THE COMMISSION OF BOOK HISTORY (1966–1990) AS THE LATVIAN BOOK SCIENCE PROMOTER

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In the article, the role of the Commission of Book History in the establishment and sustainable development of the Latvian book science is considered. The minutes of meetings and other materials of the Commission (they have been preserved in the National Library of Latvia) give evidence about the establishment of the Commission in 1965, its tasks, chairmen and most active participants, its principles and trends of work, initiated academic activities, discussed research works and upcoming publications, as well as about the abolishment of the Commission in 1990. The article gives information on particular decisions of the Commission, which had a significant impact on the further research of Latvian book history.

Key words: Latvian book science, history of Latvian book, Latvian book publishing, National Library of Latvia, Academic Library of the University of Latvia

Until now, publications on the history of Latvian book science have dealt mainly with the contribution of individual persons or organizations to the studies of the Latvian book. Less attention has been paid to the organizational processes that affected the quality and intensity of research in the field of Latvian book science.

An important role in the organization and coordination of the activities of the Latvian book researchers belonged to the Commission of Book History of the Latvian SSR, founded in 1966 and operating till 1990. Although the Commission had no funding and its administrative power was limited, it managed to consolidate the status of book science as an academic discipline in the system of science. The purpose of the present study is to show the importance of the history of the Book Commission in the development of the Latvian book science. The object of the study is the Commission of Book History, while the subject is the formation of the Commission, its functionality, operating principles, and key achievements.

The method of document analysis is used in the research. To specify and supplement the information found in the documents, several unstructured interviews were conducted with persons engaged in the Commission: perennial bibliographers of the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the National Library of Latvia – Silvija Šiško (worked in the Department from 1966 till 2011) and Lilija Limane (working in the Department since 1974), Head of the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts Ināra Klekere (working in the Department since 1972 with an interruption in 1997–1999) as well as the Director of the National Library of Latvia Andris Vilks (worked in the Department since 1978 till 1989).

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES OF LIBRARIES AFTER SOVIET OCCUPATION

After reincorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1940s, the small group of Latvian book history researchers lost the possibility to be engaged in research institutions, libraries included. The researchers (Jānis Straubergs (1886–1952), Arturs Štāls (1897–1951), Roberts Malvess (1905–1982), Kārlis Egle (1887–1974) and others) were discredited, demoted or dismissed[1]. Only in the mid-1950s when the repressive Soviet political regime became more liberal, the research libraries could resume the compilation of scientific bibliographies and other research activities. To a great extent these were promoted by the arrival of a new generation of librarians educated in the schools of the independent Republic of Latvia. They were interested in the national literature, culture and science and willingly took over the well established traditions of bibliographical work.

In 1958, the Department of Scientific Methods and Bibliography of the State Library of the Latvian SSR (currently the National Library of Latvia – henceforth the State Library) resumed the compilation of the retrospective part of the analytical index "Latvijas zinātne un literatūra" (Latvian Science and Literature) which once had been done by the bibliographer Augusts Ģinters (1885–1944). This work had been entrusted to Marta Apine (1920–1984), an alumna of the Library Science Department of P. Stučka State University of Latvia (currently the University of Latvia – henceforth the State University of Latvia).

In Latvia, as well as in other Soviet republics and in Europe, there was a tendency to separate book science and its unique research object – the book – from the totality of the humanities. In Latvia, the most rapid growth was experienced by the history of the book due to the preliminary in-depth studies of related fields (linguistics, literary theory, history). The Sector (since 1967 – Department) of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the State Library under the guidance of Aleksejs Apīnis (1926–2004, in the State Library since 1951), began the formation of a card index of book history. A. Apīnis

[1] About two prominent Latvian book historians (Kārlis Egle un Jānis Straubergs) after the second soviet occupation, see [25; 26].

enthusiastically focused on the studies of the history of the Latvian book. From 1956, he started delivering lectures in this discipline, first to the staff of the State Library and since 1960 also to the library science students at the State University of Latvia[2]. In 1965, he obtained the candidate degree in philology for his research work "Latviešu antifeodālā rokraksta literatūra" (The Latvian Antifeudal Manuscript Literature).

