Classification of a Classical Studies Library in Greece and the Changing Nature of Classical Scholarship in the Twentieth Century

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ABSTRACT. The Carl W. Blegen Library of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens contains one of the most comprehensive collections of books on classical philology and the archaeology of Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. Early in its history, an amateur librarian, Theodore Woolsey Heermance, created an independent, highly detailed classification system, which encompassed classical studies in all its facets. His system is still used in the Blegen Library today. However, the discipline of classics has changed considerably, especially in the last couple of decades, and while the breadth of Heermance’s system (and, indeed, Heermance’s foresight) is such that monographs in all areas of classical studies can be accommodated, the system as a whole also serves a unique document of classical scholarship a century ago. Moreover, because the letter designations have not changed since 1903, it is possible to track trends in scholarship and publication within fairly narrow subject headings. This article addresses not only Heermance’s impressive classification system, but also the means by which this static classification system can be used to draw conclusions about the state of classical scholarship and the humanities in general in the twentieth century. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2003 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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A particular strength of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens has always been its library. Now encompassing over 80,000 volumes on all aspects of classical studies: archaeology, philology, history, philosophy, art history, and religion, the advantage of the library to its readers is not only the comprehensive collection, but also its classification system. The system was designed by Theodore Woolsey Heermance, a classicist himself and it is a credit to Heermance’s professional skills that the system is still in use almost exactly as he set it up. The collection of the American School in 1903 was very different from the collection a hundred years later: classical scholarship has changed considerably in the last century, while the classification system has remained the same. Changes can be tracked through the library’s shelf list, and it is possible to draw some interesting conclusions about the nature of classical scholarship in the course of the twentieth century. But Heermance’s system is worthy of record on its own: it is an exhaustively complete classification of classical scholarship as it existed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Because the American School of Classical Studies, from its foundation, focused on all aspects of classical antiquity, its library likewise represents the full spectrum of classical scholarship.

The field of classics, in general, encompasses the study of the history, archaeology, language, and literature of the Mediterranean and the area surrounding the Mediterranean (i.e., the Greek or Latin speaking world) from the third or second millennium B.C. through around 500 A.D. As far as the classification system is concerned, study of the language and literature of the Greek and Roman world has not changed significantly.¹ In the field of classical archaeology, scholarship has changed more dramatically. Heermance’s classification system, while it is still largely functional, nonetheless reflects intellectual interests at the turn of the century. A brief background to the history of classical archaeology will serve to put into perspective the field then (i.e., the field as Heermance knew it) and now.

The origins of classical archaeology as a discipline lie in the eighteenth century, when organized categorization and study of ancient artwork began.² Much of the impetus for this field of study is attributed to Johann Joachim Winckelmann, whose book Geschicht der Kunst des Altertums, published in 1764, attempted to place the development of classical art within a chronological framework. The foundation of the
fields of art history and classical archaeology has been attributed to Winckelmann. His conclusions were often incorrect, but his method, the study of objects of classical antiquity within their chronological and cultural framework, still underlies many aspects of contemporary classical archaeology.

Also in the eighteenth century, the notion of the “Grand Tour” arose. Whereas Winckelmann’s study of ancient art was limited to material in Italy (thus he wrote about Roman sculpture, or Roman copies of Greek sculpture), the Grand Tour increasingly included Greece. Travel to Greece increased during the Napoleonic Wars, when travel to France and Italy became impossible. Travelers focused on the topography of Greece, often using as a guide ancient sources (particularly Pausanias, who wrote a travel guide to Greece in the second century A.D.). But also at the turn of the nineteenth century, acquisition of material from Greece for western European collections increased rapidly. Lord Elgin removed most of the sculpture from the Parthenon in Athens. C. R. Cockerell led a group who excavated and removed the pedimental sculpture from the site of the temple of Aphaia on Aegina and the sculptured frieze from the temple of Apollo at Bassae. Greek works of art, apart from the vases which were known from Etruscan sites in Italy, were now widely visible outside Greece, and this had a profound impact on the development of classical scholarship.

