



International Leads

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Bulgarian Libraries: Before and After 1989

By Evelyn Weliver

In 1989 the Berlin Wall came down leading the way for democratic changes throughout Eastern Europe. Twenty years later in Bulgaria the government and leadership are evolving and libraries are struggling to get support, computers, databases, and space.

In May 2010, I visited several libraries in Bulgaria to learn what they experienced during the Communist rule after World War II and what the situation is today. I interviewed Aneta Doncheva, Deputy Director of the National Library and Vanya Grashkina, President of the Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA). They clearly appreciate the partnerships that Bulgarian librarians and American Library Association members have formed.

Interview with Aneta Doncheva, Deputy Director of the St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, Sofia, Bulgaria

EW (Evelyn Weliver): How are libraries different now from the way they were before 1989?

AD (Aneta Doncheva): Before 1989 there was a clear hierarchy under the Ministry of Culture and the major function of libraries was to educate about the ideologies of Communism. It was not important how much information or how many people received information because the information was controlled. Certain books weren't given to the people. The selection



The reading room at the St. St. Cyril and Methodius Library, Sofia, Bulgaria

of books was controlled. Yes, there was public access to the library, but the library could refuse to give you a book. Now the purpose of libraries is to inform, educate and provide free access to books and databases.

EW: How would the government know what you bought?

AD: The book orders went through the state and a special budget for purchasing books. Then the books were sent to the library. A special report was made to the state. We were forbidden to buy many foreign books, but libraries got some foreign books by exchanging books from their libraries for books of the same value with foreign libraries.

EW: Have you received help from other libraries since 1989?

AD: After 1989 there has been much

helpful cooperation with American libraries and the American Library Association (ALA). They have contributed to our way of thinking and ways of problem solving. This has been a very difficult adjustment. They have helped people have a higher esteem for doing the work of librarians and for their position in society.

Doncheva was referring to the ABLE project (American-Bulgarian Library Exchange) that was formed in 2003 to "provide online community information centers," develop partnerships between libraries and "increase understanding and support by the Bulgarian government and community leaders for the role of libraries in a democratic society."

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Message from the Editor

This issue starts with an interesting article from Evelyn Weliver, who writes about the differences in Bulgarian libraries between 1989 and now. It's great to see how much the libraries there have developed, in large part due to the efforts of partnerships. Proof that an international partnership can have long-term effects!

The other article comes from Dr. Amany Zakaria El-Ramady, a faculty member at the Library and Information Science Department of the University of Egypt in Alexandria. Dr. El-Ramady writes about the work done by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina to support the development of civil society in Egypt during the revolution earlier this year. It is wonderful to see a library at the center of this type of public discussion.

It is June yet again, which means ALA Annual is just around the corner! For those making last-minute plans, the schedule of IRRT and IRC events is on page 8. I wish all attendees a successful conference!

Most of the events at both the Annual and Midwinter conferences

could not happen without the work of the many volunteers needed. I urge every IRRT member to consider volunteering as a committee member. IRRT relies on its members to make it such a great round table—we need YOU!

Other interesting bits of news... If you are going to be at Annual, maybe you'll run into Mr. Yohannes Gebregeorgis, who will be receiving an honorary membership in recognition of his work to bring literacy to Ethiopia.

I will not be at Annual this year, as I am currently overseas for the summer. Moreover, this is my very last issue as Editor of *International Leads*. Come September, a new Editor will be filling these pages with interesting stories about librarianship from around the world. This person will be chosen at Annual, and I wish him or her all the best! It's been a great experience and I appreciate all the Chairs who have supported my effort, and especially Delin Guerra, proofreader extraordinaire. Thank you all!

~ Rebecca L. Miller

Call for Submission

Do you have news about...

- International library activities?
- People in international librarianship?
- Upcoming international conferences?
- International partnerships between libraries?

Then why not submit it to *International Leads*?
Send your news to intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com
for consideration.

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A Case Study of Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Supporting the Egyptian Revolution

By Amany Zakaria El-Ramady

Editor's note: The effects of the revolution on Egyptian libraries were described in an article in the last issue. Now, Dr. El-Ramady examines the contribution of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in support of political and societal development.

Libraries are social entities: for society they are established, and by society they are supported. The ALA stated “*Libraries are the mind and soul of their communities, and librarians are the mind and soul of the library.*” For this reason, libraries should keep pace with societal change.

