“Continuing Solidarity with Our Colleagues” in Eastern Europe: the American Library Association (ALA) and the Postwar Rehabilitation of Eastern European Libraries, 1945-1948

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Abstract: The topic of the destruction of libraries during World War II has been well publicized. However, the American Library Association (ALA)'s assistance with postwar cultural rehabilitation of Eastern European libraries remains relatively unknown. The paper examines the “Aid to Libraries in War Areas” program, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and administered by the ALA, with respect to Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia (Soviet Union), and Yugoslavia. The program consisted of two parts: the first, which ran from 1941 to 1947, dealt with periodicals; the other, in operation from 1944 to 1947, focused on books. Its goal was to replenish, though on a limited scale, devastated collections with American publications unavailable to most European and Asian libraries during Axis occupation.

Keywords: American Library Association; libraries; Reconstruction; Eastern Europe

Introduction

In September 1944, the American Library Association (ALA) received a letter from Anna Kravchenko, a Moscow librarian, including a dramatic account of the destruction of the Korolenko Library in Kharkov (Kharkiv) in the Soviet Union.1 Kravchenko described the bombing of the library that caused the roof and “all the four walls” to collapse, but left the shelves intact “with no roof over them.”2 She and her colleague considered it a powerful symbol of survival and endurance, and concluded that “no wars whatever can destroy the aspiration of mankind after genuine knowledge, wars are powerless to destroy the books in which this knowledge is stored.”3

By 1945 the ALA leadership was well aware of the war waged by the Nazis against European cultural institutions as well as the destruction of libraries caused by military operations as evidenced by articles published in ALA Bulletin and Library Journal. The June 1944 ALA
Bulletin article about the destruction of Russian libraries “was cabled to the American Library Association by the Soviet Scientists Antifascist Committee, Moscow, in answer to an A.L.A. request” (Segalov, 1944). The article provided some dramatic examples of war damage sustained by Soviet libraries and heroic efforts of Russian librarians to salvage various collections. The May 1945 Library Journal article was authored by Grayson Kefauver, United States Delegate to the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education in London, and Carle White, Director of Libraries and Dean of the School of Library Service at Columbia University. The article titled, “The Library Situation in Europe,” was based in large part on the information compiled by ALA about the destruction of European libraries (Kefauver and White, 1945). The authors supplied ample evidence of the destruction of libraries in many European countries, including Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, Poland, etc. They examined two kinds of devastation suffered by European libraries: the first was the result of the Nazi looting and destruction; the other was the result of military operations, and was mostly “unpremeditated” and “unavoidable,” however unwelcome it was (Kefauver and White, 1945).

In addition, requests for books that ALA received from European librarians, scholars, and institutions often included descriptions of damaged library buildings and collections. For example, Margaret Demchevsky, chief librarian of the National Library of Bulgaria, described her ordeal following the destruction of her house in Sofia by the Allied bombing.4 The bombing, which she described as a “cruel blow” coming “unwittingly from friends,” destroyed the collection of books and materials that she “had been so painstakingly trying to collect for years with the generous aid of the Carnegie Endowment for the Library Economy Book in Bulgarian.”5 In his letter to ALA, Professor D.I. Mangeron, director of the Central Library and the Mathematical Department of the Polytechnic Institute of Jassy, Romania, reported that “our Central Library and the Mathematical Department” were “destroyed during this tremendous war,” and were “wanting for necessaries for a serious scientific production.”6 Yugoslavia also suffered the destruction of many libraries. Nikola Dobrović, director of the Institute for Urban Planning in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in a letter to ALA, stated that “as our library, as well as the other libraries, has been looted and destroyed by the invader, our work is gravely hindered by the lack of technical books.”7 Furthermore, in February, 1945, ALA received an English translation of the December 1944 Politika article about “the status of libraries in Belgrade.”8 The article provided examples of the destruction of many Belgrade libraries and book collections. Finally, in 1948 ALA received a photo album about the destruction of Budapest, The Mutilated Budapest, which made many ALA officials “most sympathetic and shaken by the evidences of ruin to so many lovely buildings.”9

