

National and University Library of Iceland

Annual Report 1997/98

Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn

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Facts and Figures

Opened in a new building on 1 December 1994.

The Library was created by amalgamating the National Library (founded in 1818) and the Library of the University of Iceland (founded in 1940).

Size of the building 13,000 sq. m

Reader seats 700

Computers available to users 70

Print collections, total 820,000

Number of special collections 12

Open-access collection 250,000

Music (sound recordings) 11,000

Videos 700

Manuscripts 15,000

Staff, total (full-time equivalents) 95

Academic staff 58

Technicians 5

Clerical and support staff 23

Bookbinders and conservators 4

Computer staff 5

Circulation 80,000

Interlibrary lending

requests received 6,750

loans and copies supplied 6,250

Finance and Funding

After a period of severe cuts in acquisitions, the Government Budget for 1998 brought considerably increased funding both for general collection building and for the University Acquisitions Fund.

The Library's Budget for 1998:

University Acquisitions Fund ISK 46,500,000 (GBP 388,000) 1997: 31,500,000 (GBP 262,000)

Other acquisitions ISK 23,500,000 (GBP 195,000) 1997: 23,500,000 (GBP 195,000)

Building and its maintenance ISK 32,000,000 (GBP 267,000) 1997: ISK25,000,000 (GBP 208,000)

Staffing and other costs ISK 251,500,000 (GBP 2,096,000) 1997: ISK 165,000,000 (GPB 1,375,000)

Total ISK 353,500,000 (GBP 2,946,000) 1997: ISK 245,000,000

Revenue earning ISK 21,000,000 (GBP 175,000) 1997: ISK 20,000,000

Staffing Matters

In keeping with the Government's policy of devolution in the public sector, with the aim of increasing efficiency and accountability, more and more bargaining is taking place locally in Government agencies and institutions. After the Government has reached a general agreement with the unions concerned, further negotiations are conducted at local level. The Library has now signed institutional agreements with its employees for the first time. The new arrangements have brought increased working pressure and placed new financial burdens on the Library.

The number of full-time equivalents in the Library is about 95 at present. Back in 1994, at the opening of the new Library, it was estimated that the Library would be manned by about 115 people when in full operation.

Legal Deposit of Materials

The legal deposit law now in force is from 1977. On 1 August 1997, a committee was appointed by the Minister of Education and Culture with the task of revising the legal deposit act and making recommendations as to what materials are to be subject to legal deposit, who should be responsible for handing in depository copies, and what institutions should be charged with the responsibility of receiving and preserving legal deposit material, as well as formulating rules for the use of depository copies with regard to copyright law. In Iceland as elsewhere it is mostly the new media that necessitates new legislation in this field.

Conservation/Preservation of Collections

A small, fully-equipped conservation workshop is in the new building. A qualified conservator was appointed at the beginning of 1998. More staff is needed, however, as the need for conservation is heavy. Digitization (cf. the projects described below) can be a useful measure in addition to conventional conservation.

Technological Developments

The Government of Iceland has formulated its policy concerning the evolution of the information society in Iceland. It is based on the principal goal of placing Iceland in the forefront of the World's nations in the utilization of information technology in order to improve the standard of living and increase prosperity. To follow up on this chief aim, some main objectives were set out, and the Prime Minister is responsible for implementing the

policy as a whole, while individual ministries have formulated policies for their respective fields. One of the goals of the Ministry of Education and Culture is the preservation of cultural values, stating that a determined effort be made to preserve and catalogue cultural values in digital form. A priority should be given to rare and damaged works.

The National and University Library will be instrumental in carrying out the policies of the Ministry of Education and Culture and will develop some of its activities towards a National Electronic Library. In 1997 the Library completed the digitization of about 220 historical maps of Iceland from the period 1500-1900, and made them accessible on the Internet (<http://egla.bok.hi.is/kort>), and a three-year project of digitizing approximately 500,000 pages of manuscripts and printed material, the Icelandic Sagas in particular, and making them accessible through the Internet (<http://www.bok.hi.is/cgi-bin/saganet>) is well under way. This project is being carried out in cooperation with Cornell University and with the participation of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland. The material is digitized in a manner that will ensure that it fulfills the demands for long-time preservation. To that end a high-quality digital camera has been acquired and is already in use. About six members of staff are working on the project, three of them in cataloguing the manuscripts in the *Gegnir* (see below), which has not been done before and requires a lot of skills. This project, named *SagaNet*, is extremely important to the library, for Icelandic culture, and for making Iceland known abroad, for this material includes some of the most important cultural heritage of the Icelandic nation.

