

# A day in the life of an assistant librarian



## MARIA TOURNA

*As part of an occasional 'follow-up' feature, your Eds decided to catch up with Maria Tourna, who was awarded a sponsored student place at the UKSG Conference in 2008. They found her working as Assistant Librarian at the Blegen Library in Athens, Greece, and now mother to a little girl*

Now I am a working mother, my typical day starts really early at around 6 o'clock, or whenever my three-year-old daughter chooses to wake. Coffee for me, desperately; milk for her. Even if she is not up by six, I'm always up by then so that I have time to catch up on as many routine things as possible. It has become a habit to then always turn on my laptop to check on any news from newspapers' websites. I leave home at 7.30 this morning and, as usual, I make it to the Library about 40 minutes later. My official starting time is 8.30 but my goal is to arrive early enough to make another coffee and check my e-mails before getting down to whatever else the day brings.

I've been working for the Blegen Library, one of the two research libraries of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, for more than 11 years now. For the last five years, despite my job title of Assistant Librarian, my role has focused mostly on serials. My job includes classifying books and journals (following a unique classification system

originally created in 1903), providing library reference services to both members and visitors, since there is no reference desk, giving orientations to members of the academic programmes and assigning reserved carrels to any visiting academics to use during their stay. Summertime is always the busiest period for the Blegen Library with many visiting professors from affiliated universities returning to the library for research.

On today's agenda there is an orientation scheduled for 10.30 for the summer session students which lasts approximately half an hour, so that leaves me two hours to check my e-mails, reply to any queries and process claims requests for missing issues. During the orientation, we introduce new members to the library's premises, explain the processes they need to follow, discuss the rules and demonstrate our OPAC and the list of our online resources.

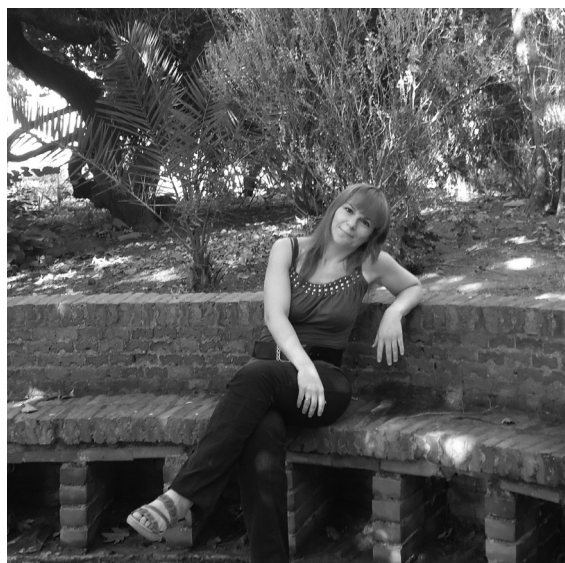
With the orientation over, and after a couple of routine enquiries – a patron asking for help in

order to find a misplaced book in the stacks and a more complex query on a bibliographical reference – it is time to continue my ongoing cataloguing project. The online cataloguing of current and dead periodicals is an ambitious project that started two years ago and involves cataloguing and systemization using Aleph 18 software. Even though the majority of serials titles have now been fully processed, it is a project that still requires most of my working hours at the moment. There are days when the cataloguing is pretty straightforward and there are days when most of my time is spent in the stacks in order to identify old titles and sort out more complex cataloguing issues in relation to the library's holdings. I've been working, for a few days now, on processing the Russian journals – a real challenge for me as I have to catalogue them in Russian and not in a transliterated form. Quite a few ceased publication over 50 years ago and there are many inconsistencies and mistakes that need to be cross-checked against the traditional card catalogue and corrected in the OPAC. It is an interesting process but a time-consuming one.

The Blegen Library is a research library focusing on all aspects of Greece from the earliest prehistory through late antiquity, and my BA in Archaeology was the main reason I started working in this Library in the first place. Over the years, new technologies and their impact on librarianship urged me to learn more and focus on a new career. That's why at the moment, and with the School's continuous support, I'm also in the process of writing my Masters dissertation. I'm enrolled at the MScEcon/Diploma Information and Library Studies, Department of Information Studies at Aberystwyth University.



*Maria double-checking serials data with the traditional card catalogue before updating online*



*The School's gardens where Maria likes to sit at lunchtime*

The American School of Classical Studies at Athens is a private institution founded in 1881, so this year it celebrated its 130th anniversary. As well as promoting classical studies since its earliest days, it has sponsored major excavation projects such as the excavation of the Agora of Ancient Athens and the site of Ancient Corinth. Through the excavation projects, its two research libraries – the Blegen and the Gennadius – its archives and its Wiener Laboratory, it offers graduate students and scholars from affiliated North American colleges and universities their basis for advanced study of all aspects of Greek culture. So, I am fortunate to be able to now combine my two areas of interest by working here.

Back to my day, and a little after two, I take a short lunch break in the calm atmosphere of the School's gardens where the trees provide some shade, and then I get down to another two hours of cataloguing. I leave work around 4.30 and by the time I get back home, my baby girl is awake from her nap and eager to play with me and her dad. She deserves all our attention so usually we go out for walks or visit neighbouring playgrounds, and today we go to the park. There is practically no free time for me to study daily on my dissertation, and the effort to do some work after she goes to sleep for the night is not always successful, and tonight is no exception. I have been known to end up falling asleep in front of my laptop. That's why extra vacation days are planned in order to speed up the writing. Needless to say, without my husband's support, it would have been impossible to balance all the different aspects of my life to avoid a negative impact on our family.