

# Descriptive Cataloging and Rare Books

LAURA STALKER AND JACKIE M. DOOLEY

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In this current era of belt-tightening in the American academic community, rare book cataloging tends to catch the eye of library administrators desperate to cut costs. Shrinking budgets and bloated backlogs demand that staff churn out as many serviceable bibliographic records as possible, and there is widespread interest in simplifying cataloging practice in the direction of more limited description and fewer formalized access points. Cataloging simplification is in the air.<sup>1</sup> In such a climate, it is difficult enough to justify paying skilled staff to create lengthy and elaborate catalog records for rare books; devoting hours of professional time to revising the rare book cataloging code may seem even more self-indulgent.

With such a bleak reality very much in mind, the authors of this paper present their view of the recent revision of *Bibliographic Description of Rare Books* (BDRB).<sup>2</sup> We describe some of the ideas that we brought to the revision process, including our desire to make rare book cataloging a more straightforward process without sacrificing the clarity or usefulness of the resulting bibliographic records. Let us waste no time revealing the happy ending: simplification and effectiveness coincide nicely in the context of rare book cataloging, and we believe that progress has been achieved toward the goal of making rare book cataloging both more effective and more affordable.

In this paper we also outline the process which led to the revision of BDRB and describe changes to the rules which resulted, now entitled *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books* (DCRB).<sup>3</sup> We conclude with a consideration of possible future activity in this area.

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Laura Stalker is Assistant Director for Bibliographical Projects at the Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside, and Jackie M. Dooley is Head of Collections Cataloging at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Santa Monica, California. As present and past chairs, respectively, of the RBMS Bibliographic Standards Committee, Laura Stalker and Jackie M. Dooley played a prominent role in the revision of BDRB. This article represents the authors' opinions; positions officially taken by the committee are explicitly identified. The authors are grateful to rare book catalogers at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Michigan whose comments in informal discussions in 1989 were instrumental in determining the direction of BDRB revision.



### WHY REVISE BDRB?

In 1988, as AACR2 became “AACR2.5”<sup>4</sup> and as the first revision of ISBD(A),<sup>5</sup> the international descriptive code for rare books, was nearing completion, it became apparent to members of the RBMS Bibliographic Standards Committee (known as the RBMS Standards Committee until 1989) that our national rare book cataloging code was becoming outdated. BDRB had been compiled and published by the Library of Congress in 1981 as a response to the adoption of AACR2 (1978) and the publication of the first ISBD(A) (1980). The interdependence of AACR2 and BDRB was emphasized in the preface to BDRB, where the latter is described as “the Library of Congress’ interpretation of AACR2 Chapter 2 for its own cataloging of older printed materials” and as “supplementary to AACR2.”<sup>6</sup> Scrutiny of all codes supplementary to AACR2 was warranted by the 1988 revision; additionally, the enthusiastic participation of the Bibliographic Standards Committee in the international review of ISBD(A) established the momentum for the committee’s involvement in the revision of BDRB.<sup>7</sup>

Also influencing the committee’s press for revision was the fact that rare book catalogers had accumulated almost ten years’ experience with BDRB and increasingly were voicing a desire to see it updated. The committee received a steady flow of inquiries regarding the possibility of LC “rule interpretations” for BDRB, or perhaps a list of corrections to be published in the *Cataloging Service Bulletin*. Furthermore, the staff of two international bibliographical projects—the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) and the North American Imprints Program (NAIP)<sup>8</sup>—had amassed extensive experience working with large bodies of comparative data drawn from the rare book collections of more than 500 North American libraries, and this experience had demonstrated the virtues and vices of the various rare book cataloging rules, particularly with regard to matching holdings of contributing libraries to existing bibliographic records.

Early in 1989, the committee informally surveyed American rare book catalogers to determine whether the need for revision seemed serious enough to warrant the effort and expense of producing a new edition. Dozens of catalogers responded, and enthusiasm for a new edition ran high, despite widespread sentiment that BDRB was generally a very effective code. A number of respondents described, for example, their confusion regarding treatment of early letter forms, frustration with inconsistencies in transcription rules, and a desire to see editorial errors remedied and an index to the rules added. In June of the same year, the Library of Congress expressed its need to reprint or republish BDRB, agreed that some changes were necessary, and readily accepted the committee’s offer of assistance.

At the outset, committee members felt that a revision limited to correcting minor errors or a piecemeal examination of particular rules taken out of context would not suffice. Rather, it seemed necessary that the entire process be informed by a coherent view of the purpose of rare book cataloging, distilled from the needs of experienced rare book catalogers. The ten recommendations (see Appendix I) adopted by the committee at the January 1990 ALA Conference broadly represented the needs



expressed by this community. During 1990, committee members produced a variety of discussion papers, the Library of Congress distributed two draft revisions for widespread comment, and catalogers throughout the Anglo-American cataloging community expressed their needs and views eloquently and in detail.

## THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF RARE BOOK CATALOGING

Two basic assumptions figured prominently in the committee's thinking. The first was that a rare book cataloging code should be driven by the characteristics of early printed books (i.e., books printed during the hand-press period) even though such a code may be used to describe any book. This had been implicitly acknowledged in BDRB's statement of scope and purpose<sup>9</sup> and by the fact that virtually all of the examples in BDRB were taken from books printed before 1801.

The second assumption was that harmony among related and analogous cataloging codes is desirable. The genealogical and analogical relationships among AACR2, ISBD, ISBD(A), and BDRB, as well as the significance of contradictions among them, were repeatedly debated; as a result, an expanded discussion of these relationships was included in the revised preface, which explains that DCRB owes its greatest allegiance to AACR2, the "parent" American cataloging code.<sup>10</sup>

Once these assumptions were articulated, the committee worked to establish a principled framework by defining the purpose of a descriptive cataloging code for rare books. Cataloging is essentially a practical activity and cannot be considered in isolation from the desired product and its use; therefore, a separate descriptive code for rare books, and each particular rule within it, can be justified only if it results in catalog records that are used in ways that general catalog records for books are not.

The code on which BDRB was based, AACR2, is generally taken as an attempt to fulfill the classic objectives of the catalog as defined by Cutter and revised by Lubetzky. To justify the existence of a set of rules for rare books and to determine its shape, the committee identified two additional special objectives that such a code might be expected to fulfill:

1. To enable the precise identification of books on the basis of characteristics that do not relate solely to the works or texts they contain; and
2. To justify and explain access points which allow the user to identify books which possess these intellectual and physical characteristics.

The fulfillment of the second special objective does not require any theoretical departure from the provisions of AACR2; "anchoring" access points in the descriptive portion of the record is part of ordinary cataloging practice. The *types* of special access points traced in rare book cataloging (such as genres, bindings, graphic processes, printing and publishing characteristics, and provenance information), however, are largely unknown in general cataloging. Their choice and formulation, as well as the notes describing them, often demand considerable scholarship and bibliographical sophistication, producing a result which may appear overly lengthy and full of arcane



vocabulary to most users of the catalog. But there is no *principled* difference between such records and “plain vanilla” AACR2 records; the logical relationship between description and access is the same.

On the other hand, the fulfillment of the first special objective, that of identification, requires something beyond elaboration of analogous AACR2 rules, because the object of description for rare books is not the same. A number of writers have observed that defining exactly *what* a catalog record represents is a slippery business—works, texts, publishing units, and individual copies are inevitably conflated.<sup>11</sup> Although AACR2 does provide a simple bibliographic description of a particular *nonunique* physical item, its underlying purpose is to enable the user to identify works and versions of works.

BDRB gave similar status to identifying both publishing units and individual *copies* of physical objects, which are described, uniquely identified, and placed in relation to one another.<sup>12</sup> BDRB included rules that had no equivalent in AACR2,<sup>13</sup> and in general was clearly intended to “enable different works and different editions of the same work to be readily identified,” as is ISBD(A).<sup>14</sup> It can be maintained that the fundamental difference between AACR2 and BDRB is that the object of description is essentially different; i.e., that BDRB was designed to describe pre-1801 books printed by hand. It is more accurate, however, to say that BDRB was designed to describe books about which a certain judgment regarding the bibliographical and/or artifactual value has been made, and that this judgment most often is made about books printed before 1801.

Some may take the extreme position that *all* books should be so privileged, that all are unique objects to be valued on all possible levels rather than serving as neutral carriers of texts which may be transferred intact from one vessel to another.<sup>15</sup> This position implies that all books are equally suitable candidates for description under rules that draw attention to the book as a physical object as well as to the text it contains. In the real world, however, such judgments are reserved for a small minority of books. Additionally, judgments vary over time and among individual institutions and their catalogers, and this variance creates tension within the catalog. A particular copy may be treated differently as intellectual fashions change, or two copies of a single edition (two objects which most people would refer to as the “same book”) may be treated differently by two catalogers at different institutions.

The object of description exists in a network of relationships with similar objects. The accepted categories of edition, issue, impression, and state<sup>16</sup> define the object’s position in the rare book world, just as the concepts of “authorship” and “work” (as exemplified in AACR2 by main entry and uniform title) determine an item’s place in the universe of authors and their works. One of the most commonly drawn distinctions between bibliography and library cataloging is that the former requires the comparison of several copies and describes no one copy, while the latter is based on a single copy.<sup>17</sup> In an era of shared catalogs and national databases, however, no catalog record can



be said to identify completely the object it represents without an indication of that object's place in its bibliographical "family," and that place cannot be determined without comparison of copies.

