

# South East European Collections in the British Library

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## Historical background

Systematic acquisition of material in most of the Slavonic languages began in 1837. However, some rarities came as part of the foundation collections of Sir Hans Sloane, Old Royal Library and later donated collections of King George III, Sir Joseph Banks and Thomas Grenville, just to name a few. The library, then part of the British Museum, founded by an Act of Parliament in 1753 had been opened to the public six years later. The Old Royal Library, the collection of the Kings of England had been founded in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by Edward IV and donated to the newly formed library in 1757 by King George II. But the most valuable gift that the Old Royal Library brought was the right of Copyright Act, which laid down that the Royal Library should receive a copy of every printed work registered at Stationers' Hall.

A rapid growth of the library began however from the 1840s through purchases when a wide network of domestic and foreign book agents and booksellers had been set up. In addition adequate funds granted to the library by the government

ensured steady and regular influx of books and journals from all over Europe, including the Balkan countries. This was supported by donations and sales by private individuals. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century holdings were unrivalled outside the countries of origin. Levels of acquisition slumped between 1914 and the mid-1950s due to inadequate funding and turbulent events, but many gaps were filled later. In the mid-1950s exchanges of publications were established with libraries in Eastern Europe. The volume of acquisition grew rapidly.

The library operates on the same principles as formulated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Antonio Panizzi, the greatest librarian ever. An Italian refugee, who joined the library in 1831, became Keeper of Printed Books in 1837 and from 1856 to 1866 was Principal Librarian and Director. The library as it is known today was his creation. In his statement to the British Museum Trustees he wrote: "... the library ought to collect, firstly, not only the publications of Britain but also works relating to the British Empire; secondly, the old and rare, critical editions of ancient classics and good

comments upon them as well as translations of them into modern languages; and thirdly of foreign literature, arts and sciences, the best editions of standard works, expensive works, literary journals, transactions of societies, complete series of newspapers and collections of laws and their best interpreters". When Panizzi became Keeper the collection of printed books numbered some 230,000 volumes and by 1871 was raised to almost a million.

The British Library, which was created in 1973 bringing together the collections of a few institutions, including the library departments of the British Museum, is the national research library of the UK and one of the largest libraries in the world. The Library's collections have developed over 250 years and exceed 150 million separate items. They include books, journals, manuscripts, maps, stamps, music, newspaper and sound recordings in all written and spoken languages.

### **Highlights of the South East European collections**

South East European collections are part of the Slavonic and East European Collections in the British Library.

The collections include material covering geographical areas of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Croatia and Slavonia, Dalmatia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and Vojvodina. The collections comprise material written in the languages of the South Slav peoples – Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Slovene and Macedonian. Holdings include early Croatian, Montenegrin and Slovene material printed in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Latin,

Glagolitic and Old Church Slavonic scripts. It should be however noted that little material with Balkan connections was acquired before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Notable exceptions among BL holdings is a copy of the only incunabula of 1494 *Osmoglasnik* from Makarije's press in Cetinje and the only Cyrillic incunabula in the UK, the 1508 *Mirakuli slavne dive Marie* printed at Senj in Glagolitic and a Croatian Missal of 1531 printed in Rijeka by Šimun Kožić and a Bible printed in 1578 at Ljubljana by Sebastian Krelj. The religious works of the first Slovene writer and philosopher Primož Trubar mostly printed in Tübingen are represented by Bibles of 1557 and 1582. In the collection is a copy of the fine Dalmatian Bible of 1584. In Regensburg the famous *Otrožja* Bible was printed in 1566 containing the catechism in five languages including Croatian and Slovene.

Amongst early editions of the first Croatian writers and philosophers are first editions of Hanibal Lucić *Scladanya...* and *Rubigna...* of 1556 and 1585, and collections of Dinko Ranjina poems, printed in 1563 and 1565. Philosophic works include Marin Burešić's *Slate rieci nauka Katovijeh*. Works of Croatian Latinists are well represented including several early works of perhaps the greatest humanist writer of the period, Marko Marulić. *Evangelistarium* of 1529 with comments in the handwriting of Henry VIII is believed to be his bedside book before he broke up with Rome.

