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THE POLISH LIBRARIANS' ASSOCIATION IN IFLA. ORIGINS OF COLLABORATION



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KEYWORDS: Polish Librarians' Association 1928-1939. IFLA 1928-1939.

ABSTRACT: Thesis/purpose of the article – The article recalls the historical circumstances in which the Polish Librarians' Union joined the IFLA in 1928. It describes the contribution of Polish librarians to the work of this organisation, especially to its annual sessions and also to the work of its subcommittees. **Methodology** – the primary source used is IFLA's main publication, *Actes du Comité international des Bibliothèques*. Polish sources and documentary materials were also used. **Results/conclusions** – Poland joined the IFLA at an early stage, which allowed our country to follow global tendencies in library practice, and to implement some of them domestically. Poland's contribution to IFLA's work was not very significant, as at that time the Polish librarians' community was in its formative stage, following the period of the country's partition, and its intellectual centres had not developed yet.

In October 2017, Polish librarians will celebrate the 100th anniversary of their professional association, brought into existence as the Polish Librarians' Union (ZBP)¹. This summer, on 19-25 August, the 83rd General Conference of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the third event of its kind to be hosted in Poland, will be held in Wrocław². Therefore, let us recall the circumstances in which the Polish Librarians' Union began its co-

¹ The inaugural meeting of the Polish Librarians' Union was held in Warsaw on 21 October 1917. A recent monograph dedicated to its works, edited by Jadwiga Konieczna, is due to come out in 2017.

² The first IFLA session held in Poland took place on 31 May – 2 June 1936 in Warsaw. The second IFLA conference, also in Warsaw, took place on 14-17 September 1959 (25th Session).

operation with this organisation back in the 1920s, and outline their mutual contacts in that period. Back then both organisations were relatively young. ZBP was established later than its peers in Western Europe and in the U.S. The world's first librarians' association, the American Library Association (ALA), was launched in the U.S. in 1876, one year before the British Library Association (LA). They were followed by unions of librarians in Austria (1890), Germany (1900) and France (1906). In all these countries, librarians working for large and wealthy libraries found themselves in a situation where collaborating with libraries in other countries was becoming indispensable, at the very least to jointly take control of what was even back then a skyrocketing increase in the amount of information being provided by research literature.

In Poland, at that time a nation partitioned amongst three countries, the situation was different. There were virtually no large scientific libraries, which were initiating such joint projects in other countries. Only Galicia had two relatively independent Polish universities with their respective libraries: the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow and the Lviv University Library. Nevertheless, educational library networks had been operating in all three partitions, established by social activists who were bringing "enlightenment" to the people while also fostering their national identity. The first librarians' association in our country was founded in the territory of the Russian partition, which had no Polish university libraries whatsoever – despite this, the educational library network there was more developed than anywhere else. Educational activists were supported by the Warsaw intelligentsia: the city's historians, its dynamic bibliophile community, and other book lovers.

At first, the Union's activities were limited due to constraints caused by turbulent political events, and during the 1920 Polish–Soviet War it had to suspend its activities. It was revived after 1926 under Edward Kuntze, director of the Jagiellonian Library. Kuntze strongly supported the idea of Polish librarians cooperating with their peers worldwide. This was anything but easy, as after World War I librarians worldwide were still looking for the most convenient ways to collaborate. In the beginning, all integration initiatives were coming from bibliophile circles. In 1923, the International Congress of Librarians and Bibliophiles was held in Paris, followed by other similar events in interwar Europe: in Prague in 1926, in Rome in 1929, and in Madrid and Barcelona in 1935³. Polish librarians and bibliophiles took part and presented papers in all these congresses (Więckowska, 1973, pp. 197-226)⁴.

³ The conferences in Rome (1929) and in Madrid/Barcelona (1935) were known as the "Library and Bibliography Congresses". These events (including the ones in Paris in 1923 and in Prague in 1926), with their impressive scale and attendance level, are sometimes referred to in literature as IFLA conferences even though the first two were held before this organisation was instituted, and were inspired not only by librarians, but also by book lovers in general, especially bibliophiles, bibliographers, writers, book sellers and editors.