In the second largest scientific library of Latvia, which was the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences of the LSSR (currently the Academic Library of the University of Latvia – henceforth the Fundamental Library), studies on the history of bibliography were activated. In 1957, research by the long-time head of the Misiņš Library, bibliographer and literature scientist Kārlis Egle "Īsa latviešu bibliogrāfijas vēsture (līdz 1917. gadam)" (A Brief History of the Latvian Bibliography (up to 1917)) and the first "Bibliotekāro terminu vārdnīca: Krievu-latviešu un latviešu-krievu" (Glossary of Library Terms: Russian–Latvian and Latvian–Russian) were published. The latter included the definitions of book trade terms. The compiler of the glossary was Eiženija Peile (1908–1979), a bibliographer at the State Library and later at the Fundamental Library. In the article "Некоторые спорные вопросы библиотечно-библиографической терминологии и "Словарь книговедческих терминов" Е.И. Шамурина" (Some disputable questions on library–bibliographic terminology and "The glossary of book-trade terms" by E. I. Šamurins) included in the first volume of the Proceedings of the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences "Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijas Fundamentālās bibliotēkas raksti", issued in 1960 [7], she proposed a discussion on the terminology of the book [27]. The Proceedings comprised also publications on the history of bibliography and the Fundamental Library. After four years, this was followed by the first volume of the Proceedings of the State Library of the LSSR "Latvijas PSR Valsts bibliotēkas Raksti" [6]. Among the original articles there was the research article by Aleksejs Apīnis "Rokraksta grāmatas 18.gs. otrajā un 19.gs pirmajā pusē" (Manuscript Books in the Second Part of the 18th and the First Part of the 19th Century) [6, 71–107]. Both publications marked the start of a series of collections of articles on book science and library science and played a vital role in promoting research in the branch and popularizing its results in Latvia[3].

Systematic research on the history of the Latvian book was started in the second part

[2] The Department of Library Science and Bibliography of the Faculty of History and Philology of the State University of Latvia was founded in 1947. In 1954, the Department was abolished. The education of librarians at the State University was renewed in 1957.

[3] Latvijas PSR Valsts bibliotēkas Raksti (5 volumes in 1964–1974). The serial "Bibliotēkzinātnes aspekti" (Aspects of Library Science, 13 volumes, 1977–1991) was the continuation of the Proceedings. The Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences of the LSSR published only one volume of the "Proceedings", followed by a number of thematic collected articles.

of the 1960s when the linguist and researcher of writing Konstantīns Karulis (1915–1997) became an associate of the Fundamental Library. The history of the first Latvian encyclopedias was studied by Riva Joffe (Bluhm, 1916–2010), the curator of the Sectors of Special Collections (*Specfondi*) and Rare Books and Manuscripts, while the literature specialist Laimonis Stepiņš (1927–1989) studied the origin of literary journals.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMISSION, COMMENCEMENT OF ITS ACTION

On December 14, 1965, four enthusiasts of the branch (A. Apīnis, K. Karulis, K. Egle, and E. Peile) proposed that the Commission of Book History (Latvijas PSR Grāmatniecības vēstures komisija, henceforth the Commission) should be established as an integrated part of the Joint Library Board [8]. The Joint Library Board had functioned in Latvia since 1955, in accordance with the instruction of the Ministry of the Culture of the USSR, in order "to avoid parallelism" in the work of libraries of different subordination. The State Library and the Joint Library Board accepted the creation of the Commission without any objections, so on January 13, 1966 the first meeting of the new Commission took place.

A group of initiators nominated the bibliographer and literary scholar Kārlis Egle for the position of the Chairman of the Commission. Riva Joffe and Zenta Zelmene (1916–2006), the bibliographer of the Library of the State University of Latvia, was also invited to join the Commission. Riva Joffe's position could arouse a twofold attitude (as the head of the Special Collection, she had to maintain relations with the state security services, and her political reliability had been scrupulously tested). The minutes of the meetings testify R. Joffe's considerate attitude towards the research works of her colleagues; however, during the closed discussions on publications, she frequently insisted on the necessity of proper ideological accents in the publications. Jānis Upītis (1911–1983), an associate of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Academy of Sciences of the LSSR, was also invited to join the Commission. He represented the viewpoint of the official Soviet literary theory. After his death, the meetings were attended by Oto Čakars (1908–1999), a literary scholar, lecturer at the State University of Latvia. Pēteris Bauģis (1914–2000), a writer, an employee of the Party History Institute, was also a member of the Commission.

