

THE CZECH NATIONAL LIBRARY AND ITS SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

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Abstract: Main mission of Czech National Library in Prague is to collect and bibliographically cover documents of national production, including so called Bohemica from abroad. In addition, Library's general collection of foreign literature is traditionally the largest in the country. Special collections represent the third important constituent part of the Library: Department of Manuscripts and Old Prints (9.000 med. manuscripts, 5.500 incunabula, etc.), Music Department (4.500 music manuscripts, 100.000 printed music mat., Mozart collection, etc.), Library of Literature on Libraries and Information Science (30.000 publ., 200 journals, etc.), and Slavonic Library with 700.000 items of Slavonic literature incl. Smirdin Library, etc. History, functions, and specific role of these special libraries has been described.

The Czech National Library in Prague is the biggest and one of the oldest Czech libraries. Its main mission is to collect, preserve and make available a complete set of documents of national production, as well as so called Bohemica from abroad. The right to receive legal deposit copies of each title published within the territory of the Czech Republic enables the Library to perform the function of the National Bibliographical Agency, as well. On the other hand, the Library's traditional mission is to develop a general collection of foreign literature, which is the largest one among its holdings. The reason of it has resulted from the history.

The origins of the National Library (NL) collections date back to the mid-14th century, when the Prague University was founded by Emperor Charles IV who bestowed upon the new University colleges a collection of manuscripts. This collection and further book acquisition obtained by the University Colleges till the first half of the 17th century represented the first source and constituted the core of the contemporary NL collections.

After the year 1556, when the first group of Jesuits came to Prague and began to build a large college called Cletinum, a new large library came into existence there and was growing very fast. In 1620's the Charles University was passed over to the Jesuits in consequence of defeat of the Czech protestant political movement,

and both the University and the Jesuit College Libraries merged together and were located in Clementinum. In 1777, four years after the suppression of the Society of Jesus, the Library was taken over by the State, opened to the general public and named The Royal Imperial Public and University Library.

Although since that time, the Library has not been related to the University any more, the word "university" itself had remained a part of its often changing name for next almost 200 years. During the 19th century, the Library had been gradually commissioned to function as a national library, namely for its having obtaining the right of legal deposit. In the 20th century, it has become the national bibliographic centre. After a long period of the so-called State Library existence, the name of the National Library was accepted only in 1990, reflecting thus more correctly its main functions.

Nevertheless, the NL has never broken its links to the Charles University respecting in general the needs of under graduates and of the academic staff as well, because there is still no central University Library in Prague. Therefore, one of the major activities of the NL is to build a general collection of foreign literature and to provide an access to it. Its acquisition policy is directed to cover traditional university fields such as humanities, and social and natural sciences.

The main functions of the NL are as follows:

- to build, preserve and provide access to the Czech national collection of documents and to be responsible for its completeness,
- to build, preserve and provide access to a general collection including a major part of foreign literature, all documents aimed at traditional university branches,
- to provide central bibliographic and information services, having the main task in publishing the Czech National Bibliography,
- to provide other libraries with consultancy services and experts' opinions in different fields of their activities,
- to develop library automation technology and standards etc.

Nowadays, the whole National Library collection of ca. 6 million items, contains three main parts: 1) National conservation archive of Bohemica, including those from abroad, and Slovaca up to 1992, 2) General research collection, containing both Czech and foreign material focused on humanities, social and natural sciences, and 3) special collections.

The National Library has been for several years undergoing changes of its organisational structure aiming to improve the flow of material, use of capacity, and to establish simple and integrated processing lines. In this respect, the problem of special collections, activities, and services had to be faced. Rethinking the whole area, we concluded in defining the main general processing line on one side, covering those two main parts of the national Library holdings, i.e. the National and General ones, and on the other side, special organisational units keeping their own collections apart. It has been decided that the most important of special collections of the National Library be under custody of either autonomous libraries or special departments, not integrated into the main line of general library process; their own processing scheme should be run in parallel. It means they are charged themselves with acquisitions of relevant material, bibliographical processing of it, making it available, providing readers with special services, etc. However, being constituent parts of the general National Library system the autonomous areas have to observe the same international standards the National Library itself has adhered to. Obviously, the funding and administration is centralised for the National Library as a whole.

