



LIGUE DES BIBLIOTHÈQUES EUROPÉENNES DE RECHERCHE
ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Manuscript Librarians Group

Russia – Backgrounds

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Contents: The National Library of Russia, St Petersburg. – Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg. – Russian State Library, Moscow. – State Historical Museum.

National Library of Russia (former Imperial Public Library; State Public Library named after M.E. Saltykov-Schedrin), St Petersburg

<http://www.nlr.ru/>

- Founded in 1795 by the Empress Catherine the Great; opened in 1814. It contains up to 34 million volumes or items and is the second largest library in Russia. Famous Russian writers, architects, researchers always worked there.
- The Manuscript Department of the National Library of Russia possesses over 30,000 items, the richest collection of ancient Russian and South Slavic manuscripts of the 11-19th century in the world, among them the oldest dated Slavic manuscript the *Ostromirovo Gospel* (1056-1057) and the *Zograph Gospel* of the 11th century in glagolitic script. There are also collections of ancient Russian monasteries of the 12-17th century. Annually additions are made to the Old-Believers' manuscripts of the 17-20th century.
- Collection of Greek manuscripts is largest in Russia and one of the largest in the world (904 items). The oldest part consists of papyri of the 3-4th century including fragments of comedies by Menandres and fragments of the famous vellum *Sinai Codex* (4th century).
- The collection of Western manuscripts and autographs is second to none in Russia. It includes 6,000 codices of the 5-20th century and more than 70,000 documents, including a manuscript containing a work by St Augustine (5th century) and the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* of Bede (746 CE).
- The collection of Eastern manuscripts consists of c. 20,000 items; there are Persian, Chinese, Arabic, Indian, Turk, Hebrew and other manuscripts on papyrus, palm leaves, vellum, stones, leather, wooden and metal plates, birch bark, paper, silk (including embroidered ones) and canvas. The oldest manuscripts are two Egyptian papyri of the 10th century BCE.
- Russian archives of the 18th-21th century form over half of the collections. They include documents on the history of the national culture, literature, theatre and fine arts. There are documents of the collection of the Romanovs from the

reign of the Emperor Peter the Great up to the demise of Nicolas II. Recent accessions include many new collections from abroad, from families of Russian emigrants.

Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg

<http://www.rasl.ru>

- Founded in 1714 by the Emperor Peter the Great; opened in 1728. It contains up to 20 million volumes or items. A specialist Manuscript Department was opened in 1900; the first head of it was the famous scientist V.I. Sreznevsky.
- The core of the collection are manuscripts from the personal library of Peter the Great including those of his relatives - his father (tsar Alexey Mikhailovich), brothers, sisters and son. There are many manuscripts with autographs by Peter the Great.
- Main collection consists of ancient Russian codices of the 12th -18th century. In the foreign collection there are mainly manuscripts of the 15th century in Latin and European languages, many of them are illustrated with miniatures, ornaments and arabesques. There are Books of Rules and Regulations (of the Benedictine Order, for instance), Psalters, Breviaries, Missals and Books of Hours.
- The collection of Greek manuscripts, dating from the 5th -20th century, takes third place in the country. The oldest (5th-century fragments of St John's Gospel) was found in the binding of an ancient Russian book.
- Since the 18th century, the Library has been collecting hand-made cartographic materials. The base of this collection is made from copies gathered by Peter the Great: drawings and city plans (Vyborg, Shlisselburg, Novgorod, Astrakhan, Taganrog, Derbent) and schemes of fortifications from the first quarter of the 18th century.
- In the well-known Old-Believers' collection of M.I. Chuvanov (prior of the Transfiguration Community) there are precious liturgical books of the Pomorsky Order famous for their Old-Believers' ornaments of the 18th -19th century.

Russian State Library (former Imperial Moscow and Rumiantzev Museum; State Library named after V.I. Lenin), Moscow

<http://leninka.ru>

<http://www.rsl.ru>

- The collections of the Russian State Library began with the collection of the State Chancellor Count N.P. Rumiantzev which comprised more than 28,000 books, 710 manuscripts and more than 1,000 maps. The Rumiantzev Museum was founded in 1828. Now the library holds over 43 million volumes and items.
- The Manuscript Department opened in 1862. In a period of 200 years they built up a unique collection of manuscripts of the 6th-20th century, over 550,000 items. There are Byzantine manuscripts including a volume of *Apostles* (6th century), Western European codices, Japanese texts on rice paper, Indian and Burmese books on palm leaves, ornamented Arabic and Persian manuscripts with precious miniatures.
- The collection is world-renowned because of 60,000 unique masterpieces of ancient Russian culture, including the *Arkhangels Gospel* of 1092, the *Mariinsky Gospel* of the 11th cent., the *Ochrid Apostle* of the 12th century.
- Largest part of the collection consists of c. 800 personal archives of state and social figures and outstanding researchers. Also includes rare documents on the

history of social thought and events of Russia and its culture and life of the 17th-20th century. Over the past 15 years more than 100 personal archives and composed individual funds of writers, academicians and others purchased. There is a glorious tradition of gifts of manuscripts and documents to the Library: over the past 15 years the Library has received more than 300 gifts from Russia, Spain, Argentina, France, Britain and the U.S.A.

State Historical Museum (former Imperial Russian Historical Museum), Moscow
<http://www.shm.ru>

- Founded in 1872 under the initiative of the society. Collections range from Paleolithic times to the present day. The Department of Manuscripts and Old Printed Books is one of the largest such repositories in Russia. There are more than 31,000 manuscripts, including Greek papyri from the First Millennium CE, Novgorod texts on birch barks, Greek manuscripts of the 6-17th cent. The rich collection of Slavic manuscripts is made up of many private and monastery collections as well as the collection of the Synod including ancient vellum codices and precious material from Mt Athos.
- The Department keeps and studies volumes of the Illustrated Historical Code (Litzevoy Letopisny Svod) created following the idea of Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century, volumes of the Great Missals of the Metropolitan Makarios (16th century), the largest collection of Lives of saints and works by the Church Fathers in Russian history.
- The first curator was one of the founders of the Russian paleographic school V.N. Shchepkin. Currently, the Department is among the leaders of codicological studies; it provides libraries with albums of watermarks of Russian manuscripts. The Administration and personnel of the Department have created a digital catalogue of the collections which is available freely to readers in the hall of the Department.