⁴ The contribution of Polish librarians to the activities of the international librarians' movement has been most extensively discussed by Helena Więckowska (1973).

Of particular importance for librarians was the congress held in Prague, known as the “International Congress of Librarians and Booklovers at Prague”. It was attended by 78 representatives from Poland, who gave 18 lectures. One of the congress sections was dedicated to problems of international cooperation among libraries and the need for an organisation that would bring librarians together. French librarian Gabriel Henriot, president of the French association of librarians (Association des Bibliothécaires Français), authorised by the Prague Congress, outlined a project for such an international organisation of librarians at a conference of the American Library Association, held in October 1926 to celebrate ALA’s 50th anniversary. The Americans were supportive of this European idea and sent out a survey to library associations worldwide with questions about the scope of activities such a prospective organisation should conduct, asking whether those associations would be interested in joining its ranks⁵.

Nine countries, including Poland, replied positively. The response was most likely signed by Edward Kuntze, head of the Polish Librarians’ Union since 1926. The results of the survey were announced one year later (1927) in Edinburgh, at a conference celebrating the 50th anniversary of the British Library Association. At this conference (on 30 September), the International Library and Bibliographical Committee was brought into existence. 15 countries signed their declarations of accession; however, the Polish delegation was absent in Edinburgh. The first session of the Committee was held in 1928 in Rome.

ZBP joined the Committee on 28 April 1928, when its Assembly of Regional Delegates signed the so-called Edinburgh Resolution⁶. IFLA decided that each association could delegate one representative with the right to vote, with an unlimited number of librarians able to participate in its sessions. ZBP appointed Jan Muszkowski as its chief delegate. He first took part in the work of the Committee at its 2nd session, held as part of the Library and Bibliography Congress in Italy on 15-30 June 1929. As a result of this session, the Committee had its name changed to “International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions” (IFLA). Muszkowski submitted a request to launch the IFLA Subcommittee on Statistics, of which he became chairman. Appointing a Polish librarian to the position of a subcommittee chairman was a great distinction at that time, as the librarians’ community from our country remained virtually unknown internationally. It must have been Muszkowski’s personal charisma that made his election possible, not to mention the fact that he spoke several languages.

IFLA met on an annual basis: in Stockholm (1930), Cheltenham (England, 1931), Bern (1932), Chicago and Avignon (1933), Madrid (1934), Madrid and

⁵The survey was sent out by the ALA President William Bishop.

⁶Since then, ZBP has paid an annual membership fee amounting to 0,60 Polish zloty per member of the Union in exchange for 5 copies of each IFLA publication.

Fédération Internationale des associations de bibliothécaires.

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

STATUTES.

Sec. 1. The name of this organisation shall be the International Federation of Library Associations.

Sec. 2. The object of the Federation shall be to promote international library cooperation.

Sec. 3. Members of the Federation shall be those Library Associations of national (or wider) scope which approve these resolutions and which comply with such other provisions as are adopted from time to time.

Sec. 4. The affairs of the Federation shall be administered by the International Library Committee; this committee shall consist of representatives selected by associations which are members of the Federation. There shall be from each country only one designated member or substitute with the right to vote. But with him may be associated delegates. Delegates are elected for a period not exceeding 5 years but are eligible for reelection.

Sec. 5. The duties of the Committee shall be to select the time and place for international library conferences and with the cooperation of local committees to prepare programs for such conferences; and to make investigations and recommendations concerning international relations between libraries, organizations of librarians and bibliographers and other agencies.

Sec. 6. International library conferences shall be held at least once in five years. Plenary sessions of the Committee must be held in connection with each international library conference. Other sessions may be held at the call of the Chairman and must be held when requested by one third of the Committee.