As the war intensified and the number of damaged and destroyed libraries increased, ALA began to design an assistance program for libraries in war areas. The “Aid to Libraries in War Areas” program was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation grants and was administered by the ALA’s Committee on Aid to Libraries in War Areas in collaboration with the ALA’s International Relations Board. The program consisted of two components: the first, which ran from 1941 to 1947, dealt with journals (periodicals); the other, in operation from 1944 to 1947, dealt with books. Its goal was to replenish, although on a limited scale, devastated collections with American publications unavailable to European and Asian libraries during the war. The total Rockefeller Foundation grants awarded for the entire program amounted to $588,000 and affected over 30 countries in Europe and Asia, including Eastern and Central European countries such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia.
Kraske, 1985). In addition, the Rockefeller Foundation provided some supplemental funding to ALA to purchase selected titles in response to “special request” received from individual scholars and libraries in Europe and Asia.10

The war not only caused the physical destruction of libraries, but also interrupted ongoing subscriptions to American scientific literature, including numerous technical journals. The ALA’s periodical purchase program involved “the acquisition of wartime issues of outstanding journals in all important subject fields,” based on “printed lists and recommendations of specialists.”11 Eventually, some 400 journals were selected for possible inclusion in the program and by June 1947, 6,037 titles and 9,320 sets of journals had been sent to 33 countries.12

As previously mentioned, thanks to the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation, ALA developed book purchase program for libraries in war areas. The 1947 Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report stated that “collections in many libraries in war areas were seriously damaged or completely destroyed.” Therefore, “the hunger for books is second only to the hunger for food in many parts of the world.”13 The purchased books would represent “the most important American reference [subject] works published during the war years” (Kraske, 1985). The selection and purchase of books published from 1939-1943 was based on a list compiled by Charles McCombs, Chief Bibliographer of the New York Public Library (American Library Association, 1945). The selection and acquisition of books published in 1944, 1945, and 1946 was based on the lists prepared by Foster Palmer, Reference Assistant of the Harvard College Library (American Library Association, 1946, 1947). According to McCombs, “the aim of the list was a selection of books generally considered significant contributions to knowledge in their respective fields, or books embodying the results of recent research” (American Library Association, 1945). Palmer applied the same selection criteria used by McCombs and insisted that the titles be of “scholarly character or otherwise of more than passing value for reference libraries” (American Library Association, 1947). By the time the project ended, a total of approximately 45,600 volumes were sent to over 200 institutions in 31 countries.14 “The number of readers, students, of physical and spiritual architects of the future, who received practical assistance in the rebuilding of their ruined countries through the material sent” could not be estimated.15 The bookplate to identify the books of the War Areas project carried the insignia of the American Library Association and the legend suggested by Dr. William Warner Bishop, a member of the ALA Committee on Aid to Libraries in War Areas: “Ad rem publicam litterarum restituendam” (for the restoration of the republic of letters) (Figure 1).16
Figure 1. The donated books were identified by the bookplate carrying the ALA insignia and the legend in Latin. *Courtesy of the ALA Archives at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*
However, as will be demonstrated, the amount of aid varied (sometimes considerably) from country to country.

**ALA Assistance Program and Eastern European Libraries**

**Bulgaria**


Although Bulgaria did not receive any sets of American books (1939-1946) from the ALA book purchase program, some gift and “special requests” items were sent to libraries and research institutes in Sofia and Varna.19 For example, the Bulgarian Bibliographical Institute in Sofia received a selection of library science and press law publications, including a two-year subscription to *The Library Quarterly, Margaret Mann’s Introduction to Cataloging and the Classification of Books* (1943), *Keyes D. Metcalf’s The Program of Instruction in Library Schools* (1943), Emily Miller Danton’s *The Library of Tomorrow* (1934), and *Lucy Maynard Salmon’s The Newspaper and Authority* (1923).20 A brief announcement about the gift was published in Bulgarian newspapers, including *Otechestven Front and Zemedelsko Zname*.21 Other institutions that received small donations of books included Direction Générale de la Statistique [Bulgarian General Direction of Statistics] and the University Library in Sofia, and Institut D’Économie Planifiée [Institute of Planned Economy] in Varna. For example, the Bulgarian General Direction of Statistics received several books about mathematics and statistics, including Paul Rider’s *Analytic Geometry* (1947), Albert Waugh’s *Elements of Statistical Method* (1943), and C. B. Davenport’s *Statistical Methods in Biology, Medicine, and Psychology* (1936).22 ALA also ordered a small collection of books on economics for the Institute of Planned Economy in Varna, including Eugene Staley’s *World Economic Development* (1944), F. W. Taussig’s *International Trade* (1936) and *Principles of Economics* (1939), J. P. Warbasse’s *Cooperative Democracy* (1942), and Edmund Whittaker’s *A History of Economic Ideas* (1940).23

