee chaired by Lord Macmillan from 1943 to 1945 are at the British Library, in *Additional Manuscripts* 54577–54578.
 10. See Lauder (2002).
 11. See <http://www.tazzla.org> and a story on the foreign service Web site of the *Washington Post*, <http://www.sum.uio.no/research/mali/timbuktu>.
 12. <http://www.memory.loc.gov>.
 13. <http://www.nof-digitise.org> describes the principles behind this project, which is collecting together digital images from large and small libraries, archives, and other organizations across the United Kingdom.
 14. The National Register of Archives (<http://www.hmc.gov.uk/nra>), now nearly eighty years old, provides extraordinarily wide-ranging information about archives in Britain, while the recently formed Access to Archives project, based at the Public Record Office, (<http://www.pro.gov.uk/archives/A2A/>) complements this information with a rich collection of archival finding aids describing the holdings of large and small, local and national repositories in great detail.
 15. Established in 2002 with Joseph A. Hewitt, university librarian of the University of North Carolina, as chair.
 16. At Yale, the university library has carried out a survey as part of its strategic planning process and identified a list of uncataloged collections whose titles alone cover more than seventeen pages. Estimates of the amount of work required to catalog all of these run into decades.
 17. The MALVINE and its successor, LEAF, projects bring together libraries cataloguing in five different European languages, with funding from the European Union, to attack the problem of describing modern literary manuscripts. Both are based at the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, where a German national project, Kalliope, is also working to provide nationwide open manuscript descriptions. See the respective Web sites, <http://www.malvine.org>, <http://www.leaf.org>, and <http://www.kalliope.staatsbibliothek-zu-berlin.de>.

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