In the mid-nineteenth century, excavations of single sites (especially the excavations of Heinrich Schliemann in Turkey and in Greece starting in 1870) turned attention away from study of single classes of objects and toward study of entire civilizations. Professionalization of German classical scholarship influenced the study of classics in general, and led to the systematic publication and categorization of large bodies of material relating to the classical world (not only in the field of archaeology, but also in language and literature). The German excavations in the Greek world, such as the excavations at Olympia (which began in 1875), shaped subsequent excavations in Greece, especially regarding publication of archaeological material. Final publication of the Olympia excavations separated material into classes (pottery, sculpture, small finds), which were then published together, separate from their context on the site. Since that time, most excavations have followed the same model; publications of excavations have grouped material by type: “Classical Archaeology is pre-eminently an archaeology of objects.”

It was in this framework that the American School of Classical Studies at Athens was founded in 1881. It was created as a place where students of classics could “carry on the study of Greek thought and life
to the best advantage, and where those who were proposing to become teachers of Greek might gain such acquaintance with the land and such knowledge of its ancient monuments as should give a quality to their teaching unattainable without this experience.”

It was, and is, slightly different from the mission of the other foreign archaeological schools in Athens (the largest of which, the French, German, and British, were also founded in the mid to late nineteenth century) in that classical studies (i.e., language and literature as well as archaeology) was its focus, and not just the archaeology of Greece.

Theodore Woolsey Heermance, an instructor at Yale University in classical archaeology, left Yale to become the secretary and then the director of the American School of Classical Studies. He served as secretary from 1902-1903 and director from 1903-1905. In the fall of 1905 he contracted typhoid fever and died in Athens. When T. W. Heermance arrived at the American School in 1902 to serve as secretary, the School was already well-established in its current home and had a library of about 4,000 volumes. It was the secretary’s responsibility to maintain the library. A dedicated librarian was not appointed at the School until 1930, and so cataloging and classification depended on the skills of the secretary of the School (or anyone else who took an interest). Although Heermance was primarily a classicist and archaeologist, and was instrumental in the American School’s publication of the Erechtheion on the Athenian Acropolis, his most important contribution was the development of the classification system still in use.

T. W. Heermance was in the habit of writing weekly letters home to his mother and sister, and less frequently to his brother. Almost all these letters survive in the archives of the American School, and although Heermance tended not to focus on the administrative details of his position, he did nonetheless mention his work in the library. In addition, Heermance wrote frequently to James Rignall Wheeler, professor of Greek archaeology and art at Columbia University and the chairman of the Managing Committee of the American School, about his professional duties at the School, including his work in the library.

Soon after arriving in Greece in September 1902, he wrote to his mother and sister that he was helping the outgoing secretary (and later long-time director of the School, Bert Hodge Hill) with the library, and that both were going through the collections to figure out what was missing or poorly catalogued. By October, he already had his new classification system in mind: “Mr. Richardson has given me the Library Fund to administer and I shall probably have charge of the library as well. Hill has gone through it carefully and brought it up to date on
the old system. I was afraid he was going to reorganize it, when I first heard what he was doing, and this I want to do myself early next summer, though it is a huge piece of work. It is necessary, however, as the old system is unscientific and long outgrown.”15 Books were then arranged by fixed shelf location.

Heermance was clearly familiar with professional library practice. Throughout the academic year 1902-1903, he made reference in his letters to his impatience to begin rearranging the library (“I have got to stay in Athens until I finish the rearrangement of the library as it can’t be left half done and can’t be worked at while people are using the books.”16) Until such time as he could essentially close the library, his natural tendency for organization and detail was turned toward other similar projects like the reorganization of the photographs from the American excavations at Corinth.17 In December 1902, he wrote to Wheeler:

What I have in mind is a complete rearrangement of the library, and I fancy it will take me nearer two months than one to accomplish it. The present numbering of books is by section and shelf, and, as some departments have developed faster than others, it has long since been outgrown, and the addition of a single volume often requires quite a little shifting of books in order to find a place for the new comer [sic]. The result is that what was once a complete arrangement by subject is now so only in part. My scheme is to do away entirely with the section and shelf numbers—fit only for a library which does not receive additions—and substitute for it a purely subject-classification, giving to each book a symbol (to denote class, subclass and number), so that practically indefinite expansion will be possible. Then with a new ‘shelf-list’ it will be easy to see just what the library has in any given department of knowledge.

