

“A Chinese Writing in Arabic Numbers”

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Abstract

Lucian Blaga became one of the leaders of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library in Cluj in a period when the introduction of the Dewey decimal classification system raised much debate all over the world. Following the Soviet model, Romanian libraries as well introduced this classification system which would provide a better handling of their collections. The paper communicates Lucian Blaga's lecture on this issue, preserved in a manuscript format in the Special Collections Department of the Lucian Blaga Central University Library.

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“A Chinese writing in Arabic numbers” – this is how the “librarian” Lucian Blaga defined the decimal classification system. Consequently to the reform of higher education in 1948 Lucian Blaga was first “transferred” from the date January 1, 1949 to the History and Philosophy Institute of the Academy of the Romanian People's Republic where he worked as an Institute Professor until June 1, 1951, when he was moved to the Library of the Romanian Academy, Cluj Branch,¹

¹ Cf. Lucian Blaga Central University Library, Special Collections, Ms. 6564, *Autobiografie. Memoriu de activitate* (Autobiography. Activity Memorials), Cluj, 1923, 1958, f. 15. [The Lucian Blaga Central University Library preserves in the Special Collections Department the **Lucian Blaga Personal Archives Collection**. It was constituted within our collection thanks to Mrs Ana Dorica Bugnariu (Dorli Blaga)].

Chronologically, Lucian Blaga fixed the beginning of his library career to the date June 1, 1951. The same date is given in the monograph written by the poet's daughter, Dorli Blaga, *Tatăl meu, Lucian Blaga* (My Father, Lucian Blaga), Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 37. On the other hand, Ion Bălu corrected this information,

becoming Chief Librarian and then Deputy Scientific Director,¹ and choosing for a field of study the decimal classification.²

His debut as a librarian coincided with launching of a large campaign militating for the introduction of decimal classification in every library in Romania.³ To support this initiative Soviet speciality studies were translated,⁴ professional training courses were organized,⁵ articles were published which demonstrated the necessity to constitute systematic catalogues, as well as to organize library collections thematically.⁶ The issue of the introduction of decimal classification was ideologically motivated as well.¹

stating that Lucian Blaga began his activity in the Library of the Academy only on July 1, 1951, from the moment when he signed the last activity report at the History Institute for the period 1–30.06.1951. Cf. Ion Bălu, *Viața lui Lucian Blaga* (The Life of Lucian Blaga), vol. IV, Bucharest, 1999, p. 103.

¹ Ion Bălu, *op. cit.*, p. 104; Dorli Blaga, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

² Ms. 6564, f. 16.

³ With regard to the history of the adoption of the decimal classification by the Romanian libraries see I. Lupu, *Introducerea clasificării zecimale în România* (The Introduction of Decimal Classification in Romania), in *Studii și cercetări de documentare și bibliologie* (Documentation and Library and Information Science Studies and Research), Bucharest, 1966, no. 2, p. 191–203.

⁴ *Clasificarea zecimală. Expunerea sistemului. Tabele prescurtate și prelucrate pentru biblioteci, arhive documentare și fișiere individuale de studii* (Decimal Classification. The Presentation of the System. Tables Shortened and Transformed for Libraries, Documentary Archives and Individual Study Cards), Bucharest, 1949; *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci, servicii de documentare și fișiere individuale de studii* (Decimal Classification for Libraries, Documentation Services and Individual Study Cards), Bucharest, 1952.

⁵ “Cursuri de bibliotecari de la Biblioteca Universitară din Cluj” (Courses for Librarians in the Cluj University Library), in: *Călăuza bibliotecarului* (The Librarian’s Guide), Bucharest, 1950, p. 29.

