Letter to the Editor

The article "Johann Heinrich Hottinger and the Systematic Organization of Jewish Literature" (Jerchower and Lerner, 2007) was impressive for the thoroughness of its documentation.

I was struck by the authors' observation, found both in the Abstract and, in slightly different form, in the Conclusion: "Hottinger's innovation was . . . analyzing a collection according to its contents" (p. 1).

The idea of designing a bibliographical classification scheme by analyzing the actual literature that exists—as opposed to using a philosophical division of knowledge—is generally credited to Wyndham Hulme (1911), a British librarian. The concept is known as *literary warrant*. It is amazing that a Judaica bibliographer came up with this idea two-and-a half centuries before Hulme.

It should be noted, however, that Hulme focused on the notation for a shelf classification, advocating that notation be allocated according to the number of books on a subject. This principle is evident in the Library of Congress Classification (LCC), which squeezes the history of four continents into Class D, while allocating two base letters, E and F, to the Americas. LCC was developed before Hulme's theoretical paper was published. LCC's architect was Charles Martel, who also published an important paper on classification theory in 1911; Sayers (1967, pp. 49, 197) discusses Hulme's praise for LCC's literary warrant.

Hottinger's classification is reminiscent of LCC in its inclusion of examples of titles that belong in a particular category. The enumerative nature of LCC is one of the reasons many libraries adopt it.

It seems to me that a subject classification for a bibliography—as opposed to the schedules of a shelf classification scheme—*has* to be based on the actual books in the corpus; otherwise, there would be empty categories. In fact, Hulme discussed the link between subject bibliography and shelf classification: "To this literary warrant a quantitative value can be assigned so soon as the bibliography of a subject has been definitely completed" (p. 51).

The concept of literary warrant is not praised by all classification theorists. Farradane (1961, p. 203) pointed out that "Literary warrant represents the standpoint of research at a particular time. . . ." A Judaica classification based on the literature of the seventeenth-century would surely require revision today.

I plan to discuss these ideas with the students in my course on Classification Schemes and Information Architecture.

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SOURCES

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