**Czechoslovakia and Poland**

Czechoslovakia and Poland were two of the greatest beneficiaries of the ALA journals assistance program, with Czechoslovakia receiving 336 journal titles and 631 sets of journals, the fifth largest number of titles (after France, China, USSR, and the Philippines), and Poland presented with 311 journal titles and 675 sets of journals, representing the third largest gift of sets (after China and France) (Sroka, 2017). The journals represented a wide range of subjects, including a
significant amount of medical literature, as evidenced by the large number of sets of periodicals received by the medical library of Charles University in Prague and the University of Warsaw. The former received approximately 100 different medical journals, in most cases complete sets published during the war.24 The donation represented the first substantial contribution of medical literature to Charles University since 1938 and was described by Jan Bělehrádek, the University’s rector, as “a token of real friendship of the American nation towards the free Czechoslovakia.”25 The journals were a typical sample of American medical literature, including publications such as American Heart Journal, Archives of Internal Medicine, Journal of Immunology, and Quarterly Cumulative Index Medicus.26 ALA ordered 112 wartime sets of periodicals for the University of Warsaw, including humanities, medical, and scientific journals such as American Historical Review, American Literature, Journal of the Infectious Diseases, and Journal of Chemical Physics.27

Both Czechoslovakia and Poland received the same number of sets of American books published from 1939 to 1946. These included 771 titles in 858 volumes (published in 1939-1943), 187 titles in 196 volumes (published in 1944), 153 titles in 177 volumes (published in 1945), and 144 titles in 146 volumes (published in 1946), totaling 1,255 titles in 1,377 volumes, which made Czechoslovakia and Poland one of the top ten receivers of the ALA’s donation.28 The titles represented a wide range of subjects, including agriculture, economics, education, language and literature, medicine, philosophy, political science, religion, sociology, and technology. Moreover, Czechoslovakia and Poland received 731 and 574 items, respectively, from the special request fund.29 The books were sent to more than thirty different university departments, research institutes, and libraries, including colleges outside of major academic centers such as Prague and Warsaw. The requests received from Czechoslovak and Polish cultural and educational institutions underscored the great postwar needs for Western books, especially American publications.

Hungary

Hungary received 234 titles and 333 sets of journals under the ALA periodical purchase program (Committee on Aid to Libraries in War Areas, 1947). Journals represented a wide range of topics, including titles such as Art Quarterly, Journal of Agricultural Research, Journal of the American Chemical Society, Transactions of the American Philological Association, and The Yale Review.30 Although Hungary did not receive any sets of American books (1939-1946) from the ALA book purchase program, some gift and “special requests” items were sent to universities and research institutes in Budapest, Pécs, Sopron, and Szeged.31 For example, the Hungarian Libraries’ Board in Budapest received 74 items, including a three-year subscription to The Publishers Weekly, and various reference and library science books such as Webster’s New International Dictionary (1945), Harold Wentworth’s American Dialect Dictionary (1944), Grace O. Kelly’s The Classification of Books (1937), and Henry E. Bliss’ A Bibliographic Classification (1940).32 The donation of American journals was acknowledged at the “Rockefeller-celebration” organized by the American Legation and the Hungarian Libraries’ Board in June 1947. The event drew many university professors and dignitaries, including Dr. Stephen Gál (Gál István), Acting Director of the Hungarian Libraries’ Board, who stated that “these journals will always remind us how important freedom of thought and freedom of research are to every country.”33
Romania

Romania received 211 titles and 290 sets of journals under the ALA journals assistance program (Committee on Aid to Libraries in War Areas, 1947). Journals requested by various institutions were sent to the Romanian Academy Library (Biblioteca Academiei Române) for distribution. Journals represented a wide range of topics, including titles such as American Economic Review, American Journal of International Law, Biological Abstracts, and Botanical Review. Romania was not presented with any sets of American books (1939-1946) from the ALA book purchase program. Neither did it receive gift or “special requests” books.