⁶ N. Mironescu, “În jurul problemei introducerii unui catalog unic în bibliotecile noastre” (Around the Introduction of a Unified Catalogue in Our Libraries), in: *Călăuza bibliotecarului*, Bucharest, 1951, no. 3, pp. 33–34; Eugenia Bodea, “Cum am organizat fondul bibliotecii după sistemul clasificării zecimale” (How We Organized the Library Collection According to the Decimal Classification System), in *op. cit.*, 1951, no. 10, pp. 31–32; Zoia Dincă, “Reorganizarea tematică a fondului de cărți și a cataloagelor a îmbunătățit munca de îndrumare a cititorilor” (The Thematic Reorganization of the Book Collection and of Catalogues Improved the Reader Guidance Activity), in *op. cit.*, 1951, no. 10, pp. 33–34; “Reorganizarea cataloagelor în bibliotecile științifice și regionale” (The Reorganization of Catalogues in Scientific and Regional Libraries), in *op. cit.*, 1952, no. 5, pp. 17–19; Teodor Mihăilescu, “Importanța catalogului sistematic în

Lucian Blaga wrote the article *Expunere² a dezvoltării clasificării zecimale³* (Exposition of the Development of the Decimal Classification) in this context. According to the marginal note made by Dorli Blaga the manuscript has not been published yet.⁴ The text of the manuscript, 12 A4 format leaves, is written with pencil and is not dated by the author.⁵ The *Exposition* is divided in two sections: a first, theoretical part in which Lucian Blaga presents in brief the history of the development of the universal decimal classification, and a second part which contains practical examples.

We communicate the entire text of the manuscript.⁶

f. 1

In the presentation I was asked to make today before our trade-union group, I am going to speak about one of the most interesting activities, which have been taking place for (...) some decades in the libraries from all over the world, which pretend to have the level required by the intellectual necessities of our age; we are speaking about the decimal classification. For my part, I began to study and perform this activity within the Library belonging to the Cluj Branch of the Academy of the Romanian People's Republic approximately a year and a half ago.

difuzarea cărților cu caracter politic-social” (The Importance of Systematic Catalogues in the Diffusion of Books with a Political-Social Character), in *op. cit.*, 1952, no. 5, pp. 29–31.

¹ The organization of collections according to format was considered a “residue of bourgeois formalism”. For this reason the “necessity of grouping according to the content (...), the reorganization of the collection on scientific bases following the Soviet model” was supported. See: Așezarea fondului de cărți după conținut, o condiție a îmbunătățirii activității bibliotecii noastre (The Placement of the Book Collection According to the Content, a Condition to the Improvement of the Activity in Our Library), in: *op. cit.*, Bucharest, 1951, no. 9, pp. 26–27.

² Lucian Blaga Central University Library, Special Collections, Ms. 6576, 12 u.a. (in the following: Ms. 6576).

³ Written: *decimale*.

⁴ “Inedit. Dorli Blaga”. Ms. 6576, f.1.

⁵ Ion Bălu stated that Lucian Blaga presented it before his library colleagues in January 1953. Ion Bălu, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁶ In the transcription we completed some abbreviations: ex. (e.g.) – example, we marked with (...) the parts of the text the author erased. The editor’s interventions in the text are marked by []. The translation tried to render faithfully the original even preserving the inconsistency of some passages from the original.

⁷ Text erased.

One could say that I am myself a novice, all the more, since I had somehow to initiate myself in this domain which represents (...) ¹ among many other aspects, (...) ² the equivalent of a true technical science. When sometimes a year ago an acquaintance asked me what I worked within the Library, I tried to explain in a few words the activity of a decimal classifier in the following way: I learn, I answered him, to write in Chinese with Arabic numbers. Though seemingly humorous, the description I made has a grain of truth. Indeed, the persons who devised the system of the library materials' decimal classification started, maybe without exactly realizing this, from the old preoccupation, which in Europe dates back to around 1700, to the philosopher Leibniz's age, to find symbolic signs, ³by which to designate not words, not sounds, but notions. ⁴The Chinese discovered, for their use, already (...) ⁵ some thousand years ago, ideographic (...) ⁶ writing. Their writing turned out rather difficult, for they sought to imagine ⁷ a separate graphic sign for each notion. You may imagine how

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unpractical would be the introduction of such a writing irrespective of its advantages consisting mainly in the fact that such a writing could be read in any language. Those who invented ⁸ the decimal classification have taken into consideration (...) ⁹ the practicability (...) ¹⁰ of the ideographical writing they were searching for. The person who based decimal classification on a combinatory system of Arabic numbers was extremely ingenious. If the learning of Chinese ideographical writings requires decades of work, being impossible for a single man to master it completely, decimal classification, or at least its principles, can be learnt in some hours. Otherwise, this great invention [...], decimal classification, is rooted in the initial interest given to the bibliographical ¹¹ activity. An ideographical writing such as the Chinese

¹ Text erased.

