A Guide to Archival and Related Standards

Descriptive Cataloguing of Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, and Early Modern Manuscripts (AMREMM)

Title

Descriptive Cataloguing of Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance, and Early Modern Manuscripts (AMREMM), Gregory A Pass

Name of Standards Organisation

Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, Bibliographic Standards Committee, Association of College and Research Libraries Division, American Library Association

Current version


Abstract

AMREMM provides bibliographic based rules for the description of manuscript items as a supplement to the rules set out in AACR2, Chapter 4.

Description

AMREMM is one of a number of standards that provide specific rules for the cataloguing of manuscripts that was a product of early attempts to provide electronic access to medieval manuscripts in the U.S. in the 1990's. An effort to update it is now being undertaken under the title Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Manuscripts) - DCRM(MSS).

AMREMM represents the ‘bibliographic’ approach to manuscript cataloguing in contrast to the ‘text encoding’ approach which has resulted in the module for the description of manuscripts integrated into the latest version of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) XML schema (TEI P5).

The scope of AMREMM is Latin and Western European vernacular manuscript materials ranging in date from late Antiquity to about 1600. It is stated though that the rules should be broad enough to accommodate manuscripts from other cultural contexts such as Greek, Hebrew, Coptic and Arabic. 'Manuscript' is defined literally thereby encompassing handwritten materials, of all types (literary manuscripts, letters, charters and 'archival records'), in all formats (fragments, single leaves and codices whether bound or unbound) and in all materials (parchment, paper, papyrus etc), whether the original or reproduction.

AMREMM is designed to produce item level catalogue records compatible with general bibliographic catalogue records conforming to the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2). It is then a supplement to the rules found in chapter 4 (‘Manuscripts’) of that standard, which it is argued do not provide the sufficient level of analysis and intellectual control necessary for pre-modern manuscript materials due to their ‘special historical, artistic or literary value’.

While the rules for punctuation in AMREMM suggest that it is designed for the production of catalogue entries on paper, it is specifically stated that they can be implemented in MARC21 to allow integration of manuscript catalogue records into library online catalogues.
Mappings and detailed examples of the rules as expressed in MARC21 are, therefore, provided as appendices.

Following acknowledgements and an introduction, the rules are set out in the same nine parts as chapter 4 of AACR2. A General Rules section defines the scope and sets rules for sources of information, punctuation, levels of detail, language and script of description, transcription and editorial practice.

There then follow eight numbered areas of which three are considered unnecessary for manuscripts: Material Specific Details (3), Series (6) and Standard Number and Terms of Availability (8). Of the remaining areas four provide basic identification information:

- Title and Statement of Responsibility (1)
- Edition / Version (2)
- Place and Date of Production (4): only for literary manuscripts as for letters, legal manuscripts and archival records the date of production is included in the title
- Physical Description (5): a brief statement of a manuscript’s extent, material and dimensions as well as the presence of illustrations, maps or seals

In line with AACR2 the more detailed descriptive parts of a catalogue entry are consigned to the Note area (7), which consists of 27 possible elements. These cover:

- Former and current references
- Information about the sources for the title given in area 1 as well as any alternative and/or popular titles and a note of the Secundo folio where appropriate
- More detailed description of the format, nature, scope and contents of a manuscript including any decoration, musical notation and seals
- Languages and scripts
- More detailed description of physical aspects of a manuscript such as collation, layout and binding
- Details of a manuscript’s origin, provenance, and immediate source of acquisition
- References to published descriptions, citations, editions, or facsimiles
- References and locations of reproductions of the manuscript or the originals if the catalogue record is for a reproduction
- Conditions of access and use
- Cataloguing history

Appendices provide rules for authority controlled indexing of manuscript items, the linking of descriptions of parts of a manuscript and the whole in the case of composite manuscripts and a very useful bibliography and glossary.

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