New Technologies in Russian Cartographic Libraries

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Only two years separate us from the third millennium. The most important feature of our time is the pervasive spread of information in society, with new technologies being promptly introduced in all fields of activity. This phenomenon could not pass by national libraries. It should be noted, however, that libraries are probably the most conservative institutions, and the older and richer a library is, the more difficult are the problems of its modernization. This observation has certain peculiarities with regard to cartographic libraries.

ACQUISITION

As to acquisition, more and more cartographic materials appear on CD-ROMs. Presently, libraries receive both foreign and domestic manufacture and their number constantly grows. We already have topographic maps of Russia, its separate regions, and cities. Unfortunately, publishing houses do not include these products into the flow of complimentary copies sent to national libraries according to the Russian legal deposit law, and we have to buy them. There are even more problems with purchase of modern foreign editions. The cartographic departments have a number of electronic reference databases compiled at the library for the readers' convenience. They present various reference data on St. Petersburg, Moscow, etc.

CATALOGUING

In the field of cataloguing, the main task is compiling electronic catalogues. At the same time, traditional cards are being written, as we are not yet going to abandon them altogether. The State Library in Moscow began automated

processing of foreign maps in the 1980s and published summary catalogues of foreign maps present in Russian libraries. The information presently stored will be uploaded to the electronic catalogue using the software system MECA-LABIC, on the basis of the ISBD format. At the National Library in St. Petersburg, automated processing of maps and atlases has been done since 1994 on the basis of their own temporary system. The electronic catalogue already lists about 1,400 items and is available on the Internet. Now, in connection with the necessity of a unified inter-library system, the cartographic department is completing development of the RUSMARK format for cartographic materials. This format is based on UNIMARC, but is also adapted to the Russian rules of bibliographic description. As soon as this work is completed the existing database will be converted into the new format. Development of computer processing of records has started at the Library of the Academy of Sciences and a number of other archives.

As it is evident from everything said above, the materials in various libraries get electronically processed in different formats. This is the result of different technological opportunities as well as the absence of a national processing format. We consider it a flaw and are hoping to overcome this antiquated practice so the RUSMARK format can be introduced to Russian libraries.

THE RETROCONVERSION OF THE CATALOGUES

Here, of importance is the initial condition of traditional catalogues. At the State Library in Moscow, the catalogues are mainly printed cards, which can be converted into the electronic form via scanning. For that, the most demanding part of the task is the standardisation of descriptions written at various times. At the National Library in St. Petersburg, where the cartographic collection has existed for already two centuries, the problem is much more complicated. Along with printed cards, there is a significant number of typewritten and hand-written ones which makes scanning impossible, and the conversion can only be done manually with simultaneous editing of the descriptions. The resulting electronic catalogue is to include more than 180,000 maps and atlases. The retrospective conversion program is presently under development, and will be carried out after the bibliographic format RUSMARK finally gets introduced.

THE CREATION OF SERVICES FOR ELECTRONIC DATABASES

Of primary concern are the databases designed for internal technological purposes. An example can be seen in the database „Restorer", on which information on the physical condition of foreign atlases printed in the 16th-17th centuries in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg is stored.

PRESERVATION

Presently, the NLR has modern equipment, which allows us to make high-quality electronic CD-ROM copies of old maps. Russian engraved maps of the first quarter of the 18th century will be scanned first. A similar project, „The Memory of Russia", runs in the Russian State Library.

THE COMMUNICATIVE ASPECT

First of all, new technologies abolish the isolation of cartographic departments. Earlier, they used to be mini-libraries inside larger ones, and would solve their internal problems within them. Nowadays, the situation has changed. The electronic catalogue of the cartographic department of the National Library in St. Petersburg is included into a uniform network linking all general catalogues of the library. The experts in geography working in the field of map studies are involved in solving general problems that are important for the whole library. One of these problems is creating the authority file of geographical names. The other problem is to control of cataloguing literature containing geographical names. These activities imply a network of communication between various departments of the library. The Russian national libraries are connected to the Internet. Information includes data provided by its cartographic departments. The readers of the libraries have free Internet access.

RESEARCH

In the field of research, the main topic is the Summary Catalogue of 18th-century Russian maps in an electronic format, for which the National Library in St. Petersburg experts have developed the necessary software. The program provides access to scientific descriptions of maps and immediately indicate the authors, geographical, thematic and other indices. This catalogue will reflect the collections of diverse libraries, major archives, the Russian

museum, the Hermitage, and many others. An integral part of this catalogue is the Index of Russian map engravers of the 18th century. This index will not only be useful for cartographers, but also for experts in art. By the end of 1998, it will be accessible through the Internet. In connection with the 850th anniversary of Moscow, the Russian State Library created a database „Moscow on old maps of the 16th-20th centuries". The database includes over 400 records, and is available for the readers.

CHANGE OF READERS' REQUIREMENTS

On the one hand, a significant number of the readers are young people. They prefer working on PCs in the reading room, using electronic catalogues and maps, and actively employing all possible means of communication. Unfortunately, the rather small quantity of electronic databases does not completely satisfy these readers' demands. On the other hand, many older readers do not like new technologies and have difficulty in working with electronic databases. In these cases, they are assisted by the staff of the department, who are ready to give advice concerning the use of a PC.

THE PROBLEM OF TRAINING

The fast technical progress has required that the library staff quickly master computers and acquire experience with the usage of electronic maps and atlases. For this purpose, the National Library in St. Petersburg has conducted training carried out by experts working in the Department of Automation. However, it should be admitted that the basic form of training is independent work with the various manuals and training programs. There is also a „generation gap" among the staff. As you see, despite these improvements we have complicated problems, some of which need to be solved. However, Russian libraries are ready to overcome all difficulties and to pass the turn of the millennium as libraries provided with all modern technologies.

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