

Ruin and Recovery: Strategies for Building South Slavic Collections after the 1990s

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There is perhaps no greater challenge for a Slavic materials selector in the early 21st century than navigating the bibliographic straits of the Former Yugoslavia. Before the 1990s, the handful of vendors selling Yugoslav books, along with functional exchanges with the major libraries of the country, constituted a reliable network through which major research collections in the United States were maintained. The Yugoslav federal government's fiscal reform efforts of the early '90s made all Yugoslav books, including the national bibliography, prohibitively expensive. Although institutional exchanges continued after that time, even that avenue for acquisitions became very problematic, if not impassable, following the conflict that ensued after the successive declarations of independence by Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia beginning in June of 1991.

The economic and logistical challenges posed by prevailing conditions of war in Croatia and Bosnia made both the provision of material from exchange partners in both countries and their procurement by Western vendors nearly impossible. Moreover, the U.S. sanctions

regime imposed on rump Yugoslavia destroyed any remaining U.S. exchanges with the National Library of Serbia. While material could be sent from Belgrade, U.S. institutions were not allowed to reciprocate by sending any material to their colleagues in Serbia. This spring marks both the 10th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accord as well as the beginning of the recovery of South Slavic collections in the United States. The University of Pittsburgh has cultivated relationships with a variety of new vendors for South Slavic materials since 1995 and has worked assiduously during both my own and my predecessor's tenures to rekindle our exchange activities with institutions throughout the former Yugoslavia.

Gone are the Cold War years when U.S. research institutions were showered with funding by the U.S. government to support the advanced study of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Such benefaction allowed many research collections to collect nearly comprehensively for materials from many countries in the region. Both the state monopoly distributors and their counterpart vendors

in Western countries made the selection and acquisition of material from the region a reasonably uncomplicated endeavor. However, the emergence of market conditions in the regional book trade has made both selection and acquisition considerably more complicated and labor intensive.

While Russia and East Central Europe have become secondary priorities for U.S. foreign policy, the still evolving political statuses of both Bosnia and Kosovo, enduring uncertainty about the stability of Macedonia, and broader security concerns relating to Eurasia and the Middle East have made Southeastern Europe an especially important policy priority in the post-communist space. Accordingly, areas studies centers that have successfully demonstrated a commitment to the region have fared well in recent competitions for the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI support. These awards remain a critical factor in American research libraries' ability to continue to build South Slavic collections.

At the University of Pittsburgh, as at most U.S. institutions, funding restrictions compel bibliographers to select based on curricular needs first and foremost. The Center for Russian and East European Studies at Pitt promotes a wide variety of courses focusing on Southeastern Europe in both the humanities and social sciences. Three years of the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language are offered during both the academic year as well as on an intensive basis during the university's Summer Language Institute (SLI). These courses number among the more than sixty that were cross-listed under the Center for Russian and East European

Studies for the fall 2004 semester alone. Recent additions to the course schedule include "Introduction to Islamic Civilization" and "Nomadic Empires of Central Asia," both taught by Sarajevo native Snjezana Buzov. The former includes an integrated field trip abroad to Sarajevo this May. Such curricular diversity poses unique challenges for the Slavic bibliographer at the University of Pittsburgh given that the teaching and research of faculty and students together constitute the single most important consideration in collection development.

As at most academic research libraries, the University of Pittsburgh uses an approval vendor, Blackwell's Book Services, for all of its English-language material published in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Selection is done by the vendor based on the University Library System's (ULS) collection development policy. Accordingly, South Slavic related English-language titles are shipped to our library automatically without my having to select books on a title-by-title basis. Most academic and virtually all university press titles are added to our collection in this way. This strategy produces a collection intensity ranking between a research-level (4), and a comprehensive-level (5), in accord with Library of Congress classification. The resultant English-language collection density enables the university library adequately to support undergraduate and basic graduate instruction and research.

The most labor intensive part of the collection process for any Slavic bibliographer is certainly the selection of vernacular language materials. Although

my linguistic limitations often make deciphering titles a challenge, faculty and graduate student research principally governs my selection. In this effort, I work with several vendors both in North America and the former Yugoslavia to obtain material. Prior to the 1990s, the University of Pittsburgh used primarily Anton Kovač and Kubon and Sagner (K&S) in Munich for firm ordering South Slavic titles. However, the introduction of the Euro and the emergence of a number of reliable domestic vendors have supplanted both. Although K&S continues to publish extensive catalogs and to offer books and serials from the former Yugoslavia, I consult them only as selection tools. Kubon and Sagner crafted a fiscally clever, but nevertheless obvious conversion of their prices from DM to Euro. Where the price of a book had been 15 or 20 DM, it suddenly became 15 or 20 Euro. Although I do not have a precise correlation available, Germans were certainly not given a one-to-one exchange when Germany began using the new currency. However, Kubon and Sagner apparently expected their customers to begin paying for books at precisely such a rate.

