



Music libraries in Armenia

Report of visit, 17-20 October 2018

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Local contacts

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Introduction

I have been invited in Armenia for the celebrations of the 85th anniversary of the National Children's Library after Khnko Aper, and I have had thus the occasion to oversee the state of the Armenian musicological library (now known as Armenian music library) and to visit other libraries in Erevan and Achajur. This report has been prepared from observations over four days of activities and I would like to thank all those who made my stay 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 four preceding visits to Armenia in 2006, 2011, 2012 and 2017.

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, the visit in 2017 was focused on the new Komitas Museum-Institute and the possible solutions to host there the National music library. Despite the short time passed since my last visit, several aspects have changed, and I am relieved to say that the possible future developments seem much clearer.

This report is focused on the present state of the National music library and related subjects; more information on music in library collections, description of funds, and recommendations may be found in the previous visit reports prepared on behalf of IAML for the Armenian Minister of Culture, in part in collaboration with Ruth Hellen, enclosed.

I wish to thank all colleagues that assisted me during my stay, and especially Ruzan Tonoyan for her kind invitation to take part to the celebrations and for the occasion that she gave me to visit Armenia once more, to speak and to take part to encounters and round tables, besides all other activities, storytelling and ceremonies for the celebrations, offering me and all guests an unforgettable time and a great experience; all the staff of the National Children's Library for their and friendly and warm kindness; Lilit Harutyunyan for bringing me to visit the libraries in Erevan; and Tigran Zargaryan for dedicating me once more his time to discuss the state of the Music library. I could have formal and informal meetings, including a fruitful dinner with two Deputy Ministers of Culture of the Armenian Government, Vahe budumyan and Nazeni Gharibyan.

Outline of the report

1. Activities
2. Overview of the activities since the visit in 2017
3. Overview of the general state of the libraries visited
4. Focus on the Armenian Music Library
5. Conclusions

1 Activities

1.1 Visits

- National Children's Library
- Komitas Museum-Institute
- National Library of Armenia
- Library of Komitas State Conservatory
- Achajur Cultural Center

1.2 Meetings and conferences

- Paper: The skills which are necessary for a modern librarian (Wednesday 17)
- Round table: Prospect for cooperation: IBBY, IFLA, IAML (Thursday 18)
- Meeting with Armenian writers, Armenian Writers Union (Friday 19)

2 Overview of the activities since the visit in 2017

One of the outcomes of the visit in 2017 was the plan to host a music librarian in Italy for a training period. In fact Dr. Lilit Harutyunyan, head of Bibliography, Digitisation and Sound Recording Department of the Music Library, Komitas Museum-Institute could spend one month, from 28 May to 28 June 2018, working mainly on cataloguing music and on maintenance of authority data in the Italian National union catalogue (SBN), both in the Ufficio Ricerca Fondi Musicali in Milan and in the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico in Rome. A report on Dr. Harutyunyan's activities in Italy is enclosed.

The transfer process of the National music library to its new locations proceeds as planned.

3 Overview of the general state of the libraries visited

3.1 National Children's Library

A visit to the library is always an emotion: not only it is almost unique in its genre in the world, and offers a fascinating building and plenty of space for all its activities, but it is a lively cultural centre, and simply looking at the fascinated faces of the children and young people taking part to storytelling is worth the visit. Of utmost importance is the openness towards foreign languages, with connections to cultures of several areas in the world, notably France, Germany, and Arabic countries.

Limiting my observations to music, I am aware that there are ample possibilities to improve the collection of scores, books and recordings in any language. The library is interested to receive copies of the multiple items owned by the National music library, and I can only second this request.

3.2 National Music 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, and its move to new safer spaces looked extremely urgent already in 2006. The process started in 2017 and should take one more year to be accomplished.

From a preliminary observation of the collection some issues were raised:

- there are multiple exemplars of several items

- there are books which do not concern music (e.g. arts, politics, etc.)

In the original location books and scores are being classified, stored in carton boxes, and progressively transported to the Komitas Museum-Institute. Here the original inventories are verified, then double and non-music items are taken apart and transferred to dedicated storing spaces in the basement of the National Library of Armenia. Only one or few of the multiple exemplars of the same score, sound recording, or book related to music should be kept at the Komitas Museum-Institute. The new location of each item is reported in the inventories, so that at the conclusion of the work missing items will be traced.

From the observation of what has been analysed until now, some conclusions may be foreseen:

- some multiple exemplars are of dozens – even more than 50-60 – copies of the same item;
- the quantity of non-music books is relevant;
- the National library most probably already owns at least one copy of the non-music books;
- some libraries in Armenia are interested in receiving materials that for any reason do not interest the Komitas Museum-Institute nor the National Library of Armenia.

As a consequence, the amount of items of the Music library that should be kept at the Komitas Museum-Institute is significantly reduced, compared to the about 190,000 that appear in the inventories, and the amount of space needed to store them is reduced as well.

3.3 Komitas Museum-Institute

During my first visit to the Komitas Museum-Institute I observed 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.”.

