

# **Bibliothèque nationale de France**

## **Annual report for 1997**

### **1998 CENL meeting, Prag**

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As indicated in the previous annual report, the major event for the Bibliothèque nationale de France those past months, was the opening, on December 20, 1996 of the ten "haut-de-jardin" reading-rooms in the new building of Tolbiac.

Those reading-rooms are destined to "the general public", i.e. to any person aged over 16, without any condition of registration, except the payment of a fee. They house 1,600 seats, and an open-access collection of ca. 200,000 books (370,000 in the years to come).

The first six months were slightly disappointing : with an average of 2,000 readers and/or visitors each day, the attendance was inferior to schedule (4,500 readers, plus 2/3,000 visitors), probably due to difficulties of access and insufficient public transportation means. After the holiday break and an eager information campaign, the attendance rose swiftly to an average of 7,000 readers and/or visitors each day, which is quite satisfactory for a new library, whose research reading-rooms are not open yet ; peaks of more than 10,000 and even 11,000 readers and/or visitors have been recorded during week-ends, particularly on Sundays, when latecomers have to queue up two hours or more to have access to reading-rooms and exhibition halls.

This success has been enhanced by several record-breaking exhibitions, such as the opening exhibition, about encyclopaedia, which was visited by 100,000 people, or the "Nude in the Photography of the early years" which has attracted more than 50,000 visitors, which has no example for a photograph exhibition in Paris.

A survey has been processed about the public in two phases : in the spring and in autumn. This survey reveals very high satisfaction rates about the reading-rooms, the collections, the staff and the services ; lesser satisfaction rates have been recorded about the opening hours (10 am-7 pm from Tuesday to Saturday, 12 am-6 pm on Sunday), particularly about the closing hour, regarded as too early, mainly for working people, and about the cafeteria.

A vast majority of readers are students : ca. 70 % of the frequent readers, 80 % of the season-ticket holders, in relation with the situation of university libraries in Paris and its area. But most of those students do not simply use the reading-rooms as work-rooms, but do really read the books and use the library services for research purposes.

This enables the Bibliothèque to be quite optimistic about the co-existence in a same building of a reference library open to the general public and of an authentic research library. This research library, the rez-de-jardin, will open in October 1998, with its 2,000 seats.

This opening is now the main priority of the Bibliothèque. The removal of the collections (10 millions books, 360,000 periodicals, 1 million audiovisual documents) from the old building to the new one has started on March 16, 1998 and all the reading-rooms will close in

September, to allow the staff to prepare what should be a major event for librarianship in France and all over the world.

The second major event at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in 1997 has been the opening, in October, of Gallica.

Gallica is an experimental server, which gives access, on the web site of the Bibliothèque ([www.bnf.fr](http://www.bnf.fr)) to a digital collection of 2,600 books (i.e. 1 million pages) and 7,000 pictures, all related to the XIX<sup>e</sup> century. Just a sample of the digital collections of the Bibliothèque, this collection seems to be, at least as far as the books are concerned, the largest text collection available on the web.

More than 350,000 connections to Gallica have been recorded since its opening; the most consulted items are bibliographies, encyclopaedia and dictionaries, and the great classics of literature, such as "Cyrano de Bergerac" and "Madame Bovary".

This success should lead to a new step: in October 1998, 500,000 extra pages should be added to Gallica, and in March 1999, the whole copyright-free digital collection of the Bibliothèque should be available, i.e. ca. 12 million pages.

This effort to make remote access to library items possible has been the occasion of a deep change in the digital policy of the Bibliothèque: instead of trying to constitute a comprehensive virtual collection, it has been decided to take into account the user's expectations, as indicated by the Gallica experiment, and the offer of other websites.

This new policy rests on a close partnership with French and foreign libraries: several conferences have been planned to try to establish the bases of a more common approach of these issues.

This partnership is a new goal in the networking policy of the Bibliothèque, on a national as well as on an international level; for instance, there is a strong link between the Bibliothèque's own efforts and its involvement in such international projects as "Cobra", "Gabriel" or "Biblioteca Universalis", whose second official meeting has been chaired by France in Copenhagen in September 1997: during this meeting, the theme of travels and international exchanges has been chosen as the mainframe of each participant's contribution to the project, and accordingly, the Bibliothèque nationale de France has chosen this theme as one of the main elements of its digital collection.

The main objective for the Bibliothèque is now, as written earlier, the opening of the research library in October. This opening, and the end of the removal, scheduled in December, will make an emergency of the situation of the old building, Rue de Richelieu: the special collections of the Bibliothèque (manuscripts, prints and photographs, coins and medals, maps, music, performing arts) will stay in this building, but if many studies and reports have been devoted to this question no decision has been made yet by the Government about the modernization of those collections.

This is unsatisfactory, because the balance between the two main sites of the Bibliothèque is one of the keys of the unity of the institution and of its collections and a condition of its further development.

The Bibliothèque has done major efforts to contribute to the modernization of special collections : lastly, retrospective conversion of the map catalogue has been started, while on-line cataloguing was started for manuscripts and prints.

But the outstanding historical and cultural value of these collections justifies that they should be regarded as a major asset for research, equally with books, periodicals and audiovisual materials : this is the next challenge for an institution which, in ten years, has overcome a very deep change and which is now, as fit as ever, ready for the information society of the XXI st century.

**Paris, April 1998**

## **ANNEX**

### **1. Major innovation and achievements :**

See report

### **2. Finance and funding :**

The Bibliothèque nationale de France is still 90 % subsidized by the central Government of France. The extra funds are mainly applied to the preparation of the opening of the research-library.

### **3. Legal status :**

No change.

### **4. Legal deposit of materials :**

According to the legislation of 1992, copies of books and periodicals acquired through legal deposit are attributed to regional libraries, according to the publisher's or printer's location. This helps to create collections that are a reflection of book publishing and printing in the regions. In any case, the Bibliothèque nationale de France keeps at least two copies for its own needs.

### **5. Buildings and plant :**

See report.

### **6. Acquisitions :**

No particular remark.

## **7. Conservation and preservation :**

The new preservation centre in Marne-la-Vallée, a few miles out of Paris, is now open, although its opening has been slightly delayed for staff reasons.

## **8. It and new technology :**

See report.

## **9. Services to readers :**

Free and unrestricted accesses to Internet are offered to readers in all the reading-rooms, the only limit being a working-session of 45 minutes.

## **10. Exhibitions :**

"Tous les Savoirs du Monde" : 100,000 visitors (Encyclopaedia)

"The Photographe et son modèle" : 50,000 visitors (Nude)

"L'Aventure des Écritures" : 50,000 visitors (History of Writing)

"Splendeurs persanes" : 40,000 visitors (Persian manuscripts).

## **11. Publishing :**

No particular remark.

## **12. Cataloguing :**

No particular remark.

## **13. Library co-operation :**

See report.

## **14. Staffing matters :**

No particular remark.