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union received 347 titles and 633 sets of journals under the ALA journals assistance program, which represented the fourth largest gift of sets (after China, France, and Poland) (Committee on Aid to Libraries in War Areas, 1947). Many journals were sent to specific libraries in response to requests; others to the Lenin State Library and the Central Medical Library in Moscow. The latter received the bulk of medical journals, including American Heart Journal, Annals of Surgery, New England Journal of Medicine, and War Medicine. In a letter to the Lenin State Library, Harry M. Lydenberg, director of the Board of International Relations of ALA, explained the nature of the ALA donation of American journals “as tokens of our pleasure at this first step towards restoration of international intellectual exchanges we hope soon may be accepted as normal and universal.”

The Soviet Union was one of the largest recipients of sets of American books published from 1939 to 1945. These included 2,403 titles in 2,637 volumes (published in 1939-1943), 748 titles in 784 volumes (published in 1944), and 612 titles in 708 volumes (published in 1945), totaling 3,763 titles in 4,129 volumes, which represented the second largest number of donated titles and volumes (after China). Russian librarians were not only grateful for the ALA donation of journals and books, but they were also eager to learn more about American librarianship. In December 1945, the Soviet State Library for Foreign Literature organized an exhibit about American libraries (Figure 2). William Nelson, editor of Amerika Illustrated, sent pictures of the exhibit to ALA informing the Association that the library’s director, Margarita Rudomino, “is most anxious to receive news of American library practice and is striving as hard as she can to build up her collection of American books.”
Figure 2. An exhibit of American library practice held at the Soviet State Library for Foreign Literature in December, 1945 (today’s M. I. Rudomino All-Russian State Library for Foreign Literature, Moscow). Courtesy of the ALA Archives at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia received 201 titles and 341 sets of journals under the ALA periodical purchase program (Committee on Aid to Libraries in War Areas, 1947). Journals were sent to the University of Zagreb for distribution to “all the important libraries in Yugoslavia.” The periodical represented various topics, including titles such as American Journal of Nursing, Engineering Index, Food Research, and Hispanic American Historical Review.

Yugoslavia also received 1,028 titles in 1,112 volumes of American books published from 1939 to 1946, including Richard Hofstadter’s Social Darwinism in American Thought (1944), George Pullen Jackson’s Spiritual Folk-Songs of Early America (1937), John von Neumann’s Theory of Games and Economic Behavior (1944), and Robert Freund’s and Edgar P. Richardson’s American Romantic Painting (1944). Books were sent to the Yugoslav Committee for Schools.
and Science in Belgrade for distribution to Yugoslavian libraries; some sets were also shipped to the University of Zagreb Library.\textsuperscript{42}

**Conclusion**

The ALA’s reconstruction efforts helped to break European and Asian libraries’ wartime isolation by providing them with recent works of American scholarship. Despite the varying amount of aid distributed, many Eastern European libraries were able to enrich their depleted collections and offer their academic communities scholarly publications that otherwise would have been impossible to obtain. The ALA’s actions represented support and solidarity with war devastated libraries in Eastern Europe. That pledge of solidarity was probably best expressed by Carl Milam, ALA executive secretary, who in a letter to Josef Bečka, librarian of the National and University Library in Prague, assured him of ALA’s “continuing solidarity with our colleagues in Czechoslovakia” and lamented “the continued lack of opportunity for personal contact with our colleagues in Europe.”\textsuperscript{43} It should be noted that the ALA’s aid program for libraries in war areas included both former Axis powers and the newly emerging Communist countries of Eastern Europe, which was consistent with the Rockefeller Foundation’s apolitical stance.

The ALA’s position was most eloquently explained by Harry Lydenberg in his letter to a librarian of the Akron Public Library, who asked Lydenberg whether “the policy of the ALA in sending aid to libraries in war areas was contingent on the political views of their government.” Lydenberg replied in most strong terms: “the answer is, “NO.”\textsuperscript{44} One may argue that the ALA’s cultural engagement with Eastern Europe was a right strategy as it contributed to the reconstruction of many library collections helping Eastern European librarians to recover, if only for a while, from dark years of wartime intellectual isolation.

