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Review -- Grandmougin, Anne-Cécile. Lucien Herr: Socialist Librarian of the French Third Republic

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Grandmougin, Anne-Cécile. Lucien Herr: Socialist Librarian of the French Third Republic. Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2020. 9781634000949, 136 pages. \$18.00 (*Tegan Raleigh*, trans.)

Reviewed by **Joshua Hutchinson** (Cataloging and Metadata Librarian, University of California, Irvine) <jchutchi@uci.edu>

This biography of a late 19th and early 20th century French librarian shows the reader what 21st century librarians have in common with the past as well as what we can learn from it. Rather than focusing on that which makes us different, instead it shows what hasn't changed about the profession of librarianship and through those similarities describes just what the libraries were like where Herr worked.

An intellectual first and foremost, Lucien Herr was librarian at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure from 1888 to 1926. He played an important role in shaping not just that library but also the intellectual development of many of the students who passed through that institution while he was there. He saw the role of librarian to be an active one—to direct not just the library collection, but also the research of the students studying in it. Herr was also friends with many of the important thinkers and academics of his time, and a prolific reader and reviewer.

Grandmougin's level of archival research is impressive, apparent for instance when comparing the prodigious quantity of reviews that Herr wrote on an annual basis with the books that he purchased for his library. Herr appears to have truly believed that he needed to read the books that he was purchasing for his library so that he could best help his patrons. He was a bibliographer conversant in many fields—not only was he able to read and review many or most of the books that came into the library, he also knew many of the intellectual luminaries of his time, such as Jean Jaurès (along with whom he was a co-founder of the newspaper *L'Humanité*), Léon Blum and Charles Peguy. In addition, Grandmougin describes how Herr was intimately involved in the Dreyfuss Affair.

The ways in which Herr's practice of librarianship are mirrored in today's libraries—even those in a different country, different century and different context—are both amusing and illuminating. He had difficult budgetary constraints and struggled because the fiscal year imposed upon him “did not correspond to the natural rhythm of acquisitions in the library” (pp 58-59). Serials accounted for a large share of the acquisitions budget, which meant that he was unable to be as flexible or complete in his monographic purchases as he would have liked. He had to regularly justify the library's budget to administrators, and he dealt with the advent of new formats (such as slides and film reels) in libraries, and struggled (both in terms of budget and policy) with how they fit within the collections. These are just a few of

the ways in which Herr's librarianship was similar to the practice of librarianship in the 21st century, and also in which 21st century librarians can study and learn from him.

As a book, this is extremely readable. It's fairly short—with the main text only a little bit more than 100 pages—but much is packed into those pages. For readers who are already aware of the social and historical context, it will prove to be an illuminating biographical sketch. For those who don't have a deep knowledge of France from the 1880s to after the First World War, it provides an introduction to the period while telling an interesting story about the history of libraries. The translator has a note at the beginning explaining some of the decisions made throughout the work, and the translation itself is very impressive—the text reads smoothly and clearly.

This work, a translation of Grandmougin's *Mémoire d'étude* (dissertation), is a work of scholarship in both library science and French history. There is also a significant aspect about the history of teacher training, because Herr was director of the main teacher training library. Grandmougin is currently Conservateur des bibliothèques at Université Paris XIII. The French original is available online at the *enssib*'s institutional repository. Because of this book's cross-disciplinary interest, the translation is certainly worth having available, particularly for those with strong programs in library science and/or 20th century French history.

ATG Reviewer Rating: Available somewhere in my shared network.