Speaking about Egypt's tremendous societal, economic, and political changes wrought by the 2011 revolution that took place following a popular uprising beginning on January 25th, Egyptian libraries should be the mind and soul of the new Egyptian community. Fortunately, one of the Egyptian libraries that took the initiative was Bibliotheca Alexandrina. In this study all the activities and programs held by this distinguished library to support the Egyptian people from the outbreak of the revolution to the end of April 2011 are studied.

The Egyptian revolution's events are still going on. These events have had many good and bad effects on the Egyptian society. Libraries in Egypt, for many reasons, have been a marginal aid for society in the incidents, except for the largest library in Egypt—Bibliotheca Alexandrina—which has played an important supporting role in these circumstances by providing a variety of activities and programs.

The last symposium at Bibliotheca Alexandrina before the beginning of the revolution was held on December 23rd and the topic was cancer cells and nanoparticles. The revolution broke

out on January 25th and the library was temporarily closed. On February 8th, three days before Mubarak stepped down and with the revolution still going full on, the library held the first of many symposia to keep pace with societal events. Although the timing may have seemed strange, the symposium on January 25th was attended by many. The library then started hosting regular events on March 5th, supporting the revolution.

The library hosted 18 symposia, 3 workshops, 3 lectures, 1 conference, 1 photo exhibit, 1 volunteering initiative, and 1 musical event from February 8th to April 30th. There were a total of 28 activities in three months, of which April was the most active and effective. After February 11th, Egyptian society began to regain its normal life alongside with the continuous revolution, and Egyptians decided to protest only on Fridays in order not to disrupt work.

Bibliotheca Alexandrina has supported the political development of Egyptian society by hosting several events and presentations concentrating on politics, comprising over one-third of the programs. This is logical, because Egyptians are in great need of political awareness and the political activities were a great help for Egyptians to comprehend the political issues arising every day since the revolution breakout. Moreover, the next most common topics were social work, a crucial topic for supporting the revolution, and human development and culture, very important for the present phase of revolution. Other topics included geography, economy, Islamic religion, Islamic movements, literature, and geology. Interestingly, although the role of social media was critical during the revolutions, presentations about the media were few.

Bibliotheca Alexandrina is equipped with three big halls and a theatre, which enable it to hold symposia, conferences, and lectures at the same time. Moreover, its general director, Dr. Ismail Serageldin, believes that “dialogue is the best way for development,” as he said in one of the symposia. All activities were held in Arabic, which was suitable as these events were for the Egyptian people. Only the symposium titled “The Role of Youth in Politics” was not given in Arabic, because many of the speakers were Swedish.

The library hosted several scientists, politicians, and think tanks, and three of the most popular speakers were Amr Khaled, Mohamed Salim El Awa, and Belal Fadl. It also hosted two of the most distinguished scientists in Egypt, Farouk El Baz and Mamdouh Hamza. The presentations attracted many attendees, mostly young men. Even at the symposium held on February 8th. The most attended symposium was the one presented by Amr Khaled, where the main big hall in addition to the three other halls and theatre were full, and no wonder, because he is a very popular preacher in Egypt and in the Arab World.

All the activities at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina were open to the whole public for free. Moreover, all symposia are available online, in video recordings through Bibliotheca Alexandrina's Webcast (<http://webcast.bibalex.org/home/More.aspx?ID=2>), except for the ones marked with an asterisk in table (1). The activities were marketed in many ways, including on the official website of Bibliotheca Alexandrina (http://www.bibalex.org/home/default_ar.aspx), on its offi-

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Bulgaria

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Bob Anderson was Project Director and Nancy Bolt was Project Manager, both ALA members in the United States, while in Bulgaria Iskra Mahailova was Project Manager. They received grants from the United States Department of State and as part of the project librarians exchanged visits. Ani Popova, Bulgarian librarian, says in her evaluative report that librarians visiting the United States “learned the way American citizens participate in society...that the citizen himself, not the state government, is an architect of his/her way of life.”

