

Russian Libraries— The Door Swings Open

INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS of the last year, as everyone knows, have given little hope of improved relations between the world powers. Yet in spite of the latest misunderstandings and problems, there is reason to believe that some progress is being made toward a clearer understanding of differing points of view. One evidence of this is the fact that for the first time in about twenty years hundreds of Americans have been permitted to enter the Soviet Union. In theory, American travelers have never been completely barred from going to Russia, even during the height of the Cold War, but travel restrictions and other impediments have kept the number infinitesimal and the area of visitation in the Soviet Union highly circumscribed.

With the partial lifting of restrictions in 1955, the picture has rapidly changed. A whole new generation of Americans, many of them specialists in the humanities and social sciences, and well equipped linguistically for exchanges with the Russians, have been permitted to roam far and wide within the borders of the Soviet Union, notebooks, typewriters, and cameras in tow. With the aid of travel grants and the blessings of both governments, they have learned more about Russia than at any time since the end of World War II. The results of this overseas expedition between the two countries may have far-reaching consequences for future relations, and there is hope, at least, that it will remove even further some of the misconceptions that

persist on both sides of the iron curtain.

In June, 1956, I found myself among the early arrivals in Leningrad starting on a month's tour of the Soviet Union. My principal purpose was to investigate several of the Russian history collections in the larger libraries, to meet a few of the well-known Soviet historians in my field, and, of course, to see something of the country. It was far from the ideal situation in terms of the time allotted. However, in view of a more extensive European trip the previous year, devoted to examining Russian book collections in other countries, I felt that even so brief an introduction would be valuable.

The trip was in many ways an eye-opener. The size, quality, and general atmosphere of the larger libraries I visited in Leningrad, Kiev, and Moscow was impressive. Being familiar with Russian historiography of the pre-Revolutionary era, I had anticipated sizable collections of pre-Revolutionary Russian contributions to the social sciences and humanities; but I was unprepared for the vastness and the broad European character of the materials that are available—the manuscripts, incunabula, rare books—many pertaining to Western Europe and the Near East. The excellent condition and careful cataloging of these works was also unexpected. Entering these libraries for the first time gave me the same feeling of awe experienced upon my first visit to the great art collection of the Hermitage in Leningrad—that here were rich and little-known treasures in untold quantity. The scale of these collections is commensurate with the physical size of the Soviet Union.

The number of libraries in the Soviet

Dr. O'Brien is associate professor of history, University of California (Davis).

Union must be numbered in the thousands—350,000, according to the British publication, *The World of Learning*.¹ Most of these are comparable to American community and county libraries, but there are also large public libraries in each of the Republics, as well as great central repositories in Leningrad and Moscow. It was these latter libraries and the State University Library in Kiev that most attracted me.

The atmosphere of these larger libraries in Leningrad, Kiev, and Moscow differs very little from that of the great libraries in Paris, Vienna, Stockholm, and Helsinki. They are used almost exclusively by the advanced student and academician. The rare book collections exist primarily for the scholar. The use of manuscript and archival collections is limited almost entirely to the professional scholar. While university students also use the larger libraries, one sees fewer of them than in the reading rooms of university and public libraries of the United States.

Gaining admission to these libraries is a formal process, requiring credentials, identification cards—usually with photograph attached—and frequent encounters with guards and library officials. While use of manuscript materials requires less ceremony than in France, for example, the surveillance of anyone using manuscripts is no less rigid. Nevertheless, the visitor gains access to sources more rapidly than in many Western European libraries—perhaps because readers and scholars make more limited use of the library and archival materials. Furthermore, it takes less time to obtain materials from the stacks, and a reader is permitted to examine more material in a single day than in London, Paris, or Rome.

The staffs of the main libraries in Leningrad, Kiev, and Moscow seem capable

and well informed. Institutes for librarians and for historian-archivists in Leningrad and Moscow have kept the standard high. Many staff members are scholars in their own right, carrying on active research programs in addition to their library responsibilities. They are highly skilled in the arts of paleography, diplomatics, and sphragistics. And, on the personal level, they are helpful to the foreign scholar and patient with his awkwardness in working with catalogs or with registers of documents and manuscripts.

The Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library of Leningrad is the largest of some eleven major libraries in the city. With its volumes numbered in millions,² its large collection of incunabula, manuscripts, Aldines, rare books from Western Europe, musical scores, and Hebraica, this is truly one of the great collections of the world. Age and the rugged war years have brought it to a serious state of disrepair, and its enormous contents and vast size have created a serious problem of renovation for the library administration. Even in disrepair, however, its faded neoclassic architecture and decor, its lofty stacks, its acres of parquet floors retain the splendor of an earlier day. The collection of books in foreign languages, foreign periodicals, and printed documentary material is very incomplete—in some cases shockingly so—but the Director of the Library and his assistants are aware of these gaps and look forward to correcting them. This condition, however, is not peculiar to Russia—it is shared by many world-famous libraries in Western Europe.

The materials of the library appear to have been carefully cataloged in several large files, rather than the single central file that we are accustomed to. As in most European libraries, items in

¹ Europa Publications, Ltd. *The World of Learning*, 1955. 6th ed. (London: 1955), p.746.

² *The World of Learning* estimates its size at over 10,000,000, including a large collection of incunabula and MSS. This figure is confirmed by the *Report of the Librarian of Congress*, 1955.

the catalog frequently appear in long-hand, and many of the cards have become faded and worn. Each item I examined, however, gave complete information, and the majority of the cards were typewritten. In quality, the catalog compared favorably with those of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and the Vatican Library.

The staff of the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library are men of learning and courtesy. They readily gave me access to materials and helped me in the compilation of a lengthy bibliography, for I found here much to my purpose. Nor did their cooperation stop with the end of my visit. My time was so limited that I was unable to complete the listing of titles pertaining to my research topic. When I mentioned this to the assistant-director, he volunteered to have it completed for me, and I accepted the offer gratefully but with some skepticism. Within two months after my return home, however, I was agreeably surprised to receive the completed bibliography, carefully typewritten.

As I mentioned earlier, Leningrad also boasts a number of sizable libraries devoted to the social and natural sciences, the fine arts, and the applied arts. The Library of the Academy of Sciences, founded in 1714, has a large collection of books and manuscripts pertaining to mathematics and the natural sciences. The library of the State Hermitage Museum is strong in the graphic arts and art history. Some of the institutes, such as the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, also have imposing libraries. Professor M. P. Viatkin of the Academy of Sciences showed me part of the collection on history, which has many rare books and works that are difficult to obtain in the United States.

From Leningrad I journeyed to Kiev to inspect the libraries of Shevchenko State University and of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of

the Ukrainian S.S.R. These collections were smaller than I had anticipated, particularly after seeing those in Leningrad. The Shevchenko State Library has approximately a half million volumes, most of which pertain to the natural sciences and agricultural sciences. There is a notable lack of foreign literature. The library of the Institute of History is little more than a working library, although it includes a number of out-of-print items and a growing collection of historical materials on microfilm, some of which have been gathered from Polish and Czech sources. Much of the valuable material on early Ukrainian history, literature, and the arts has been transferred to Moscow. The size of the Kiev libraries, I was told, did not compare favorably with the larger collections in Kazan, Lvov, and Tbilisi.

In Kiev as in Leningrad, the library staff were men and women of high professional caliber. Many of them are productive scholars, hard-working and dedicated to their tasks. Several of them are members of the Kiev Academy of Science. Since the output of publications of the Kiev Academy exceeds that of most American university presses, their production is impressive. The staff of the Institute of History I would judge to number around thirty. They were cordial, communicative, and highly interested in learning of the training, status, and research interests of American scholars. On one occasion I found myself in a small auditorium filled with historians and graduate students, facing a barrage of questions about American libraries, scholarship, the research interests of American scholars in the Slavic field, and so on. While many of the questions showed a wariness of Western scholarship and publications, particularly as they relate to Russia, my questioners also manifested undisguised wonder at the scope of interest in Russian studies in the United States and particularly

that much of our research extends to periods other than the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary epochs. Hope was strongly expressed that some kind of enduring tie might be formed with scholars of the West and that the exchange of library materials might increase.

The volume of Soviet research devoted to the social sciences and arts is well known in the United States. Since 1954—the three-hundredth anniversary of the union of the Ukraine with the Grand Principality of Moscow—an avalanche of publications relating to Ukrainian history and art has emanated from the Kiev Academy. In other Union republics as well, the intensive subsidized research of Russian scholars has greatly strained the stack space of regional libraries and added new space problems for central repositories in Moscow and Leningrad. The cataloging, housing, and general care of this plethora of materials poses serious problems for the Russian librarian, as it also does for the American librarian who receives even a small portion of the total output.

