

November 2013

Acquisitions Archaeology -- What is a Crisis? (Vol. 2 No. 2, April 1990)

Jesse Holden

Millersville University, jesse.holden@millersville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Holden, Jesse (2009) "Acquisitions Archaeology -- What is a Crisis? (Vol. 2 No. 2, April 1990)," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 21: Iss. 5, Article 35.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2671>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

DL: I may be in the minority in believing there will still be a place for the printed book into the indefinite future. The days of multi-volume encyclopedic collections are gone, but I think there will still be a need for concise printed reference sources like the *Handbook*. Comprehensive databases on the Internet, such as the **NIST Chemistry Webbook**, will grow in size and usefulness, assuming the funding is available to allow free access. However, I have a real concern about the proliferation of unverified scientific data on the Internet. A **Google** search for any property of any chemical compound is likely to give thousands of hits, many of which are junk. Unfortunately, the high-quality sites like **IUPAC** and **NIST** usu-

ally fail to make it to the top on the list. Since students, even in junior high school, are now conditioned to use the Internet for everything,

there is a pressing need to educate them on how to choose the most reliable sources. 🌿

Author Bio

Svetla Baykoucheva (last name spelled as “Baykousheva” on some publications) is currently head of the **White Memorial Chemistry Library** at the **University of Maryland** in College Park, Maryland. She holds a MS in Chemistry, a PhD in Microbiology, and a Master’s degree in Library and Information Science. From 1997 until 2005 she was manager of the Library & Information Center of the **American Chemical Society (ACS)** in Washington, DC. For the past four years, she has been the editor of the *Chemical Information Bulletin* published by the **ACS Chemical Information Division**. For many years she was a lab-bench scientist studying lipid metabolism and biological membranes and has published articles in this field.

Contact: Svetla Baykoucheva, University of Maryland, Phone: 301-405-9080, <sbaykouc@umd.edu>, www.lib.umd.edu/CHEM/svetla_profile.html, <http://network.nature.com/people/svelte/profile>. 🌿

Acquisitions Archaeology — What is a Crisis? (Vol. 2 No. 2, April 1990)



Column Editor: **Jesse Holden** (Coordinator of Technical Services, Millersville University) <jesse.holden@millersville.edu>

In September of 1989, **Hurricane Hugo** made landfall in South Carolina. The result was a devastating crisis. The next month, waiting for the third game of the much-anticipated “Bay Bridge” World Series (Giants vs. A’s) to begin, I was caught in yet another natural disaster that precipitated a major crisis — the **Loma Prieta Earthquake**, which caused major devastation around the Bay Area. Even now, even the slightest unexpected shaking sensation takes me right back to those terrifying moments almost twenty years ago. These two natural disasters brought about situations that I think of as “big crises” — serious kinds of events resulting in direct and dire consequences, but of an acute nature and a limited duration.

Another kind of crisis is the less drastic variety that arises in the course of day-to-day events. These kinds of crises, while in some cases more significant on a personal level, are less severe in absolute terms. We can, therefore, think of “crises” in two tiers: the big crises, such as those following major disasters, and then the daily “crises” that punctuate our daily lives. When dealing with the latter, it can help to keep in mind the former. No doubt the Charleston-bound in 1989 had this perspective going into the conference.

In November, the **Charleston Conference** went on as scheduled even as the city recovered from **Hugo**. **Janet Flowers** summarized a number of sessions at the conference for the “**And They Were There**” feature of the April 1990 issue of *ATG*.¹ Several of the first sessions she covered in her *ATG* article are interesting, as they dealt with increasing serials prices, shrinking print runs of university press monographs, peer review and copyright, and the role of vendors in the distribution of scholarly communication. These elements make up a large part of the well-known formula resulting in “the crisis in scholarly communication.” I should note that at no point does **Flowers** directly invoke the serials crisis in her summary, though gets very close when concluding that collaboration is the key to tackle “the issues facing us as we attempt to manage an exponential increase in scholarly output in a time

of shrinking resources.”² Reading this conference summary, I thought immediately of the crisis in scholarly communication as there has been an (ongoing) one since before I started in libraries. And, to put it all in perspective, the literature on the subject recedes into the early 1970s, at least — demonstrating that there has been a crisis since before I was born.