The special areas are as follows:

Department of Manuscripts and Old prints

The collection of the old University library has become basis for the holdings of the Department. It contains about 9.000 medieval manuscripts, 5.500 incunabula, a collection of old Bohemica, amount of Greek papyri and other various fragments, old Arabic literature, old Prague Charles University theses, and many other special collections. However, other several hundreds of old printed material have been included into the general research collection. A retrospective bibliography of Czech book printing to 1800, as well as of medieval manuscripts and incunabula is being produced by the Department. It also participates on the project of a digitalized format of that retrospective bibliography. In addition, selection of the most precious items is undergoing a programme of image transformation into digital media, recently launched by the National Library. The Department provides scholars as well as the general public with special services in the field, and consultancy, and is active in national expert committees.

Music Department

Established in the 1920th, the Department holds 4.500 music manuscripts, 100.000 items of printed music material, private correspondence sent by and to composers, and amounts of other reference publications, etc. The whole collection is to be taken as unique national music archives, but it contents considerable foreign material, too. If nothing, at least the famous Mozart collection (Memorial)

founded in 1837 should be meant. The union catalogue of the music material kept by both institutions and individuals on the territory of the Czech Republic is being developed here, as well as other special bibliographical projects. The Department is not only active as special information centre, but also provides other libraries with consultancy concerning their music departments activities. In addition, the secretariat of the Czech Committee of the International Association of Music Libraries is there.

Library of Literature on Libraries and Information Science

A collection of more than 30.000 publications and 200 journals from the field of library and information science is kept here. Special reference tools and services are available - abstracts, current contents, databases, directories, consultancy. Besides, the collection serves as basis for activities of the whole Librarianship Division of the National Library - special research, analyses, statistical data control, consultancy, and education.

The Slavonic Library

It is a great special library keeping and collecting material in Slavonic languages and referring on the literature, history, art, ethnography, and institutions of Slav nations. Established by the Czechoslovak government in 1920 for the purpose of promoting scientific and economic contacts with Slav countries, and especially supporting spiritual life and institutions of emigrees from the USSR of the time, it was later included into the National Library. Unlike the Helsinki Slavonic Library (Finland) focused on older Russian literature, the Slavonic Library of ours has collected more material from first decades of Soviet era. Nowadays, the Library holds almost 700.000 items, divided into national departments: Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Bulgarian, Polish, Lusatia-Serbian, and South Slavonic. (This last one, at present, is basis for defining the Bosnian literature, as the National library recently adhered to the international programme for reconstruction of the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Some parts of the whole Slavonic collection are really unique. E. g. the collection of newspapers of so called Russian foreign historical archive connected with activities of the Soviet emigration, a number of very old precious items, or a collection of 11.000 volumes of the Russian literature from the 18th and the first half of the 19th century representing a remnant of the library of the Petersburg bookseller and editor Smirdin, etc. The Slavonic Library suffered from nazis discrimination or later from communist political pressure. However, it has reached good results, contributing to the development of Slavic studies, and has been acknowledged by specialists all over the world. The Slavonic library is realizing several important bibliographical projects and is cooperating with a number of institutions involved

in the field such as special Slavonic departments of universities and libraries all over the world.

The Central Economic Library

This Library has its origins in the beginnings of this century as the library of social sciences. Thus, it traditionally, in spite of its present name, still keeps this broader scale of interest. The Library became division of the National Library in 1950th, but at present we are preparing transmission of it to the Prague University of Economy. The decision resulted from the fact, that this Library for decades has been housed directly inside the building of the University of Economy, permanently providing its students and staff with library services. The collection of the Library contents ca. 750.000 items.

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