I shall endeavor to save time by perfecting my scheme of classification during the winter, and have already notes on the arrangement adopted in several archaeological collections, so that only the manual labor will be left for the summer.18

Heermance unfortunately does not make mention of the other collections from which he drew inspiration.19

In July 1903, he was able to begin classifying the collection of some 4,000 volumes:

I have saved much time by having had the subject of the classification in mind all the years so that I have the skeleton of it well in hand.
There are puzzling cases, though, the various classes so intersect one another and I want a certain amount of logic in the order in which they succeed one another. I start with Bibliography, Library catalogues, History of Philology and archaeology, general encyclopaedias of classical antiquities &c. That is “A.” For “B” I take history in all its subdivisions according to place and time. “C” will be represented by geography, which will be followed by topography, travels, excavators, and the like. Then comes Kunstgeschichte in all its branches, and so on. It is a kind of work I like best, combining the mechanical with a small amount of brain use—or brain use of rather a low order.20

My library work is progressing well, I think, though certain classifications have taken me longer than I anticipated. Still, in relation to what has to be done, I am well satisfied with my rate of speed. ‘General works of reference’ and ‘History’ are in final shape. The big class of ‘Geography, Travels, Topography & Excavation’ is practically complete, and a beginning has been made on the books dealing with the ‘Archaeology of Art.’21

My library work seemed to go slowly most of the week. I was engaged on the hardest part of the task—that dealing with the Archaeology of Art in its various subdivisions—Sculpture, Ceramics, &c. &c.—& there were a lot of little treatises which take but little room on the shelves but require as much labor as if they were ten times their size. Latterly there seems to be a little more progress & I expect to make good headway this coming week.22

Apart from his consideration of the organization of other libraries with strength in archaeology, Heermance makes no mention of his influences, especially regarding American library practice. He had been both a student and a lecturer at Yale for several years before coming to Greece. Although Yale at the time used its own classification system, it is clear Heermance must have been aware of other contemporary systems, especially the increasingly influential Dewey Decimal Classification.23 His decision not to attempt to use or adapt the Dewey system must be due to the limited subject matter of the American School’s library; the library would have virtually its entirely collection located in the 700 or 800 classes.24 More influential was probably Charles Ammi Cutter’s Expansive Classification system, a system which was never completed, but which was highly influential; many aspects of the Library of Congress’s system were adopted from Cutter’s system, and Heermance likewise seems to have adopted aspects of it.
The first subset of Heermance’s system is “A,” “Bibliography, History of Philology, Encyclopaedia, etc.”; this is not unlike Cutter’s “A” (“Works of reference and works of a general character covering several classes”). Although the Expansive Classification progresses through seven levels of classification, ending with four letter designations, Heermance (and the Library of Congress) stopped, for the most part, at two letter designations. Heermance may also have been influenced by Yale’s system. Yale’s system (which was in use until 1968, when the Library of Congress system was adopted) was somewhat different in that it used a combination of letters and numbers, both levels of which had designated meanings. Heermance does not seem to have established any particular rules for the numerical facets of his system; if he originally gave them significance (which is unclear) they have since lost it. New materials are inserted in the system using decimal divisions of the numerical facet so that like materials are arranged together, but the numbers have no meaning on their own, and like the Library of Congress classification, have no relation to one another from one class to the next: the numbering of each primary letter designation has developed independently. This is, incidentally, unlike the Cutter system, where numbers have the same meaning across classes. General guidelines for number assignation have since been designated within many of Heermance’s classes, but this is more the result of organic growth than decree; the concern is logical arrangement on the shelves. If Heermance was influenced by Cutter’s Expansive Classification System, he did not use Cutter’s decimal system for designating authors.