**Notes**

\textsuperscript{1} Today’s Kharkiv State Scientific Library of Vladimir Korolenko.
\textsuperscript{2} Anna Kravchenko [sic], Librarian, Moscow, USSR, “Excerpt of a letter dated April 4, 1944,” Russia and USSR file, Record Series [hereinafter, RS] 7/1/52, Box 4, American Library Association Archives at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign [hereinafter, ALAA]. The author of the letter identified in the English translation as “Anna Kravchenko” was most likely Anna Grigorevna Kravchenko (d. 1984), a Russian librarian.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{4} Demchevsky to Milam, July 25, 1945, Bulgaria file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA. Bulgaria being one of the Axis powers was subject to Allied air raids.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{6} Mangeron to ALA, July 2, 1948, Roumania (Romania) file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
\textsuperscript{7} Dobrović to ALA, February 5, [1946?], Yugoslavia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
\textsuperscript{8} “Status of Libraries in Belgrade,” December 7, 1944, Yugoslavia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
\textsuperscript{9} Mauseth to Beothy, April 28, 1948, Hungary file, RS 7/1/52, Box 3, ALAA. *The Mutilated Budapest* was published in 1946.
\textsuperscript{10} Viola I. Mauseth, “Books for War Areas Program: Final Report to the Rockefeller Foundation,” May, 1948, Washington Office Director Subject files, RS 17/1/6, Box 17, ALAA. Non-European countries participating in the special requests pool included China, Japan, the Philippines, and Siam (Thailand).
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 “Periodicals Sent to University of Sofia, Bulgaria,” [1947?], Bulgaria file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
18 “Periodicals Sent to Narodna Biblioteka, Sofia for Bulgarian Libraries,” [1947?], Bulgaria file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
20 “Bulgarian Bibliographical Institute. Desiderata,” May 17, 1947, Bulgaria file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
21 Borov to Milczewski, April 5, 1947, Bulgaria file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
22 Mauseth to Kiranov, December 2, 1947, Bulgaria file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
23 Kipp to Tosheff, December 1, 1947, Bulgaria file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
24 Markings on the packages shipped to Prague read: “Gift of American Library Association.” Ernst to Comins, December 1, 1945, Czechoslovakia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
25 Bělehrádek to ALA, October 12, 1945, Czechoslovakia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
26 “Journals Being Sent to UNRRA for the Medical Library of Charles University, Prague,” Czechoslovakia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 1, ALAA.
27 “Lists of Sets of Periodicals with 1946 Subscriptions Ordered by the Committee on Aid to Libraries in War Areas for University of Warsaw,” Poland file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
30 “Periodicals for Hungary, sent to Dr. Stephen Gál, Budapest,” [1947?], Hungary file, RS 7/1/52, Box 3, ALAA. Periodicals were sent to the Hungarian Libraries’ Board in Budapest.
31 Ibid.
33 “Speech made by Dr. Stephen Gál,” [June 6, 1947], Hungary file, RS 7/1/52, Box 3, ALAA.
34 “Periodicals for Romania,” [1947?], Romania (Romania) file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
35 “Medical Journals Sent to the U.S.S.R.,” [1946?], Russia and USSR file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA. See also, “Periodicals Sent to the Lenin Library for Allocation,” [1946?], Russia and USSR file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
36 Lydenberg to Lenin State Library, November 1, 1945, Russia and USSR file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
38 Nelson to Milczewski, March 11, 1946, Russia and USSR file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA. Today the library is named after Margarita Rudomino and is called All-Russian State Library for Foreign Literature.
39 Doroty [Comins] to Department of State and American Embassy, Belgrade, May 6, 1947, Yugoslavia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
40 “Periodicals for Yugoslavia sent to Dr. A. Stampar,” [1947?], Yugoslavia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
41 Mauseth, “Books for War Areas Program: Final Report to the Rockefeller Foundation.” See also, Ziherl to American Library Association, June 26, 1946, Yugoslavia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
42 American Library Association, “Yugoslavia 20 cartons plus 1 for University Library Zagreb,” [1946?], Yugoslavia file, RS 7/1/52, Box 4, ALAA.
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