The Library holds also the first edition of *De humilitate...* of 1519.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the great Illyrian names appear constantly as translators of Latin

and Italian doctrinal works and as do the authors of early Croatian language text books, dictionaries, etc. We have Kasić's first grammar in the Croatian language *Institutionum linguae Illyricae libri duo* of 1604, along with the first complete Croatian *Ritual rimski* of 1640 and his *Život Gospodina nascego...* of 1638, Levaković's *Azbukvar...* of 1629 in Glagolitic and his translation of Bellarmini's *Dotrina Christiana* in Cyrillic and Glagolitic of 1628 and 1629. The library holds the first book by an author from Bosnia Matija Divković *Nauk karstianski* printed in Bosančica, Venice 1611 as well as that of Mrnavić's first edition of 1627. Historical works include Mavro Orbini's *Il regno degli Slavi...* of 1601 which was prohibited by the Vatican and put on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* and his *Zarcalo duhovno...* of 1614.

In the collection are examples of the early form of the Serbian language of Zaharija Orfelin's *Iskusni podrumar* and Jovan Rajić's *Istorija raznih slavenskih narodov* of 1794. The library has first editions of Dositej Obradović's works *Život i priključenja* of 1783, *Sovjeti zdravago razuma* 1784 (donated to the library by the author) as well as Vuk Karadžić's first editions of his three collections of folk literature, poems, tales and customs (Vienna in 1814-5, Leipzig and Vienna 1823-1833 and Vienna in 1841-1865). Interest in the folk songs of the Slavs had developed in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and the library has a number of early collections of folk poems containing Serbian songs, including Fortis's *Viaggio in Dalmazia* of 1774 (includes Hasanaginica), Tommaseo's *Canti popolari...* of 1841 and a number of English translations such as John Bowring's *Servian popular poetry* 1827, William

Denton's *Servia and the Servians* 1862, Owen Meredith's *Serbski pesme* 1861.

Works of the founders and members of the Illyrian movement are to be found in the collection such as Janko Drašković's *Ein Wort an Illieriens...* of 1838, Mirko Bogović's *Domorodni glasi* of 1848, Stanko Vraz. Although periodical holdings are poor from this period the library has a set of *Kolo* 1842-51. In the library's archives there is evidence that Adolph Asher, the German bookseller obtained for the library a large proportion of the rare Yugoslav material during this period and he made special efforts to obtain "Illyrian literature". Representative of this period in Bosnia and Hercegovina are Frano Jukić and Grga Martić's *Narodne pjesme bosanske i hercegovačke* (1858) and Grga Martić's *Pjesnička djela* (1883-93).

There are good runs of academic series of the important learned societies from an early date, such as Matica srpska in Novi Sad (1826), Srpska Akademija in Belgrade (1842). Matica slovenska in Ljubljana (1864) and Jugoslovenska Akademija in Zagreb (1866). A large number of new journals published during this period are unfortunately not well represented in the collection, however some gaps were filled later.

Statistics were collected in a systematic way during the "Kraljevina" and the library has a number of these publications from the 1890s. The main official publications are held, though with some gaps as they have always presented problems, first due to the federal nature of the country, then due to the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

The collection is particularly strong in history, literature, language, ethnography

and the arts. There are also accounts of travel, maps, plans, coats of arms. Coverage of the Yugoslav period is good and includes a sound selection of material on self-management, social and political transformations, nationalism, minorities and ethnic conflicts and works of such political figures as Josip Broz Tito, Edvard Kardelj, Milovan Đilas.

