

Music libraries in Armenia

Report of visit, 25-30 November 2017

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Local contacts

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Introduction

This report has been prepared from observations over four days of library visiting and I would like to thank all those who made my visit so enjoyable and informative. I am aware of some of the financial and other problems facing the development of libraries in Armenia, but feel that I must give a truthful account of my findings. These recommendations are based on many years' experience in various library sectors, and on three preceding visits to Armenia in 2006, 2011, and 2012.

The visit of 2006 was mainly an overview of the Armenian music libraries, the visit of 2011 was focused on the future of the Armenian musicological library, the visit of 2012, in occasion of the celebrations of Erevan World book capital, included contacts and meetings with music librarians.

During most of the meetings and especially in occasion of the whole-day workshop I have been assisted by extremely valid and competent translators, both from/to English and Italian.

More information on music in library collections, description of funds, and recommendations may be found in the 2006 visit report prepared on behalf of IAML for the Armenian Minister of Culture by Massimo Gentili-Tedeschi and Ruth Hellen, enclosed.

Outline of the report

1. Activities
2. Overview of the changes since report of 2006 and preceding visits
3. Overview of the general state of the libraries visited
4. Focus on the Armenian Musicological Library
5. Other outcomes of the visit
6. Conclusions

Activities

1.1 Visits

Komitas Museum-Institute

Musicological Library

National Library of Armenia (for a meeting only)

National Children's Library (for a meeting only)

1.2 Meetings

With the aforementioned colleagues, every day

With heads of institutions and representative of the Ministry of Culture (Tuesday 28)

With the Minister of Culture, Mr. Armen Amiryan (Wednesday 29)

1.3 Other activities

Workshop on cataloguing (Monday 27)

2. Overview of the changes since report of 2006 and preceding visits

The change in technical equipment, especially since the last visit, is impressive. PCs are mostly up-to-date, networks and WiFi connections efficient and reliable.

A general impression of Erevan is that of a city in movement and transformation: full of life, of traffic, most cars being fairly new; only the public transports - but I had no occasion to take a metro - seem unchanged, with their small, old buses; new brilliant restaurants in the center are every day full of people.

This modernisation has also implied some losses: in the centre the usual fashion boutiques have replaced the tiny craftsman shops and laboratories; modern, somehow anonymous buildings have replaced the old ones; the fabulous and unique old market is now an ordinary supermarket; I miss a bit the old flavour of the town, even if I can understand the need of change.

3 Overview of the general state of the libraries visited

3.1 Komitas Museum-Institute

This is the very news since my last visit. Located in a park not far from the city centre, adjacent to the Komitas Pantheon memorial where illustrious Armenians are buried, the museum was opened on 29 January 2015. It presents with magnificent photos, documents, original scores, autograph note-books, objects, and recordings, the life and activities of father Komitas (born Soghomon Soghomonian, 1869-1935), musicologist, composer, arranger, singer, and choirmaster, considered the founder of Armenian national school of music and a pioneer of ethnomusicology. The visit is involving and moving.

The building was designed by Arthur Meschian, expanding the former Palace of Culture by Koryun Hakobyan. Besides the ample spaces for permanent and temporary exhibitions, facilities include a concert hall for more than 100 persons, a specialised library, meeting rooms, a bookshop, and a laboratory for audio and image digitisation. Equipment is modern, network connections efficient.

Activities include research and publications on Komitas's activities and on Armenian music in general, a conference-festival (26 September - 8 October), lectures, concerts, an educational programme, guided visits; the website <http://komitasmuseum.am> is well designed and rich in information, both in Armenian and English.

3.2 National musicological library

This library, in two separate spaces on the ground floor of an apartment building, has been until now in an extremely bad physical condition, but luckily it is in the process of being transferred to safer spaces at the National library of Armenia and at the Komitas museum-institute.

Books and scores are being classified, stored in carton boxes, and progressively transported in the new locations. The process seems approximately halfway through, and should take approximately one more year.

3.3 National library of Armenia

At a glance, the renovation works that were noticed in the previous visits are now visible, even if much more is still needed.

Opening hours are more than ample (9.00-21.00 weekdays, 9.00-20.00 Saturdays, 9.00-17.00 Sundays), access is allowed to users over 16 (it was 18 in the 2006 visit), free Internet access is provided.

Electronic resources are now available, inter-library loan is provided. No private loan facilities are supplied, as is normal with a national library, but as already observed is a problem for music, which has no language and age barriers, and must be available for loan in order to study and practise.