Books cataloged under rare book rules seldom leave their home institutions and often cannot be photocopied, so copies usually cannot be directly compared; catalog users must rely on surrogates for comparison and identification. For some early books, descriptions in published bibliographies serve this purpose, but for the vast majority, records in shared catalogs provide the only basis for comparison. Clearly all possible points of difference between bibliographical entities cannot be predicted and provided for in a rare book catalog record, but the experience of large cooperative projects such as ESTC and NAIP has shown that close transcription of title page information often reveals unrecorded editions and provides a clue to substantive textual variations.

This argument for the closest possible transcription of the title pages of early books is not based on any bibliographical principle; the wording, spelling, and punctuation of title page information by no means reveals these distinctions in all cases. Faithful transcription often serves this purpose, however, and since title page information must be transcribed in any case, it should be as faithful as possible and serve this additional purpose where and when it can. It may be argued that this approach is necessary only in cases where variants exist, but this position contains an essential flaw: variants can be discovered only by means of comparison. The discovery of hitherto unknown variants is part of the daily routine of large cooperative bibliographic projects, and this is made possible in large part by uniform cataloging treatment of all items in a database.

It is important to note that faithful transcription does not necessarily entail lengthier transcription or a more complex catalog record. In fact, the seeming paradox of faithful transcription is that it both provides an accurate "picture" of the object *and* is simpler to learn and practice than the transposition and normalization mandated by ISBD and AACR2. Thus, the cleaner the transcription, the more straightforward the cataloging effort, and the more effectively the rare book catalog record fulfills the objective of identification.

A turning point in the authors' thinking about the revision of BDRB was the realization that the two parameters along which rare book records most typically differ from "regular" records, namely fullness and faithfulness, bear no necessary relationship to one another. Rather, each is directly related to one of the special objectives of the rare book catalog: fullness is the result of providing and justifying special access points, and faithfulness leads to precise identification of bibliographic entities and individual physical objects. Hence, the fulfillment of the first special objective (precise identification) should not lead to increased cataloging costs, and in fact, as pointed out above, can result in savings.

Simplicity of application and the objective of precise identification coincide in yet another way. BDRB included numerous options in order to allow libraries flexibility



in describing unique collections and serving specialized constituencies, but in an environment of shared records, a wide range of descriptive options impedes identification. For example, BDRB rule 0E provided three different punctuation options for transcribing the same title page, and rule 4D1 instructed catalogers to record imprint dates using arabic numerals, with the option of transcribing roman dates as they appear, followed by the same date converted to arabic numerals and enclosed in square brackets. Such options make it impossible to reconstruct what was actually printed by viewing a catalog record, and the authors felt that eliminating them would render the record less ambiguous and the code more straightforward. The degree to which such problems were remedied is described below.

### INTERNAL CONSISTENCY AND HARMONY AMONG RELATED CODES

Although one of the committee's basic assumptions was that the revision process should be guided by a principled approach, the financial and practical constraints within which most catalogers work were never forgotten. In this vein, faithful transcription and consistent application of options contribute to both fulfillment of the first special objective (precise identification) and simplification of the cataloging process. Determining what information to convey in a rare book record often requires research skill and scholarly knowledge, but there is no reason why cataloging *per se* (i.e., arrangement of the results of observation and research in a standardized format) should be difficult; it should be a straightforward process, and cataloging rules should be easy to read and apply.

Furthermore, common sense tells us that the more the rules are riddled with exceptions and inconsistencies, the more difficult they are to apply. As the committee examined the text of BDRB with revisers' eyes, a number of inconsistencies surfaced within and among rules, and it was concluded that such inconsistencies should be eliminated wherever possible. Most were in the rules governing transcription from the title page; the rules governing collation and notes did not in general present such problems. The revision team's success in resolving these issues is discussed later in this paper.

Just as internal consistency was necessary, so too was harmony with the descriptive codes with which BDRB has a family relationship. As cited earlier, BDRB is considered a "supplement" to or "interpretation" of AACR2, Chapter 2. As such, BDRB may provide for fuller and more faithful descriptions of books than does AACR2, but in principle it must stay within the larger code's basic framework of areas and elements and must retain the standardized ISBD punctuation which defines that framework. This greatly influenced the original authors of BDRB, so the rules were kept in harmony with AACR2 in this general sense. On a more pragmatic level, it seems safe to say that most North American catalogers come to the rare book rules already familiar with AACR2 and use it regularly to describe modern special collections materials, so basic inconsistencies between AACR2 and BDRB would have been a major impediment to training catalogers.<sup>18</sup>



The relationship between ISBD(A) and BDRB is a more distant one, and was less clear at the outset of the revision process. ISBD is intended as the general framework within which national codes such as AACR2 are constructed, and ISBD(A) is its extension for rare books. The nature of the relationship between ISBD(A) and BDRB surfaced as discrepancies between corresponding rules in ISBD(A) and AACR2 were identified, and the committee wondered which way BDRB should turn. The Library of Congress informed us that this was not a debatable issue, since it is LC policy that BDRB must follow the national code—AACR2—in cases of conflict with ISBD(A).

