



Harvard's importation of foreign books since the war

Citation

Jones, Frank N. 1947. Harvard's importation of foreign books since the war. Harvard Library Bulletin I (2), Spring 1947: 256-260.

Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42672620>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

ence services centered in one building. Until the new library is built, improvisations with existing facilities will be continued, in an effort to pro-

vide the maximum of service now possible.

PHILIP J. McNIFF

Harvard's Importation of Foreign Books since the War

AS war spread across the world in the late thirties many libraries in the United States, including Harvard, asked agents abroad to hold for future shipment such books and periodicals as it might be impossible to forward on publication. The sudden shock of Pearl Harbor and subsequent events dislocated arrangements of this kind and left eventual coverage uncertain. Again, when war in Europe ended a bit more quickly than was anticipated, it had been impossible to work out in advance definite plans for reopening trade relations and restoring channels of acquisition.

Two years have now elapsed since fighting ended on the Continent. The first of those years was spent in formulating and getting into shape the machinery through which, during the past twelve months, a great quantity of European publications have been brought to American libraries. The situation except for Germany is now closer to its normal pre-war status. New methods have been developed in the acquisition of European imprints, and one project in particular did much to prevent high prices and offset competitive confusion. It is the purpose of this note to outline the channels through which material has been received at Harvard, and to give

a brief indication of its extent and variety.

The earliest shipments from what had been Nazi-dominated Europe to reach Cambridge after the war were received by the Harvard College Library during January 1946. These consisted of monographs for which orders had been placed previous to 1941, and of material published during the war years for which agents abroad had standing orders in the Library's name. Sweden, Holland, and Denmark were the countries of origin for these initial shipments. In March similar consignments came through from France, and, in the months immediately following, Italy, Belgium, Greece, and other countries were able to clear shipments. Booksellers' lists were received from Austria late in 1946 and it is expected that shipments from that country may reach Cambridge at any time. The situation with Germany is still bound up with official restrictions, but it is hoped that by the time this note appears Germany will be open for trade relations.

Some months before the earliest shipments arrived from Europe a project was organized called the Library of Congress Cooperative Acquisition Mission for Recent Foreign Publications, to which the Harvard

College Library lent initiative and support. The background of this experiment in cooperative purchasing, and the story of its work abroad have been fully set forth elsewhere.¹ Essentially the Mission was a coordination of effort in the public interest between government authorities responsible for the administration of post-war Germany and librarians in the United States responsible for obtaining the best available coverage of European imprints for the war years. The goal of this effort was to locate and secure in Europe the books which had survived, and get them to the United States without having to run a gauntlet of wasteful competition and ruinous fluctuation in the market for foreign books.

The work of collecting material and getting it shipped to Washington was done through the fall and winter of 1945-46 by a group of Library of Congress employees authorized to purchase extensively. While these operations were centered in Germany and a large proportion of the books obtained are of German origin, publications in Italian, French, Dutch, Flemish, Polish, Hungarian, and other languages were also acquired, making a total of several hundred thousand volumes. In the spring of 1946 distribution to over one hundred cooperating libraries was begun.

The distribution is governed by a list of two hundred and fifty-three subjects, from which each library was asked to select those in which it would be chiefly interested, and for which it would be willing to accept responsi-

bility as a purchaser of whatever was obtained. For some of the libraries with highly specialized collections only one or two subjects were of interest, while for the larger research centers far wider variety seemed desirable. Harvard holds first or second priorities in more than fifty subjects, and lower ratings in a large percentage of the remainder. In determining the final allocation geographical distribution and the importance of existing collections were given some weight by the committee which worked out the plan.

The first shipment from Washington of Library of Congress Mission books reached Harvard in May 1946. Since that time 17,650 volumes have been received through this channel. Of this number, more than 14,000 are already in use in the collections shelved in Widener, and 2,900 volumes have been deposited in the libraries of the Law School and the Graduate School of Business Administration. Smaller numbers have been distributed to the Medical School, the School of Engineering, the museums, laboratories, and other research agencies throughout the University Library system. Current shipments continue to bring in from fifteen hundred to two thousand volumes each month. If revised estimates hold it is expected that Harvard will receive eventually some fifty thousand items.

