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Novum Regestrum. The Union Catalogue of Printed Books from 15th to 19th century in Latin American, Spanish and Portuguese Libraries

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Abstract:

Presentation of the Novum Regestrum, Union Catalogue of Printed Books from 15th to 19th century in Latin American, Spanish and Portuguese Libraries, new stage. This ABINIA (Asociación de Estados Iberoamericanos para el Desarrollo de las Bibliotecas Nacionales de Iberoamérica) project started in 1989, under the National Library of Spain coordination. A Catalogue in CD-ROM was published in 1995 and the project was continued in 1996 when it was decided to create an online database, accessible since 2002, via Internet to the libraries involved in the project.

The Union Catalogue Origins

The first Latin American Meeting of National Libraries was held in Madrid in 1988 to organise the 1992 celebration of the Fifth Centenary of the Discovery of America. It was decided to hold an international exhibition about the bibliographical treasures preserved in the different National Libraries. This meeting brought up the necessity of establishing an organizational framework to continue the efforts planned at that moment and to take advantage of the support of the Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario. In 1989, at the meeting held in Mexico, the ABINIA's Acta Constitutiva was signed. At ABINIA's General Assembly, after considering the problems encountered by libraries, the following aims were approved:

- a) To collect and maintain retrospective and updated information about National Libraries.

- b) To take the necessary steps to increase public and government awareness about the meaning and importance of library and documental heritage of the member countries.
- c) To adopt policies, strategies, standards and training programmes to preserve the collections in the national libraries.
- d) To adopt compatible technical standards in libraries which guarantee the bibliographic control and help the exchange of information and material and the information services automation.
- e) To draw up national and regional reference resources to encourage research, study and information exchange.
- f) To link National Libraries with academic, governmental, legislative, public and historical libraries and the existing information systems in their countries and in other Latin American countries.
- g) To release collections through catalogues, publications and exhibitions.
- h) To support academic training programmes and services aimed at updating and improving human resources in National Libraries, together with the formation of the users.
- i) To exchange experiences and carry out joint research on problems common in National Libraries.
- j) To offer technical assistance to members that may require it.
- k) To manage the acquisition of financial, material and human resources to consolidate and modernize National Libraries' collections and services and to allow the creation of cooperative programmes.

The main aims set for the period 1990-1992 were: to hold the "Testimonios" exhibition in Venezuela and Spain and to build the Latin American Union Catalogue of ancient books from 16th to 19th century.

Project Planning

To set up the catalogue, a Union Catalogue Planning Seminary was held in Madrid in 1991, coordinated by the National Library of Spain in collaboration with the Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario. At this technical meeting, bibliographic description and information exchange guidelines were established to carry out data collection at the libraries.

The differences in human and technological resources within the libraries involved in the project forced the adaptation of the data collection methodology in all libraries and the creation of management centres and focal points to undertake all the project stages.

The management centres were established in Venezuela and Spain.

Four focal points were created taking into consideration the cooperation agreements between countries from the same geographical area (Caribbean, Cono Sur, etc.) and the computer development of each library in a particular area:

- The Central America Focal Point in Costa Rica to gather information from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.
- The Caribbean Focal Point in Puerto Rico with all the records from Dominican Republic and Cuba.

- The Cono Sur Focal Point in Chile to gather information from Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.
- The Andean Focal Point in Colombia (records from Ecuador) and Venezuela (from Bolivia and Peru)

Venezuela sent the records from all these Focal Points to Spain, which also got the records from Mexico, Brasil and Portugal.

Despite the commitment of all participants on the guidelines to be used to help unify the bibliographic descriptions and existing titles, the library situation in each country made the data processing very difficult.

Computer compatibility problems had to be solved at basic levels (character combination problems: control characters, diacritical and special signs construction, etc.) and in information coding in the different automation systems of some of the participant libraries.

The Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario hired companies to unify this information, under National Library of Spain supervision and with clarifications, not always precise and exhaustive, from the participant libraries and Focal Points, and to put into practice the automatic and manual processing to harmonize the information in order to complete this stage.

The period for publishing the catalogue was extended at the III General Assembly (Madrid, 1992).

CD-ROM publishing (1995)

The National Library of Spain presented the ABINIA's Union Catalogue of Ancient Books prototype at the 59th IFLA General Conference and Council held in Barcelona in 1993.