Significant inconsistencies were nonetheless debated, and some changes were made in cases where conflict with AACR2 was not at issue. Inconsistencies between DCRB and ISBD(A) which remain, however, include differences in prescribed source of information for the edition statement, variations in transcription of early letter forms, the ISBD(A) requirement for a note describing the punctuation convention used, and more stringent requirements in ISBD(A) for notes regarding transposition. One inconsistency not discussed was a basic variation in formulation of the physical description area: DCRB places the bibliographic format last, while ISBD(A) places it before the expression of dimensions. This difference seemed relatively unimportant, since the same data appear in the record, albeit in a slightly different location.

There remains an argument to be made for an international standard for rare book cataloging particularly for books published before the establishment of the present national boundaries when an international Latinate culture still determined the form and content of printed books in Europe and America. Perhaps even more pressing is the fact that just as use of USMARC and the establishment of a *de facto* national database have necessitated the development of numerous bibliographic standards, so do recent developments in other parts of the world—from the invasion of Europe by the U.S. bibliographic utilities to the formation of the European Community—suggest the wisdom of putting international standards in place as rapidly as possible. European books printed before 1801 have had two centuries and more to move around, and substantial collections are to be found in countries other than those of their origin. There is also the more pragmatic consideration that the corpus of printing in Europe before 1801 constitutes a large but finite body of material, and a comprehensive database of such books, following a single descriptive standard, is imaginable. As British and other European libraries automate and make decisions about adoption of existing rare book cataloging codes such as DCRB and ISBD(A),<sup>19</sup> time will tell what progress can be made on this front.

## DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGING OF RARE BOOKS

To what extent were these various assumptions and concerns addressed in *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books* (DCRB), the rules which emerged from the revision process? And not to forget our opening premise, how has rare book cataloging been rendered more straightforward and effective? Improved layout and typography alone



should make a big difference to weary catalogers, but more substantive changes abound. As stated earlier, the committee felt that any substantive rule revision should lead to a code that would be more internally consistent than was BDRB, that would better fulfill the two special objectives of precise identification and expanded access to special features, and that would be in closer harmony with ISBD(A).

Significant strides were made in the direction of ease of use and consistent application of rules; many rules were reworded for greater clarity with no substantive change in meaning. The notorious rule 0H (on transcription of early letter forms) is perhaps the most prominent example of clearer wording, but others such as the reorganized rule 4D2 (on transcription of dates requiring adjustments or additions) are equally improved.

Greater simplicity also was achieved by eliminating some internal inconsistencies. An example is found in BDRB rule 4D1, which called for the silent omission of words and phrases such as "Printed in the year" or "Anno" appearing in the imprint, while the more general rule for recording imprint information instructed the cataloger to indicate *all* omissions with ellipses. DCRB improves upon this by requiring inclusion of such words and phrases, thereby both eliminating the inconsistency and improving the accuracy of the transcription. In another case, BDRB rules 4A2, 4C6, and 4C13 confused catalogers who felt these rules contradicted each other with regard to treatment of complex publisher statements from different sources of information. In DCRB, the situation is made clear in revised rules 4A2 and 4C6 (4C13 was dropped).

A third example is BDRB rule 0E (Punctuation), which was difficult to read and contained various inconsistencies in recording of punctuation and use of ellipses. For example, the rule stated: "Do not transcribe a mark of punctuation that precedes the mark of omission unless it is a mark of abbreviation or of final punctuation (e.g., a period or a question mark)." In DCRB this sentence was dropped; the decision is left to the cataloger's judgment. This change eliminates an apparently meaningless exception and thereby simplifies the rule; on the other hand, users of DCRB records will not know whether or not the mark of punctuation preceding an ellipsis has been dropped.

BDRB Rule 0E was also identified as a rule in which the choice of options (three in this case) could admit ambiguity and thus impede identification. In DCRB, the number of options has been reduced to two. Another case, noted above, in which the options obscured identification, was not altered: DCRB rule 4D2 (formerly BDRB rule 4D1) still allows omission of the literal transcription of roman dates and uniform transcription of all dates in arabic numerals, however they appear on the title page.

In their comments on BDRB rule 1A2, catalogers expressed widespread interest in being allowed to use ellipses to indicate omission of pious invocations and other "non-title" information. LC would not allow this, since it violates rule 0E's prohibition against use of ellipses to represent omission of information "that is not considered part of any area." The wording of 1A2 was loosened up a bit, however, to give catalogers



more latitude in determining under what circumstances such information is part of the title and must be either recorded or represented by an ellipsis.

