

The Collection and Databases of Estonian Literature in Exile in the Tallinn University Academic Library

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Considering their collections, the archives of Estonian literature in exile operating outside Estonia are archives, libraries and museums, all in one; in this respect this article is about only a small part of the cultural inheritance of the Estonians living outside Estonia, namely the collection and databases of the Estonian literature in exile in one of the largest libraries of Estonia – the Tallinn University Academic Library.

The works of Estonian authors published abroad were strictly locked away from Estonians in their native country for nearly half a century, throughout the Soviet occupation during 1944–1991. However, as the published literature is the most durable form of cultural heritage, the literary works produced in exile have survived and are available for us in considerably great number of copies up to the present time. The Estonian community in exile has published in the free world over 4,000 works of significant impact for the Estonian culture plus more than 500 titles of periodicals. Without those publications the memory of Estonians pertaining to their history would have certainly been cut off.

In the recently published first volume of the collected letters of Eduard Tubin we can read, “Any nation would disappear and perish without believing in the strength of its culture.” That particular strength of the culture was superbly recognized by the Estonians in exile, otherwise they would not have diligently recorded in hard copy all the facts and issues that were considered of special importance for Estonian history and culture.

Attempts were made to deliver the exile publications to the native country by the official postal service, but in most cases those consignments did not reach the receiver. Book packages were confiscated already at the postal service. Still, in some way or other those books managed to infiltrate through the iron curtain and reached their readers in firmly limited dissident and culturally minded circles.

At the beginning of the seventies it was devised by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the ESSR that it would be expedient to give the confiscated publications over to a larger library. It is suspected that the originator of the idea was Felix Kauba, the Director of the Library of the Academy of Sciences of that time, who was a renowned connoisseur and lover of books. A considerable amount of the printed matter, published by the Estonians in exile, had been assembled at various public offices of the Estonian SSR, such as the Propaganda Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Security Committee and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and their maintenance became troublesome. The idea to assemble the publications of exile into a library was definitely outstanding, since by this means their preservation was secured. Otherwise a considerable part of the invaluable printed heritage might have been lost. First and foremost it holds true for periodicals. It was decided, in consequence of negotiations held among the functionaries of the Communist Party, the Board of the Academy of Sciences and the Director of the Library of the Academy of Sciences of that time, that the books would be given over to the library of the Academy of Sciences and a respective department of restricted access would be established in the structure of the library. A small collection of the printed matter of exile was at the library already, since books that had been sent to the members and employees of the Academy of Sciences from abroad but not delivered to the addressees on account of their forbidden content, had been handed over to the library.

A decisive factor turned out to be the location of the library. It was situated directly opposite the headquarters of the Communist Party (the present building of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs) that made the further accessibility of the publications easy. Instructions for the storage conditions were received from Moscow – the rooms had to be placed behind iron doors and under alarm system and their windows had to be provided with bars. The depository had to be isolated from the reading room. However, it was managed to have the windows without bars, as the room was located on the second floor.

In 1972 it was decided to form a department of special custody at the Library of the Academy of Sciences, which constituted the basis for the present Collection of Estonian Literature in Exile held by the Tallinn University Academic Library. Publications were assembled in the collection during 1973 and library services were started in 1974. The publications of exile that were kept in the Sector of the Archival Collection were allowed to be used exclusively on the strength of special permits and the observance of the precept was strictly examined by local censorship authorities and once a year by functionaries from Moscow. It was not permitted to have reference facilities of any kind, yet the leaders of the Communist Party steadily requested for information, which called for the card indices. For that reason, the employees of the department started to compile a card file for persons of interest from the political point of view, comprising, alongside with biographical particulars, also data on the publications related to that person. Special attention was dedicated to their anti-Soviet activities. The card file has been preserved in the present Reading Room of Estonian Literature in Exile to this day. Although the department of special custody was a structural unit of the library, its functions and work were not reflected in the reports of the library.

On their arrival into the library, publications were tagged by censorship authorities as follows: a triangle for books permitted to be held in the general collection – reprints of the works of Estonian classic authors, published in exile, and lots of translations of foreign authors, issued by the publishing house Orto as well as books by a few Estonian authors, namely Gert Helbemäe, Karl Ristikivi, Bernard Kangro and some others; a hexagon for forbidden literature, and a double hexagon for extremely forbidden books (this category included the works of Arved Viirlaid for one, but also several volumes of political content like “Eesti riik ja rahvas Teises maailmasõjas”, “Eesti saatuseaastad 1945–1960” and many others). Now and then flaws occurred in the work of the censorship authorities – separate copies of books have been tagged differently and the copies of one and the same title have been tagged with a triangle, a hexagon and even with double hexagon over time.