Clearly, things have been far from ideal in scholarly communication for a long time and from many perspectives. But I have become uncomfortable with the idea of “the (ongoing) crisis” within this context — as have many others. More than a decade ago, for example, **Sanford G. Thatcher** had already observed that the “crisis” was something more of a “chronic illness.”³ The situation with academic serials and monographs has definitely caused a great deal of (ongoing) anxiety within the scholarly community. It is, however, more a crisis of the second tier, if “crisis” is even the right word: we are looking not at swift and terrible disaster, but a slow eroding of libraries’ ability to provide stable, long-term access to certain (but not all) content. The lingering situation in scholarly communication has implications for everyone involved, including authors, publishers, vendors, and librarians. This situation suggests the possibility of “disastrous” consequences for scholarship, and I do not want to imply that such a situation is less important than it is for everyone involved.

But what *are* we talking about when we use the word “crisis”? To pull a few choice phrases out of the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* definition of the word, components of a crisis may include a “turning-point for better or worse,” “marked or sudden variation,” “critical point in the course of events,” “decisive stage in the progress of anything,” and a “decision.”⁴ Now, the *OED* notes, a crisis might also mean “times of difficulty, insecurity, and suspense in politics and commerce.” While the elements constituting the crisis in scholarly communication might create a time of difficulty or insecurity, it is worth noting that there is no indication that a crisis is a time of *prolonged* difficulty or insecurity. A crisis is clearly a *definitive* moment.

I am not dismissing the potential harm caused by runaway serials pricing, the uncertain future of the academic monograph, or other difficulties imposed by the troubling economics of scholarly communication. But reflecting back on all the challenges posed by the changing market for academic publishing, all of us here in 2009 should have the lessons of the communication crisis firmly in mind — as well as a thought for those greater crises that help keep everything in perspective. The program for the **2009 Charleston Conference** shows that we have experienced a shift vis-à-vis electronic resources. We are now facing not only uncertain and rapidly changing pricing models, but variable modes of access, numerous content delivery platforms, and complicated archival challenges. To top it all off, we are now somewhere in the middle of the most dire budget situations that many of us have ever seen. The increase in scholarly output and shrinking resources we are managing in 2009 go well beyond what the scholarly community faced back in 1989. Is this shift to e-resources an expansion of the serials crisis? Is it an entirely new crisis? An additional crisis?

I would answer “no” to all three of the questions above. We have come to the point where there is no crisis. For starters, we have passed that “critical point in the course of events” where we are uncertain about the future of e-resources in academic libraries. A quick glance through the program for this November’s conference confirms that; the consensus is that we have arrived (at last) in a completely new environment. Our emerging dialog concerning change here in 2009 does not suggest a continuation of the rhetoric from the preceding communication crisis, either, but rather something much more positive and energetic. To pull some select words out of the upcoming conference session titles, we are “leveraging,” “reconfiguring,” “implementing,” “following-up,” “facing,” “assessing,” “moving,” and “partnering” while dealing with great uncertainty and unease. This is important to note, because it is clear now that things are not going back to the way they were (a long time ago). We must come to

continued on page 58

From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

The *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* (2009, 978-0195305135, \$750) is a major update and expansion of an already established and admired reference work. In this new six-volume set, editor **John Esposito** builds on his 1995 effort, the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, to offer an up-to-date, more comprehensive work that will appeal to a broad-based audience ranging from informed scholars to interested lay readers.

Some 550 experts and scholars have contributed a total of 1,025 articles covering historical, political, social, cultural, economic and religious topics from the birth of the **Prophet Muhammad** in the 6th century through the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Articles vary in size from brief entries as short as 250 words that amount to descriptive definitions to lengthy essays that treat a diversity of topics that range from Arabic Literature to the Muslim Brotherhood, Secularism to the concept of Fatwa, the Ottoman Empire to Sufism and Architecture to Marriage and Divorce. Some of the more lengthy treatments have up to four sub-entries and all have substantial bibliographies. There are also individual entries for specific countries where Islam is pre-eminent as well as for countries where it has significant impacts. In addition, there are articles that provide biographical information for both historic and modern figures as well as essays that discuss specific Islamic schools of thought like **Alevis**, **Druze**, **Khojas** and the **Salafi** groups. The articles are fact filled

and objective, often providing historical context as well as specific information.