The website <http://www.nla.am> looks slightly outdated but contains all relevant information, including access to the Armenian Union catalogue <http://armunicat.nla.am>, and is in part translated in English and Russian.

4 Focus on the Armenian Musicological Library

4.1 Solutions foreseen in 2006

The conclusions of the visit held in 2006 considered three options for the re-location of the library:

- I. stay in the same building;
- II. move to another building;
- III. merge with another library.

Advantages and issues of each solution were analysed, leaving the solution of the problem to the decision of the Ministry of Culture and Youth, even if solution b. was recommended, in order to preserve the identity of the library; however, and institution like the Komitas Museum-Institute did not exist yet, so that the option that was finally preferred, to move the library to the Komitas Museum-Institute could not be considered at that time.

4.2 Location of the library at the Komitas Museum-Institute

It has been agreed that the head of the Komitas Museum-Institute has the task to choose which materials of the Musicological Library will be re-located in the Museum-Institute; it is likely that only the materials of no musical interest should be transferred to the National Library.

This solution guarantees that the library is not dispersed, and significantly enriches the Komitas Museum-Institute with sources that are of the utmost importance for the documentation of the Armenian music heritage.

However, the visit of the building reveals that the space for the storage of the large holdings of the Musicological Library are largely insufficient: there is a small room conceived as a depot, but its irregular shape - not only polygonal, but also with a leaning roof - makes it unfit to hold efficiently a set of compact, moving shelves.

Furthermore, spaces for library functions, such as reading, cataloguing, and distribution services, seem to be hard to find, without using part of the premises that now serve the primary tasks of the museum.

A site inspection of the spaces adjacent to the present building of the Komitas Museum-Institute has revealed that it could be possible to construct a separate building located opposite to the entrance. This relatively small building could have enough underground space to host the stacks, while the upper floors could be used for the reading room, the cataloguing service, the distribution service. A bridge, or covered passage may connect the library to the main building, so to make it an extension of the museum and attract visitors and scholars.

4.3 Potential for development

The abundance of space could be used to host any other function that may be offered to the users, or as facilities for special offices, so as to make of the Komitas Museum-Institute what in 2006 was figured out as possible development of the library: a centre for the documentation of the Armenian national music heritage:

- producing a register of Armenian music libraries and music collections;
- establishing a centre for the national catalogue of music, linked to RISM (Répertoire International des Sources Musicales);
- establishing a national office for the documentation of Armenian scholarly studies on music, linked to RILM (Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale);
- creating an additional function as a music documentation centre (MIC) for contemporary Armenian music;
- developing a centre supporting music education. For example, a publishing facility, linked to the State Order, could be established to produce up to date educational material in Armenian, as most material in libraries is in Russian and very old;
- playing a role in the international arena, representing Armenia as an ambassador in the musical world.

5 Other outcomes of the visit

5.1 Training of an Armenian music librarian in Italy

Due to its unique musical heritage, Italy is a country where music cataloguing is highly considered, so that the national union catalogue has developed special fields for the description of both published and unpublished music resources, as well as for access points, such as the most detailed elements of the attributes of musical works.

A free training period of one-two months for one Armenian librarian, to be held both at the Ufficio Ricerca Fondi Musicali in Milano and at the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico (the national bibliographic agency) has been proposed. It has been agreed that it will probably take place in Spring 2018.

5.2 IFLA repertoire *Names of Persons*

During the visit it has been noticed that the Armenian file of the online repertoire *Names of Persons*, <https://www.ifla.org/node/4953>, maintained by the IFLA Cataloguing section, dates back to 1977, and urges a full revision.

Examples of recently updated files have and preliminary instructions on how to proceed with the update been provided to the Director of the National library of Armenia. IFLA editors have been informed.

6 Conclusions

The Armenian Musicological Library is unique in Armenia and there are few similar libraries in other countries. It should act as an example of good practice in other countries within and outside the region. Its role must be preserved and developed if the Armenian musical heritage is to be preserved and made more accessible. We believe that the only way to achieve these aims is to preserve the library and to ensure that its building, location and facilities are tailored to providing up to date, long-term specialist services.

Useful links

<http://www.iaml.info>

<https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/publications/ifla-world-report/armenia.pdf>

Related reports

- Report of the IAML delegation, 9-15 October 2006
- Report of Lilit Harutyunyan's visit to Italy, 28 May-28 June 2018
- Report of visit, 17-20 October 2018

Respectfully submitted

Massimo Gentili-Tedeschi

IAML, February 2018