Where from did those publications come to the library? Many of the books were in all probability from the confiscated postal packages. Torn title pages refer to dedications, which can never be restored any more and give evidence of works that were sent to compatriots from abroad, and yet never reached them. We may assume that part of the publications was acquired from foreign embassies, and there were books that had been sent to libraries by Estonian publishing houses and authors in exile. Annual volumes of newspapers were obtained from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Security Committee.

Deregulation of the special collections of restricted access was started in 1988, upon the receipt of the earliest corresponding signals from Moscow. A letter, pertaining to the transfer of the publications to the general collection arrived on March 24, 1988. It was not a directive of the Minister of Culture of the USSR, but a relatively unpretentious letter of the First Deputy Minister, N. P. Silkova. After that letter, a couple of corresponding directives of the Ministry of Culture were issued in Estonia – to release the special collections of restricted access, i.e. books published during the period of capitalism and occupation (April 4, 1988),

and the periodicals of the mentioned periods (June 8, 1988). Naturally, the occupation meant was the German one.

A regulation of the State Committee of Cultural Affairs of the ESSR, concerning the release of the special collections of restricted access and meaning the whole production of printed matter in Estonia during the period of capitalism and occupation, was issued on November 29, 1988. The literature in exile was reached on December 2, 1988. It was exempted from restrictions on use by a regulation. Among others, open access was provided to the department of special custody of the Library of the Academy of Sciences, including the sector of its archival collection, which was kept under particularly rigid supervision, encompassing among other things the requirement for the authorization of the Central Committee of the ESSR to get access to its holdings.

The department of special custody was headed until 1988 by the so-called “number one anti-propagandist of the Soviet Estonia”, Andrus Roolaht who is the author of the final five volumes of the collection “Eesti riik ja rahvas Teises maailmasõjas” published in Estonia (the previous ones had been published in Sweden). The volumes of Roolaht are misleading falsifications, imparting a Russian-minded appraisal of World War II. He has also composed three minor propagandist books under the heading of “Eesti emigrantide saatusaastad” that were published under the name of Rein Kordes.

When I started my career at the Library of the Academy of Sciences in 1989, public interest in the Estonian exile literature had reached its peak. The collection of literature started to increase with brisk speed. Books and periodicals arrived from foreign libraries, organizations, archives, as well as from private persons. While in 1989 the Collection of Estonian Literature in Exile comprised approx. 2,000 titles of books in 8,726 copies, by January 1, 2006 the overall size of the Collection was 31,300 copies of 4,600 titles of books. The annual volumes of Estonian exile periodicals, amounting to 650 titles, are of special importance and heavily used as well. For the moment the Collection of Estonian Literature in Exile, held at the Academic Library of TLU has been acknowledged as the leading respective collection in Estonia with respect to its completeness and systematization level. I dare say that the same holds true for the whole world as it accumulates publications that have been issued in all the host countries of Estonians and incorporates especially scarce publications of the refugee camps and other rarities. But the *desiderata* list of the Estonian literature in exile comprises still more than a thousand titles up to the present time. The missing publications do not belong to the production of large publishing houses, but are constituted of books that were issued in refugee camps in small number of copies during the first years of exile as well as books of exile authors in foreign languages, treatises, books published by individuals, publications of organizations, etc. Their attainability becomes increasingly more complicated year by year as quite many of them have not been preserved. Still, hundreds of significant books and periodicals have been obtained in recent years by addressing the authors and bibliophiles outside Estonia (lists of missing books and periodicals have been published in Estonian newspapers of various foreign countries).

The present Sector of Estonian Literature in Exile is not confining its activities to the acquisition, storage and lending of publications but is also involved in an extensive reference work in accordance with everyday requirements. Biographical data of the Estonians living outside Estonia are frequently required, for Estonian reference books have provided absolutely no information about them for a long time. In the beginning, information was obtained from the afore-mentioned *personalia* card file of Estonian politicians and cultural figures living outside Estonia, which was further complemented with biographical data of other persons. The card file of outstanding Estonians living outside Estonia comprises approx. 10,000 cards and it enables to reply to numerous enquiries by other libraries, museums,

publishers and individuals. Assistance has been granted to compilers of various reference books, in particular, biographical lexicons. Enquiries from abroad have become regular as well. Data requests are primarily related to biographical data particulars, but include publications and other particulars as well. Data input to the electronic database VEPER was started in July 2004, and it is available for public on the Internet since May 2005. More than 600 individuals have been included in the ontogenetic database of the Estonians, living outside Estonia for the moment.

