The Polonica Collection of the Slavonic Library is one of the most versatile collections of the National Library of Finland. The collection and its historical dimension have been forgotten over the years, even though Polonica can offer a number of research themes from a time period spanning over two hundred years.

The Polonica Collection comprises publications in Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian, Slovakian, Sorbian, Polish and Czech. There are approximately 17,000 monographs included in the Collection, and nearly the same number of serial publications. The earliest works were printed in the beginning of the 19th century, and today the Collection continues to grow with approximately 800 titles annually, including publications published as parts of monograph series.

The creation of Polonica – in support of scholars

During the period 1828–1917 the National Library had the statutory right to receive a copy of every publication printed in Russia. These legal deposit copies received from the Kingdom of Poland, then part of Russia, form the foundation of the Polonica Collection. The exact founding date of the Collection is not known, but the Rector’s reports from the academic years 1902–1905 mention that the establishment of such a collection into the Russian Library was well underway when officials in Warsaw began again to send Polish-language publications to Helsinki as required by the censorship regulations of the Russian Empire.

The motivation for establishing the Collection was related to the development of Slavonic studies at the University of Helsinki. Jooseppi Julius Mikkola was appointed docent of Slavonic philology at the Imperial Alexander University of Finland in 1895, and later appointed as professor extraordinaire in the discipline in 1900. In order to support the discipline, the Russian Library, then under the auspices of the University of Helsinki Senate, intended to gradually accumulate a small reference library including central works on all Slavonic peoples and their literature.

Personal relationships in the university community can also be seen to have influenced the establishment of the collection. Andrei Igelström, acting librarian of the Russian Library from 1900 (full librarian from 1902), had met Mikkola in the beginning of the 1890s. Igelström took several leaves of absence during his first years in office, leaving Mikkola to act in his place. It is not known whether it was the Vilnius-born Igelström or Mikkola who took the initiative to establish the collection, but the foundation of Polonica was certainly orchestrated by them.

Polonica materials from the legal deposit era

What types of materials are included in the Polonica Collection and what kinds of research topics does it offer? Polish-language literature printed in different parts of the Kingdom of Poland forms an interesting segment of the Collection's history. During the 19th century, most of the Polish-language literature collected through legal deposits arrived from Vilnius, Kiev, Mogilev and Piotrków in addition to St. Petersburg and Warsaw. Publications printed in Vilnius feature prominently, as the University of Vilnius held special significance in the divided Poland of the early 19th century. The Collection, however, includes only a few examples of scholarly literature from that time. The golden age of printing in Vilnius was in the 1830-1850s. Polonica comprises a total of over 650 titles from this time period, of which approximately 430 are from Vilnius. Most of the Vilnius publications comprise fiction and spiritual literature.
Most of the works acquired during the legal deposit era (1828–1917) in the Polonica Collection are works of fiction. Thus the Collection provides excellent opportunities for researching Polish literature from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. From this considerable time period, the Collection includes works and series of collected works by key authors from the Polish literary canon of the era. Featured authors include the national poet of Poland, Adam Mickiewicz and his successors Alexander Fredro, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, Juliusz Sławacki, Zygmunt Krasiński and Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz, but also Polish female authors from the time of the nationalist awakening, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Maria Konopnicka and Klementyna z Tanskich Hoffmanowa.

The beginning of the 20th century was a time of rapid expansion of the Polonica Collection. During the last two decades of the legal deposit period, the collection acquired more than two thousand titles, mainly Polish-language fiction printed in Warsaw. The collection also features the more experimental genres of Polish short stories and poetry from the early 20th century.

Literature printed before the year 1918 dominates the Polonica Collection with over 3,000 titles, nearly 2,200 of which were printed in Poland. Works printed in Lithuania number over 600, while works printed in countries that are currently known as the Czech Republic, the Ukraine and Russia number approximately one hundred for each country. The collection also includes some pre-1918 works in Slavonic languages acquired through donation or purchase, printed in Bosnia, the UK, Croatia, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United States. When the older section (pre-1918) of Polonica was compared to the collection catalogues of the Lithuanian and Polish national libraries, Polonica was found to include approximately 300 Polish-language titles which could not be located in the catalogues of these national libraries. A closer comparison of the historical libraries in these countries and the Polonica Collection would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness of the Polonica materials.