The Sociedad Estatal ended up its activities when the celebrations of the Fifth Centenary were concluded and the National Library of Spain became responsible for all the Sociedad Estatal projects, especially the Union Catalogue.

In 1995, the CD-ROM catalogue was published under the title *Novum Regestrum, Catálogo Colectivo de Fondo Antiguo, siglos XV-XIX de la Asociación de Bibliotecas Nacionales de Iberoamérica (ABINIA) (Novum Regestrum, Union Catalogue of Ancient Books, 15th-19th century, of ABINIA)*. The CD-ROM information from all participant libraries was compiled overcoming many problems such as the lack of human and technical resources and the novelty of undertaking a collaborative project of this magnitude.

The name *Novum Regestrum* is a tribute to Fernando Colón (Spanish historian and bibliophile, 1488-1539) who attempted to collect all the books in the world in all languages and sciences. He included the descriptions and classifications in a repertory which starts with the words: "Regestrum librorum don ferdinandi colon primi almirantis indiarum filii..."

The Novum Regestrum, the first Union Catalogue to describe ancient books from Latin American National Libraries, including Spain and Portugal, is the beginning of a bibliographic tool supported with information contributions and adjustments. The CD-ROM includes 100.000 bibliographic records from National Libraries and some universities from 22 countries. It contains information on libraries that own copies of each edition and information on every library in order to help to obtain reproductions or accurate information on the inventoried copies.

New stage of the Project (1996)

ABINIA, willing to continue this project under National Library of Spain coordination, proposed a preparatory meeting to update the Union Catalogue held in Madrid, in September 1996, with representatives from the Focal Points and participant libraries. At the meeting, the work and the final product were submitted for evaluation. The conclusions of this meeting were that the creation of a database to update the catalogue should be considered at the ABINIA's VII General Assembly to be held in December in Bogotá.

The database should be hosted in the National Library of Spain site web, but separate from its catalogue (ARIADNA). Only participant libraries would have access to the database and the information would be retrieved to be published in any format chosen. This work would allow stronger control over information and processes in order to solve the main problems detected in the published CD-ROM catalogue.

Some of the problems are:

- Existence of duplicate records
- Lack of authority control
- Differences in bibliographic description levels
- Typographic and transcription errors
- Differences in information coding and character sets that generate problems in record processing and conversion.

Every library should bring the records to the National Library of Spain to be analysed and adapted before being entered into the database, using the refined module capabilities.

Setting up the database, prototype presentation (1999)

National Library of Spain, between 1997 and 1998, worked on prove record analysis, approached the design of the database structure to manage the union catalogue and analysed the records from the National Libraries of Brasil, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Venezuela and the library of the University of Puerto Rico.

Some problems were detected related with:

- Records structure in the information format
- Characters encoding (local use of standard positions for characters with diacritics, ñ, ordinals, etc.).
- Information encoding in MARC format:
 - Presence of nonexistent fields in the format
 - Local use of field formats

- Absence of obligatory field/subfield
- Field/subfield inadequate repeatability
- Errors in codified values (country codes, languages)
- Wrong use of indicators
- Descriptions elements punctuation:
 - Different position (before/after the identifier)
 - Irregular allocation in fields /subfields
 - Different punctuation for such elements
- Differences in descriptions of *bound-with* volumes:
 - Use of field 501 for both Published with / Bound with
 - Copy information in related note
 - Individualized description of every work bounded
- Copy information
 - Specific field for location, selfmark and notes
 - Specific fields for location, selfmark and notes in the same field as the edition
 - Notes about multiple copies without link
 - Copies in several volumes

The database prototype for the catalogue was presented at the Seminary “The Novum Regestrum Union Catalogue database description and use” held in Cartagena de Indias, April 26th - 28th, 1999.

The database information is structured as follows:

- Bibliographic information: printed books from 16th to 19th century descriptions
- Information about collections: individual description of all items
- Authorities: normalization of personal and corporate bodies names and titles used in descriptions of editions and copies
- Libraries: Directory with information on each library where copies are stored

During the seminary meetings agreements were ratified on catalogue content, guidelines for records and work methodology.

The content agreement included the descriptions of printed books from 16th-19th century and the descriptions of all the copies. These descriptions should be as accurate as possible, with particular reference to provenance, preservation and location.

This is, without doubt, the novel aspect of this stage; until then the only information available was the name of the library where a copy was stored, without specifying the number of copies or its special characteristics. This information makes easier the research on collections and assessment of Bibliographic Heritage in libraries unknown, in some cases.