Sec. 7. The Committee shall have power to appoint sub-committees from its own membership or from the membership of any of the cooperating library associations.

Sec. 8. The officers of the Federation and of the Committee shall be a President, two Vice Presidents and a Secretary. These officers shall constitute the executive board and shall be elected by the committee for a term to expire not later than twelve months after the close of each congress. The Secretary may be, but need not be, a member of the Committee designated by some national association. He shall have the right to vote.

Vacancies on the Executive Committee shall be filled by the Committee.

Sec. 9. Annual dues for each member Association shall be fixed at a rate between 25 and fifty centimes (Swiss) for each member of that association or on a basis of 5 or 10% of the receipts from membership dues of the associations, but shall not be more than 2,500 francs (Swiss) for any association. Dues shall be payable to the Secretary on or before March 1 for each calendar year.

The amount of the dues will form the budget of the Association.

Sec. 10. Any association may withdraw from the Federation if its dues for that year have been paid.

Sec. 11. By-laws may be adopted by the Committee.

Sec. 12. Resolutions adopted by the Committee or by any Congress held under its auspices shall not be binding on any member association until ratified by that association.

~~Florence~~ June 1929.

Venice 29

Photo 1. The first IFLA statutes adopted in Venice on 29 June 1929 [source: http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/history/1929_statutes.pdf].

Barcelona (1935), Warsaw (1936), Paris (1937), Brussels (1938), and The Hague and Amsterdam (1939). Muszkowski represented Poland at the IFLA sessions until 1936⁷. He presented reports on the activities of Polish libraries in the years 1930-1932, published by IFLA in *Actes du Comité international des bibliothèques*. In Chicago (1933), he gave a lecture on Polish libraries, discussing their current condition and achievements as well as the problems they faced. All throughout this session, shared between Chicago and Avignon, Muszkowski was exceptionally active. At the second meeting of the Avignon session, he presented a paper on inter-library loans in Poland, and published the results of work carried out by the subcommittee responsible for coordinating the international rules on print statistics in *Actes*. At the same time, he spearheaded the launching of the ZBP International Section and was appointed its head.

It was also due to Muszkowski's efforts that Warsaw was selected to organise the 9th IFLA session from 31 May to 2 June 1936. He put forward Poland's candidacy at the Madrid session on 20-30 May 1935, where, following a discussion, his proposal was approved. The IFLA session in Warsaw was a great organisational success. However, not all Polish librarians were happy that these meetings were held in Poland. Opponents argued that the Polish librarians' community was still in its formative stage, and could not yet afford grandiose international events which would bring no tangible benefit. Nevertheless, the voices of librarians such as Kuntze and Muszkowski prevailed, as they were aware that isolating the Polish librarianship from the rest of the world would be a strategic error. Thus the session eventually took place, with 34 delegates arriving from 17 countries and 3 continents. They were received at the Royal Castle in Warsaw by the Polish president, Ignacy Mościcki, and at the town hall by the city mayor, Stefan Starzyński. At Muszkowski's initiative, the IFLA session was combined with the 4th Congress of Polish Librarians, with Muszkowski chairing the organisational committees of both. Muszkowski's idea was well aimed, as it gave the IFLA Committee members a chance to learn first-hand about the conditions and organisation of the Polish librarians' community. The 4th Congress was particularly well attended, with 519 participants, and the conference papers were printed beforehand in an extensive volume (*IV Zjazd Bibliotekarzy Polskich w Warszawie, Referaty* [4th Congress of Polish Librarians in Warsaw. Conference Papers], 1936) — this rare organisational achievement did not go unnoticed by the foreign guests. Once the session finished, its participants visited Cracow, Wieliczka, and Zakopane. In Cracow, they admired the new building of the Jagiellonian Library. However, in Poland itself the fact that our country had organised an IFLA session went largely unnoticed. Even in specialised journals, only a few press reports ap-

⁷ Excluding 1934, when he did not go to Madrid.



