

# 125 YEARS OF THE PERIODICALS COLLECTION

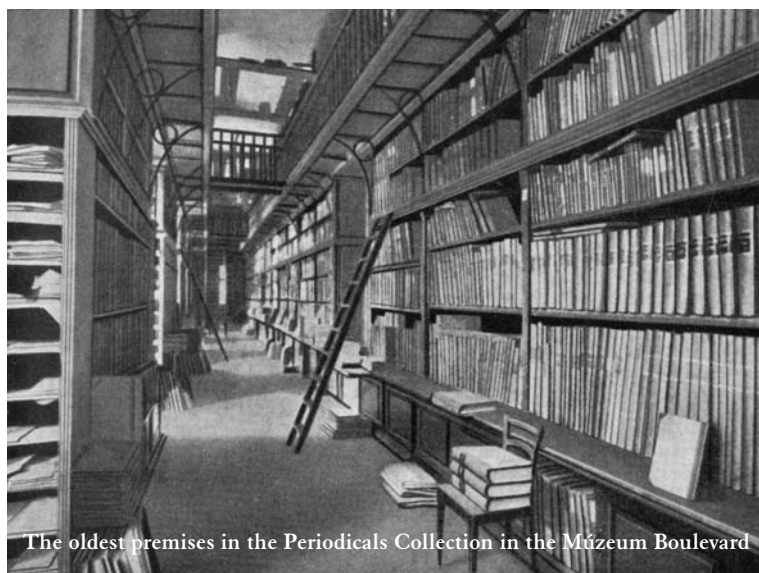


Today at the time of anniversary packages and other one-off compilations, few of us think of the enormous effort our predecessors made in the careful, systematic and forward-looking enrichment of the collection which József Szinnyei senior so doggedly fought for. His lobbying of two decades led to education minister Ágoston Trefort's decree on 2nd July 1884 to establish the National Periodicals Library within the Hungarian National Museum. Naturally, the execution of the decree was placed into Szinnyei's hands, who was still in the employment of the University Library, therefore worked part-time for both libraries. With his assistants István Kereszty and János Váczy (two colleagues paid by the day) and a servant, he immediately started arranging and, processing the National Museum's stocks, and later also supplementing them with periodicals from the University Library, the Academy Library, the National Casino and the Transylvanian Museum. This effort was unique and progressive even by international standards, as apart from the Bibliothèque National and the British Library there was no such institution or an equally rich collection in the whole of Europe. The National Museum and its library seemed appropriate for the grand project for two main reasons. Firstly because it possessed the largest collection of newspapers, and secondly because, according to the founder Count Ferenc Széchenyi's intentions from its very start the museum was an institution with a national mission of preservation. In order that it should meet this responsibility, a decree was passed as early as

1802 that besides the University Library the National Museum should also receive deposit copies. Entrusted by the government, between 1885 and 1887 Szinnyei called on all the publishers of periodicals in the country to personally convince printers of the importance of sending in the papers, something that Act XVIII of 1848 had already ordered them to do. Szinnyei's 'tours' proved successful and the collection was steadily growing and becoming better and better organised. Because of the reduced binding capacity during WW I, the stock was almost 'unmanageable':

processing slowed down and the number of unbound papers started going up again. Nevertheless, the library's management and staff tried very hard to acquire war publications, with newspapers among them. The library's leaders addressed diplomatic bodies and other offices asking their staff to monitor and preserve war documents. A number of private persons (teachers, priests and scientists among them) did voluntary collection work to supply the publications missing because of the war. After the peace treaty, many printers and publications were released from the obligation of supplying deposit copies. Thus in 1920 periodicals sent in reached no more than 20-25% of the previous level. The National Library's staff and supporters then again tried to replace the missing pieces by new purchases and generous individual contributions.

The 'quiet' life of the Collection was again disturbed by WWII. During the siege of Budapest, stacks



The oldest premises in the Periodicals Collection in the Múzeum Boulevard

of periodicals were sent to the National Museum's cellars, and only after the fighting had died down were they replaced on their shelves. This implied moving some twenty thousand volumes of periodicals twice, requiring heroic efforts from the staff. After the war, the library's collection scope was modified. Earlier, from beyond the new country borders the library had collected only Hungarian periodicals. Later, however, the literature and the main periodicals about the culture, land, peoples of historically and diplomatically important regions were also included. Because of the

