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# ARTICLE CITATIONS AND "OBSCOLESCENCE" IN MUSICOLOGICAL JOURNALS

BY R. M. LONGYEAR



The ranks of bound journals provide one of the most impressive sights in the well-run music library. Yet demands for precious shelf space, in view of the expansion of music (and other) collections, have caused many librarians to consider consigning back issues of journals to storage, microfilm, or discard;<sup>1</sup> "a petroleum library which retains its journals for twenty years is retaining 35% of its stock, and therefore using 35% of its floor space, to satisfy a mere 4% of the total demand."<sup>2</sup>

Studies of obsolescence of journal articles have been almost entirely confined to the fields of science and technology, wherein the problems of obsolescence of previous studies are most pertinent. Though a few studies have been devoted to the social sciences,<sup>3</sup> the humanities have been virtually ignored, and a search of the extensive list of items, twelve pages in length, consulted by Line and Sandison discloses no studies dealing with music.<sup>4</sup>

Citation studies, showing the frequency of citations of journals or articles therein, have been the favored method of determining the use of previous research. The *Science Citation Index* and abstracting journals, though not totally reliable,<sup>5</sup> provide working bibliographical tools which are not available to the student of the literature in the humanities. Studies of obsolescence have relied most heavily on the counting of citations from primary journals, since these reflect "the collective judgment of scientists about the material they judge relevant to their own work."<sup>6</sup>

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1. For a review of the problems, see Carol A. Seymour, "Weeding the Collections: A Review of Research on Identifying Obsolete Serials," *Libri* 22 (1972): 183-89.

2. P. F. Cole, "Journal Usage Versus Age of Journal," *Journal of Documentation* 19 (1960): 17.

3. E.g., N. N. Wood and C. A. Bowen, "The Use of Social Science Periodical Literature," *Journal of Documentation* 25 (1969): 108-118, and Wilson O. Aiyepoku, "The Periodical Literature of Geography," *Libri* 22 (1972): 169-77.

4. M. B. Line and A. Sandison, "'Obsolescence' and Changes in the Use of Literature with Time," *Journal of Documentation* 30 (1974): 331-41.

5. John Martyn, "Tests on Abstracts Journals," *Journal of Documentation* 23 (1967): 45-70.

6. J. M. Brittain and M. B. Line, "Sources of Citation and References for Analysis Purposes: A Comparative Assessment," *Journal of Documentation* 29 (1973): 80.

Other methods of determining the viability of back issues of journal collections provide less reliable data. User surveys are virtually impossible to conduct in the typical academic library where open-stack privileges are customarily given to faculty and graduate students, if not to all students. At research libraries where access to back issues of journals is controlled, a user survey would be heavily weighted toward the older and more esoteric journals, since the working scholar, before coming there, would have already done his basic research among the titles more readily accessible in the open-stack libraries. The same weighting would occur in studies of inter-library loan requests for journal articles. Brookes has raised a most pointed question concerning user surveys: how to contrast a casual flipping through the pages of a journal with a "serious day's work analysing a single paper in a quiet corner of the library."<sup>7</sup> One additional method suggested for determining obsolescence is a poll of the faculty,<sup>8</sup> yet the data provided by a citation count would provide more "hard evidence" for decision-making than the subjective judgments of a heterogeneous music faculty.

Student user surveys would be least reliable of all. In the one study of the humanities and their reliance on journal articles, a recent survey that included citations of journal articles in 112 M.A. theses in English at the University of Rhode Island, the authors found that four journals, representing less than one-tenth of one per cent of the University's total collection, supplied 15% of the periodical citations.<sup>9</sup> The Ph.D. dissertation would provide a better source than the master's thesis for musicology and the other humanistic disciplines. A survey of student term papers and the journal articles cited therein would be the least reliable of all, for books are easier to find than journal articles: one need but look up the book in the card catalogue and go to the shelves, whereas for journal articles one must browse in bibliographies, footnotes, *RILM Abstracts* and other article indexes, and then find the journal—provided that it is not at the bindery! Unless the professor provides guides to sources for his or her students, the journal literature cited will tend to be of the "ephemeral" rather than the "classic" variety.<sup>10</sup>

Citation indexes, therefore, have been presented as the most reliable method of determining the use of journals in research, and restricting the index to primary journals gives the best idea of how the working

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7. B. C. Brookes, "The Growth, Utility, and Obsolescence of Scientific Periodical Literature," *Journal of Documentation* 26 (1970): 292.