² Text erased.

³ Underlined by the author.

⁴ Underlined by the author.

⁵ Text erased.

⁶ Text erased.

⁷ Initially written: *devise*.

⁸ Initially written: *devised*.

⁹ Text erased.

¹⁰ Text erased.

¹¹ Underlined by the author.

could never have been adapted (...) ¹ to library services for which decimal classification was devised. The Chinese ideographic writing one would not have made possible a bibliographic catalogue ² such as the one put at our disposal by the decimal classification, which essentially (...) ³ can be nevertheless characterized, as I described it, as a Chinese writing in Arabic numbers.

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I am not going to make a more thorough historical presentation of decimal classification, I shall only mention some date of general interest. This classification system was founded by Melvil Dewey, ⁴ who published his system for the first time in 1876. ⁵ The system was published in America and raised many discussions among the specialists of the library science and bibliography problems. Since in each new edition the system suffered modifications and was subjected to great amplifications, we cannot speak of a more general usage of the decimal classification by librarians and bibliographers before 1895, when decimal classification was adopted by the Institute of Brussels as the basis of international bibliography. During the following decades the system was ever corrected and amplified. The 1929 Brussels edition (in French) of the classification system had approximately ⁶ 1600 pages. The appearance of this edition is a very important data in the history of decimal classification. The title of the edition was “Classification Décimale Universelle 2-^é[me] édition complete” and was published at the International Bibliographic Institute of Brussels (from 1927–1929 ⁷). This publication contains The Main Systematic Table, ⁸ with the decimal numbers of the notions from all the domains of human activity, preceded by a summary presentation of the classification principles. In 1933 ⁹ is

¹ Text erased.

² Underlined by the author.

³ Initially written: *remains however that, which*. Text erased.

⁴ Underlined by the author.

⁵ *Classification and Subject Index for Cataloguing and Arranging the Books and Pamphlets of a Library*, Amherst, 1876.

⁶ Initially written: *the dimensions of a volume (...) of*. A part of the text is illegible, being erased.

⁷ *Classification décimale universelle*, vol. I–III, Bruxelles, 1927–1929.

⁸ Underlined by the author.

⁹ *Classification décimale universelle. Tables de classification pour les bibliographies, bibliothèques, archives*, vol. IV, Bruxelles, 1933.

published, as an indispensable completion of the Main Systematic Table,
a

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new volume containing the Alphabetical Index¹ of the decimal classification together with the developed Auxiliary Systematic Tables,² and a presentation of the principles and rules of universal decimal classification. This edition consists of 4 volumes and is the basic treaty of the universal decimal classification³ of the International Bibliographic Institute of Brussels having been adopted by very many countries,⁴ mainly after 1930. Editions of the treaty were published in different languages. A new edition (...) ⁵ appeared in French in 1941,⁶ another was begun in 1951.⁷ (...) ⁸. The German edition of 1948,⁹ in booklets containing special chapters, is a useful one, which (...) ¹⁰ contains not only amplifications of the system, but also some of its useful technical simplifications. Soviet Russia was among the first countries to adopt the system. Here, however, it was sought from the beginning to improve the lacks of the system, which (...) ¹¹ through its structure it can be felt strongly from the bourgeois ideology and the circumstance that it was conceived in a capitalist country. Librarians and bibliographers were however confronted with a universally adopted system, thus the improvements made by Soviet scholars on the system in the perspective of the Marxist-Leninist ideology were at the time only completions and developments and not a total remaking of the system

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according to the intrinsic necessities of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, remaking which (...) ¹² existed however in plan and which (...) ¹³ would be realized in the course of time. (...) ¹⁴

¹ Underlined by the author.