The set is also equipped with a number of value-added features. While the set is text-rich with scholarly content, there are numerous black and white photos and illustrations that compliment the text. The first volume has a helpful chronology as well as an alphabetical list of all entries in the encyclopedia. There is also a list of the over 40 maps that can be found throughout the set. As hinted at above, there are bibliographies for each entry but they are selective containing primary sources as well as "important scholarly works." Relevant "see also" references are provided at the end of each article and there is a topical outline of all entries in volume six that also offers additional access to related articles. All articles are signed by the contributor and there is a full list of contributors along with their affiliate institutions and the entries that they authored in this last volume. These scholars are drawn from an international cast and are both Muslim and Non-Muslim. There is also a thorough and comprehensive 173 page general index providing volume and page access to the entire set.

Once again, **Oxford University Press** has provided an academic work that while intended for students and scholars will be equally useful to the interested general reader. Admittedly, the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* is not nearly as comprehensive as **Brill's** massive twelve-volume *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2004, 978-9004141155, \$4,068). However, it is also far less imposing and

costly, and as such, far more accessible to non-scholars and libraries on tight budgets. While the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World* will not replace **Brill's** *Encyclopaedia of Islam* as the cornerstone in academic library reference collections, it will proudly stand beside it. In addition, it offers a viable alternative for larger public libraries that have neither the budget nor the need for the larger set. Most academic libraries as well as many larger public libraries will want to add it to their buy list.

(For those interested in the electronic access to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, it is not available as a standalone resource but is one of the core reference sets in the *Oxford Islamic Studies Online subscription database*. According to the **Oxford University Press Website** at <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/about.html>, it "encompasses over 3,500 A-Z reference entries, chapters from scholarly and introductory works, Qur'anic materials, primary sources, images, maps, and timelines." For complete pricing information or to subscribe, follow this link: http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/Public/contact_us.html.

Librarians interested in the print version of the **Brill** set should check out http://www.brill.nl/m_catalogue_sub6_id7560.htm. Information about the *Encyclopaedia of Islam Online* can be found at www.brillonline.nl. A free demo is available as are links to information about subscriptions and site licenses.)

Acquisitions Archaeology from page 56

terms with much more information than we have ever had, while receiving much less money with which to acquire this vast amount of information — which is available to us in many more forms. The challenges before us now are paradigmatic; they must be faced strategically rather than fought reactively. Operation in crisis mode is not always rational and does not lend itself to long-term planning based on careful decision-making. One is required to react to a crisis, but to move forward one must plan ahead....

Endnotes

1. **Flowers, Janet**. (1990). "The Charleston Conference in a Nutshell." And They Were There. *Against the Grain* 2:2 p. 2-3.
2. **Flowers**, p. 2.
3. **Thatcher, Sanford G.** (1997). "Thinking Systematically About the Crisis in Scholarly Communication." The Specialized Scholarly Monograph in Crisis: Or How Can I Get Tenure If You Won't Publish My Book? Conference sponsored by American Council of Learned Societies, Association of American University Presses, Association of Research Libraries; September 11-12, 1997, Washington, D.C. Online access: <http://www.arl.org/resources/pubs/specscholmono/thatcher.shtml>.
4. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. (2009). Oxford University Press.

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Column Editor's Note: *What a timely review for the Charleston Conference edition of ATG. Librarian Thomas W. Leonhardt not only explores Richard Abel and Gordon Graham's edition Immigrant Publishers: The Impact of Expatriate Publishers in Britain and America in the 20th Century; he also looks at the many ways that information, books, and publishing impact society and vice versa. This resonates as one of the tenets of the Charleston Conference and ATG — linking together those who have their hands in the cauldron of information.*

While **Tom** is new to *Monographic Musings*, he is not new to *ATG*. As a contributing editor, he has added insight to this publication on everything from antiquarian booksellers to publishers' catalogs. He has been a regular contributor to the library journal *Technicalities*. On top of that, he has authored numerous books regarding technical services, library instruction, electronic media, and other topics. Many thanks to **Tom** for his most recent publication in this column.

Happy Charleston Conference and happy reading, everyone! — **DV**

Immigrant Publishers: The Impact of Expatriate Publishers in Britain and America in the 20th Century. Edited by **Richard Abel** and **Gordon Graham**. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2009. 978-1-4128-0871-2. 254 pages. \$39.95.

Reviewed by **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (St. Edward's University)

Of the making of books there is no end. After reading this book you should have a better understanding of the Preacher's words however limited they were in hindsight. Although he had no idea of the proliferation to come, his observation about book-making is recalled regularly

and will continue to resonate as books continue to be made at a steadily increasing pace and made available in the traditional, impossible to improve codex format but also in electronic and audio versions. There is no end in sight and I rejoice.

continued on page 60