

Recent Experiences with Soviet Libraries And Archives: Uncommon Resources and Potential for Exchange

TRIPS TO THE SOVIET Union from nearby Finland in 1957 and 1958 gave the author the opportunity to acquaint himself with some aspects of Soviet libraries and archives which may be of interest to others. The reader should keep in mind the fact that conditions can change rapidly and that, therefore, some of the conclusions presented here may be rapidly invalidated. The author's particular concern on his trips was the promotion of exchanges between the Library of the University of Kansas and Soviet libraries. The thoughtful reader may wish to compare the author's conclusions with those in a forthcoming book, Melville J. Ruggles and Vaclav Mostecky, *Russian and East European Publications in the Libraries of the United States*. This is an unpublished report prepared for the Association of Research Libraries in 1958 which is to be published by Indiana University late in 1959. See especially Chapter 2 (Acquisitions).

EXCHANGES

Expansion of exchanges with Soviet libraries is a goal particularly worthy of consideration by librarians of those universities that have decided to establish centers of Russian studies where effective research can be done, especially in the social sciences and humanities.

Dr. Backus is Professor of History, University of Kansas.

It offers, in addition, a means of securing works in the natural and physical sciences.

Of New Books. Previous comments and accounts of trading have stressed the trading of contemporary works (i.e., books published from World War II on). They have performed a needed service. I have come to a few conclusions about trading of new books, periodicals, etc., which differ from current conceptions:

1. *The rate of exchange for calculating the trading value of current publications is eight rubles to one dollar.* The Lenin Library in Moscow indicated a willingness to trade at this rate, provided sufficient exchanges were forthcoming. The Academy of Sciences Library in Leningrad acquiesced in respect to the rate of eight to one.

2. *Institutes of the Academy of Sciences, especially in the humanities and social sciences, have a substantial interest in receiving gifts of books and can be expected to reciprocate.* Direct dealings with an institute offer an excellent way of being assured of rapid delivery of institute materials. Such dealings relieve the Library of the Academy of Sciences of much additional paper work and distributional effort.

In August 1956, Mr. S. F. Anderson of the department of Germanic and Slavic languages of the University of Kansas travelled to the Soviet Union and there promoted the exchange of publications and microfilms. Since that time the Li-

brary of the University of Kansas has acquired among other things several hundred monographs and a few dozen serials, including substantial runs of *Chteniia v obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh* (164 vols.) and *Uchēnye zapiski moskovskago universiteta* (154 vols.), and complete sets of *Izdaniia obshchestva liubitelei drevnei pis'mennosti* (143 vols.) and *Pamiatniki obshchestva liubitelei drevnei pis'mennosti* (212 vols.).

Some Soviet libraries wish to exchange book for book, others page for page, and others at dollar equivalents. The formula makes little difference as long as the net result is satisfactory.

Of Old Books. The lack of emphasis on trading of old books is an unfortunate oversight, for (1) old books are available in large quantities in the Soviet Union, especially in major centers (Moscow and Leningrad) and (2) old books must be obtained in quantity if new centers of Russian studies are to spring up in the United States. *Quaere*, is it in the interest of United States libraries to consider vast purchases of old Russian books both to encourage the formation of new centers and to strengthen existing centers of Russian studies? The University of Kansas has acquired books at a faster rate through exchanges than it could have on western markets.

Soviet librarians are not well informed of market conditions in the West. Consequently they are fearful of making trades which might be disadvantageous. I had the unsettling experience of learning, in the midst of negotiations with the Library of the Academy of Sciences, that someone had sent that library a copy of a recent catalog of one of the highest-priced dealers in Russian books in the world. I have insisted in my dealings with Soviet libraries that in any large volume trades they must be competitive not with the most expensive book dealers in the West but with more moderate book dealers and with going rates in the

West for collections of Russian books. Soviet librarians have demonstrated, however, a desire to test just how far they could go and still keep business.

The Russians are interested in obtaining primarily new works in physics, chemistry, engineering, and related fields to be purchased on the open market by American institutions in exchange for old books, and in trading either the entire output of American universities or that part of the output which would accurately reflect a "profile" of each university.