² Underlined by the author.

³ Initially written: *international*. Text erased.

⁴ Initially written: *European countries*. Text erased.

⁵ Initially written: *complete*. Text erased.

⁶ We have not been able to identify this edition.

⁷ *Classification décimale universelle*, Bruxelles, 1951.

⁸ Text erased.

⁹ *Dezimal-Klassifikation*, Berlin, 1948.

¹⁰ Text erased.

¹¹ Initially written: *is*. Text erased.

¹² Text erased.

¹³ Text erased.

¹⁴ Initially written: *We can mention here in parentheses that*. Text erased.

The decimal classification system is based on a classification of sciences and the domains of intellectual activity, detached from the bourgeois¹ ideology, (...) ². In the order of importance of these naturally Marxist-Leninist ideology sees many things completely different. We mention for instance that main digit 2 indicates in the decimal classification system the problems related to religion. (...) ³ In the perspective of Marxist-Leninist ideology religion cannot be placed so high in the order of importance of spiritual domains. In the system (...) ⁴ of decimal classification as it has been modified (...) ⁵ and completed by Soviet scholars too, main digit two indicates things connected to religion, ⁶ but the lack has been corrected to some measure in the sense that (...) ⁷ the works (...) ⁸ supporting atheism are also classified at this index. (...) ⁹. The main merit (...) ¹⁰ for the modifications and completions made on the decimal classification system in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism is due (...) ¹¹ especially to the Soviet scholar Tropovski ¹²

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who published ¹³ in 1942 and 1946 shortened textbooks of decimal classification ¹⁴ for the provisory use of libraries and bibliographers, which more and more take into consideration the intrinsic necessities of Marxist-Leninist ideology. The recent editions of the decimal classification system in Russian brought new ¹⁵ ameliorations and much amplification. After Tropovski's textbooks in Romanian an

¹ Underlined by the author.

² Initially written: *and not on a classification and that (...)*. Text erased.

³ Initially written: *Religion does not*. Text erased.

⁴ Text erased.

⁵ Initially written: *by also*. Text erased.

⁶ Underlined by the author.

⁷ Text erased.

⁸ Text erased.

⁹ Initially written: *Soviet scholars have done so in many cases for the time being, modifying and completing decimal classification, (...) international, without (...) however, changing radically the essential division of the internationally adopted system*. Text erased.

¹⁰ Initially written: *of the scholar(...)*. Text erased.

¹¹ Text erased.

¹² Underlined by the author.

¹³ Initially written: *a textbook*. Text erased.

¹⁴ Lev Naumovich Tropovskii, *Kratkie tablitsy detsializatsionnoi klassifikatsii*, [s.l.], 1942. And the edition of 1946.

¹⁵ Spelling error in the original.

edition was published in 1949¹ which is adapted to the local necessities of the Romanian People's Republic, and now (...) ² followed at the end of 1952³ a new edition much enlarged especially at main index 3, (...) ⁴ which contains social and political sciences, (...), ⁵ and at index 9, which takes especially into consideration the new division into periods of history elaborated by Soviet historiography.

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Some words on the structure of classification

Decimal classification⁶ is based on the division of all human knowledge in ten classes, which correspond to ten main subjects. Each subject is given an index, (...) ⁷ in Arabic numbers, from 0 to 9. The classes are the following: 0 – General works, 1 Philosophy, 2 Atheism-religion, 3 Social sciences, 4 Philology, linguistics, 5 Natural sciences, Mathematics, 6 Technique, Agriculture, Medicine, 7 Art, games, sport, 8 Literature, 9 History, geography, biographies.⁸ Each class has divisions, for example: 51 Mathematics, 52 Astronomy, 53 Physics, 54 Chemistry, 55 Geology ... 59 Zoology. These are followed by subdivisions: 51 Mathematics: 511 Arithmetic, 512 Algebra, 513 Geometry ... 519 Combinatory analysis.⁹ Classification by specification can be continued endlessly and following this operation, following the same decimal method. For example 3 Social sciences: 33 Economical sciences, 331 Trade unions, the problem of work, 331.1 Workers' rights, 331.11 Contract of employment.¹⁰