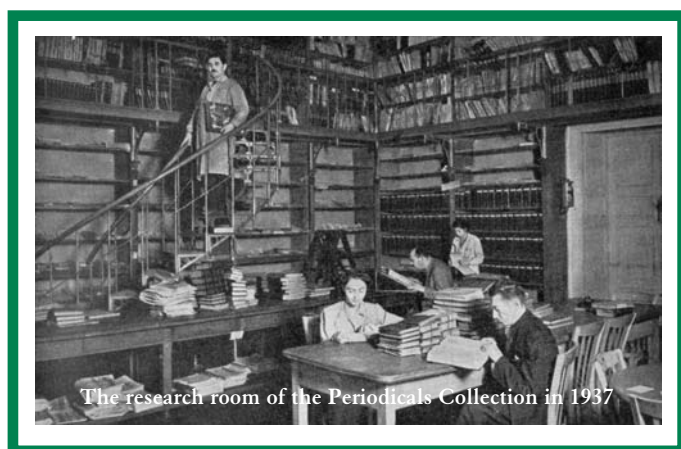
growing numbers of emigrants, publications of Hungarians living on distant continents were gaining more significance. In addition to extending content, between 1945 and 1957 there was also a typological rearrangement. Szinnyei's Periodicals Library was limited to press products issued more frequently than once a month. As categorization according to periodicity was becoming harder, the collection scope of the Periodicals Collection was extended to less frequent journals as well.

One could say that the Collection had its heyday under Béla Dezsényi's direction. Dezsényi took over the unit already called Periodicals Collection in 1943 and led it up to 1962. The twenty years was not without certain difficulties. Despite the problems (or perhaps exactly because of them), he created an excellent group, and through hard and dedicated teamwork they produced impressive results. He claimed that the Periodicals Collection "*had an increased scientific responsibility in addition to the general obligation of preservation and processing...*"<sup>1</sup> Dezsényi shared this responsibility with his colleagues. On top of their daily routine tasks, he expected them to be familiar with the latest professional literature, to improve their expertise, to do research into press history and to publish regularly. Under his leadership in 1946 they began the repertory building of journals, the construction of an article catalogue and, sponsored by the Academy of

cial collections on the acquisition-exploration-application model and to attach them to the appropriate section of the library. Due to the special features of documents in these collections, this idea was abandoned in most cases, but not in the case of the Periodicals Collection. In 1971 the first function to be separated was acquisition, then readers' service (and the associated information provision) as well as storage. At that time, reorganization simply meant setting up new units. The real separation took place at the time of moving into the Buda Castle in 1985. This was then justified by the size of the Periodicals Collection, as it seemed in the new building there was not enough space for all of it. Thus, the former tasks were divided among by different units physically very far from each other. Seeing the negative consequences of the decision, a few years later the Director General's College put the question of the Periodicals Collection on its agenda. On 4<sup>th</sup> November 1988 the General Director established a team to explore the possibility of reestablishing the Periodicals Collection. Katalin Illyés tabled her "*Recommendation for organizing and operating the Periodicals Collection as an independent organizational unit*", which was evaluated by the team. Relying on team members' opinions and recommendations, with regard to local conditions, the library's management rejected the idea. Consequences are obvious: the collection of papers and journals is no longer a special collection, but due to its nature, it has not become an integral part of the core collection either. The protection of the rights of periodicals is hard to realize and is not seen as a priority, in the same way as it has become impossible to train specialists who are familiar with all sides of the 'disorderly nature' of periodicals. We trust however, using the words of General Görgey (of the 1848 War of Independence against Austria), "*that the true cause cannot be lost forever.*" The present and future staff of the library will look after the Periodicals Collection with the same care and dedication as our predecessors did.

The Press History Department set up in 2009 and the academy press history research group will fill the gap left behind the National Periodicals Library, the Periodicals Department of the Széchényi Library of the Hungarian National Museum, and more recently the Periodicals Collection and their competent and dedicated staff.

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The research room of the Periodicals Collection in 1937

Sciences, internal and external colleagues started collecting material for the missing period bibliographies. The first outcome of this project was *The Bibliography of the Hungarian Press 1945-1954*<sup>2</sup>, published in 1956. Unfortunately, the Periodicals Collection could not fulfill the mission of being a 'research laboratory' for long. Dezsényi was removed as director, and a few years later the issue of functional work management was raised. Accordingly, they intended to divide spe-

<sup>1</sup> Béla Dezsényi: *Periodicals in the library*. [Bp.]: [OSZK], 1954. p.7

<sup>2</sup> *Bibliography of the Hungarian Press 1945-1954* / Béla Dezsényi, Zoltán Falvy, Judit Fejér. – Bp. : Művelt Nép, 1956. – 159 p.