On the basis of approximately one third of the probable yield, a preliminary appraisal may be made of the intrinsic value of these books and periodicals. Much has been received of genuine scholarly value, and by the same standard much also of relatively little importance. There is an inevitable block of propaganda in many forms

¹ Reuben Peiss, 'European Wartime Acquisitions and the Library of Congress Mission,' *Library Journal*, LXXI (1946), 863-876, 911.

and there are official documents revealing something of the basic operations of the fascist powers. The physical make-up of the books is equally varied and includes leaflets on poor paper as well as beautifully illustrated books on fine paper, and very good examples of printing. In judging the results of this new and untested method of buying books under highly specialized conditions, it is well to bear in mind that everything printed in Europe during and immediately preceding the years of war is a part of the record of a period in European history for which no complete and consistent body of literature could be assembled while current. Material which is not appropriate to the working collections will be stored in the New England Deposit Library.

Books secured by the Mission have already added materially to Harvard's resources in general reference material and in the broad fields of literature and history. It is, however, in the special subject fields that the highest percentage of valuable and desirable books have thus far appeared. To the Law School have gone hundreds of volumes of German, French, and Italian codes, commentaries, and textbooks, which are of great interest to those concerned with comparative and international law. Among them are imprints dating back through the thirties and into the twenties, which, although occasionally duplicates, include books it would be difficult to find and more difficult to purchase on the market today. Important serial publications in the field of law have been received, but no volumes that might be considered exceptional as rarities.

Business and economics are liberally represented in the shipments. Text-

books and manuals on accounting and correspondence, sometimes at high school level, constitute a percentage which might well have been smaller for research purposes. More useful are volumes (including *Festschriften* and similar types) in which are found the histories of business corporations and their founders in Germany, Italy, France, and elsewhere. On the average the German books in the field of economics include more desirable items than do those of Italian or French origin, but single items of value have been received in most of the major languages of western Europe. The political and economic background of Italy's ambitious struggle for a modern empire is revealed in reports and statistical material as well as through propaganda intended for home consumption.

Many branches of the fields of fine arts and archaeology are covered, and some very good material has been obtained. It is unfortunate that books through the Mission have to be supplied without advance listing, since books on fine arts purchased during the past few months are now and then duplicated within a short time by the Mission. In this field noteworthy examples of the traditional German techniques in reproduction have come in, and many architectural studies, both modern and historical. Detailed information concerning notable buildings and other works of art damaged or destroyed will often be largely dependent on descriptive guides, exhibition catalogues, pamphlets, and lists, often of a relatively ephemeral nature. Shipments to date have not indicated that the Mission was able to secure as much as had been hoped for fulfilling this special need,

but such items are not altogether lacking and there is still opportunity for more in what is yet to be received. A number of the books on fine arts obtained through the Mission were included in an exhibition in Widener last September, illustrating the quality and variety of non-political publication in Europe during the war.

While in Europe, the representatives of the Mission were able to make arrangements with Russian and American authorities for releasing and shipping to the United States material held by dealers and publishers in Germany for delivery after the war. Russian sanction was necessary, as much of this material was stored in and near Leipzig, the headquarters of the Harrassowitz firm and other important houses. A portion, possibly one third of Harvard's anticipated amount, has been received in Cambridge. Included in this first lot, a total of several thousand pieces, are many short runs and some fairly substantial series of periodicals. Most of the items date from 1942 or earlier, and the bulk of them fall within scientific fields, although history, politics, business, literature, and philology are represented. Additional shipments are in preparation in Leipzig and Berlin which may reach Cambridge by the late spring or summer.

Including books obtained by the Library of Congress Mission and those secured since the war through other channels, Harvard now has a fair coverage of the European field. An example in one field gives some indication of its approximate completeness, although it probably indicates a coverage well above the average for most fields. The Library of the Fogg Museum recently checked a list of all

books known to have been published in France during 1939-45 which deal with fine arts, and found that Harvard has acquired seventy-five per cent. It is hoped, as fuller bibliographical information for the war years is made available, that a reasonably good coverage will appear for other fields.