8. Barbara Rush, Sam Steinberg, and Donald H. Kraft, "Journal Disposition Decision Policies," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 25 (1974): 214.

9. George R. Chambers and James S. Healey, "Journal Citations in Master's Theses: One Measurement of a Journal Collection," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 24 (1973): 401.

10. Terms from R. E. Burton and R. W. Kebler, "The 'Half-Life' of Some Scientific and Technical Literatures," *American Documentation* 9 (1960): 20–21.

scholar uses previously reported research. The musicologist, however, uses not only journals but also books, prefaces to scholarly editions, archival documents, and, most important of all, the music itself, hence journal citations provide a significant, but not overwhelming (as in the sciences) number of references. Line and Sandison, in the best study of journal citations, have given several caveats as to exclusive reliance on references to documents: many references to the older literature are “ceremonial” (the “review of the literature” section of the dissertation carried over into the article); older items that the writer reads for his research are not cited because they are mentioned in more recent studies; editorial recommendations often set limits on the number of footnotes;<sup>11</sup> and some items are read but “prove on reading (and only on reading) to be of no value for the work in hand.”<sup>12</sup>

Some sampling procedures for citation counts could not be applied to this study. Gross utilized a frequency count of the *Bibliographie géodésique internationale* from 1928 through 1945 to find that the “most-cited” titles were a small and decreasing percentage of all titles, whereas the “least-cited” proved to be a large and increasing percentage of the titles involved.<sup>13</sup> Brookes, for his findings, used two issues of *Physica status solidi*.<sup>14</sup> Kohut, on the other hand, included a wider sample of twelve geoscience journals, embracing such disparate fields as paleontology, seismology, and petroleum geology.<sup>15</sup>

The customary way of predicting the obsolescence of journal literature is through the computation of the “half-life” (an analogy with radioactive substances) of an article, which is defined as “. . . the time during which one-half of all the currently active literature is published.” Citation counts in selected source journals determine the sample. In 1960, the date of Burton and Kebler’s pioneering study, the half-lives varied within various scientific and technical disciplines, from 3.9 years in metallurgical engineering and 4.6 years in physics to ten to eleven years in mathematics, geology, and botany.<sup>16</sup> Line has recommended a series of corrections which would account also for the growth of

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11. For example, *German Life and Letters* (Oxford, England) requests that “. . . in view of the high cost of production articles should be sent in their final form and with few footnotes.”

12. Line and Sandison, 288.

13. Ole V. Gross, “Relative Importance of Articles Cited Versus Titles Cited in Frequency Counts,” *American Documentation* 19 (1968): 102–03.

14. B. C. Brookes, “Obsolescence of Special Library Periodicals: Sampling Errors and Utility Contours,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 21 (1970): 321. His sample was checked with the second (1976) issue (b) of *Physica status solidi*: of the 42 articles, citations ranged from 2 to 39, with an average of 15 citations. Approximately 90% of the citations were to journal literature.

15. Joseph J. Kohut, “A Comparative Analysis of Obsolescence Patterns of the U.S. Geoscience Literature,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 25 (1974): 242–51.

16. Burton and Kebler, 18–20.

the literature in a given field.<sup>17</sup> Kohut discovered two median citation ages or apparent half-lives in the geoscience literature.<sup>18</sup> All of these studies contain elaborate mathematical and statistical formulae, graphs, and histograms to determine and demonstrate half-lives. The question arises whether such measures of journal obsolescence would be valid for music or any of the humanistic disciplines.