Photo 2. Participants of the inaugural meeting of the 9th IFLA Session at Staszic Palace in Warsaw, 31 May 1936 [source: *Actes du Comité International des Bibliothèques: 9me Session*. Varsovie, 31 Mai-2 Juin 1936, Fédération Intern. des Assoc. de Bibliothécaires].

peared. Nevertheless, an extensive account of the Congress was provided as a report in two volumes dedicated to the 4th Congress of Librarians (*IV Zjazd Bibliotekarzy Polskich w Warszawie. Protokoły* [4th Congress of Polish Librarians in Warsaw. Protocols], 1936).

The IFLA session in Warsaw was the last one to be attended by Muszkowski. Entailer Edward Krasieński dismissed him from the office of the Krasieński Library Director, which made him feel depressed and provoked his withdrawal from all library activities, including his role in IFLA⁸. IFLA President Marcel Godet accepted Muszkowski's resignation with regret, which he expressed at the 10th Session in Paris in August 1937. Another reason for his resignation might have been the poor results of his efforts as head of the Subcommittee on Statistics. Over the years, he failed to coordinate even the most basic rules on preparing such statistics; for that matter, his successor, German librarian Heinrich Uhlenal, did not manage to achieve this challenging goal either.

His successor in the IFLA Committee was Józef Grycz, as delegated by ZBP. In the years 1930-1939, the latter worked at the Science Department of

⁸Muszkowski also withdrew from the Committee of Experts in Library Materials.

the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education, supervising public scientific libraries in Poland. Grycz took part in the 10th IFLA Session in Paris, in 1937, where he delivered a lecture on the condition of Polish libraries (Grycz, 1937, pp. 163-165). The ZBP delegate at the following, 11th IFLA Session in Brussels was Aleksander Birkenmajer, at that time head of the Manuscript Department of the Jagiellonian Library. During this session, Grycz accompanied him (without the right to vote) as a member of the Sub-Committee on Normalization in the Field of Books and Libraries (Birkenmajer & Grycz, 1938, pp. 162-164)⁹. Grycz was the second Pole in the interwar period (after Muszkowski) to become a member of an IFLA subcommittee. Grycz's appointment to this team was well-advised, as together with Adam Łysakowski he was the strongest Polish advocate of normalisation in library procedures, which they believed should start with setting common cataloguing standards for specific categories of library holdings. Grycz also promoted initiatives to introduce common international standards, which represented one of IFLA's main objectives. Grycz was a practising librarian, particularly well prepared to transpose the latest IFLA regulations in Poland, following his experience and participation in IFLA's work. He also prompted ZBP to set up its Normalisation Committee on Library Science, Books and Journals (on 12 November 1937). Unfortunately, this committee did not manage to begin its activity before the war. IFLA paid much attention to the accurate regulation of international inter-library loans. This issue was of much interest to Polish libraries, whose readers frequently requested foreign materials, including manuscripts and old prints. In line with IFLA directives, on 11 January 1939 the Polish Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education published the *Ordinance on International Inter-library Loans*, edited by Grycz and accompanied by the *Regulations on International Loans of Library Holdings*, a translation of the respective IFLA regulations.

Another IFLA initiative drew attention to the growing role of documentation in libraries. In organisational terms, Polish libraries were not ready to perform such functions. However, Józef Grycz tried to open a discussion on the need to develop documentation centres at libraries in Poland, which unfortunately failed to deliver any tangible results. He proposed that the ZBP Council put forward an initiative to establish an IFLA International Centre for Library Documentation, which he thought could be located at the League of Nations Library in Geneva.

The Poles did not attend the last IFLA session before World War II (in The Hague and Amsterdam, 1939). As World War II broke out, they lost all contact with IFLA. In occupied Poland, all professional associations were abolished, including the Polish Librarians' Union. Its Chair, Adam Łysakowski, sent a letter to IFLA's Swiss president, Marcel Godet; however, its contents

⁹Both librarians jointly drew up a report on the activities of Polish libraries in the years 1937-1938.

remain unknown. Godet replied on 9 March 1940, expressing his sympathy and a will to “collect and send something”¹⁰. After that, all contact between the two organisations were severed.