BDRB's tendency not to require notes describing transposition of title page elements hindered identification, since absence of such notes makes it impossible to reconstruct the appearance of the title page. BDRB rule 2C2 required a note whenever a statement of responsibility is transposed from a position following the edition statement, but rules 1B1 (elements preceding the title proper), 1G3 (statements of responsibility preceding the title proper), 2B7 (edition statements), and 2C3 (statements of responsibility relating to edition) call for transposition notes only "if desired." Making all such notes mandatory would not only promote consistency within the code, but would enhance the identification function of the resulting records and would conform more closely to ISBD(A). Some progress was achieved in that DCRB requires notes for all transpositions of title and statement of responsibility data (rules 1B1 and 1G3).

BDRB rules for constructing notes (Area 7) were studied with a view to better fulfillment of the second special objective, that of explaining and justifying special access points. A committee subgroup found that the existing provisions were entirely adequate, since they allow catalogers considerable latitude in composing any appropriate or necessary note. They did suggest minor wording changes intended to give extra emphasis to the existence of the RBMS thesauri and other specialized vocabulary lists. Also, rule 7C6 on authorship notes was revised and expanded in order to draw attention to the frequency of anonymous and pseudonymous publication in earlier books and to the need to exercise special care in the case of attributed authorship.

Numerous other changes, both major and minor, were made in the rules. A brief list of the more significant changes is given in the preface to DCRB.<sup>20</sup>

As the original ten committee recommendations clearly indicate (see Appendix I, below), catalogers yearned for more than a set of descriptive rules; they wanted advice on access points, serials, MARC coding, and minimal-level cataloging, as well as a concordance with AACR2, a set of cataloging examples, and a bibliography of cataloging tools, all within the covers of BDRB. In short, they longed for a rare book cataloging manual.

DCRB delivered most of the extra features that were requested (see Appendix II below for a list of DCRB appendixes), and although purists may scoff at such additions to a descriptive cataloging code, each DCRB appendix further simplifies rare book cataloging by providing a useful new tool or eliminating the need for a previously separate one.

More reliable access to title variants should result from the guidelines in Appendix A, and the mysteries of early letter form transcription will, one hopes, be lessened by a thorough reading of Appendix B. The serials guidelines in Appendix C have been adopted by CONSER. For those libraries driven by economic exigencies (and the magnitude of arrearages) to reducing cataloging time, the minimal-level cataloging



guidelines in Appendix D will encourage creation of brief records that meet the identification objective of rare book cataloging. Use of Appendix E will make coding of USMARC field 040, subfield e, more consistent, and therefore more meaningful. And the concordance between DCRB and AACR2 rule numbers (Appendix F) should ease the transition between codes for generalists who use DCRB infrequently, as well as simplifying the training of new rare book catalogers. Other additions to DCRB include a brief list of rare book cataloging tools which appears in the preliminary matter, and a detailed index. The latter was by far the most frequently requested improvement.

The chief remaining lacuna is an extensive set of full-record cataloging examples. Examples were eliminated from DCRB due to the substantial delay this would have imposed on the publication schedule, but the Bibliographic Standards Committee has begun work to address this need.

One way to measure the extent to which the revision team accomplished the task it set for itself is to examine the fate of the committee's ten original recommendations (see Appendix I). Recommendations I (title change), V (explanation of the relationships among BDRB, AACR2, and ISBD(A)), VI (an AACR2 concordance), and VII (guidance in the use of USMARC field 040) were fully realized as originally envisioned.

Other recommendations were at least partially implemented. Recommendation VIII, suggesting the establishment of levels for rare book cataloging, led to the creation of guidelines for minimal-level rare book records (Appendix D), but this recommendation would have been more completely fulfilled if an "exact transcription" level of description had been created.<sup>21</sup> Recommendation IX listed four categories of possible additions to the publication; two (parts a and d) were deemed suitable for inclusion in DCRB and two (parts b and c) were not, but there are plans underway to address these desiderata through appropriate means.

Recommendations II and III involved substantive rule changes focusing on transcription issues, and the degree to which they were implemented was discussed above. Although the authors feel that the objective of precise identification would have been more fully realized by additional changes, the changes that were made do contribute to a more faithful transcription. Perfect consistency in transcription practice was not achieved, but progress was made; as a consequence, DCRB should be simpler to apply than was BDRB.

Recommendation IV, which called for the elimination of options, was not adopted; catalogers did not want to be deprived of the freedom and flexibility that the options allow, given the wide variety in situations found in early printed books, broadsides, and other materials chosen for treatment under DCRB. One option was eliminated, however, as mentioned earlier: the portion of rule 0E governing the transcription of punctuation was simplified, and the three options formerly available were reduced to two in order to reduce ambiguity.