Like the Library of Congress system, Heermance’s system was a way of organizing one body of material (the collection then held by the American School of Classical Studies) rather than a system conceived for expansion beyond the type of holdings of Heermance’s time, although he specifically intended it to be as flexible as possible. Since the American School collected comprehensively in Greek archaeology and classical philology, the system represents the gamut of scholarship in these fields in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. And like the Library of Congress system, changes in scholarly practice and interests have created problems because it remains largely unchanged since 1903. The Library of Congress system, however, is constantly updated and added to; Heermance’s system remains the same. That it has worked for a hundred years is largely due to Heermance’s thoroughness and foresight, but also because the overall scope of the Blegen Library has not changed during the course of the twentieth century; it is still a library whose focus is classical philology and the archaeology and his-
history of the ancient Mediterranean and Balkans with primary emphasis on Greece, Turkey, and Italy.27

But the system is very much a product of the late nineteenth century. The 4,000 books which then formed the American School’s collection, and around which he built his classification system were the results of the interests of classical scholars in the nineteenth century. Because the American School was a school of classical studies and not classical archaeology alone, Heermance gave ample weight to language and literature. Archaeology, however, was always a primary focus of the American School and its library, and it is in the field of archaeology in particular where the change in classical scholarship during the course of the twentieth century is most evident. New publications in classical archaeology are increasingly difficult to fit into Heermance’s classification scheme.

Many of Heermance’s classes are still more than adequate for scholarship of the twenty-first century. Heermance’s organization of classical authors gives the prefix “R” to Greek authors and “S” to Latin authors, with a second letter representing the author’s name, and numbers serving to maintain authors in alphabetical order (thus Plato is RP 62 and Plutarch RP 66). It is a transparent system, easy for users to negotiate, since ancient authors appear on the shelves alphabetically. Secondary number designations for each author serve to keep texts and then secondary criticism together: texts of the complete works of Plutarch are RP 66/1 and 62/2, texts of individual works RP 66/3-66/50, and secondary works RP 66/51 and following. Heermance’s system for geography and topography continues to work well: excavation reports, an important part of the holdings of the library, are in the C section and are divided by region, first of Greece, then of the eastern Mediterranean, and then of western Europe.

Heermance could not have foreseen, however, the problem caused by the increase in interdisciplinary work in classical studies in recent years, and the emphasis on social history. The clear-cut subject distinctions of Heermance’s classification are representative of the type of scholarship carried out a century ago. The shelf-list of the Blegen Library as it exists now is frequently a testament to the enduring patterns of classical scholarship: in many cases, new books fall naturally into one of Heermance’s categories. But the nature of classical scholarship is increasingly diffuse, and many books do not fit well into Heermance’s original scheme. In many ways, Heermance’s classification system represents the type of scholarship now felt to be conservative, especially in the field of archaeology. Catalogues of vases or coins are easy to classify in Heermance’s system; interdisciplinary works considering the social significance of
archaeological finds are not. “M” (“Antiquities,” in Heermance’s designation) is the default catch-all for any sort of social history, and is the fastest growing section of the Blegen Library. Here are found books on death, the family, gender, etc.: all topics which were only treated marginally until the second half of the twentieth century. The shelf list offers an immediate visual corroboration of the importance of these studies to the field today: there are more drawers of cards for “M”; more than any other section apart from topography (“C”) and ancient authors (“R” and “S”). Disproportionately large numbers of books are classified in the “M” section today.

Classical archaeology has an uneasy relationship with the wider field of archaeology as a whole, and engaging classical with anthropological archaeology has met with differing levels of success.28 Although awareness and recognition of the importance of allied fields has grown considerably in the last twenty years, the results do not always fall organically into Heermance’s traditional divisions, and while classical archaeology was never as simple-minded (endless catalogues of like materials) as it has been made out by those outside the discipline, it is true that recognition of the importance of theoretical and cross-disciplinary approaches to classical archaeology is a relatively recent phenomenon. Suffice it to say that Heermance’s system is ideal for old-fashioned archaeological publications. Even in fields like topography, where classification should be easy, the system is built around the topography of single sites. Archaeological surveys, a form of fieldwork unimagined at the turn of the twentieth century, cover regions, and as such, are not included in the system.29

A further problem is the tendency of the classification system to divide classes of material from the same location. While monographic series of publications of single sites are kept together (e.g., the American School’s series Corinth and Excavations in the Athenian Agora), a work independent of a complete site publication like The Lion Monument at Amphipolis,30 is housed in the sculpture section at GL 30, and not with monographs on excavations and topography of Amphipolis at CR 48, although the monumental stone lion was found at Amphipolis and remains in situ. Although publication of single classes of material continues to be a standard of classical archaeology, the divorce of the material from its context is less and less accepted.