The Polish contribution to the work of IFLA was the main way by which our country’s librarians cooperated with their peers around the world. However, other contacts also existed. Librarians, along with the well-organised Polish bibliophiles, expressed a spontaneous need for networking with the Western community of book lovers even before IFLA was created. This led them to take part actively and in considerable numbers in subsequent congresses of bibliophiles and librarians. One example of this is their participation in the Prague event in 1926. Other, less numerous Polish delegations attended all the above-mentioned congresses for librarians, bibliophiles and bibliographers. Following in their footsteps, other Polish communities organised their own sessions. The first two, held in Cracow in 1925 and in Warsaw in 1926, were organised by the Book Lovers’ Society, a bibliophile organisation with important contributions from librarians, who often happened to be eminent bibliophiles too (such as Kazimierz Piekarski). The next two meetings of bibliophiles and librarians were held separately, even though close in time and space: in Lviv in 1928 and in Poznań in 1929.

Polish librarians also became involved in the works of the Library Experts Committee (Comité d’Experts de Bibliothèques) operating within the League of Nations. It was composed of seven members representing the European elite in library studies (including IFLA presidents Isak Collijn and Marcel Godet). During his 1930-1935 term, Jan Muszkowski was a member of this exclusive circle. The Committee discussed critical issues, with the League of Nations supporting and approving some of its resolutions. Unfortunately, the possibilities of their practical implementation were limited, even while IFLA took over some of the work it initiated to further develop and apply their results. Nonetheless, the Committee promoted several important initiatives, such as the *Index Bibliographicus*, registering journals dedicated to bibliography or with thematic bibliographic sections. Librarians from the Jagiellonian Library submitted data from Poland for this publication.

Undoubtedly, the intention of Polish elite librarians to cooperate with their Western European counterparts was natural, as it was in the West that the consolidating Polish librarians’ community could find models and standards

¹⁰ *Bibliotekarstwo polskie 1925-1951 w świetle korespondencji jego współtwórców* [The Polish librarians’ community in the years 1925-1951 as portrayed in the correspondence of its co-founders]. Selection of texts and edition: Maria Dembowska, p. 262. Łysakowski advised Marian Łodyński of this letter: “Vom Herrn Godet habe ich die Antwort vom 5 März bekommen. Er hat mein Schreiben „Avec la plus vive sympathie” zur Kenntnis genommen und dessen Kopie an die Mitglieder versandt. Er hofft, dass is ihm gelangen wird was zu sammeln und uns zu senden”.

to follow after years of the country's partition. The question was, however, to what extent Poland would be a consumer of existing European achievements and to what it would be able to make its own contribution. It was clear at that time that Polish librarians had not developed any of their own theoretical or practical concepts that could support global library studies yet – it was still too early. Kuntze, one of the advocates of bringing Poland closer to Europe, discussed this issue with calm: "Our participation in international cooperation is rather passive," he concluded, "the entire collaboration resting on just a few individuals" (Kuntze, 1932, p. 115). When saying this, Kuntze certainly referred to Muszkowski, later to Birkenmajer, and possibly also to himself, as he also participated in the international librarians' movement. "Our own contribution is modest," Kuntze continued, "perhaps apart from editorial statistics, which have become a specifically Polish domain, thanks to the efforts of certain individuals. However, Muszkowski cannot act alone; we need to select a small number of specialty areas in which to invest our efforts"¹¹.

These calls had virtually no effect, since the Polish librarians' elite was too small and too overloaded with work to dedicate their time exclusively to international issues. Yet a fruit of these efforts has unquestionably been the fact that we are now present on several international fora, which enables us to follow global development trends and to try to keep up with them.

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¹¹Ibidem.