Recommendation X asked that a mechanism be established for regular and ongoing review of BDRB. Although this issue was not formally resolved, the well-publicized success of the revision project seems to have led to greater recognition at LC, and perhaps in the cataloging community at large, of the needs of rare book catalogers; the appearance of various rule interpretations and guidelines pertaining to rare materials appearing in recent issues of the *Cataloging Service Bulletin* are one indication of this. We hope that this instance of successful collaboration between the Library of Congress and the Bibliographic Standards Committee is the beginning of a productive long-term relationship.

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Many other issues were raised by the surveys and public discussions that accompanied the revision process. Some new and revised guidelines were judged inappropriate for inclusion in DCRB proper and already have appeared elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> Others are in preparation, while some remain desiderata. In addition to the handbook of examples already mentioned, many other topics have been discussed in committee, including work on uniform titles for early works, descriptive standards for sheet music and broadsides, and forms of heading for early printers. Some of these issues surely will be addressed during the coming decade. And as mentioned earlier, time will tell whether progress will be made toward creation of an international rare book cataloging code.

Another idea that has generated committee interest is a research project on the use of rare book records, particularly descriptive data. Most of the library literature on the use of catalogs focuses on access points; there is relatively little written on how users employ the descriptions that catalogers go to so much trouble to construct in either rare book or general catalog records.<sup>23</sup> It might be said that proposing such a study *after* revising the rules is a bit backwards, since it would have been an appropriate prelude to the theoretically based revision of the rules that the committee felt was desirable. Much of the revision was based on conscious and unconscious assumptions about how catalog records are used; unfortunately, it seems likely that the work was informed more by knowledge of how librarians use records than by any real understanding of how anyone else uses them.

The rare book cataloging community was thoroughly energized by the BDRB revision process. Members of the Bibliographic Standards Committee became acquainted with many knowledgeable colleagues who had not previously been involved with committee activities or other national-level cataloging initiatives, and our hopes are high that their interest in working to develop and improve rare book cataloging standards will not wane. We welcome and encourage all efforts to debate, research, and publish stimulating ideas on a broad range of topics related to modern standards for bibliographic control of rare books and special collections materials. Our profession and the users it serves will be much the richer for it.



**APPENDIX I: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BDRB REVISION**

The following ten recommendations were adopted by the RBMS Bibliographic Standards Committee at its January 1990 meeting. They were intended to guide the BDRB revision team, both providing guidance on specific assignments and giving overall direction to the project. As discussed above, some were fully incorporated in DCRB, some partially, and some not at all.

I. That the title of BDRB be changed to *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books* to clarify that it is a set of rules for cataloging, not bibliographic description proper.

II. That substantive rule changes be made to increase faithfulness to the object. This applies primarily to transcription from the title page, where transposition, omission, normalization, and interpolation should be kept to a minimum.

III. That conventions for transcription from the title page be made consistent among the various areas, with the goal of easier and more reliable reconstruction of the title page.

IV. That the options relating to transcription be eliminated, with the goal of greater predictability among records.

V. That the purpose of BDRB and its relationship to AACR2 and ISBD(A) be addressed in more detail in the introduction to a revised edition.

VI. That a concordance to the corresponding rules in AACR2 be incorporated into the text of a revised edition.

VII. That guidance be provided for determining when a record should be coded BDRB (040 e) rather than AACR2. For example, a record which follows BDRB rules for transcription from the title page and physical description in fields 245, 250, 260, and 300 might be coded BDRB.

VIII. That suggested levels for rare book cataloging be developed analogous to those found in AACR2. The minimum level should provide sufficient information to fulfill objective (1). The levels may be defined by presence or absence of categories of data (as in AACR2), as well as by the extent to which data are omitted within the areas.

IX. That BDRB be expanded to include: (a) guidelines for the description of rare serials; (b) discussion of access issues of particular interest to rare book catalogers (e.g., form of entry for early names, use of thesauri developed by this committee); (c) MARC-tagged examples of catalog records for materials in various formats, including broadsides and serials; and (d) a bibliography of other rare book cataloging tools, including the other RBMS thesauri and *Standard Citation Forms for Rare Book Cataloging*. Alternatively, that the committee sponsor the preparation of a rare book cataloging manual to be used with BDRB, and to include all of these items.

X. That a mechanism be established for ongoing review of BDRB and issuance of "rule interpretations" or corrections, as necessary.



## APPENDIX II: LIST OF DCRB APPENDIXES

### *Appendix A: Title Access Points*

In DCRB, titles generally are transcribed very much as they appear on the item, without the degree of transposition and normalization that are characteristic of AACR2 catalog records. Given the frequency of anonymous and pseudonymous publication, the imperfect physical state, and the extensive use of early letter forms and contractions all found in early printed books, added title access is of particular importance. This appendix serves to remind catalogers of situations which may call for more generous title access than usually is provided under AACR2.