The following study was confined to six major musicological journals for the years 1973 to 1975 inclusive, either entirely in English or, in two instances, journals of international provenance in which English was one of the primary languages, with only the articles in English used in the sampling. Excluded were journals devoted to music theory, organology, or ethnomusicology; journals of relatively recent origin (since 1960); or journals that contained articles in English but were devoted to a limited geographical area or to the music of a single composer. The principal criteria for selecting these six journals were universality, articles in English, a sufficiently long existence (since 1950) to provide a proper use sampling, and (subjectively) a widespread international reputation and repute.

The journals included two based in the United States (*Musical Quarterly*, 1915–, and *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 1948–, with references to the preceding *Papers* and *Bulletin* also included), two based in the United Kingdom (*Music and Letters*, 1920–, and *Music Review*, 1940–), and two international journals, *Acta Musicologica*, 1928– and *Musica Disciplina*, 1948–). Though the latter journal is devoted to music before 1600, it was included to provide balance in the sample for the numerous articles about music after 1750 in the British journals (57% in M&L, 77% in MR). The frequency of articles by period is shown in Table I.

Certain articles were excluded from the citation count by their nature: editorials, necrologies, communications, critiques of performances, and book and record reviews, though citations of these in other articles were included. Review articles and *Forschungsberichte* were also omitted since, in Kohut's words, "selected bibliographies and review articles introduce a certain degree of subjectivity in selection of cited items and do not, for the most part, report original scientific research."<sup>19</sup> Newspaper accounts were excluded from the citation counts. The total article citation count was 1374, from 304 articles examined from the

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17. M. B. Line, "The 'Half-Life' of Periodical Literature: Apparent and Real Obsolescence," *Journal of Documentation* 26 (1970): 46–52, with an appended note concerning the difference between uniform and exponential growth of literature by B. C. Vickery, pp. 53–54.

18. Kohut, 244.

19. Kohut, 244.

**TABLE I**  
**Frequency of Journal Article by Period**

Journal	Anti- quity	Medie- val	Renaiss- ance	Ba- roque	Clas- sic	19th cent.	20th cent.	Gen- eral	Ethno- music- ology
Total	4	25	53	45	43	71	46	12	5
AMl*	0	1	4	0	4	0	0	3	0
JAMS	0	9	14	10	7	6	0	2	2
M & L	0	4	6	18	9	18	12	2	0
MD*	0	5	13	0	0	0	0	0	0
MQ	3	3	11	10	12	22	12	1	3
MR	1	0	5	7	11	25	22	4	0

\*English-language articles only.

six journals, thus providing a sufficient population from which data can be derived.<sup>20</sup> Twenty-two per cent of the articles contained no references to journal articles; such articles, for the most part, dealt either with contemporary composers about whom no previous scholarly bibliography had been compiled, were essays (especially in *MR*), or dealt with primary sources, chiefly newly-discovered archival documents or musical manuscripts. Nine articles contained over 100 footnotes, one over 200, with many of the footnotes containing multiple citations.

Cross-references were made to comparable primary journals in other languages (*Die Musikforschung*, *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, *Revue de musicologie*, *Revue belge de musicologie*, and the more recent *Rivista italiana di musicologia*). A further category, non-musical journals, was added to show the extent to which musical scholars rely on the journals published in other disciplines or interdisciplinary journals. Such journals are also housed in and controlled by a central library, and a citation frequency count can be used to aid in determining the "obsolescence" of these journals.