There is a general impression that "page-for-page" is a safer and more satisfactory way to trade books. There is little doubt that, when institutions are exchanging only their own publications, a page-for-page exchange is reasonable and fair. It does, however, involve a considerable amount of extra bookkeeping. The necessity for it arises either because an institution has had little experience in exchanging with another institution and so has no grounds to trust the institution with which it is exchanging or because an institution has grounds to mistrust that institution. In fact when only the publications of the exchanging institutions are involved a book-for-book exchange is simpler and less costly in time.

A page-for-page basis can make exchanges economically unfeasible when the American institution receives old (i.e., pre-Revolutionary and pre-World War II) publications from the Soviet Union and is asked to buy on the open market in the United States or elsewhere for a Soviet institution. The average cost to the University of Kansas of books or serials purchased for Soviet institutions runs at almost exactly two cents per page. This high level is the result of the aforementioned requirements of Soviet institutions. Added to the two cents per page must be a factor to cover overhead. That figure is high because the University of Kansas is compelled to enter into

correspondence with a variety of dealers and to process bills often with separate vouchers for each specific publication. The Soviet institutions when supplying old publications generally confine themselves to supplying publications of which they have duplicates or which are available in local second-hand stores. Some of these publications have many pages and yet are intrinsically not too valuable. For example, a volume (three issues) of *Russkaia Starina*, a well-known nineteenth- and twentieth-century publication, which has a normal market value in the West of five dollars (although, to be sure, I have purchased volumes for two dollars) and which sell, on the average, for ten dollars at the official exchange rate or four dollars at the tourist rate in Soviet second-hand shops, would cost the recipient twenty dollars (i.e., eighty dollars per year) if a page-for-page basis were employed. Such a result would obviously make it impossible for an American institution to accept any issues of *Russkaia Starina* on exchange.

The simplest procedure for obtaining old books is to send want lists to one of the four Soviet libraries with large duplicate collections: (1) Library of the Academy of Sciences, Berzhovaia Linia I, Leningrad; (2) Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library, Sadovaia ulitsa 18, Leningrad; (3) Lenin State Public Library, Mokhovaia ulitsa, Moscow; (4) Library of the University of Moscow, Mokhovaia ulitsa 9. The combined duplicate resources of these institutions total some seven million volumes, according to figures furnished me by officials of these institutions. Although these figures may well have been estimates, the officials in question insisted on their near accuracy. It should be noted that one reason for low estimates of the number of duplicates available is the unwillingness of Soviet librarians to concede that their figures of total holdings are inflated by a factor of as much, in some

cases, as 25 per cent by duplicate holdings.

I was told in the Soviet Union that several United States libraries have already been doing this for a few years, e.g. Harvard, Columbia, Indiana, and California. Unfortunately, from the point of view of Soviet libraries, these libraries are unable to exchange in large volume, primarily because they already possess the largest part of the duplicates available for exchange in the Soviet Union. The Universities of Tübingen and Cologne in Germany have done substantial business with Soviet libraries. Dr. Peter Scheibert, since May 1959 professor at Marburg, but formerly at Cologne working under Professor Günther Stökl, has done an outstanding job of building up the holdings of Cologne University's *Seminar für Geschichte Osteuropas* which a few years ago did not exist. It is my impression that there is today a good opportunity for libraries like those of Cologne and Kansas quickly to build substantial Russian holdings through exchanges with Soviet libraries.

BUYING IN SECOND-HAND SHOPS

The book-buying habits of American librarians and scholars who travel in the Soviet Union have been materially changed by a Soviet regulation put into effect in the spring of 1958. According to it books published before 1917 which are purchased in second-hand shops for export are subject to an export tax, normally payable on mailing the books. The tax is calculated by officials either of the Lenin State Public Library in Moscow, or of the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library in Leningrad. The tax is based not on the prices actually paid for second-hand books but on the values assigned to those books by the officials involved. The tax seems to average about 200 per cent of the prices actually paid for books. Since this tax is not imposed on books sent by Soviet libraries on exchange, it seems clear