### *Appendix B: Early Letter Forms*

BDRB rule 0H, which gives directions for transcribing obsolete forms of letters, as well as how to handle i/j and u/v when the AACR2 rules for capitalization call for converting them to uppercase or lowercase, elicited more comments, complaints, and questions than any other rule. The substance of the rule was not changed, but it was rewritten for greater clarity, and Appendix B was added to give additional background on early printing practices.

### *Appendix C: Rare Serials*

The guidelines for rare serials, originally published in *Cataloging Service Bulletin* 26 (Fall 1984), were updated with the cooperation and approval of CONSER. The revised guidelines cover not only descriptive conventions but also MARC format provisions and guidance on linking related records and creating separate records for individual issues of serials.

### *Appendix D: Minimal-Level Records*

This appendix is a response to widespread concern about large cataloging arrears in rare book and special collections libraries. While it is most desirable to provide full description and access to rare materials, the committee recognized that many rare book catalogers are compelled by circumstances to do at least some brief cataloging of rare materials, and that it would be useful to have a guideline in place that provides for records which fulfill the special objective of precise identification. The alternatives of creating a guideline *ad hoc* within each institution or following existing general guidelines for minimal-level cataloging are much less desirable.

### *Appendix E: DCRB Code for Records*

USMARC field 040 e indicates the descriptive cataloging code that was followed in a catalog record. The decision to use the code "dcrb" in this field is usually straightforward, but this appendix gives guidance for some ambiguous situations: minimal-level cataloging, microforms of early printed books, rare serials, nonbook materials, and what has come to be known as "special collections cataloging."



*Appendix F: Concordance Between Rules in DCRB and AACR2*

This concordance was provided to assist the many catalogers who use both descriptive codes, and should prove of particular assistance in training generalist catalogers to use DCRB.

*Appendix G: Glossary*

This is an updated version of the BDRB glossary, which supplements the glossary in AACR2. Of particular note in DCRB is the revised definition of "title page."

## NOTES

1. For examples of recent publications on the subject of cataloging simplification, see David A. Smith, *A Perspective on Cataloging Simplification* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Cataloging Forum, 1991); and Dorothy Gregor and Carol Mandel, "Cataloging Must Change!" *Library Journal* 116:6 (April 1, 1991): 42–47.

2. *Bibliographic Description of Rare Books: Rules Formulated under AACR2 and ISBD(A) for the Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books and Other Special Printed Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1981).

3. *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Books*, 2nd edition (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1991). Prepared by a working group under the auspices of Office for Descriptive Cataloging Policy, Library of Congress, and Bibliographic Standards Committee of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Association of College and Research Libraries, American Library Association.

4. *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd edition, 1988 revision (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988). This is a revision of the original AACR2, the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2nd edition (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978).

5. *ISBD(A): International Standard Bibliographic Description for Older Monographic Publications (Antiquarian)*, second revised edition (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1991).

6. BDRB, p. vi.

7. In 1988 the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) invited the American Library Association to review the revised draft of ISBD(A), and ALA conveyed this request to the Resources and Technical Services Division (now the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services). RTSD appointed its Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access, the AACR2 oversight committee, to handle the review, and invited RBMS participation. The section in turn asked the Standards Committee to undertake the project. The two committees immediately joined forces and conducted a productive joint review, returning numerous editorial and substantive comments to IFLA.

8. The Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) seeks to record all institutionally owned copies of items printed in Britain or British possessions or in the English language, 1701–1800; responsibility for North American imprints of the same



period was assigned to the North American Imprints Program (NAIP) at the American Antiquarian Society. NAIP records are constructed according to BDRB; ESTC has its own cataloging rules, which do not adhere to AACR2 or ISBD (*The Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue: The Cataloguing Rules*, 1991 Edition. Revised by J. C. Zeeman. London: The British Library, 1991). The two sets of records have been successfully combined in the ESTC database in RLIN.

9. BDRB rule 0A states: "These rules are based on the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, second edition (AACR2) and on *ISBD(A): International Standard Bibliographic Description for Older Books (Antiquarian)*. They are for the description of any printed books, pamphlets, broadsides, and single sheets requiring special description. There are three categories of material that may be treated under these special rules. The first of these is based on the date of printing of the publication: for example, publications from countries following European conventions in bookmaking often need special rules if they were printed before the 19th century. The second category is based on the place of origin, particularly when the publications are printed by hand or by methods continuing the tradition of the hand-printed book. The third is based on the administrative policy of the institution, which may choose to catalog some or all of its holdings at a more detailed level of description than that provided for in AACR2." A footnote to the next paragraph states LC's policy of applying BDRB to books published before 1801 and of generally using AACR2 for later books.