Certain patterns of citation were evident. Self-citation (articles in previous issues of the same journal) occurred with a higher frequency than citation from any other journal (AMl 10.2%; JAMS 14.7%; M&L 20.3%; MQ 12.3%; MR 12%) with the exception of MD (10.6% self-citation, 10.6% MQ, and 14.1% JAMS). Periods emphasized by the various journals were the chief measure of inter-citation: MD, with its concentration on mediaeval and Renaissance music, had the fewest citations among the six journals in M&L and MR, whereas MR, with 77% of its articles devoted to music since 1750, was the least frequently cited journal in AMl, JAMS, and MD. On the other hand, MR was cited more frequently than AMl and MD in MQ (46% of articles on

20. Brookes, "Obsolescence," 320-21.

music since 1750), and AMI and MR with approximately equal frequency and MD with less frequency in M&L. At least in musicology, inter-citation among journals cannot be construed *ipso facto* as a measure of “quality.”

The foreign equivalents of the six journals were not cited as frequently as one might expect. In only one of our primary journals did a comparable foreign journal receive more than 4% of the citations (*Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* in MD was given 10.5% of the citations, with 6.5% post-1946 and 5% pre-1931). Among the other foreign journals, only the 1956–65 issues of *Die Musikforschung* (4.6%) were awarded over 3% of the citations by decade or period. Of the total French-language journals, those of the 1956–65 decade received more citations than those of 1966–75 (6.8% as opposed to 2.1%). *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* showed the most unusual pattern: 3.4% of the total citations, but 8% of the 1900–1930 citations, 7% of the 1946–55 citations, and only 2% for 1956–65 and 2.4% for 1966–75.

Citation patterns by language showed certain patterns, both among individual journals and as a totality of citations. Table II shows that over half the journal citations in each of the six journals were to English-language articles, but only in MR did the foreign-language journal citations fall below 40%. The frequency of total foreign-language citations may be broken down further: 21.5% for German, 9.9% for French, and 2.5% for Italian; all other foreign languages totalled 1.7%, mostly Spanish (*Anuario*), with surprisingly very scattered references to articles in Dutch, Swedish, Hungarian, the Slavic languages, and Hebrew. But as Table III shows, the implications for the growing frequency of English-language citations are not ethnocentric, but represent the growth in both quantity and quality of English-language musical scholarship since 1945, the emergence of Canadian and Australian scholars on the musicological scene, and a tendency of many scholars in the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Hungary to report much of their research in English rather than in German.

The most important conclusion from Table III is that the journal

**TABLE II**  
**Percentages of English and Foreign-Language**  
**Citations by Journal**

Journal	English	Other Languages
AMI	56%	44%
JAMS	51%	49%
M & L	58%	42%
MD	59%	41%
MQ	59%	41%
MR	71%	29%

literature in musicology does not “obsolesce” in the sense of the comparable literature in the sciences and technology on which virtually all the previous studies of journal obsolescence and “half-lives” have been based. In even the pre-1900 citations, wherein most of the references are to primary sources, there are nevertheless several references, and more than merely “ceremonially,” to the pioneering studies in *Monatshefte für Musikgeschichte*, *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, and *Rivista musicale italiana*.

One would expect to find a progressively decreasing number of citations to individual journals; this is true for JAMS, M&L, MQ, and MR, but not for AML or MD. Regarding some of the foreign journals, citations from *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* are more frequent for 1946–55 than for 1966–75, and the citations from the French-language journals are less frequent for 1966–75 than for any other period. Going back in time, one finds that the 1900–30 issues of M&L and MQ are cited more frequently than their 1931–45 issues, although there are declines in citation frequency among the six journals (48% of post-1945 citations, 17% of 1900–45 citations). No pattern, however, is discernible that would justify the calculation of “half-lives” of the musicological literature.

The decade or period as percentage of total citations shows a significant number of citations for each grouping, even before 1900. On the other hand, no journal “dominates” any period; the highest is in the 5% range per decade, with only JAMS (5.2%) and MQ (4.9%) for 1966–75 at this percentage, with AML for 1946–55 (0.4%) the lowest (all figures based on citations after 1900, a total number of 1,220). As a percentage of the total number of entries, MQ had 10% and JAMS 9.5%. A statistically significant number of citations can be produced as justification for keeping complete runs of all the six journals on the shelves (the oldest, MQ and M&L, with 1.1% and 0.6%, respectively, from 1900–1930).