The Commission started its work with well-defined tasks:

1) to identify the research institutions, individual researchers of book history and allied fields, as well as their achievements;
2) to involve new organizations and individuals into research work;
3) to coordinate and specify the compilation of card files on book history;
4) to identify the most urgent problems in the field and to select persons who could work on them;
5) to organize discussions on the research and prospective publications in order to identify and eliminate mistakes;

6) to organize scientific conferences on book history.

At the suggestion of K. Karulis, the popularization of the Latvian book history became another task of the Commission [5].

The first meetings, which took place in 1966, were private as only members of the Commission were allowed to take part, but since 1967 they became public, the so-called informative, meetings in which all interested persons could participate. This fact, of course, had an impact on the activities of the Commission. At first, academic discussions prevailed, but later on, as the circle of lecturers and audience widened, the informative part – the book history popularizing aspect – became predominant.

Due to the liquidation of the Joint Library Board at the end of 1967, it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Academy of Sciences and renamed into the Commission of Book History at the Fundamental Library of the Academy of Sciences of the LSSR (Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijas Fundamentālās bibliotēkas Grāmatniecības vēstures komisija) [9]. Thereafter, the collaboration with higher organizations had to be organized through the Director of the Fundamental Library, and reports on its activities had to be submitted to him. The Commission had to be led by an employee of the Academy of Sciences. Because of his poor health, K. Egle resigned as the Head of the Commission, and J. Paeglis (1926)[4], a bibliographer at the Fundamental Library, later Head of the Department of Bibliography, was appointed to his place [11]. He chaired most of the meetings, sometimes also delivering lectures on the history of bibliography.

By the memories of the staff of the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the National Library of Latvia, A. Apīnis was the actual leader of the Commission . Thanks to him, the action of the Commission was directed to a professional track. He encouraged also students of the Latvia State University, learners of the course "The History of the Book", as well as his colleagues to turn to research and to participate in the work of the Commission. A. Apīnis promoted and chaired discussions, actively expressing his viewpoint, drawing attention to essential mistakes and the necessary supplements in the research works or defending the researchers in episodes when their studies due to small inaccuracies were declined as unfit for publishing. For A. Apīnis, the Commission was an instrument for implementing the book science development strategy.

THE FIRST ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION

To facilitate the further investigations, one of the first tasks of the Commission was to organize a discussion on the periodization scheme of the Latvian book [11]. The period up to 1900 was developed by A. Apīnis and the 20th century by K. Karulis. Without too much discussion, the scheme was approved and later published; it served as an informal profile showing the border divide between

[4] J. Paeglis graduated from the State University of Latvia in 1951. An associate of the Fundamental Library from 1951 till 1991, Head of the Commission of the Book History till 1986.

the two research centres. The State Library under the lead of Apīnis studied the period up to 1900, and the Fundamental Library took the 20th century. In practice, the selection of the directions and subjects was affected by the interests of the researchers and the necessity of the cognition and popularization of the collections.

Opportunities to publish the researches were identified. At first, they were offered only by the publishing house of the State University of Latvia. A plan for the necessary publications was compiled. It included not only publications on new studies, but also anthologies of the most important articles published in the period of the Republic of Latvia as well as historical sources. A. Apīnis appealed to the members not to be limited to issuing only the publications of qualified researchers, but to publish also the best diploma papers on the history of the book, written by the graduates of the State University of Latvia. He proposed a compilation of an in-depth course on the history of the Latvian book for students, making use of the "existing short surveys". Unfortunately, the rest of the Commission considered the idea unrealistic because of the lack of adequate research material [10].

