

UNMIK - JIAS DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE REPORT:

Assessment of Books in Mitrovica City Library 24 - 25 March 2001

By Andras Riedlmayer, Sophie Massal and Svetlana Pencheva

1. Background

In response to allegations concerning the state of the book collection of the Mitrovica City Library and in particular the holdings of books in Serbian language, the library was visited by a representative of IFLA and the President of the Norwegian Library Association on 6 and 10 March 2001. Upon their recommendation (see Attached Report -- www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/mitrorep.pdf -- in Annex 1), an ad hoc committee carried out an investigation and on-site assessment of the entire book collection. This was done in cooperation with Mr. Hajrullah Mustafa, Director of the Mitrovica City Library and Ms. Olivera Stevic, Director of the library in northern Mitrovica.

Mr. Andras Riedlmayer, bibliographer at the Harvard University Library and an expert on cultural heritage in Kosovo, was invited to direct this examination as an independent consultant.

Mr. Riedlmayer, accompanied by Ms. Sophie Massal, from the JIAS - Department of Culture of UNMIK, and Ms. Svetlana Pencheva, Civil Officer at Mitrovica Regional Administration, visited both the Mitrovica City Library and the library in northern Mitrovica on 24 and 25 March, met with all parties involved and examined the facts and the material available. On 25 March, a complete shelf count of the book collection present in the Mitrovica City Library was carried out with measurement of shelves and estimates of the number of books in all subject categories and languages in all divisions of the Mitrovica City Library.

The director of the Mitrovica City Library and members of the staff were present at the count and confirmed the findings of the commission. Ms. Stevic and Ms. Gocmanac, from the northern Mitrovica library, were also consulted and agreed to the proposed methodology.

2. Work done

The work of the commission was conducted over two days, Saturday 24 and Sunday 25 March.

On 24 March, the two Serbian librarians agreed to visit the Mitrovica City Library on the south side of the city, jointly with the other members of the commission to help establish the facts. They brought with them a list of books currently stored in boxes in the library in north Mitrovica and some samples of the books in question. Many of the books carry the markings of the Mitrovica City Library and were allegedly retrieved from a paper mill in Vladicin Han in South Serbia (for background, see the above-mentioned report). They suggested that this list be checked against the registers of Mitrovica City Library.

At the outset, the Serbian and Albanian librarians agreed that the presentation of this case in the Serbian daily *Politika* was full of errors and misrepresentations and that it should not form the basis of this investigation. The Serbian librarians stated that they had not been interviewed for the article and that they did not regard it as responsible journalism.

They were also in agreement about certain facts concerning the library:

- No full inventory of the Mitrovica City Library had been carried out for more than a decade.
- The library building had been open and unattended from 10 June 1999, when Ms. Stevic went to north Mitrovica, until 14 July 1999, when Mr. Mustafa arrived and took charge. All parties agreed, without assigning blame, that anyone could have entered the library and taken books during this period.

While Mr. Mustafa and Ms. Stevic were not in agreement about all issues, they expressed respect for each other as professionals and stated that they would like to see more cooperation between librarians in north and south Mitrovica. It was pointed out that, complying with the request of Ms. Stevic after the war, Mr. Mustafa had sent three books from the Serbian Academy of Sciences to the library in north Mitrovica.

Therefore, the commission decided to focus on the verifiable facts at hand. As a first attempt, Mr. Riedlmayer suggested, and the other members agreed, that a small random sample of the list be checked against the registers and that an effort be made to locate those books on the shelves. There were five items selected:

- *Savremena poezija Jugoslovenskih naroda i narodnosti* (accession no. 32923)
- *Vasiljev, Covek peva posle rata* (32390, 32391)
- *Jakov Ignjatovic, Publicisticki spisi* (33672)
- *Jakov Ignjatovic, Misli o srpskom narodu* (33667)
- *Vladimir Boban, Srpske i albanske narodne pesme sa Kosova* (34214)

In all five cases, the registry numbers provided by the Serbian librarians matched the entries in the library's registers. An attempt was made to locate these books on the shelves in the section of the library where Serbian literature is kept. While the shelves were full of books, many of them by the authors cited, these five particular items could not be located. It should be noted however that the arrangement of the books on the shelves was not fully alphabetical. Many books were misshelved and some lacked classification numbers. The library staff stated that the collection was being rearranged to better meet the current needs of the users and they regretted that some of the reshelved books were out of order.