that the purpose of this tax is to stop the flow of books from Soviet second-hand shops to foreign libraries. There are probably several reasons for undertaking to stop that flow. It seems probable that an important reason is to compel foreign libraries to obtain old books for Soviet libraries, thus assuring the latter of greater credits in their dealings with the outside world. Since the Soviet state public libraries have displayed a willingness to purchase old books on the open market for foreign libraries, those Soviet libraries stand to gain most from this change. Indeed under present conditions any American librarians and scholars who locate old books desired for their libraries in second-hand shops are doing their own libraries, as well as Soviet libraries, a great disservice by purchasing them outright. The proper procedure is to reserve them and then negotiate with a Soviet library for the purchase of these books by the Soviet library on behalf of the American library in question, the latter undertaking to furnish books in exchange. That means that travelling scholars and librarians must, in the future, be supplied by their libraries with evidence of their *bona fides*, either through a general letter conferring authority to act as agents or through letters to the same effect to the individual Soviet libraries.

The above in no way affects the desirability of purchasing in the second-hand shops books published 1917 and after.

MICROFILMING POSSIBILITIES

Soviet libraries supply microfilms of unpublished MSS and documents to foreign scholars, within the limits of their capacities. That there is an interest in the expansion of microfilming capacities is evidenced by the opening of a plant to produce microfilming units in Odessa which delivered its first products probably in September 1957. The major academy of science libraries (Leningrad,

Moscow, Tbilisi, and Kiev), the University of Moscow Library, the major public libraries (Leningrad and Moscow), and the Central State Archive of Old Acts in Moscow have long been known to possess their own microfilming equipment and they generally are ready to microfilm materials in institutions in the same city which lack such equipment. The Odessa State Public Library and the library of the University of Odessa are probably now in a position to supply microfilms. The hope is that more and more libraries will obtain such equipment. It should be mentioned that apparently all Soviet microfilms produced by libraries or archives are on a nitrate rather than an acetate base; therefore, they are highly inflammable and should be kept cool and in a fire-proof container or room, separate from other microfilms. If they cannot be kept in a reasonably cool and secure place, they should be copied.

INTERLIBRARY LOAN

It appears that Soviet libraries are permitted to engage in international interlibrary loan. Soviet books have been sent to Finland and Germany. The Lenin Library has supplied on loan microfilms of dissertations for about twenty-four cents apiece. The Library of the Academy of Sciences has indicated its willingness to send other than *unica* in limited quantities on loan to the Library of the University of Kansas.

DISTINGUISHED COLLECTIONS

Both from travelers and from printed Soviet sources, especially in the last few years, it is possible to form an extensive image of the collections available in the major centers, Moscow and Leningrad. Relatively few comments have been made on collections in other centers. A few descriptions based on personal experiences may help to rectify that lack. Persons desiring to use these collections

might well write in advance to the officials named below.

1. *Belorussian State Public Library* of Minsk has a special collection of some 65,000 volumes on Belorussia which are kept separate and are listed in a separate catalog. The director of the library is Iosif Benseanovich Semanovsky, Krasnoarmeiskaia ul. 3. Although the bulk of the library's holdings was taken by Germans, its special collection, partially re-established with the help of other Soviet libraries, is unique.

2. *Public Scientific Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic* contains a manuscript division with over 200,000 MSS. In it are to be found literary MSS of many authors such as Frank and Gogol. The Lazarevsky collection contains *prikazi* of hetmans, land grants, and military documents. Eastern documents including papyri are available, especially in Persian, Chinese, and Assyrian. The Cossack papers of Vodyn Mdzalevsky, largely published, represent another substantial holding. The vice-director in charge of international exchanges is Nikita Patapovich Rud', ul. Volodimera 58A, Kiev.

3. *The Scientific Library of the Odessa State University by the name of Mechnikov* contains three noteworthy special collections: (1) The Vorontsov collection assembled by M. S. Vorontsov during the French Revolution comprises among other things a French Revolutionary collection of several thousand pamphlets, some of which have been reportedly borrowed by French scholars because they were not available in France. The Vorontsov collection, along with (2) the Strogonov collection, also offers the scholar a large collection of books published in France during the period of the French Revolution and Napoleon. (3) The Shil'der collections afford additional works, primarily secondary, dealing with the same period. Roughly 65 per cent of all books in the Odessa Uni-

versity Library are in foreign languages. The director is Nikolai Vladimirovich Pavliuk, ul. Sovetskoi Armii 24.