In the first meetings of the Commission, the researchers agreed on the content and usage of the key terms of the field (book, book printing, book science), defined the framework of the term "book science". The terms "library science" and "bibliography" were also included. To identify the origins of the Latvian book, theoretical statements of book science were discussed. In the closed meeting of the Commission on March 5, 1973, there was a heated debate about the manuscript by Aleksejs Apīnis "Latviešu grāmatniecība līdz 1900. gadam" (The Latvian publishing until the year 1900), in which the origin of the Latvian book was dated to 1525 when the first book in Latvian was published in Wittenberg (Germany). This was a Lutheran Mass; information about it had been preserved in the State Archives of Schleswig-Holstein (Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Germany), but up to nowadays no copy of it has been found [13]. As the authors and the publishers of the book were Germans, several reviewers were of the opinion that it should be included in the field of the foreign book history together with other literature initiated and published in Latvian until the middle of the 19th century when Latvians themselves started book publishing and printing [15]. During this discussion, A. Apīnis managed to strengthen the origin of the Latvian book on the basis of the functional approach of the Soviet book science: the "book–society" system includes not only the author (initiator) and the publisher, but also the addressee and user of the book, i.e. the reader [14][5]. Consequently, every book that was directly or implicitly envisaged for Latvians had to be considered a constituent part of the Latvian book history. This wide-ranging definition of the "book–society", system which A. Apīnis popularized also in his publications, allowed the research

[5] See also minutes of the meeting on December 11, 1974. RXA 155, 103.l, p. 211–215.

on the more ancient period (16th–19th centuries) of the Latvian book to continue unhindered. However, until the middle of the 1980s, both in books and articles on the history of the book, the facts had to be interpreted in the context of class struggle.

THE MEETINGS OF THE COMMISSION

The minutes of about 180 meetings from 1966 to 1990 have been preserved in the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the National Library of Latvia. On average, eight meetings took place every year, usually with at least two reports at each. Altogether, 330 reports were delivered. Most research studies discussed at the meetings were later published in the scientific and popular-science literature, as well as in newspapers and magazines.

The young employees of the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the State Library (S. Šiško, I. Klekere, A. Vilks, L. Limane) were also involved in the organization and participation of the meetings. This was the place where they introduced to the audience their first studies, took part in the discussion of reports and publications. The regular participation in the Commission under the lead of qualified and experienced book scholars unlocked the intelectual potential of the young specialists and enabled them to start their career as researchers.

The audience of the meetings was twofold. The core of the frequent lecturers at the meetings of the Commission was composed of the staff of the Departments of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the State Library and the Fundamental Library as well as of bibliographers who delivered most of the lectures. The second group included interested persons. For some of them, the occupation of Latvia had denied the career development as full-fledged researchers, but they maintained an interest in the history and theory of the book throughout their lives (Valdemārs Jauģiets (1905–1974), Eiženija Peile, Tenu Karma (1924), Arturs Eglīte (1905–1981), Arturs Ģērmanis (1899–1993), Marija Lācis (1905–1988)). Also after retirement, they were constant visitors at the meetings and occasionally delivered lectures.

The meetings received reports at book science conferences, book fairs and exhibitions, discussed problems of publishing and book trade in the Soviet Union and abroad, as well as modern trends in book art. Very frequently (in more than 30 cases) the meetings started with the evaluation of the upcoming publications. It should be recognized that most of the reports (more than 100) were dedicated to the history of book publishing and printing, and they were among the best. The present day problems were touched upon less frequently (about 50 reports). There were few reports concerning the theory of book science (about 20), the history of book art (also about 20), the book history of other countries (about 15 reports), the resource basis for research in book history (more than 10 reports), the history of bibliography (more than 10 reports), the library history (more than 10 reports),

relations with other countries in the field of book publishing (more than 10 reports), the history of book trade (7 reports), library science (6 reports), the sociology of reading (5 reports), the history of manuscript books (5 reports), censorship (2 reports), and the psychology of reading (1 report). Typically, only one or two researchers were engaged in the less represented areas.

The atmosphere of the meetings was mostly beneficial; young researchers were encouraged to publish their findings, and most of the manuscripts were accepted for publication, although nearly every work received some critical comments. However, one piece of research received too much destructive criticism for its non-ideological approach to the issue and was published more than 10 years after the discussion[6].

MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE COMMISSION

According to the initial plan, the Commission managed to publish some selections of offset-duplicated materials. These were "Latviešu grāmatniecība" (The Latvian Book, Publishing House of the State University of Latvia, 5 issues, 1967–1970) and a series of brochures called also "Latviešu grāmatniecība" (Publishing House "Zinātne", 3 issues, 1970). Among the materials was the brochure on the first Latvian publishers "Izdevēji Heinrihs Alunāns un Kārlis Stālbergs" (1968) by Silvija Liniņa (1934), a young specialist of the State Library. It was the first publication initially made as a graduate work at the State University of Latvia under the guidance of A. Apīnis and accepted for publication by the Commision.