The decimal indices enumerated in the 10 classes of classification from 0 to 9 form the main table of decimal classification. In order to be able to make more detailed classifications some common¹¹ or general auxiliary indices¹² are added to the indices named "main". Such

¹ *Clasificarea zecimală. (...)*, Bucharest, 1949.

² Text erased.

³ *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952.

⁴ Initially written: *where*. Text erased.

⁵ Text erased.

⁶ Initially written: *Structura*. Text erased.

⁷ Initially written: *from dig(...)*. Text erased.

⁸ *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952, p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Underlined by the author.

¹² Underlined by the author.

auxiliary indices are: the indices of place, time, from, language, relation, point of view (for example the index of place is (...)¹ an Arabic number placed between parentheses: (5) Asia;² the index of time is the year placed between inverted commas: Karl Marx's book, *The Civil War of 1871 in France* will be classified as: 9(44)"1871";³ the index of language is a digit before which stands the equality sign: =4 books in French (83=4 German poems translated in French);⁴ the auxiliary index of relation is the colon (51 : 6 the relations between mathematical and technical sciences).⁵

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There are also special and analytical auxiliary indices: is – (dash) or .0 (point zero). For example in literature we can have this index: 84-31 (French–Romanian literature).⁶ Or the special auxiliary index zero-point: 75.02 the technique of painting.⁷

We have so far indicated only the most important operations of decimal classification. Specification⁸ has in principle no limit, and it is ever developing ... (...).⁹ Soviet scholars who modified and completed the system, first of all Tropovski, (...) ¹⁰ also use a multitude of letters. Class¹¹ I for philosophy has now in the first place the index 1M (The philosophy of Marxism-Leninism. Dialectical and historical materialism; the subdivision index 1M132 means: the development of Marxist philosophy by Lenin and Stalin. (S) = the Union of Soviet Republics;¹² (B)¹³ as an index of place means capitalist countries;¹⁴ (D)¹⁵ means the countries from the front of socialism;¹⁶ =M as an index is Hungarian language.¹

¹ Text erased.

² *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Underlined by the author.

⁹ Initially written: *I want to name you a series of book or publications with their indices.* Text erased.

¹⁰ Initially written: *they introduced.* Text erased.

¹¹ Initially written: *The indices fo(...).* Text erased.

¹² *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952, p. 35.

¹³ Text erased.

¹⁴ *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952, p. 58.

¹⁵ Text erased.

¹⁶ *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952, p. 64.

An index such as this: 413=S=R=M=3 means Russian–Romanian–Hungarian–German Dictionary.² In the latest Soviet and Romanian edition of the decimal classification the general auxiliary index of importance was also introduced, namely: (1), (11), (111);³ (...);⁴ the auxiliary index (1) means Marxist classics on a certain subject: 323(1) Stalin, Marxism and the National Question.⁵

After these naturally very summary explanations, I want to (...) ⁶ give you the classifying index for different books or studies from different domains.⁷

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616-053.2 Children's diseases

616-002.6 Syphilis

621.794 The chemical treatment of metallic surfaces

622.323 Oil

7.01 Marxist-Leninist art theory

8S-14 Mayakovski, V. 3.03=R (selected poems)

83-21 Goethe, J.W. 7.03=M (a dramatic work)

8S.09 Pushkin, Al. (study of literary criticism or history)

9(R)311 The 1920 General Strike (history of the Romanian

People's Republic)

9(∞) universal history

902.6 Archaeology, antiquities

92 Biographies⁸ (Ch. Darwin's biography: 57 Darwin, Ch. And complementary to 92 Darwin, Ch.

92 Eminescu (0 : 7) Eminescu represented in different artistic creations

33 (R)-231.1 The first year of the first five year plan in RPR

327.311 The day of May 1

3C21 Lenin, Selected works

3C1 Marx and Engels, Complete works

3C36 The life and activity of Stalin

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁴ Text erased.