In the recent years particular emphasis has been given to material which reappraises Tito's period and to material reflecting the social and political changes for the transitional 1980s and turbulent 1990s. The library has a good coverage of all aspects of the Balkan crisis from the war in Croatia and the war in Bosnia and Hercegovina, war crimes, human rights abuses, ethnic cleansing, refugees, destruction of the national heritage of Bosnians, Croats and Serbs, peace conferences, international diplomacy, to the crisis in Kosovo, NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and the conflict in Macedonia. The British Library aimed to collect material from all sides involved in the wars in the former Yugoslavia, as well as from other countries. As a result a unique collection of printed material, transcripts and ephemera was put together and microfilmed under the title *Yugoslav Civil Wars 1991-1999*. Special attention is currently paid to material reflecting the post-war political and economic realities in the region, European integration, etc.

The manuscript collections include some significant items from the region. The Library's most important and beautiful Serbian manuscript is the 14<sup>th</sup> century Gospels of Jacob from Serres with a splendid portrait of Metropolitan Jacob.

The Bosnian treasure is a roll containing a firman of Selim Khan of 1519 with the official signature of the Sultan and a Grant of King Stephen Dabisha with a splendid seal (1397). A notable Croatian item is a Breviary written in Glagolitic dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The South East European collection, like other language or country collections, is dispersed with the rest of the stock and all material, except that on the references shelves in the reading rooms, must be accessed via general catalogues through the Integrated Library System available on the BL website at <http://catalogue.bl.uk>. Searching by information codes is only available on the Humanities and Social Sciences 1975 onwards catalogue and not possible on the General printed books pre-1975 catalogue due to the lack of language or country codes and subject indexes. To facilitate access to the SEE collection attempts have been made to produce a number of guides covering parts of the collection:

- *Works of Croatian Latinists recorded in the British Library General Catalogue* / compiled by Branko Franolić. Zagreb, 1998.
- *Books on Croatia and Croatians recorded in the British Library General Catalogue* / compiled by Branko Franolić. Zagreb, 1996 – 2000.
- *South-East European Studies: a brief guide to reference sources on open access in the British Library* / compiled by Sadie Morgan. London, 2000.
- *The Balkan Crisis 1990- : catalogue in 2 parts* / compiled by Sava Peić, Magda Szkuta, Sadie Morgan. London, 1997 - 2001.

- *Guide to the former Yugoslav official publications in the British Library* / compiled by Magda Szkuta (not yet published)
- *Bosnian and Hercegovinian holdings in the British Library collections* – in preparation
- *Serbian holdings in the British Library collections* – in preparation

Because of the above mentioned limitations it is extremely difficult to determine the size of the SSE collection. Statistical figures are only available for the last 30 years but they do not reflect the extent of our holdings. It is not the quantity which counts, but the quality of the collection. Professor Božidar Jezernik from the University of

Ljubljana at a presentation of his recently published book *Wild Europe: The Balkans in the gaze of Western Travellers* (London: Saqi, 2004) praised the richness and diversity of the British Library collections which he explored for a few months whilst carrying out his research work.

In the near future the Slavonic and East European Collections will merge with the West European to form the European Collections of the British Library. We believe that in this union we will still follow the splendid work of our great predecessor, Sir Antonio Panizzi, and we will continue to acquire material, as widely as possible, in all the fields the collections are traditionally strong in for the benefit of current and future users.

**Asocijacija za unapređenje informacijskih nauka INFOHOUSE**

je bh. nevladina organizacija osnovana u decembru 2003. godine, sa ciljem da pomogne unapređenju korištenja informacija, informacijskih nauka i tehnologija kroz pružanje podrške informacijskim specijalistima, organizacijama i pojedincima.

Edukacija i zaštita ljudskih prava su među prioritetima INFOHOUSE-a čiji članovi nude jedinstvena znanja i vještine o informacijama, dokumentaciji i tehnologiji iz oblasti ljudskih prava, kao i posebno dizajnirane edukativne aktivnosti kreirane da odgovore na specifične zahtjeve nevladinih organizacija i pojedinaca.

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