The principle parties from whom I now select South Slavic materials are located here in the region. For Serbian materials, I use both the Belgrade-based vendor *Stubovi kulture* as well as our active exchange partner, the National Library of Serbia, as my main sources. Being the depository library for Serbia and Montenegro, the National Library of Serbia's quarterly lists of duplicates generally contain five to six hundred titles. I select quire extensively from these lists as they often contain titles that are unavailable

from vendors due to their small print runs. I also use the Toronto based vendor *Serbica*, which generally provides semi-monthly catalogs via e-mail. Although its lists are modest, *Serbica* has proven reliable as it offers only books already in stock in Toronto, which avoids the problem of selecting from catalogs that include forthcoming titles, which are often either never published or become out-of-print before the vendor ever obtains copies of them.

For Croatian materials, I have used several vendors since 2001. The one North American – based seller is Mr. Radovan Matanić of Toronto. Although a reasonably affable person, Mr. Matanić must spend more money on long distance phone calls than he could possibly recover in book sales. He is content to phone nearly all of his American customers on a regular basis to enquire whether or not this or that fax, advertising a single obscure title, has been received. Moreover, his prices are consistently higher than either *Matica hrvatska* or *Zebra komunikacija*, the other two vendors from whom I select material, both based in Zagreb. His pricing may perhaps be explained by the fact that he obtains much of his material directly from *Matica hrvatska* and simply adds his acquisition overhead costs to the prices he advertises to his customers. On a visit to Zagreb in 2003, I visited with Antonija Smakić and Maja Martinović at *Matica hrvatska's* bookshop and found that the titles for sale were consistently lower than Matanić's. A curious incident that happened while I was at the bookshop provided an abundantly clear explanation for this. As I was compiling a lengthy list of titles I wanted to purchase for my library, a visitor walked into

the shop to pick up a substantial order. The man turned out to be none other than Mr. Matanić's brother, who was purchasing books from *Matica hrvatska* to fulfill his orders from American academic libraries, including my own. After this dubious coincidence, I have relied on the two Zagreb-based vendors for Croatian titles.

For Slovene and Macedonian materials, I rely exclusively on our exchanges with the National and University Libraries in Ljubljana and Skopje. There is no specific constituency for Slovene language materials at the University of Pittsburgh. Accordingly, I select only the most general titles in Slovene. However, we are fortunate in the English-speaking world that Slovenia, much like the Baltic states, has actively been publishing materials about Slovenian history, politics, culture, and literature in English. Such titles are regularly offered on the National and University Library's exchange lists. I also select Macedonian material very judiciously from lists provided by the National and University Library in Skopje. Selected materials include reference books and general titles dealing with Macedonian history and culture.

Aside from our important relationship with the National and University Library here in Sarajevo, my main source for Bosnian books in the vernacular is the city's very own University Press. Although Mr. Matanić in Toronto has occasionally offered titles published in Sarajevo and Mostar, there generally was no reliable vendor through which Bosnian imprints could be obtained before the emergence of the University Press. Although the Press's occasional lists tend to be brief, director Dragan

Marković has shown a consistent willingness to locate specific monograph and serials titles that do not appear in his electronic catalogs. Accordingly, the University Press is now my exclusive vendor for Bosnian books.

The events of September 11th, 2001 compelled the U.S. government finally to take larger stock of an important part of the world that it had previously acknowledged only in its support of Israel and its dependence on Persian Gulf oil. One of the fortuitous consequences for Slavic collections in the wake of 9/11 has been the additional resources the U.S. Department of Education has awarded to Title VI institutions for the purchase of scholarly materials relating to Islam in Southeastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. As the Balkans represent the University of Pittsburgh's relative strength compared to other Title VI centers, I have dedicated much of that additional support to obtaining materials concerning Islam in Bosnia. During two visits to Sarajevo in May 2003 and August 2004, I spent much of my time canvassing the book shops here in town locating titles pertaining to the socio-politics of Islam in Bosnia and in the wider region. As Islam now factors directly in the Center for Russian and East European Studies' course offerings, I selected titles during these visits, some of them in English, based on my own appraisal of how these books would support the teaching and research of Dr. Buzov and other faculty.

Two important bibliographies have also appeared that will serve as tools for measuring collection density and as a basis for retrospective collection of Bosnian

materials. For English and other West European languages, the standard reference for titles published since 1990 is *Books on Bosnia*, published by The Bosnian Institute in London. For vernacular language sources, Enes Kujundžić's *Bosnian Memory* is an indispensable volume that includes extensive citations of both historical and recent publications relating to Bosnian studies in all disciplines. I am currently using both books as part of a formal collection evaluation of the University of Pittsburgh's Bosnia-related holdings. Both will also assist in the future selection of material.

In short, Southeastern Europe in general and Bosnia in particular factor prominently

in the University of Pittsburgh's current collection building efforts. While I not infrequently select titles based on what I deem to be the merit of their contents, rather than on how they might directly support the university's course offerings at any specific moment, the overall driving force behind the selection of material remains its relevance to faculty and student teaching and research. In an ideal bibliographic world, comprehensive collecting would indeed be possible. However, the finite resources available to American research libraries ultimately compel Slavic bibliographers to prioritize materials according to curricular demand over those that might be more subjectively desired for their enduring intellectual value.