TABLE III  
Journal Citations by Decade or Period

	Total Citations	Total English	Total 6 Journals (Each Decade)	Total Music	Decade/Period As % of Total Citations
1966–75	412	79%	53%	92%	40%
1956–65	294	69%	44%	87%	21%
1946–55	195	63%	42%	87%	14%
1931–45	119	38%	28%*	79%	9%
1900–30	200	26%	11%**	89%	15%
pre-1900	154	17%	—	80%	11%

\*5 journals.

\*\*2 journals.



Table III also shows the percentage of the journals devoted to music to the percentage of total journals cited. The range of non-musical journals, whether in a humanistic field or interdisciplinary, ranges from 8% in 1966–75 to 21% for 1931–45 and 20% for pre-1900. The musicologists, especially those working in music since 1800, should be given a voice in determining not only storage, filming, and disposal policies for the journals in their own fields but for the humanistic journals in general.

We therefore see that even studies that are seventy or more years old continue to be cited in the musicological literature. Some of these articles may have been partially superseded, but many of their insights are still valuable. Scholars are also aware of early studies that are outmoded but not as yet updated, such as Torchi's survey of Classic-era Italian chamber music in *Rivista musicale italiana* for 1901, and even today the serious student of the Viennese Classic period is compelled to refer to Abert's investigation of Haydn's keyboard music in the *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* between 1919 and 1921. The retention of the older journal literature is of even greater importance for the graduate seminar so that the students can see how the literature in a given specialty grows and develops. One cannot treat the older humanistic scholarship in the same way as, for example, pre-atomic chemistry or pre-DNA cell biology. Furthermore, who can predict which articles will be needed for study by future scholars?

The implications of this study can best be worked out within the framework of Brookes' concept of the  $p$  per cent library, with the 100% library defined, in terms of its journal holdings, as containing ". . . complete runs of the . . . periodicals which contribute an average of at least one relevant paper per annum."<sup>21</sup> Complete runs of the six journals used for this study plus similar completeness of all the journals, musical and otherwise, cited in the six journals, preferably in bound volumes to facilitate browsing, would be a requirement for the academic library that supports the faculty and student research necessary for a Ph.D. program of reputable quality. Concessions (fewer foreign-language journals, mainly those since 1945) would be made for the library supporting only D.M.A. and terminal M.A. programs (the 75% library); further concessions would need to fit the 60% library, serving a liberal arts program at the A.B. level or terminal master's programs in areas other than musicology, down to the 40% library which would be appropriate for the community college. The six journals in complete runs would be imperative above the 50% level (estimated for the urban central public library), with MQ, M&L, MR, and possibly

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21. Brookes, "Obsolescence," 325.

JAMS the minimum requirements for the 40% library, in terms of holdings of scholarly journals in music.

Of paramount importance is the recognition that a music library and its journals represent a special case, that techniques of "scientific library management" applicable to science and technology cannot be fairly applied to the humanities, and that each music library, though serving a particular constituency, nevertheless has characteristic features that are shared among the type of library (especially academic) and its own users. Policies acceptable and amenable to the community college, technological, urban public, or "emerging university" library would be intolerable for the music library serving a multi-purpose graduate program that offers doctoral degrees. Unfortunately, it is often the latter such library in which space is often at a premium. In such cases earlier journals must be stored or, even better, placed on some kind of microform, but must be accessible with a minimum of inconvenience. The musicological faculty, in their dual capacities both as teachers of graduate students and directors of their research as well as in their activities as scholars, should be provided constant input into the final decisions regarding storage or microfilming, since they are the ones who know which literatures are used or are likely to be used. Their advice should be considered not only for the musical journals, but for the humanistic journals as well.