Results from the ABLE project included a handbook written for use in training core leaders. Then the leaders trained others in leadership and marketing and focused on developing community information centers in Bulgarian libraries. During the first Bulgarian National Library Week in 2006, government officials and community leaders were invited into libraries to see the programs and resources being offered that help people with social issues and education. A web portal with over 700 sites was developed that libraries could link to. <http://www.ableportal.bg/bg/index-bg.html>

Currently there is an ongoing project with The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Working with the United Nations Development Programme named Glob@l Libraries, they have awarded a \$15 million dollar grant (2009-2013) to Bulgarian public libraries in order to provide free Internet access to 900 libraries, a bilingual Internet portal, and training. Microsoft will donate software. The Bulgarian government is providing \$29 million and is committed to maintaining the program. The project is “designed to facilitate the access of citizens to information, knowledge, communication, e-content and community services.” By July 2010, 455 public libraries had been selected and 120 trainers had attended training sessions.

When I visited in May there were very few computers available for research in the St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library. Banks of wooden card catalogs fill corners of the halls even though they have an online catalog. Several librarians told me emphatically that they “maintain the card catalogs for their older patrons.”

The collection includes many rare books including extensive archives from the Ottoman Empire, many Slavic manuscripts, and copies of books published in Bulgaria. Patrons request books at various desks; they are retrieved from packed “depository rooms” and checked out to be used in the library. The library was built in 1953 for 100 staff and one million books. Some additional storage has been provided for the expanding collection of seven million items, but not enough for it and the current staff of 200. Plans exist for expanding the 1953 building, but no money is available. Refurbishing and expansion is needed in many of the libraries.

www.nationallibrary.bg

The National Library contributes digital images to several libraries and has started the process of contributing to the European Digital Library: Europeana. When Bulgaria joined the European Union in 2007, funds were made available to them for this project. The European Commission’s Purpose is “to gather cultural heritage items of all European countries.” <http://www.europeana.eu/portal/aboutus.html>

Interview with Vanya Grashkina, President of the Bulgarian Library and Information Association (BLIA) www.lib.bg and Executive Director of the National Centre for Information and Documentation, Sofia, Bulgaria.

EW (Evelyn Weliver): How are libraries different now from the way they were before 1989?

VG (Vanya Grashkina): Before 1989 there was a clear organizational system and lots of money from the state. Libraries were part of the system to influence people’s minds about the Communist ideology. Now school libraries are under the Ministry of

Education and public libraries are under the Ministry of Culture. We have to educate parliament about the importance of libraries. Under socialism they realized their importance and supported them with good funding.

When I worked for the National Library Methodological Centre I traveled around the country visiting many libraries. There were very strong rules for them. If a person checked out a book, such as a novel, they also had to check out a book about Marxism or Lenin. It was part of the state machine, but there was a lot of money for books.

EW: How did the government know what was checked out?

VG: We had to report the call numbers of books that were checked out.

EW: During the Communist period it was very difficult for people to leave the country. This limited participation in international organizations. **What is the situation now?**

VG: Now a number of Bulgarian librarians are active in the International Federation of Library Associations and lead various sections of it.”

We also talked about public and school libraries. I shared with her that many of our states provide quality online databases, free of cost, to all citizens through the libraries, including school libraries. In 2009 a Bulgarian law for public libraries was passed to help regulate their organization, financing and activities.

EW: Is there legislation for school libraries?

VG: We need to have a law for school libraries. Many school libraries are not open all day and most do not have trained librarians. They are only open for library information activities.

Librarians in Bulgaria know that there is still much to be done and they are very capable of doing it. They are working with government officials and legislators, making international connections, and obtaining funding. Librarians and libraries are functioning very differently since 1989.

Egypt

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cial Facebook group (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=258460335134>), and its page on Twitter (http://twitter.com/#!/ba_news_events). The library also announced the activities on Alexandria radio, and with an extensive print campaign with brochures and posters in the library entrance and outside the library, like at prestigious social clubs and cultural centers in Alexandria.

The findings of this study demonstrate that Bibliotheca Alexandrina is actively and effectively going along with Egypt’s societal change and requirements during the revolution since its breakout, with a wide range of beneficial activities that are growing in number while the revolution is making progress. Bibliotheca Alexandrina has provided “Information for sustainable development; which can, thus, support the process of creating a truly sustainable society in a variety of different ways.”