10. DCRB, p. viii.

11. The classic treatment of this problem is G. Thomas Tanselle, "Descriptive Bibliography and Library Cataloguing," *Studies in Bibliography* 30 (1977): 1-56. In fact, it is to this article that DCRB owes its new name, since Tanselle authoritatively draws the distinction between bibliographic description and descriptive cataloging.

12. That the distinctions among these various levels of description are routinely confused was recently illustrated by LC's guidelines for special notes and access points used in rare book cataloging (*Cataloging Service Bulletin* 53 [Summer 1991], pp. 40-46). Although both edition-specific data (e.g., terms for form/genre and place of publication) and copy-specific data (e.g., provenance notes and binding terms) are discussed in detail, the article is entitled simply "Copy-Specific Data Elements for Rare Books."

13. DCRB Appendix F (Concordance Between Rules in DCRB and AACR2) explicitly lists all rules for which AACR2 has "nothing comparable." Examples include DCRB rule 1F (single sheet publications), 2B7 (transposing edition statements), 4D3 (supplying dates from reference works), and 5B4 (errata leaves).

14. ISBD(A), p. 2.

15. G. Thomas Tanselle eloquently articulates this point of view in his recently published Malkin lecture *Libraries, Museums, and Reading* (New York: Columbia University School of Library Service, 1991).

16. These four terms are defined in the DCRB Glossary (Appendix G).

17. Tanselle, "Descriptive Bibliography and Library Cataloguing," p. 6.



18. In recognition of the importance of maintaining harmony with AACR2, the committee invited ALA's Committee on Cataloging: Description and Access to appoint a liaison to the BDRB revision effort, who kept CC:DA informed regarding the committee's progress.

19. Following discussions at a meeting of American and British rare book catalogers at a joint conference of the ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section and the Library Association Rare Books Group in September 1989, various major institutions in the U.K. expressed strong interest in adopting DCRB for automated rare book cataloging; these included the National Library of Scotland and Oxford University.

20. DCRB, p. vi.

21. In Discussion Document BDRB 6/90.B.6 ("Title page transcription," prepared for discussion at ALA Conference, June 23–24, 1990), the authors suggested rewriting and explicitly labeling rules with transcription-oriented options. For example, BDRB rule 2B7 stated:

2B7. Transpose separable edition statements into the edition area from other parts of the title page. If desired, make a note indicating this transposition.

The suggested change would have read instead:

2B7. Transpose separable edition statements into the edition area from other parts of the title page.

OPTION: If desired, make a note indicating this transposition.

This technique would have assisted catalogers in locating the options scattered throughout DCRB, thereby encouraging their use as a set. Furthermore, a rigorous level of full description, corresponding to AACR2's third level and requiring consistent application of all the labeled options, could have been established. The discussion paper suggested identifying this level by a distinctive code in USMARC field 040 (used to indicate the descriptive rules under which the record was created), thus remedying to some extent the ambiguity that results from the existence of options. A degree of cataloging simplification would have ensued as well, since the decision to employ the options could be made once for the whole record rather than on a rule-by-rule basis. This proposal was rejected however, due both to general lack of enthusiasm on the part of catalogers and clear opposition from LC.

22. A recent Library of Congress rule interpretation discusses the forms of heading for persons who lived before the twentieth century (RI 22.19: "Distinguishing Terms," *Cataloging Service Bulletin* 53 [Summer 1991], p. 36–37); this LCRI was based on Discussion Document BDRB 6/90.D.2. Another example is the article on LC policy for special rare book data elements, referred to in footnote 12 above. Both of these guidelines originally were proposed as DCRB appendixes, but since they comprise Library of Congress policy, it was more appropriate to publish them in *CSB*.



23. For example, see Janet Swan Hill, "The Year's Work in Descriptive Cataloging and . . .," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 32:3 (July 1988): 203: "It is not uncommon for description or descriptive cataloging (description plus creation and assignment of access points derived from the description) to be sparsely represented in library literature. Except in times of descriptive code revision, when emotions and literary output run high, subject analysis usually occupies a greater proportion of cataloging literature. Even rarer than an article on description is reportage of actual research on some descriptive topic."

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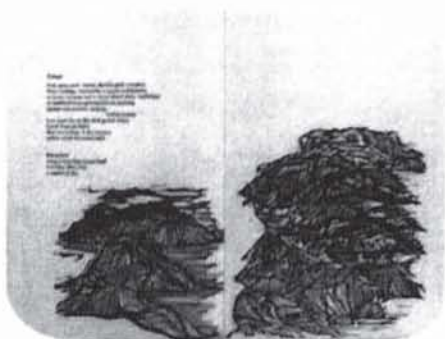
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