The state of classical scholarship, philological, archaeological, or historical, is widely debated. Recent works have argued different sides of the issues: advocating a return to earlier standards of classical scholarship, or the need to acknowledge the lessons of allied fields. Historians and critics of the discipline of classical archaeology have pointed out the field’s debt
to the ideals of the nineteenth century; that is, to the works around which Heermance built his classification system, the catalogues of types: “categories, chronology, classification, comparanda.”\textsuperscript{31} The Blegen Library’s shelf list provides ample support for this view.

It is not just the changing nature of this single field, however, which is documented in the Blegen Library’s classification system. Because the system has remained in use, unchanged, for so long, trends in publication can likewise be documented. The growth of social studies in classics documented in the “M” section is one such example, but Heermance’s system also allows conclusions about the field of humanities in general. A major change in the publications of the last one hundred years is the exploding number of edited conference volumes, a recent trend in the humanities. Heermance allotted “AI” for congress proceedings. In the early twentieth century, congresses were limited to regular, annual or multi-annual proceedings (e.g., the International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy or the International Congress of Cretan Studies). Since then, all volumes which are ultimately publications of any sort of conference, whether regular congresses or one-time conferences, have been classified as AI. The result is a mini-version of the entire library: all subjects are met in the AI section.

A recent study of the library’s shelf-list clearly reveals how recent this trend is; with the exception of the annual congresses, the vast majority of the conference proceedings have been published since 1980. Of all volumes now classified in the AI section, only 6% were published prior to 1970. Of these only 11% were the published proceedings of conferences which were not part of an annual or multi-annual congress but rather resulted from a single thematic conference. The trend toward publication of conferences began in the 1970s (although only 10% of the volumes thus classified were published during this decade). It was in the 1980s and especially 1990s when this trend exploded: 25% of the Blegen Library’s monographs classified as AI were published in the 1980s and 53% in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{32}

This is a significant change of the last two decades. Edited conference volumes have provided a venue for articles which might not otherwise have appeared in refereed journals; chapters in conference volumes can be shorter and less detailed than many journals would require. While some edited volumes are peer-reviewed, many are not. In the past, \textit{Festschriften} have sometimes served as venues for miscellaneous articles, especially those that might not be long enough or developed enough for publication in journals. Edited conference volumes are now a supplementary venue for articles of all kinds, from lengthy and well-researched to preliminary stud-
ies. Publication in edited volumes is not the result of a lack of journals in which to publish; the number of journals to which the Blegen Library subscribes (virtually all journals in the field of classical studies) has steadily risen. Some of the articles which appear in edited conference volumes now probably would not have appeared at all twenty years ago because standards of scholarship are, in general, more rigid for peer-reviewed journals than for edited volumes.

Various conclusions can be drawn from these statistics. One is, of course, that the fact that as travel has become cheaper, such conferences have become less difficult and less expensive to organize. The volumes themselves are also easier for the editors to produce because of computer technology. It also probably reflects the trend toward ever greater publication requirements for university tenure and promotion, and the relative ease of producing such volumes (where the editor need only write an introduction to the collection, and optionally, a chapter). The production of such volumes has added to the expense of maintaining a library in classical studies; not only are professors required to publish more monographs for tenure or promotion, but every year more and more conference volumes are published. The quality of scholarship in these edited volumes often varies considerably, but the less valuable articles cannot be shunned at the expense of the worthwhile.

Undoubtedly, more detailed studies of the Blegen Library’s shelf list could yield even more information about trends in publication (e.g., the time lag between conferences and publication of the proceedings). It is my intention here only to point out the fact that Heermance’s unadulterated classification system can provide unique opportunities for tracking trends in classical scholarship and the humanities; similar studies may be possible with other systems.