In 1971, the Commission considered a proposal by the Central Committees of the Communist Parties of Latvia and Estonia to organize joint celebrations dedicated to the 450th anniversary of the first Estonian and Latvian book in 1975[7]. Almost all the members (with the exception of A. Apīnis and Silvija Šiško (1938), bibliographer of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department of the State Library, member of the Commission) objected to this idea as the book concerned had a religious content (it was a Lutheran Mass); moreover, no research sources on it were available to the researchers in the occupied Latvia [16; 17]. However, the mention of this first Latvian book was permitted in scientific and popular-science publications. In 1975, the anniversary year, the publication was discussed in a more extensive article by A. Apīnis in the literary journal "Karogs" [3]. At the Commission meetings, Tenu Karma reported on the anniversary events that had taken place in Estonia and analysed the collection of articles devoted to the anniversary (about the book "Eesti raamat 1525–1975" (Tallinn, 1978), see [18]).

At the initiative of the Commission, the collection "Grāmatas un grāmatnieki"

[6] The research publication "Books for Latvians in Latgale from 1904 till 1917" by Silvija Šiško was first discussed in April 2, 1968 (LNB RXA 155, nr. 102, p. 59–63) but published in 1980 [22].

[7] The first Latvian and Estonian books were published in 1525.

(The Books and Publishers) was launched in 1985 on the occasion of the centenary of the Misiņš Library [4]. It contained not only research articles but, for the first time, also an alternative source of historical information, i.e. reminiscences of the libraries' staff and readers. All the information published had been closely scrutinized at the meetings of the previous years.

In 1988, at the suggestion of the Commission, the 400th anniversary of the Latvian printed book was widely celebrated. The exhibition "Senās grāmatas Rīgā (13.–18. gs.)" (Ancient Books in Riga (13th–18th century) was organised in the Riga Museum of History and Navigation. The All-Union conference "Latvijas grāmatniecības 400 gadi" (400 Years of the Latvian Book) took place in Riga, and a collection of the conference abstracts was published [28]. The book "Tipogrāfs Mollīns un viņa laiks. pirmās Rīgā iespiestās grāmatas 1588–1625" (Typographer Mollin and his time. The first books printed in Riga 1588–1625) by Ojārs Zanders, Head of the Sector of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Fundamental Library and an active participant in the Commission, was also published [24]. The Commission carried out a detailed evaluation of the achievements, problems, and mistakes of the anniversary year.

In the 1980s, the audience of the meetings increased, sometimes exceeding 50 people. The thematic coverage became wider. This fact can be explained by a greater availibility of information, new research areas (e.g., reading sociology), foreign experience (conferences, exhibitions, fairs, visits to libraries and archives). Unfortunately, at the end of the 1980s, the State Library withdrew from the organization of the meetings and delegated it to the Fundamental Library, which was already organizing a similar series of events called "Misiņa klubs"(The Misiņš Club). Laura Kalinka (1939–2012), an associate of the Fundamental Library, became the Chair of the Commission. At the meeting in December 1989, she announced a crisis in the Commission and called for a return to historical research [19]. Nevertheless, the last minutes of the Commission are dated May 30, 1990 [20].

Although Latvian book historians pointed out that "(..) so far only amateurs, namely librarians and bibliographers, have been engaged in studies on the history of the Latvian book" [23], it should be recognized that considerable and detailed studies had been carried out in the State Library and the Fundamental Library up to 1990.

There had been a variety of publications which provided a flow of information not only into the narrow circle of researchers, but also more widely. In 1967, a resumptive work by Konstantīns Karulis "Latviešu grāmata gadsimtu gaitā" [5] (The Latvian Book through the Centuries) appeared, after ten years (in 1977) followed by a research monograph by Aleksejs Apīnis "Latviešu grāmatniecība no pirmsākumiem līdz 19.gadsimta beigām" (The Latvian Book from the Beginning until the End of the 19th Century) [1] and still after a decade by the monograph of the manuscript book

by A. Apīnis "Neprasot atļauju" (Without Asking Permission, 1987) [2]. The history of publishing and printing-houses in Jelgava (Mītava), a significant centre for Latvian culture, was considered in the monograph "Jelgavas grāmata" (The Book of Jelgava, 1984) by the bibliographer of the Fundamental Library Līvija Labrence (1928–2007). Research on the history of the book was regularly reflected in the State Library and Fundamental Library publications. At least two symposiums of the State Library on book history were compiled from articles of the members of the Commission [4].