Certain recommendations can be drawn from this short history of the events held at Bibliotheca Alexandrina in February - April. First, the library should continue its activities to support the Egyptian society’s development, by providing information on important subjects needed at the present stage of revolution. Topics suggested for upcoming symposia are: lessons learned from the revolution for children and youth; how to keep the January 25th revolution ethics and relations among Egyptian people, especially between Muslims and Christians; how to overcome unemployment among Egyptian youth after the revolution; and how Egyptians can rely on local resources to support the economic development and pay off the international debts of Egypt.

Second, more human development activities are needed for the present stage of revolution to support the Egyptian youth in particular.

Third, the activities under study need to integrate with reading lists selected from the Bibliotheca Alex-

andrina’s holdings. These lists should include information resources on: economy, politics, Islam, Islamic movements, human development, history (especially Arab and Islamic), geography, and the Arab world. The Website of Bibliotheca Alexandrina should market these reading lists alongside with the other activities.

Fourth, webinars should also be held by Bibliotheca Alexandrina to reach out to Egyptians who live outside Alexandria or even outside of Egypt, to give them the chance to exchange ideas and get answers to their questions.

Finally, other Egyptian libraries should follow the example of Bibliotheca Alexandrina in supporting the Egyptian society for the coming phase of the revolution.

Dr. El-Ramady is faculty member in the Library and Information Science Department at the University of Egypt-Alexandria

Table 1: Titles of symposia held at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina since February 8, 2011.

*April 30	Media and the 25 th of January Revolution
* April 30	Program on political education: The revolution and the missing commitments
* April 26	Literature and revolutions
April 26	Your dream is your life!
April 21	The political future in Egypt
April 18	The people and police together to restore security and stability
* April 17	The geographical redistribution of the population in Egypt
April 11	The launch of volunteering: change management
April 10	The development pathways and the future of Egypt
April 7	The role of youth in politics
April 1	The role of youth in the revolution after 25 th of January
March 29	The democracy storm in the Arab countries
March 24	Constitutional and legitimacy issues
March 23	The future of “The Muslim Brotherhood Group”
March 16	The 25 th of January Revolution
March 5	The 25 th of January Revolution
February 8	The Egyptian Constitution

ALA Sends Condolences to Japan Library Association After Earthquakes Strike Country

ALA President Roberta Stevens and Executive Director Keith Michael Fiels sent a letter to the Japan Library Association offering ALA's condolences and support in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

Addressed to President Noboru Shiomi and Executive Director Kaname Matsuoka, the letter read:

"We were deeply distressed to hear the news today about the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. On behalf of the American Library Association, we would like to extend our condolences for those who have lost their lives in these terrible disasters. Please know that ALA members around the world are concerned about our friends and colleagues in your nation. We stand ready to support the Japan Library Association in whatever way we can to help the recovery efforts."



Free Worldwide Virtual Conference on the State of Libraries Slated for November 2-3, 2011

Just announced, the Library 2.011 worldwide virtual conference will be held November 2-3, 2011. The conference will be held online, in multiple time zones, over the course of two days, and will be free to attend.

The Library 2.011 conference will be a unique chance to participate in a global conversation on the current and future state of libraries. Subject strands will include:

- the changing roles of libraries and librarians,
- the increasing impact of digital media and the e-book revolution,
- open educational resources,
- digital literacy,
- shifts from information consumption to production (Web 2.0),
- multimedia and gaming spaces,
- libraries as community centers,
- the growth of individualized and self-paced learning,
- the library as the center of new learning models,

- understanding users in the digital age,
- assessing service delivery, and
- defining leadership and information professional careers in a networked and changing world.

The conference website will be hosted at <http://www.Library2011.net>.

Please sign up at the site to receive email updates as conference plans move forward. The call for presentation submissions will go out July 5. Needed are conference volunteers, commercial and non-commercial partners, and conference advisory panel members! Please indicate any interests in participating when regis-



Update: Albuquerque (New Mexico) - Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) Sister City / Sister Library Partnership

The Sister City relationship between Albuquerque (New Mexico) and Ashgabat (Turkmenistan) has blossomed into a Sister Libraries exchange. When a delegation from Albuquerque visited Turkmenistan in October 2009, they brought books donated from Costco stores in Albuquerque. These books were presented to the National Library of Turkmenistan from their Sister City at a ceremony in Ashgabat last spring.