Straight purchasing, of which the Library of Congress Mission was one form, has not been the only channel through which European books have come to Harvard since the war. An increasing number of the Library's foreign agents have begun to experiment with approval systems whereby it is possible to select or reject items forwarded for inspection and comparison. Piece for piece exchange arrangements are also being utilized by a few dealers, chiefly to overcome restrictions imposed on monetary exchange. Entirely non-commercial exchanges have been entered into with academic and research institutions in Europe, many in renewal of pre-war relationships, but on a larger scale. The most notable example of this kind of exchange was initiated by the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas in Madrid last autumn, when it sent to this country more than seven hundred volumes of recent Spanish scholarly books. Harvard selected approximately half of the collection, the rest going on to other American libraries designated by the Consejo. Similar plans for wholesale exchange are under discussion with appropriate bodies in France and England, and others are in prospect.

In July 1938 Harvard undertook a program of microfilming representative foreign newspapers. After 1939 wide gaps naturally began to appear in

many of the files covered by this program. Some of these gaps have been filled by the arrival, beginning early in 1946, of several large shipments of newspapers which had been systematically laid aside by the publishers during the war years. This is true for papers issued in Oslo, Copenhagen, Madrid, Zürich, Stockholm, Dublin, London, and Manchester, and others from New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa. In addition, the Library acquired, in February 1947, four tons of miscellaneous European newspapers which should not only supplement the publishers' shipments in the closing of gaps but also provide useful additions of titles not previously covered. Finally, Harvard has been purchasing negative microfilms from the Library of Congress and the University of Chicago of war-year files which might not otherwise be secured. Papers included were published in Rome, Paris, Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt, Rotterdam, Vienna, Budapest, Barcelona, and elsewhere on the Continent. In like form, files of *Pravda* and *Izvestia*

have been secured for the period from January 1940 through June 1946.

The most interesting and significant fact to be noted in connection with European importations at the present time is the extent to which war and subsequent conditions have acted as a catalyst in the development of new and untried methods. The business of securing books and periodicals from abroad for American libraries is entering a new stage in which the conventional ways of selecting titles and placing orders will be supplemented by other methods. With the experience gained through efforts to obtain coverage for the war years, libraries now approach the related problems of selectivity and inclusiveness with tools hitherto used on a limited basis. This should make possible needed simplifications in routine processes, and at the same time contribute toward a more efficiently integrated program for the distribution of research materials throughout the United States.

FRANK N. JONES

News of the Libraries

STAFF ACTIVITIES

DURING 1946-1947, the Director and the Head of the Catalogue Department in the College Library have been engaged in three projects of general significance on behalf of other libraries. In the summer of 1946 Mr Metcalf and Mr Osborn were asked to survey the work of the New York State Library, in conjunction with a proposal for a statewide system of regional libraries. Certain measures of reorganization

were recommended as a preliminary to the establishment of the State Library as the keystone in the system.

During the winter, Mr Metcalf served as chairman of a committee to consider basic policies for the Library of Congress. This library has already assumed many of the features of a national library, but it has not been recognized as such by the Congress. The 'charter' proposed by the committee defines purposes and services for the Library, establishes its central

List of Contributors

- KEYES D. METCALF, Professor of Bibliography, Director of the Harvard
Harvard University Library, and Librarian of Harvard College
- AGNES MONGAN, Keeper of Drawings in the William Hayes Fogg Museum of
Art, Harvard University
- CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON, Custodian of the Harvard University Archives;
Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society
- HAMILTON VAUGHAN BAIL, Deputy Treasurer of the Franklin Institute,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- REGINALD FITZ, Lecturer on the History of Medicine, University Marshal, and
Assistant to the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Harvard University
- ROBERT W. LOVETT, Assistant in the Harvard University Archives
- WILLIAM A. JACKSON, Professor of Bibliography and Assistant Librarian of the
Harvard College Library in charge of the Houghton Library
- ADRIANA R. SALEM, Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Harvard
College Library
- EVA FLEISCHNER, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, Massachusetts
- LOUISE B. GRAVES, Boston, Massachusetts
- PHILIP HOFER, Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College
Library
- PHILIP J. McNIFF, Superintendent of the Reading Room in the Harvard College
Library
- FRANK N. JONES, Administrative Assistant in the Harvard College Library