Analytical bibliographies of periodicals and compendiums, published outside Estonia, have been compiled since 1990. The content of received newspapers is reflected consecutively, a respective bibliography (1959–1971) has been prepared for “Eesti Päevaleht”, which is published in Sweden. Since 2003 the articles of received periodicals have been entered into the database VEART, which comprises more than 6,500 entries, pertaining to articles from Estonian periodicals, published in various countries outside Estonia.

The database VEILU contains foreign language titles of fictional literature by Estonian authors living outside Estonia, which have been published abroad starting from 1944. The database includes over 400 entries.

The compilation of VETEADUS, the database of the scholarly publications of Estonians living outside Estonia, was started in 2005 and over 500 records have been entered for the moment.

The referred databases are available on the web site of the Tallinn University Academic Library www.tlulib.ee/originaalandmebaasid.

The Collection of Estonian Literature in Exile of the Academic Library of TLU together with its databases are unique in the context of Estonia as well as the whole world, as no other memory institution in Estonia or outside holds a collection and databases assembling Estonian exile publications of all the diverse host countries. Lively interest in the literature of exile lead to the compilation of several bibliographies, among them a selected list of Estonian authors outside Estonia (“Väliseesti kirjanikke”), a selected list of memoirs by Estonians living outside Estonia (“Mälestusteraamatuid väliseestlastelt”), personal bibliographies of Kalju Lepik, August Mälk, Karl Ristikivi, Marie Under and the personal bibliography of Gustav Suits jointly with the Estonian Literary Museum. A two-volume monograph “Väliseestlaste kirjastustegevus välismaal 1944-2000” was completed in 2003 as the Doctor’s Thesis of the author of this article. The second volume of the publication includes the list of titles, published in various countries by Estonian publishing houses, organizations and individuals, living or operating outside Estonia. The literary legacy of Estonian scientists, scholars and cultural figures living outside Estonia as well as Estonian books and periodicals, published in various countries have been displayed on exhibitions. These have also been organized to celebrate the anniversaries or other notable dates and events of renowned Estonian cultural figures and institutions outside Estonia.

In order to secure the preservation of rare publications held in the collections of Estonian literature from outside Estonia for the following generations, microfilming of the most significant Estonian exile newspapers from the point of view of national culture was started in the framework of the project “Preservation of National Cultural Properties” launched in 1998 as a joint project of larger Estonian archives and libraries. For the moment 6 newspaper titles (“Välis-Eesti”, “Teataja”, “Eesti Post”, “Võitleja”, “Meie Kodu”, “Eesti Päevaleht”) have been recorded on microfilm for back-up copies. Preparation of digital copies of those newspapers by means of scanning the microfilm copies was started in 2005. The newspapers “Välis-Eesti”, “Eesti Post” and “Võitleja” will be available on the Internet in the immediate future.

The spirited activities of the Estonian refugees extended over half a century. They aspired after the preservation of their nation and culture at any cost and their aspiration was manifested by the highly enthusiastic foundation and operation of publishing houses, schools, archives and lots of other organizations. The printed heritage is a unique cultural property, whereby every researcher can acquire information on the culture in exile. The activities of the employees of the Sector of Estonian Literature in Exile are dedicated to the establishment of the basis that would sustain those studies – the formation of as complete a collection of Estonian literature from outside Estonia as possible, the compilation of databases, the digitization of the collections. The firm readership and steadily growing number of enquiries prove that our efforts have not been wasted.

The matter concerning the right location of the Estonian exile archives has been discussed now and then. Should they stay in the host countries of Estonians or be in Estonia? There is no unanimous answer to the question. Only the holders of the archives are in the position to determine where the mental riches they have accumulated should be kept. The existence of the archives of exile Estonian communities is of great impact for Estonian culture, therefore it is of importance that they have good preservation conditions and are kept in order on a regular basis. Quite many Estonian memory institutions are ready to take that consequential part of the national cultural heritage under their custody in case the maintenance of the collections should be problematic, and this has already been the case on several occasions. At the same time, the opportunity to preserve our cultural properties at different locations of the world is highly praiseworthy considering the dangerous situation of our world.

The majority of the users of the heritage of the Estonian communities outside Estonia are inevitably living in Estonia, but the open world is exerting no restrictions to the use of the archives outside the home country.

Having visited all the Estonian archives abroad, I cannot but admire the enormous amount of work, which has been bestowed to their creation, all the more as it has been done by pure enthusiasm, wishing to keep up the national culture. No support has been received from the Estonian state as yet.

At this point I would like to express my sincere gratitude to each and every creator and keeper of the archives of the communities outside Estonia!

Translated by Anne Lange