The records should meet the following rules:

- Information coding in MARC format (UNIMARC, USMARC (today MARC21) and IBERMARC) and character set according to ISO or ALA rules.
- Bibliographic description following the ISBD(A) and (M) rules.

- Access Points following the Cataloguing Rules and AACR2.
- Subjects will be displayed as they appear in the records, authority control needed was not established in this moment.
- Considering that most of the existing systems in libraries used local forms to store copies information in the bibliographic records, in case that were not possible to send the information in separate holdings records, two ways for sending it were established:
 - Option A: information embebed in the bibliographic record using fields 841 and 852 (repetitive for each copy of the library)
 - Option B: information in local fields or local use in the bibliographic record in 850, 520, 940; selfmark in 030 or 082 [second indicator = 4] or 092 or 099 or 948; copy notes in 590 with indication in \$5 on the copy which it applies the note when there are several copies in the library)

All National Libraries were set up as Focal Points, in direct contact with the National Library of Spain to send the information and the clarifications needed. A Novum Regestrum project coordinator had to be appointed in every library. These coordinators made up the Technical Committee to maintain the catalogue.

In the meeting library representatives explained the works on Novum Regestrum since 1996 and the possibilities of sending records for the catalogue. Chile, Colombia, Honduras, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain and Venezuela were committed to that aim.

The National Library of Spain got engaged to developed an online access by Internet to all libraries; to view the records and evaluate the retrieval system in order to formulate the specifications to develop an OPAC access and give public access beyond the participants libraries.

Access to the Novum Regestrum by the Internet (2002)

At the ABINIA's seminary "The Latin American Bibliographic Heritage. Knowledge and dissemination." held in La Antigua (Guatemala) between April 22nd - 26th 2002, the National Library of Spain presented Internet access to the catalogue developed during the year 2001.

At that moment, 3.344 editions describing 3.502 copies from Panama, Puerto Rico and Spain were accessible through the catalogue.

The processing before being entered in the catalogue consisted in:

- Verification of the structure of the physical and logical record (ISO 2709)
- Verification of character set
- Validation of the information structure (MARC filters, documented local use fields, copies information)
- Mapping of the UNIMARC, USMARC, IBERMARC formats
- Analysis and unification of punctuation.

The records can be retrieved through multiple access points with the information from different ISBD elements, codified in MARC format: information about editions, copies, source and updated records. That improves the management and maintenance of the catalogue.

Access points allow textual search through any character string of the record and through any authorized heading and its variants.

Navigation through the four information blocks of the database from the records is allowed. It is possible visualize the authorities from bibliographic records, and from them visualize other related bibliographic records and their copies, as well as, the information about the repository library.

Also two types of aid on content and information retrieval have been established. One textual aid on the information type aid and how it is possible to retrieve from each one of the searching screen elements, and one access to index, which display the list of words that can be found in the elements.

Current situation

3.344 records from Panama, Puerto Rico and Spain have being entered in the database.
6.144 records from Honduras, Chile and Venezuela are being processed.
Argentina, Costa Rica, Cuba and Portugal are sending their records.

Future plans about the content of the catalogue include the following:

- To increase the catalogue with more information from the participant libraries and the records given to the CD-ROM catalogue from the libraries having problems sending the information in machine-readable format.
- Catalogue maintenance and refining, with special attention to different aspects:
 - Access point normalization
 - Uniform titles elaboration
 - Duplicate description of same edition detection
 - Different cataloguing practice detection
 - Typographic error detection
 - Adding normalized access points for imprint locations
 - Added entries for printers, publishers, illustrators, translators, prolog, writers, owners, binders, etc.
 - Subject control on content, language and typography
 - Records deletion which were detected to be duplicated or by any cause

Catalogue maintenance will be achieved through the collaboration offered by bilateral personal exchange programmes, allowing the training of specialist on database development and exploitation.

Residential librarians training programmes have been developed for Mexico, Cuba and Panama, and two training courses of one month duration for library members of ABINIA on bibliographic problems in ancient books, description rules implementation, where the Internet catalogue and the database manager have been shown.

New developments in technical aspects to allow:

- Access to digitized images of the described items
- Downloading of bibliographic and holdings records

To carry out these aims the collaboration of all participant countries and the commitment to follow the rules is still needed to comply with the quality levels and the information reliability of special importance in all cooperative programmes, like the Novum Regestrum.