The British library system *Libertas* (from SLS Information Systems in Bristol) has been in use in Iceland since 1990, and has from the beginning consisted of two separate databases, *Gegnir*, as the main system is known in Icelandic, and *Greinir*, an index of articles in Icelandic journals and magazines. A third one, *Gelmir*, used for cataloguing manuscripts, was added in 1997.

In mid-1997 the SLS merged with an American company, Innovative Interfaces Inc., and the library has therefore to decide within the next three years or so whether to adopt their library system, INNOPAC, or search for other systems.

The *Libertas* system has been used by eight other Icelandic libraries. There is one other big library system used by Icelandic libraries, *Dobis/Libis*, used by the Reykjavík Public Library and several small libraries. As it is evident that the *Dobis/Libis* system will also have to be replaced by a new system within a few years, a working group was established by the Ministry of Education and Culture in March 1998 in order to study the feasibility of finding one system that could serve all or at least the biggest Icelandic libraries.

Another working group recently established by the Minister is to make recommendations as to how to facilitate the access of users in Iceland to commercially available databases.

On 16 November 1997, "Icelandic Language Day", there was a gathering in the Library on the occasion of the opening of a website with works by and about Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807-45), the best-known Romantic poet of Iceland, translated into English by Richard N. Ringler, who is professor in the University of Wisconsin (Madison). He had previously received some assistance from the National and University Library in preparing the edition. The Icelandic Minister of Education and Culture was in Akureyri, in the north of Iceland, at the time and opened the website using the new teleconference technology. The website is: <http://www.library.wise.edu/etext/Jonas/>.

Exhibitions and Other Events

There are 5–10 exhibitions held in the Library each year, some in cooperation with others or wholly organized by them. One such exhibition was held early in 1997, *Tarzan in Iceland for 75 years*, to commemorate the fact that in January 1922 there appeared in a newspaper the first Icelandic translation of a book about Tarzan.

In October 1997 there was an exhibition in cooperation with the Faculty of Theology in order to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Theological Seminary in Reykjavík, which counts as the beginnings of teaching at university level in Reykjavík. The Seminary was later incorporated in the University of Iceland as the Faculty of Theology.

Halldór Laxness, the 1955 Nobel laureate, died on 8 February 1998. He was born on 23 April 1902, which day, incidentally, was declared World Book and Copyright Day by UNESCO a few years ago, as it was on that date in 1616 that Miguel de Cervantes, William Shakespeare, and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega died. That day, 23 April 1997, an exhibition of portraits, drawings and sculptures of the poet was opened in the Library. His manuscripts had been given formally to the Library in 1996.

The Summer Exhibition was *Iceland – Heaven or Hell? Descriptions of Iceland and Icelanders Written by Foreign Writers of Previous Centuries*.

The Library Week, organized this time by Icelandic librarians, was held in the Nordic countries in November 1997, mostly by public libraries. The theme of the week was Egils saga, one of the Sagas of Icelanders, and at the ceremonial opening in the National and University Library, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former President of Iceland, read a chapter from the Saga.

Publishing

In addition to the annual Icelandic National Bibliography (*Íslensk bókaskrá*) for 1996, which came out in August 1997, volume two of the annual publication *Ritmennt* was published. It contains among other articles a statistical summary of publishing in Iceland during the last 30 years, 1967–1996, which shows that 34,578 books (periodicals not included) were published during the period, 1,152 books per year on average. The greatest number of books appeared in 1992, 1,770 titles, but only 657 titles appeared in 1974. The increase in publishing is clearly seen if the period is divided into three 10-year periods. Then the average is 790 titles in the first period, 1,160 in the second period, and 1,507 in the third period.

The Year 2000

In so far as Iceland is concerned, this year is remarkable not only as the end of the century. It will also be recalled then that Christianity was adopted in Iceland in the year 1000 and that same year the Icelander Leifur Eiríksson became the first European to sail to America.

Moreover in the year 2000, Reykjavík will be one of the nine Cultural Cities of Europe. Those events will be commemorated in one way or another by the Library. However, preparations are still in the early stages.