The meeting was cut short because of the security concerns of the Serbian librarians. Leaving the library under escort of UNMIK police, the two Serbian librarians were confronted by a large crowd of youth from south Mitrovica who shouted abuse and told them not to come back to the Mitrovica City Library again.

On 25 March, the three international members of the commission visited the public library in north Mitrovica and met with Ms. Stevic and Ms. Gocmanac for about two hours. The commission was shown the current collection of the public library, consisting of about 4000 books donated by the Serbian Ministry of Culture and foreign donors. The library has 243 registered readers.

The commission also had a chance to examine the books in boxes alleged to have been brought from Vladicin Han. The books were in a variety of condition, the majority looked new and unused, others appeared to have suffered from rough handling and damp. Most of the books examined wore markings of the Mitrovica City Library. Several of the books had deep indentations in their covers, apparently having been tied together tightly in bundles. According to Ms. Stevic, the books had been found in Vladicin Han tied together with wire. Most of the books contained reader's cards. According to the data on the reader's cards, most had never been circulated, while others had been circulated for the last time as long ago as the 1970's and the 1980's.

While it was not possible to count all the books in boxes, the number of boxes seemed to match the total number of books on the list presented by Ms. Gocmanac (477 items: see Annex 2).

Before leaving the library in north Mitrovica, the commission got agreement of the Serbian librarians to the proposed working method for assessing the collection currently in place in the Mitrovica City Library. The commission determined that the best approach was to forego hunting for individual titles and concentrate rather on the determining the holdings of the entire library by subject and language categories. However, it was agreed that while examining the collection, the commission would be on the lookout for a small number of key items mentioned by Ms. Stevic as items of particular concern.

Returning to south Mitrovica, the commission continued its work in the Mitrovica City Library. Mr. Mustafa agreed to the proposed working method for assessing the collection. Members of the library staff accompanied and observed the commission doing its work and agreed to and confirmed its findings.

Following standard library procedures, a count was made by measuring the books on the shelves. A series of one-meter samples was taken and those books were counted individually. Then the samples were averaged to produce a standard number of books per meter. This procedure was repeated in every division to account for different book sizes in different subject areas (the amounts ranged from 70 books per meter to 90 books per meter). Then the books on the shelves were measured and the total number of books was estimated using this multiplier. For books stored in boxes, the commission counted sample boxes and then used that as a multiplier checking only to make sure that the counted boxes were full.

The accuracy of this method was confirmed when the register of the library was checked for the total number of fiction in the Turkish language. Using this method, the commission estimated total holdings of 392 volumes in this category. A check of the register showed that the number of registered items was 393.

3. Summary of Findings

| <i>Divisions</i> | <i>Number of books</i> |
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| 1. Professional and scientific books | 4 723 |
| 2. Storage I | 4 391 |
| 5. Storage II | 4 438 |
| 3. Old and Rare books | 7 637 |
| 4. Processing department | 4 147 |
| 6. Children's literature | 6 863 |
| * Albanian language | 3 871 |
| * Serbian schoolbooks | 952 |
| * Serbian literature | 2 040 |
| 7. Mitrovica collection | 615 |
| 8. Reference collection | 512 |
| 9. Literature | 24 788 |
| World literature in Albanian | 3 878 |
| Albanian literature in Albanian | 5 950 |
| World literature in Serbian | 6 961 |
| Yugoslav literature in Serbian | 5 823 |
| Oriental literature in Serbian | 363 |
| Turkish literature in Turkish | 392 |
| Literary criticism in Serbian | 1 421 |
| 10. Display windows | 111 |
| 11. Director's Office | 419 |
| Total: | 58 789 |

The division of Professional and Scientific books is more than 90% composed of books in

Serbian. All the books in the Reference division except for a handful of dictionaries are in Serbian. The books in Storage I were mostly in Serbian and included a collection of 351 volumes donated by the Serbian Academy of Sciences. The books in Storage II were a mixture of Serbian and Albanian titles. The books in the Old and Rare Books division were all in Serbian language. The Mitrovica collection included books in Serbian, Albanian and Turkish languages. The books in the Processing division were mostly in Albanian and in foreign languages, as were the books in the Director's office. The breakdowns by language for the Children's division and adult Literature division are shown in the table above.