In 1971, the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the State Library started the compilation of the union catalogue of Latvian old prints, an important part of the national bibliography. The work had been going on for 28 years. This union catalogue was published in 1999 under the title "Seniespiedumi latviešu valodā 1525–1855" (Old Prints in the Latvian Language 1525–1855) [21].

After the Commission had been abolished, there were several attempts to organize similar cycles of events. In January 1998, the National Library of Latvia founded the discussion club "Gūtenberga galaktika" (The Gutenberg Galaxy), which was running for 15 years. In 2012, the former Fundamental Library, now the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, started organizing the cycle "Misiņa lasījumi" (The Misiņš Readings) dedicated to books and book publishing. Both cycles of events provide for the popularization of research on book science; however, they do not promote the research process.

CONCLUSIONS

The abolishment of the Commission at the end of the 1980s could be explained by changes in its leadership. A. Apīnis resigned from organizing the Commission's work (as well as from the post of Head of the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts of the State Library and from the post of the University lecturer) and focused mainly on the research of book history. The young generation of book historians preferred other ways for academic communication, which grew up due to the reduced censorship and the development of contacts with researchers abroad.

For a quarter of a century, the Commission had been a centre for book science, where researchers could discuss the current problems in their field, gain inspiration and support for the further work, and ascertain the viewpoint of colleagues. The Commission achieved success involving all interested researchers without regard for the departmental subordination of the institutions in which they worked. The members of the Commission consistently observed the initially defined tasks and principles of work.

The Commission provided for the inheritance of significant culture-historical information. The activities of the Commission provided opportunities for information about finished but not published research to be entered into the information flow. This

was of particular importance at the initial stage when a system of periodicals in the area had not yet been developed. Very often, the persons speaking at the meetings had limited opportunities for publication, but they had obtained a considerable knowledge base. The Commission publicised the information that was not possible to publish in the media because of censorship (e.g., achievements of the book publishing during the Republic of Latvia and individual prominent publishers such as J. Rapa, J. Roze, O. Jēpe, A. Jesens). The Commission promoted research work, because the "white spots" of the area and research problems emerged in the course of discussions.

A relatively open and stable environment for academic discussions was created. The discussion of research works and manuscripts could be equated with the first editing. It enabled researchers to adjust their research methodology, the structure of publications, eliminate mistakes and deficiencies. Only in one episode, the review of a high quality manuscript which did not correspond to the Communist Party ideology was so schorching that it delayed the publication for more than 10 years.

The Commission provided a very significant and memorable school of academic experience for young specialists. In this way, it contributed to the formation and consolidation of a new and enthusiastic generation of young book historians who could provide for the continuity of the research process in the Latvian book science.

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KNYGOS ISTORIJOS KOMISIJOS (1966–1990) VAIDMUO SKATINANT KNYGOS MOKSLĄ LATVIJOJE

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Santrauka

Šeštojo dešimtmečio pabaigoje Latvijoje, kaip ir kitose sovietinėse respublikose bei Europoje, vyravo tendencija atskirti knygos mokslą ir jo unikalų tyrimų objektą – knygą – nuo visų kitų humanitarinių mokslų. Kuriant ir plėtojant Latvijos knygų mokslą svarbus vaidmuo teko Latvijos SSR valstybinei Bibliotekai (šiuo metu – Latvijos nacionalinė biblioteka, toliau ją vadinsime Valstybine biblioteka) bei LSSR mokslų akademijos fundamentinei bibliotekai (šiuo metu – Latvijos universiteto akademinė biblioteka, toliau ją vadinsime Fundamentine biblioteka); jose buvo atliekami vertingi ir išsamūs Latvijos knygos istorijos tyrimai. Ketvirtį amžiaus trukusi santykinai atvira ir stabili akademinėms diskusijoms aplinka leido įsteigti Knygos istorijos komisiją.