With the progress of the transferring of the books and scores, the need for space is becoming more and more urgent: boxes and piles of volumes are being accumulated, and there are no shelves to host them properly; I have thus tried to verify once more if there is any space where compact, mobile shelves may be placed.

Despite the irregular space, some compact shelves might be placed in the rooms that were destined to this purpose; 3 movable double-sided shelves, about 3 meters long and 2 meters high, for a total of about 100 linear meters, considering scores, 13 for books which are of a smaller size. Other movable shelves could be hosted in the preceding room, but this would mean to abolish working place.

In the basement there are two dressing rooms, one might be reused, dividing the other in two parts that would be sufficient to offer enough space for about 30 people. In this case a space of approximately 12 x 4.50 meters, 2.50 meters high could be used, hosting possibly 23 movable double-sided shelves, for a total of 920 to 1,472 linear meters of shelves, probably enough to host the whole music-related part of the library that is the interest of the Komitas Museum-Institute.

Further, smaller shelves could fit in a corridor in the basement, as well.

This does not solve the issue of providing a proper reading room, but faces the more important and urgent one, that is safely storing the Music library, and preserve it for the future.

I have to add that some humidity was noticed in the room where books are being stored; the issue needs to be faced.

3.4 National Library of Armenia

The National library of Armenia has provided ample spaces in the basement. At present they are used to store the books that do not concern music and the multiple exemplars of sound recordings.

Unfortunately, the shelves are largely insufficient, so that a large part of materials are randomly piled in cardboard boxes laying on the ground of a large room, where traces of humidity are visible. Where shelves are available, instead, books and scores are well positioned, and a list of the content is placed in each shelf.

A negative aspect is that in the whole area where books and recordings are preserved, some kind of pollution makes it impossible to use the space as a working area: just a few minutes after my stay there I felt my throat irritated and I had to go out. Two persons work there, but they have to wear gloves and a protection mask to stay there; I strongly recommend to find a better and safer working space.

As mentioned before, there is a strong feeling that all non-music related books – mostly art books or books concerning lives or writings of leaders of the Soviet Union – are already owned by the National library; a policy of discarding them, or of disseminating them to other Armenian libraries should be decided.

3.5 Library of Komitas State Conservatory

I visited informally the library, so that I can give only my impression. Little has apparently changed since my visit in 2006: the library is in good state, the staff helpful and the reading room full of users.

The accessible catalogues seem to be only in card form. I was informed that computer cataloguing has started, using an internally developed application based on Microsoft Access, and in fact in the web page of the library, an online accessible catalogue seems to be under construction, at <http://www.conservatory.am/en/2013-07-07-13-19-54/2013-07-07-13-21-23/2013-10-18-11-47-08>.

It is a pity that no initiative has been undertaken to participate in a cooperative library network, that would make the library resources more accessible and more visible to all users.

3.6 Achajur Cultural Centre

Our stay included a trip to Achajur and a visit to the local Cultural Centre. Besides receiving a warm welcome of traditional dances and instrumental music with duduk and qanun, I could visit the small library, that includes just a few scores and sound recordings. I could see music teaching activities of such instruments, and a room with a piano.

Considering these users, I have asked the librarian if any donation of music scores and sound recordings may be of interest for the library, and the reply was absolutely positive. I think that disseminating multiple copies of scores and recordings of the Music library to libraries around the country may be the best solution, and may have a good impact on the life of such institutions.

4 Focus on the Armenian music Library

Apart from the consideration of point 4. of my 2017 report, concerning the advantages of re-locating the National music library at the Komitas Museum-Institute and the potential for development, I have to highlight one point, that was raised in my conclusions of the Italian training period of Dr. Harutyunyan: the application used to catalogue the holdings of the library is Koha, which looks good for general purposes, but shows very little specific detail for the access and description of music.

Furthermore, other music libraries use other, or no application to catalogue the same type of resources, so that a large part of items are catalogued multiple times, with a loss of time and energies.

I think that a wider use of Koha throughout all Armenian libraries should be advisable, as well as the development of the special fields needed for special types of resources, such as music.

5 Conclusions

Too little time has passed since my last visit, so that I can only repeat the considerations I wrote in my previous report, concerning the advantages of settling the Armenian music library within the Komitas Museum-Institute, and the possibility to store there all scores and recordings.

The possible amount of space needed seems smaller than previously depicted, but there is an urgent and absolute need to provide compact shelves and dedicate one more room for the stacks. Proper spaces for a larger reading room, offices and more stacks may be projected in the future, if possible.

Shelves in the basement of the National library of Armenia should be provided to store the multiple exemplars of scores and recordings, until they are distributed to the libraries that express their wish to receive them. A proper –temporary – space for workers should be provided as well.

Useful links

<http://www.iaml.info>

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

Attachments

2006 visit report, [Armenia_music_library_report_IAML.pdf](#) (November 2006)

2017 visit report, [Armenia_music_library_report_IAML_2017.pdf](#) (June 2018)

2018 report on L. Harutyunyan's visit to Italy, [Armenia_Visit_Harutyunyan_Italy_2018.pdf](#) (June 2018)

Respectfully submitted

Massimo Gentili-Tedeschi

IAML, November 2018