The commission counted 28 major sets of encyclopedias and dictionaries in the Reference division, including a number of items about which Ms. Stevic had expressed particular concern.

Acting upon the recommendations of the above-mentioned report and the specific request of the Serbian librarians, the commission took particular care to assess the collection of works by French, Polish, Italian, Spanish and Latin American authors translated into Serbian. The commission found 39 shelves full of French literature amounting to 35 linear meters of books (ca. 2450 items). Works by major French authors were represented in many copies, including authors such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Gustave Flaubert, Victor Hugo, Alphonse Daudet, Emile Zola, Marcel Proust and others. Polish authors were also well represented with multiple copies of Czeslaw Milosz and anthologies such as *Savremena Poljska Poezija*. Spanish authors were represented by multiple copies of Garcia Lorca, Juan Vallera, Blasko Ibanez, Romulo Gallegos and others. Italian authors were represented by works of Giovanni Bocaccio, Luigi Pirandello, Dino Bucati, Alberto Moravia and others. Latin American and Russian authors were also well represented.

During the commission's examination of the collection, the list of books mentioned by Ms. Stevic as special items were kept in mind and the majority of them turned up either on the shelves or in storage. Among such works were:

- Kolekcija srpske knjizevnosti (several shelves)
- Works of Feodor Dostoevsky (more than 30 volumes)
- Many works by and about Vuk Karadzic, including the specific series shown to us by Ms. Stevic, represented in more than 10 volumes.
- Catena Mundi, 2 volumes
- The Qur'an, the Bible and a presentation of Islamic Religion in three volumes
- Several volumes from the series on World Mythology were found in storage
- Books of required readings on Serbian literature for schoolchildren grades 1-8 were found in the children's division, (952 volumes).
- A deluxe edition of a boxed set of Jovan Jovanovic *Zmaj Pevanja*, was found in storage

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

With the agreement of all parties, the commission established a reasonable estimate of

all the books currently held by the Mitrovica City Library, with the exception of the books that are currently circulating with readers and 3 270 volumes donated to the branch libraries in Tunel i Pare and Bare. The commission examined registers of all the books transferred to the branch libraries.

The commission also examined a list prepared by the library staff of Serbian readers who failed to return books borrowed in the last decade. There were more than 1 500 books on this list. A corresponding list of books borrowed and never returned by Albanian readers during the same period has not yet been prepared, but it can be assumed, given the size of the borrower population, that such a list would include at least 4 500 books. Presumably, many of those books would also include works in the Serbian language.

Both the Serbian and the Albanian librarians were in agreement that the Mitrovica City Library was left unattended between 10 June and 14 July 1999. The windows and the locks were broken and children and strangers had unlimited access to the collection.

Given all these uncertainties, it is difficult to form a definitive conclusion regarding the allegations in this case. The commission considers that its most important task in this investigation was to establish the facts that could be ascertained and to determine the current holdings of the Mitrovica City Library.

The commission's count established that the number of books currently present in the building of the Mitrovica City Library is estimated at 58 789. Of these books, approximately 3/5 are in the Serbian language and the rest are in Albanian, Turkish and foreign languages. According to information submitted to the commission by Ms. Stevic, as of February 1999, the library held 1 118 linear meters of books. Applying the same multiplier used for this assessment, this figure comes to about 78 260 books. Given all the variables (books donated to branches, books currently circulating with readers, books never returned) as well as the circumstances described above, the difference between the two figures is not excessive.

The commission hopes, and the Albanian and Serbian librarians agree, that this assessment will serve as a baseline for the future management of the collection and the safe guarding of all of its constituent parts.

The commission also recommends that as soon as practicable, the Mitrovica City Library undertakes a full inventory of its collection. All interested parties should be informed of the results of the inventory, including the Ombudsperson's Office in Pristina. For the proper management of its collection, the Mitrovica City Library must ensure that all the books are properly cared for and arranged on the shelves in call number order, no matter what language or ethnic constituency they represent.

Annexes

- Annex 1:* Report on Alleged destruction of books in Serbian language in the Mitrovica/Kosovska Mitrovica library -- www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/mitrorep.pdf -- by Carsten Frederiksen and Frode Bakken.
- Annex 2:* List of items provided by Ms. Stevic and Ms.Gocmanac. (*Editorial note: not yet available in electronic format*).