Recently, a large shipment of books arrived from the Turkmen National Library and were presented to representatives from the Univer-

sity of New Mexico Library, Director of Collections Development Steve Harris; Central New Mexico Community College Library Director, Ben Wakashije and Outreach Coordinator Olivia Baca and Albuquerque Public Library Director, Dean Smith. The Ashgabat Committee celebrated Persian New Year, known as Nowruz in Turkmenistan and other countries around the region, with this donation.

Plans are being made for the Sister Cities/Sister Libraries project to host a Librarian from Turkmenistan in the not too distant future.



For more information about this project read the article by Alana McGrattan in the September 2010 issue of *International Leads*. For more information about the Sister Cit-

ies program in Albuquerque visit their website at <http://albuquerque-sister-cities.org/>

Yohannes Gebregeorgis to Receive Honorary Membership to American Library Association

Yohannes Gebregeorgis will be receiving Honorary Membership to the American Library Association in New Orleans during the opening session of the ALA annual conference. Honorary Membership is the highest honor bestowed by ALA on an individual.

In 2008 Mr. Gebregeorgis was named a TOP 10 CNN Hero for his work in bringing libraries and literacy to his native Ethiopia. Throughout his career, Mr. Gebregeorgis has overseen the establishment of over 40 school library partnerships, three free-standing children's libraries and seven donkey mobile libraries.

He received the Presidential Citation for International Innovation in 2008 from ALA President—and his former professor—Loriene Roy, and was invited by ALA President Camila Alire to present the Presidential Keynote in Boston in 2010. Later

that same year, he was honored with an Honorary Doctorate in Public Service at Regis University, in Denver, Colorado. And most recently, he was featured in "Changing the World: Stories Celebrating 100 Years of Graduate Education at the University of Texas at Austin," published by the University of Texas Press.

In recent years, Mr. Gebregeorgis established the Tigray Library and Literacy Development Project, under which he set up the Segenat Children and Youth Library in Mekelle, Tigray Region, Ethiopia. This gained the attention of *American Libraries* editor, Leonard Kniffel, who wrote about his work in an article: <http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/news/08232010/new-youth-library-ethiopia-makes-impossible-dream-reality>

In addition to his beloved book, "Silly Mamma," Mr. Gebregeorgis has writ-

ten a new children's book, "Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda: An Ethiopian Girl's Festival."

Mr. Gebregeorgis will be available throughout the upcoming conference, attending all of the IRRT events and the International Librarians' reception. He would most welcome conversation and sharing ideas about collaboration in bringing libraries and literacy to all regions of the world.

Celebrate this honor with Mr. Gebregeorgis by commenting on his wall on his Facebook Page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Yohannes-Gebregeorgis/38777207917>

More information about the Segenat Children and Youth Library at: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Segenat-Children-and-Youth-Library/161388783881687>

IRRT Announces Recipients of the 2011 ALA Presidential Citations for Innovative International Library Projects

The International Relations Round Table (IRRT) announced four recipients of the ALA Presidential Citations for Innovative International Library Projects for 2011. These awards recognize the following exemplary services.

- The RISE Videoconferencing Network of Alberta, Canada, for providing continuing education and information services to more than 500,000 people living in 89 municipalities and a geographic area of 35,500 square miles;
- The National Library Board of Singapore for its “Quest” Library Reading Program, involv-

ing 130,000 children in a reading program including collectible cards and an online portal;

- The E-Publication System Platform Project at the National Central Library in Taiwan for the design and implementation of an innovative e-publication platform that promotes digital reading through integrating legal deposit, digital rights management, full-text transferring, and circulation for e-books;
- The Expanding Information Access for Visually Impaired People project in Vietnam for forming collaborations to expand services to the visually impaired to more

than 100 libraries and organizations including launching a mobile library and 11 mini-libraries and training in countries including Laos, Cambodia, Kenya, and Kazakhstan.

Recipients will be recognized by ALA President Roberta Stevens at the 2011 International Librarians Reception on Monday evening, June 27, 2011.

The ALA Presidential Citation for Innovative International Library Projects began as an ALA Presidential initiative of Dr. Loriene Roy, ALA President in 2007-2008. For more information about the Citations, including the nomination and selection process, please visit the IRRT website.

Dear IRRT Member:

Please accept our apology for the delay of the June 2011 issue and thank you for your patience. If you have any questions, please contact the International Relations office at intl@ala.org or 312-280-3201.

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