**Approaching scholarship between the world wars**

The Polonica Collection only features approximately 250–400 titles per decade from the interwar period. The expiration of the legal deposit right naturally contributed to the decrease in acquisitions, but focusing acquisitions more clearly on scholarly literature also played a part. During the time between the world wars, Prague became a centre of research in linguistics and Slavonic studies to which many Slavonic scholars from Finland maintained connections. It is thus not surprising that the history, folk poetry, folklore, and particularly linguistics of the Slavonic countries, so central to the discipline of Slavonic studies, feature most prominently in the collection. This more scholarly focus, however, may be explained by the centre of gravity shifting to Prague.
direction is also reflected in the exchange agreements with research libraries focusing on Slavonic studies in the Polonica Collection's target countries, concluded in the 1920s and 1930s. Even though there are few examples of interwar fiction, the collection features examples of the progressive imagery of the era – the work of the Prague surrealists can be seen in the illustrations of some works of fiction, particularly in the cover art.

One of the curiosities of the Polonica Collection is the group of books which the library donated elsewhere in the 1920s or 1930s. The Polish Association and the Catholic Parish of Helsinki were given a selection of fiction from the Collection, and while some of these books were received back in the 1960s, not all of them were recatalogued at the time. In conjunction with these re-donations, the Collection gained some materials previously not included in the collections of the University, particularly Polish-language children's and adolescent literature published in the 1910-1930s.

Opportunities for contemporary research

The time after the Second World War is perhaps the most fragmented in the Polonica Collection, but it provides researchers with excellent opportunities to study a range of themes through the materials in the collection. One of the available themes is emigrant literature written in the Slavonic languages. The Polonica Collection comprises materials of post-war emigrant literature printed in Argentina, the UK, Israel and France, as well as later Czech dissident literature printed in Canada. The Collection provides excellent sources for researchers in the humanities and social sciences for the study of socialist realism in most languages covered by the Collection. The golden age of Polonica dates from the beginning of the 1970s, the highly interesting era of the Cold War, normalisation and social debate.

Exchange agreements and donations are an integral part of Polonica and highlight the diversity represented by the collection's wide range of languages. For the Collection, scholarly publication series acquired through exchange agreements hold a key position. In 1972, the Slavonic Library had a total of 118 exchange agreements, the most important of which were concluded at the beginning of the 1970s with the university libraries of Krakow and Poznań as well as the National Library of Poland. The exchange agreements enabled the Collection to supplement its series of Polish publications. Through these agreements, the Collection has acquired, for example, legal studies literature from Yugoslavia in the early 1970s. After the Second World War, fiction in particular was often donated from the people's republics in a spirit of cultural exchange and cooperation. Examples of this include works written in the westernmost Slavonic languages, Upper and Lower Sorbian, donated from East Germany. Today, any exchanges are conducted in a centralised manner through the Exchange Centre for Scientific Literature.

For the most recent time period, Polonica is strongly focused on scholarly literature. The Collection is an essential Finnish source of Western and Southern Slavonic cultures for scholars of the humanities and social sciences of the target countries. The increasing interest in research of the
Balkans is visible in the Polonica Collection, including fiction.

Efforts are being made to improve the Collection's accessibility for researchers and the general public by cataloguing its monographs in the National Library's Linda and Helka databases. The cataloguing work began in the autumn of 2010. In addition, the public can see the diversity of the collection for themselves starting in summer 2011, when the Slavonic Library of the National Library opens its exhibition on Polonica and the its wealth of Slavonic languages.

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Polonica materials may be searched and requested through the National Library's Helka database with the location code of the Polonica Collection (H2 Pol.).

https://helka.linneanet.fi/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?LANGUAGE=English&DB=local&PAGE=First