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NOTES


5. Travelers’ accounts which attempted to reconcile the topography of modern Greece with ancient sources were of varying levels of success. See, e.g., J. M. Wagstaff, “Pausanias and the topographers: the case of Colonel Leake,” in *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece*, eds. Susan E. Alcock, John F. Cherry, and Jas Elsner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 190-206. Nonetheless, study of the ancient topography of Greece developed at this period into an important type of classical scholarship.

6. The sculpture from the temple of Aphaia was sold to Ludwig of Bavaria; the sculpture from Bassae to the British Museum.


12. Heermance’s system was later adopted by the Center for the Study of Greek and Roman Antiquity (K.E.R.A.) of the Hellenic National Research Foundation in Athens. K.E.R.A. adopted the classification numbers in use for the Blegen Library, and since then has assigned its own numbers based on Heermance’s guidelines.

13. The letters are of especial interest for their detailed descriptions of life in Athens and travel in Greece (and the rest of Europe).

14. Heermance to Agnes and Laura Heermance, 28 September 1902; T. W. Heermance Papers, American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

15. Heermance to Agnes and Laura Heermance, 5 October, 1902.

16. Heermance to Agnes and Laura Heermance, 19 May, 1903.

17. Heermance to Agnes and Laura Heermance, 12 April, 1903.


19. The library closest to the American School was that of the British School of Archaeology next door, but at the turn of the century the British School too was using fixed shelf numbers (British School at Athens, *Catalogue of the Books in the Library* [1899]).

20. Heermance to Agnes and Laura Heermance, 26 July, 1903.

21. Heermance to Agnes and Laura Heermance, 2 August, 1903.

22. Heermance to Agnes and Laura Heermance, 9 August, 1903.
23. He wrote in 1902 to his mother and sister to send a copy of the Library Bureau catalogue produced by Melvil Dewey, and so was clearly aware of Dewey’s work in the field of library science (Heermance to Agnes and Laura Heermance, 14 December, 1902).

24. Many art libraries in the last century have either used adaptations of the Dewey Decimal Classification or the Library of Congress Classification or have developed completely independent systems for this reason. See in particular Roberto C. Ferrari, “The Art of Classification: Alternate Classification Systems in Art Libraries,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 28 no. 2 (1999): 73-98.

25. “As an example, the call number C52 breaks down as C=American History, General & [North American General] and 52=American Indians, Prehistoric Archaeology. The second line is a number, usually three or four digits.” William R. Massa, Jr., Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, e-mail to author, 19 December, 2001.

26. Cutter’s system has, since Heermance’s original setup, been added to call numbers to designate recipients of *Festschriften* (“V”) and the authors of collected studies (“U”).

27. Heermance allowed for limited holdings in later Greek history, archaeology, and literature, but in 1922, the American School of Classical Studies acquired a second library, the collection of the Greek ambassador to London, John Gennadius. The Gennadius Library has since collected in post-classical Greek studies, and the Blegen Library has largely restricted itself to earlier periods. The Gennadeion has its own classification system, developed by Gennadius for his own large collection and still in use. Gennadius was primarily influenced by the classification system developed by the nineteenth-century French scholar Jacques-Charles Brunet (“Notes on my classification system,” John Gennadius Papers, American School of Classical Studies at Athens). His system consists of mnemonic letter designations for most classes: HG=History of Greece, P=Periodical, etc.


29. Where should an important work like Susan A. Alcock’s *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) fit? It was assigned a call number in BX (Roman History), but it is history as told by archaeology, and is not happily at home either in Roman History or in Geography and Topography (C).


32. Heermance obviously could not have foreseen this trend. It has recently been decided that the separation of these volumes from the subject areas they encompass should be halted, and eventually many of the volumes now classified as AI may be integrated into the rest of the library. The figures as they stood in January of 2002 were 2,278 volumes; 131 from the 1960s and before, 222 from the 1970s, 557 from the 1980s, 1,208 from the 1990s, and 160 from the 2000s.