

REVIEW

Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Modern Research University. By WILLIAM CLARK. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006. Pp. 662. \$45.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-226-10921-6.

Academic Charisma was reviewed at length by Anthony Grafton in the *New Yorker* (October 23, 2006), a sign of the importance of this book and the breadth of its potential audience. Most of the book covers the centuries up to the 1820s. Cambridge and Oxford universities are dealt with but primarily as points of contrast with developments in the German-speaking lands. There, intellectual culture, especially in contrast with France, centered around the university, and it was there that the nineteenth-century progenitors of the American research university looked for their model.

Clark's book is based on creative use of archival material, even of early depictions of academic scenes, from which he draws conclusions based, for example, on the placement of the participants. This book is an extraordinary research effort, abounding in insights, as this review, focusing on chapter 8, "The Library Catalogue," will make clear.

This misnamed chapter covers much more than the library catalog. Here Clark views library development in the widest possible context. Like the entire book, this chapter has obviously long been in process of development, and "The Library Catalogue" is, in fact, a much-expanded version of "On the Bureaucratic Plots of the Research Library," in *Books and the Sciences in History*, edited by Marina Frasca-Spads and Nick Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Clark distinguishes three periods. In the Baroque, the university library's funding came from student fees, which were small at best and often unpaid at worst. The library did not grow by ongoing purchases, and it was instead an "aggregated accumulation of the already accumulated" (301). The accumulators were largely faculty members, and the collections were either acquired by gift or with funds specially appropriated. Access to the accumulations was to a considerable extent visual, since the university library was on display in a room; it was a *Wunderkammer*, with each collector's books usually bound in an identical style and shelved in a space also containing objects such as fossils and stuffed animals. Clark argues that the room was metaphorically supposed to represent the entire universe but that in reality it was a curiosity room of idiosyncratically amassed objects, books being but one type of object. Collections were usually accompanied by a catalog, which was a shelf list, and since collections were kept intact, the catalog was a collection of catalogs, each with its individual arrangement.

The goal of the universal and systematic library, which took physical shape in Conrad Gesner's bibliographical work in the sixteenth century, could not be met by catalogs of collections, which, for reasons of space and display, subdivided and shelved collections by size—no matter how comprehensive a collection might be.

The desire for the systematic and universal received impetus during the Enlightenment, roughly after 1750. One attempt at satisfying it, which arose before that midcentury point, was the genre of *historia literaria*, which had as one of its component parts bibliographies of specific fields. Clark, a historian of science, cites the

scientific bibliographies from the 1770s of Albrecht von Haller, each of which had the title “Bibliotheca.” Many others exist: J. B. von Rohr’s *Compendieuse-Hausshaltungs Bibliothek* (1st ed., 1716; 2nd ed., 1726) and G. H. Zincke, *Cameraristen Bibliothek* (1751), to cite but two.

Library catalogs would also have been a means to a universal library, if a particular systematic division of knowledge had become widespread. That did not happen, but a single library sought to become universal. The Enlightenment changed the professor’s role from only passing on erudition to carrying out research, and at the University of Göttingen the university began to make a regular appropriation for library materials. Instead of growing primarily through ad hoc appropriations for collections or, equally opportunistically, from purchases at local auctions, the Göttingen Library began to develop systematically or, one might say, programmatically. The goal was to encompass the world of learning, and this effort was backed up by the book review periodicals, *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* and *Göttinger gelehrten Anzeigen*, whose reviewers were primarily professors at the university. These and later others enabled the academic library to acquire the books that were deemed useful, indeed, the books that had been read by the members of the university. Whereas the collector had earlier determined the shape of the library, now the collective did.

The catalog—or catalogs—also changed. The goal was still to make books available to the gaze, as in the Baroque library, but also through a systematic catalog. It was classified, and the place of the book in the classification determined its shelf location. Thus, not only were acquisitions made systematically but a system had been created, whose interlocking parts worked together to create the first library that acquired and made available the publications of the learned world.

Göttingen’s systematic catalog did not become widespread; instead, in the Romantic era, from roughly 1800 onward, the author catalog came to dominate, a change that Clark attributes to the Romantic glorification of the individual, a change that also furthered the renown—charisma—of individual professors. If the catalog was shaped by the glorification of the individual, the actual collection was shaped by the view that each individual work could be understood only as part of a whole, that even a genius had to be seen in the context of the people from which the genius sprang. The Romantic ideology in which every bit of writing has value “undercut,” Clark states, “the Enlightenment’s criterion for collection, that is, the criterion of usefulness” (334). Whereas Clark’s account of catalogs is relevant to today’s discussions of library cataloging and especially of the benefits of cataloging versus nonsystematic access through the Web, his contrast between two very different criteria for collecting should also be a part of the general discourse about the goals of libraries and the preservation of our culture.

Clark does err in stating that the first university library catalog was the Bodleian’s of 1605; two had earlier appeared (Cambridge, 1574, and Leyden, 1595). No evidence exists for his assertion that Göttingen influenced American university libraries, though it would be possible to claim that Göttingen influenced the Boston Public Library and the Astor Library. These kinds of minor points are of the sort to be found in all books, but there are in addition numerous sentences with words out of order or omitted: “This must be a . . . student who has paid the largest fee to take for the collegium” (155); “The origins . . . are a harder to trace” (159); “Holders of science chairs . . . laid to plans build research facilities” (456), to cite only a few. Repetitions abound, with the almost identical sentence or phrase appearing on facing pages: on page 302, “catalogues, if extant, were usually shelf

lists”; on page 303, “catalogues were at first usually shelf lists.” Words used in unusual ways also sometimes distract.

More tellingly, Clark’s division into historical eras does not work when applied to American libraries. To be sure, the American Antiquarian Society publicly asserted in the 1830s its adherence to the Romantic ideal, as did other historical societies, but in university libraries in the United States the valuing of every printed piece, as did Harvard’s John Langdon Sibley in a well-known statement of 1856, preceded substantial regular appropriations for acquisitions. American university libraries went through stages, but to some extent they reverse two of Clark’s stages. As at Göttingen, the transformation of the library followed transformation of the role of the faculty. Thus, in the United States, university libraries did not simply learn from and emulate Göttingen. They basically had to recapitulate the history of German libraries, with the crucial impetus being, as in Göttingen, the transformation of the parent institution into one that saw its role as fostering the advancement of knowledge.

Librarians did not provide the impetus for change in university libraries, though they sometimes tried to do so. University administrators and faculty members were the prime movers. It is thus problematic to write of librarians as if they were the key policy makers, as Clark sometimes does. At the same time, it seems important to recognize that some practices result primarily from librarians seeking to provide as much access as possible within time and labor constraints.

The chapter on libraries in *Academic Charisma* is a model for its look at libraries within the broad context of the parent institution, the book trade, bibliographical tools, other types of libraries, and even libraries within other national boundaries. Clark’s chapter has the added benefit of considering the relationship between catalogs and collections.

The history of libraries of learning, which has been neglected in comparison with libraries for the general public, is not simply an account of accretion after accretion. University libraries and other libraries of learning have always undergone change, which has been shaped, even brought about, by developments outside the library. The history of these institutions ought not to be told as a positivistic and internalist recounting of facts. Clark’s chapter on libraries is an important effort at explaining both institutional developments and their consequences.

Kenneth Carpenter, *formerly of the Harvard University Library*