Moscow, like Leningrad, is another centre of huge libraries. The Lenin State Library, the Fundamental Library of the Social Sciences, the State Public Historical Library, and the Library of the University of Moscow are the foremost for the humanities and social sciences. The Lenin Library is the central repository for books in the Soviet Union, the equivalent of the U. S. Library of Congress or France's *Bibliothèque Nationale*. My time in Moscow was devoted primarily to exploring its contents. This Library, as is widely known, was the former Ruminanstevev Library, founded in 1865 and reorganized and enlarged after Lenin's death. Rare items and collections have, over the years, been gradually and surreptitiously transferred to this repository from all parts of the Soviet Union, and

it is now unquestionably the number one Slavic library of the world.

The Lenin Library is housed in many great buildings, which, for all their imposing size and number, lack the grandeur of the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library in Leningrad. Gaining admittance here took more time and effort than at the other libraries I visited, but once a permit was granted, admission was fairly automatic. Only occasionally thereafter did a curious guard insist on more identification than was shown on my library permit. The collection is larger than that of the Saltykov-Shchedrin Library in Leningrad and has been estimated at more than 15,000,000 volumes and periodicals and 2,500,000 manuscripts. The collection of early Slavonic works is particularly large, and there are important collections of rare books, including incunabula and Aldines. The library of Russian pre-Revolutionary publications is tremendous—so comprehensive that it would be difficult to think of a Russian work in the field of the social sciences that was unavailable. As in other libraries of the Soviet Union, the books of the Lenin Library are in excellent condition and have been carefully cataloged. The physical condition of many of the catalogs, however, again compares unfavorably with those in American libraries, as is true also of the larger libraries in France and England.

The manuscript collection of the Lenin Library has been housed in a separate building about two blocks from the main library. Materials from the manuscript section are conveyed to the central library by underground trolley in a matter of minutes, or they can be consulted in the small, quiet reading rooms of the manuscripts building. In general, the organization of manuscripts is like that in libraries elsewhere in Europe. Most of them are contained in folios, somewhat loosely arranged. The casual way in which they are kept, which

also makes them difficult to handle, is somewhat astonishing, considering their extraordinary value. One wonders how much longer such aged documents can endure under such treatment. Their cataloging also seems somewhat informal. Most of the registers of documents were compiled in longhand before the Revolution. No attempt has been made to have them typewritten or printed.

In addition to the manuscripts division of the Lenin Library, great quantities of documentary materials are preserved in various archival collections. The Academy of Sciences has probably the most important large collection of archival materials. Other libraries in Moscow, as well as government agencies, have manuscript materials that one normally might expect to find in a central archives. It would take months, if not longer, to locate and examine this material, if, indeed, one were permitted to do so. In my very limited perusal of manuscript materials in Moscow, how-

ever, I felt there might be fewer obstacles to overcome than one might expect in the use of such material. Some of the documentary material I asked for in Moscow, for example, was microfilmed and forwarded to me in the United States without apparent difficulty.

From these initial views of large libraries in Russia, I acquired a new appreciation of their vast contents. In all fields related to Russia or to Slavic studies they are still the primary collections. Valuable as are the Russian book collections in Washington, Paris, Helsinki, Rome, and elsewhere, they represent only a fraction of the materials extant in the central libraries of the Soviet Union. If Russian history, literature, the arts, and sciences are to be re-examined critically and definitively in future, these great source collections must be utilized. It can only be hoped that the door which was partially open in 1955 will remain unclosed—better still that it will some day swing wide permanently.

Summer Seminars at Cleveland

The School of Library Science of Western Reserve University, in cooperation with the Cleveland Public Library and the Special Libraries Association, announces two special summer seminars. The first will be held July 29 to August 2; the second, August 5 to August 9. Four courses will be conducted during the day each week. In the evenings there will be open sessions of a practical problems clinic, as desired, for consideration of specific problems suggested by the participants, topics to be scheduled in advance and notice circulated to all registrants.

Two ten-hour and two five-hour courses will be conducted each week. During the first week, the ten-hour courses will be, "Technical Libraries and Information Centers" and "Documentary Survey," and the five-hour courses will be, "Machine Aids to Librarianship" and "Report Writing." During the second week, the ten-hour courses will be, "Theory of Classification" and "Machine Literature Searching," and the five-hour courses will be, "Operation Research and the Library" and "Technical Editing."

For other information, including that on tuition, write Jesse H. Shera, dean, School of Library Science, Western Reserve University, 11161 East Boulevard, Cleveland 6, Ohio.