

Development and challenges in old manuscripts cataloguing: the experience of the National Library of Portugal

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The presentation will provide an account of the experience of the National Library of Portugal (NLP) in the adaptation of cataloguing rules and the development of the local practice in old manuscript cataloguing. The evolution of the work upon which current policies and practice are based is presented, inheriting from a long term reflection on international standards, starting with AACR2, in a continuous dialogue with other standards and looking also at the new concepts brought about by RDA.

It reveals a structural and evolutionary standardization work that has been making progress, by establishing cataloguing guidelines that include different levels of description and access points appropriate to each case or type of collection. This effort has also contributed to the dissemination of the manuscript collections through the NLP online catalogue, which dates back to 1987, and to the publishing of thematic and special catalogues, according to dissemination and publishing priorities of the library.

Also, the process and results of adapting UNIMARC to manuscripts is explained, showing how the whole practice of automated cataloguing of manuscripts at the NLP has been an innovative and pioneering experience.

The project on the Library of Alcobaça is presented as part of a wider strategy materialized by the National Digital Library, through a digitization programme covering mainly materials from special collections (manuscripts, early printed books, periodicals, maps, music, drawings and prints). Most of the major manuscript treasures are already digitized in full and available online. While providing for online discoverability and description together with direct and universal access to content, this strategy also meets the fundamental mission of the NLP in the safeguarding of the Portuguese documentary heritage, through the preservation of the original documents.