1965 metų gruodžio 14 dieną keturi šios tyrimų srities entuziastai (Aleksejs Apīnis, Konstantīns Karulis, Kārlis Egle ir Eiženija Peile) pasiūlė įkurti Knygos istorijos komisiją (toliau – Komisija). Iš pradžių Komisija buvo sudedamoji dalis Jungtinės bibliotekų tarybos, kuri veikė Latvijoje nuo 1955 metų. 1967 metų pabaigoje likvidavus Jungtinę bibliotekų tarybą, Komisija buvo perduota Mokslų akademijos žiniai. Nuo to laiko bendradarbiavimas su aukštesnėmis instancijomis turėjo vykti per Fundamentinės bibliotekos direktorių, o ataskaitos apie veiklą pateikiamos jam. Faktiškai dėl susirinkimų dienotvarkės spręsdavo Valstybinės bibliotekos Retų knygų ir rankraščių skyrius, dažniausiai A. Apīnis, kuris parengdavo pranešėjams prasmingų klausimų. Dauguma susirinkimų vykdavo Valstybinės bibliotekos patalpose, išskyrus vasarą – bent kartą per mėnesį.

Pagrindinės Komisijos veiklos kryptys: 1) identifikuoti ir vienyti tyrimo institucijas bei pavienius tyrėjus, 2) vertinti tyrimų pasiekimus ir rengiamas publikacijas, 3) skatinti straipsnių rinkinių ir kitos medžiagos, susijusios su Latvijos knygos istorija, publikavimą, 4) organizuoti savo srities mokslines konferencijas.

Komisijos susirinkimų protokolai (išsaugoti Latvijos nacionalinės bibliotekos Retų knygų ir rankraščių skyriuje) rodo, kad nuo 1966 iki 1990 metų įvyko daugiau kaip 180 susirinkimų. Viešųjų susirinkimų dalyviams nebuvo keliama jokių formalių reikalavimų. Susirinkimuose buvo pateikiamos ataskaitos apie Lietuvos, Estijos, Rusijos ir sąjungines knygos mokslo konferencijas, knygų muges bei parodas, buvo aptariamos knygų leidybos ir spausdinimo problemos Sovietų Sąjungoje ir užsienyje, taip pat šiuolaikinės knygos meno tendencijos. Labai dažnai susirinkimai prasidėdavo nuo rengiamų spaudai publikacijų vertinimo. Reikėtų pažymėti, kad dauguma pranešimų (jų iš viso buvo perskaityta 330) buvo skirti knygų leidybai ir spausdinimui (daugiau kaip 100) ir visi jie buvo aukštos kokybės. Aktualios nūdienės problemos buvo aptariamos daug rečiau (apie 50 pranešimų). Pasitaikė po keletą pranešimų knygos mokslo teorijos, knygos meno istorijos, knygos istorijos kitose šalyse, bibliografijos istorijos, santykių su kitomis šalimis knygos leidybos srityje, knygų prekybos istorijos, bibliotekininkystės, skaitymo sociologijos, rankraštinių knygų istorijos, cenzūros ir skaitymo psichologijos temomis. Dauguma susirinkimuose aptartų tyrimų vėliau buvo publikuota mokslinėje, populiariojoje spaudoje, taip pat kaip straipsniai laikraščiuose ir žurnaluose.

Devintajame dešimtmetyje moksliniai pristatymai ir diskusijos vyko vis rečiau. Dešimtmečio pabaigoje Valstybinė biblioteka atsisakė organizuoti susirinkimus ir perleido šią teisę Fundamentinei bibliotekai, kuri jau organizavo seriją panašių renginių, pavadintų „Misiņš klubs“. 1989 metų gruodžio mėnesio susirinkime buvo paskelbta, kad Komisija išgyvena krizę ir kad reikia grįžti prie istorinių tyrinėjimų. Paskutinis Komisijos susirinkimo protokolas datuotas 1990 metų gegužės 30 diena.

Komisija įtvirtino aukštus Latvijos knygos mokslo tyrimų standartus. Tyrimo darbų ir rengiamų publikacijų aptarimą būtų galima palyginti su pirminiu redagavimu. Tai leido tyrėjams patikslinti tyrimų metodologiją, publikacijų struktūrą, ištaisyti klaidas ir trūkumus. Komisijos veikla suteikė galimybę susipažinti su jau užbaigtų, bet dar nepublikuotų tyrimų rezultatais. Tai buvo ypač svarbu iš pradžių, kol periodinių leidinių sistema šioje srityje nebuvo išplėtota.

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