4. *State Scientific Library by the name of Gor'ky, Odessa* contains a manuscripts division in which there are about 8,000 MSS. Among its prized possessions are *Opisanie Kniazia Kurbskago o tsare Ioanne Vladimiroviche* in quarto, by its binding and watermark an eighteenth-century copy, and *Istoriia Kazanskaia*, a late sixteenth-century or seventeenth-century MS of 322 quarto pages. The director of the library is Vasiliu Andreevich Zagoruiko, ul. Pastera 13, and the chief of the manuscripts division is Mariia Vladimirovna Rapoport.

5. *The State Museum of Georgia of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR, Tbilisi* contains a manuscript collection in which are to be found numerous medieval Georgian theological and liturgical texts in various scripts, and frequent illuminated MSS. The director is Ivan Onisimovich Rukhadze, Ketskhoveri 10.

EXCHANGES OF LIBRARIANS

Soviet librarians are interested in becoming better acquainted with the American library scene. After discussions with Soviet librarians, it is clear that a proposal to exchange librarians on tours of inspection would have a warm reception and probably be accepted. Soviet librarians seem to be universally intrigued by the Library of Congress. There seems to be interest in observing the operations of large university libraries, of more moderate-sized university libraries, and of larger public libraries so selected as to give Soviet librarians at the same time an opportunity of observing life in various parts of the United States. A proposal, therefore, by American librarians to visit not only the major centers in Moscow and Leningrad, but also other library centers such as Minsk, Kiev, Odessa, Tbilisi, Tashkent,

(Continued on page 499)

ber of libraries not members of ARL. A number of our members also represent their institutions as members of ARL. Perhaps we could leave to them the major fields of interlibrary programs, and concentrate on internal programs. Or we might become the agency through which their programs are officially brought to our attention.

The second difficulty is that of our own tradition—or habits. This section, though large, has not in the past been a

very active or a very strong one. I do not know whether we can change or not. We are pretty individualistic. And with so many areas of interest assigned to other divisions, we may seem to have little left for ourselves. Your officers and steering committee have hopes that we can become an effective voice in our profession. We hope that you will help by serving willingly on programs or committees. Let us have your suggestions and your help.

Recent Experiences with Soviet Libraries

(Continued from page 473)

and Irkutsk as well as a few local libraries should be in order.

ATTITUDES OF SOVIET LIBRARIANS AND ARCHIVISTS

There has been a great deal of comment by American scholars visiting the Soviet Union upon the cordial reception and helpfulness forthcoming from Soviet librarians and archivists. The writer was cordially received by officials of twenty-seven of thirty libraries, archives, and institutes he attempted to visit.

The first visit, to the Library of the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad, resulted in a lengthy, but informative discourse on the operation of Soviet libraries, replete with references to Marxism-Leninism, by M. A. Viklaiev, the scientific secretary of the library. This discourse was so detailed that the writer felt that he was imposing upon the good offices of the secretary. Ultimately it proved, however, of enormous practical help in permitting more effective and quicker negotiations with other libraries. In institution after institution no effort was spared to permit me to view what I wished to see. In striking contrast was the attitude of the Central State Archive of Old Acts

in Moscow, which refused to permit a visit. I went, nevertheless, merely (although the archive has been used recently by Finnish scholars) to order microfilms of some fifteenth- and sixteenth-century documents on Muscovite relations with Lithuania which I knew to be in the archive. My order was at first accepted, but then rejected when it became clear that I was an American and not a Pole. The reason given was that per an agreement with the American Embassy no American was to be allowed to use the facilities of the archive without a letter from the Embassy. Embassy officials denied the existence of an agreement and refused to give me a letter. In the overwhelming majority of cases, I was not made to feel that Americans were subject to discrimination. On the contrary, I felt that I received unexpectedly gracious and pleasant treatment.

Soviet librarians are eager for exchanges. Soviet Academy and university scholars are often displeased by the absence of western scientific literature from the shelves of Soviet libraries. Soviet institutions have an inadequate supply of "gold" rubles (i.e., convertible currency) with which to purchase western publications. Exchanges present a welcome solution.