⁵ *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952, p. 160.

⁶ Initially written: show. Text erased.

⁷ *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952, p. 185–238.

⁸ Underlined by the author.

001 (S : R) Scientific and cultural relationships between the USSR and RPR

215 Science and religion

297 Islamism

40 general problems of linguistics

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In order to become a good (...) ¹ classifier with help of the decimal system, one must make (...) ² efforts to think hard at every step. For no matter how much technicality is in the application of the system, the classifier (...) ³ will have to (...) ⁴ make an operation of abstraction, and then an operation of specification in the case of each book or study which is to be classified. Nothing helps the classifier in these operations so (...) ⁵ as a philosophical culture, a well organized general view on the entire cosmos. ⁶

How can we benefit from the decimal classification? Greatly. (...) ⁷ A library catalogued according the decimal system offers to the readers a bibliographically organized material ⁸ related to (...) ⁹ any problem that can be studied from (...) ¹⁰ the books and studies kept in the that library. A researcher, (...) ¹¹ interested in a certain problem goes to the library where he will ask a specialist to give him the decimal ¹² indices (...), ¹³ which represent directly or indirectly the intellectual material which (...) ¹⁴ interests him. Having these indices, he will search in the decimal catalogue (...), ¹⁵ where he will find the cards of every book and study (...), ¹⁶ published in any language, which (...) ¹⁷ that

¹ Initially written: *cataloguer*. Text erased.

² Initially written: *some*. Text erased.

³ Text erased.

⁴ Text erased.

⁵ Text erased.

⁶ Underlined by the author.

⁷ Text erased.

⁸ Underlined by the author.

⁹ Initially written: *to the material*. Text erased.

¹⁰ Initially written: *infinite numbers*. Text erased.

¹¹ Initially written: *who wishes*. Text erased.

¹² Text erased.

¹³ Written: *zecimal*.

¹⁴ Initially written: *preoccupies*. Text erased.

¹⁵ Text erased.

¹⁶ Initially written: *and in ori(...)*. Text erased.

¹⁷ Text erased.

library owns related to that particular problem. The researcher is thus quickly served and he does not need to go through the alphabetic catalogue of all the books and studies which

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are to be found in the library in order to choose that which interests him. (...) ¹ This operation otherwise would require a tiring work and would be a painful loss of time.

Nevertheless, the use of the decimal classification system has its shortcomings. They are mainly of ideological nature. This is what the "Introduction" ² of the decimal classification textbook (...), ³ published recently by the Publishing House of the General Work Confederation and used mostly by the big libraries of the Romanian People's Republic , says itself regarding this: "The attempts to develop a special Soviet library classification date back to 1924, becoming larger and more precise in the years before the Great War for the Defence of the Country, but only since 1945 the thorough work towards the elaboration of a new unified classification scheme for the Soviet systematic catalogue has started. The work is done by the biggest libraries in the USSR, first of all by the V. I. Lenin Library in Moscow. Between 1945 and 1947 the general principles of the operational plan, as well as the special ones for certain domains were debated and adopted and the detailed elaboration of the classification scheme began. In the year 1947 all these works were unified, a classification project being created which contains every branch of science and has 35,000 notions in the present. When the grandiose masterpiece of the Soviet bibliographical science, the socialist classification system will be published, it will be possible

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to liquidate the actual decimal classification, a residue of the capitalist past, which makes more difficult the development of progressive scientific research. But until the appearance of the new classification system, we are constrained to use the actual system with the corrections and additions made by L. N. Tropovski." ⁴

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

¹ Text erased.

² Underlined by the author.

³ Text erased.

⁴ *Clasificarea zecimală pentru biblioteci. (...)*, Bucharest, 1952, p. 12.