

# **Littera scripta manet. The Historical Collection of the Library of the University of Latvia**

## **Experience with library exhibitions**

### **Report**

**3 Baltic University Library Meeting (15-16 May, 2019)**

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#### **Executive summary**

The report for 3 Baltic University Library Meeting (15-16 May, 2019) that was held at the University of Tartu Library. Report describes the experience of preparing exhibitions about Historical Collections of the Library of the University of Latvia. There are given two examples, that illustrates the challenges library have faced regarding the process of creating exhibitions.

#### **Way they should want to use our libraries?**

Our mission - to form an accurate understanding of their perceptions of our mission in this present day of academic library.

Debra Lucas-Alfieri. Marketing the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuru Library.  
The time is now. 2015



**(..) to step back and examine the profession – purpose, ethos and the world we live in. It is a time for independent thinking (..).**

Ronald C. Jantz. A Vision to the Future: New Roles for Academic Librarians. 2016

Debra Lucas-Alfieri, Head of Reference and Interlibrary Loan at D'Youville College in Buffalo, wrote a guidebook for the modern academic librarian in the age of electronic information "Marketing the twenty-first century library". She urge us to think about library users and ask a question – "Way they should want to use our libraries? This is the central question in order to build understanding of what library users expect from library. "Our mission should be to form an accurate understanding of their perceptions of our mission in this present day of academic library".

Mathematician and digital library architect Ronald C. Jantz – recommend “to step back and examine the profession – purpose, ethos and the world we live in”. The author noted “A vision for the future: new roles for academic librarians - it is a time for independent thinking, innovation, and the courage to undertake risk and embrace major change”.



Unique collections - The Treasures of the Library



These quotes encourage rethinking not only the overall library role in the modern society, but also library relevance in field of exhibitions and cultural events. The purpose of the report is to share experience with two exhibitions, that were dedicated to manuscripts and engravings from the special collections of The Library of the University of Latvia.

The Library of the University of Latvia has three types of unique collections:

- Special collections – created by the Library itself, or obtained from the owner of the collection,
- Donations of private collections – private libraries or collections donated by notable personalities of University,
- Historical holdings of the University of Latvia institutions - historically preserved libraries and collections of various structural units of the University.

Library was looking for new approaches – how to work with exhibitions of special collections. Our main goal was to communicate with visitors through the exhibition and not to leave a visitor in the role of passive observer.

**Black and White History  
Evidence: Egyptian  
Reflection of the 19th  
Century in French  
Engravings**

**Reflection of Latvian  
values in the material  
and spiritual culture**

**Ornament path**



Events organized by The Library:

- Lecture Cycle “Black and White History Evidence: Egyptian Reflection of the 19th Century in French Engravings” and exhibition of engravings,
- Scientific conference “Reflection of Latvian values in the material and spiritual culture” and exhibition “Ornament path”.

The lecture cycle coincided with the world's cultural and historical heritage, while the conference and exhibition took place at the 100th anniversary of the Latvian state.



Vice-rector, prof. Valdis  
Segliņš «Peculiarities of  
ancient Egyptian  
culture»



In the process of making exhibitions where the main subjects are books raises a problem - how to make a “closed” book interesting for audience. Because the purpose of book is to be read, in order to give an information and emotions. When we put a book in closed glass

cabinet, in order to showcase it, without the possibility to turn the pages we are losing the story and engagement. Library's creative team was thinking about ways besides printed and digital annotations, how to tell the story of book.



LU Library Director  
Mārīte Saviča and Art  
Historian Vita Ozoliņa  
«Ancient Egypt under  
the Reading Glass»



In the first case Library specialists were working with nineteenth century engravings. Origins of engravings are connected with the time when Napoleon Bonaparte went to conquer Egypt. Besides soldiers he took a group of scientists with him. There was founded The Napoleonic Institute of Egypt, that was a starting point of Egyptology. Scientists documented the architecture and art objects, created maps and drawings of animals and nature. To summarize their research results they created the collection of engravings. The Library has a second edition of these engravings. It was published in Paris from 1821 until 1829.



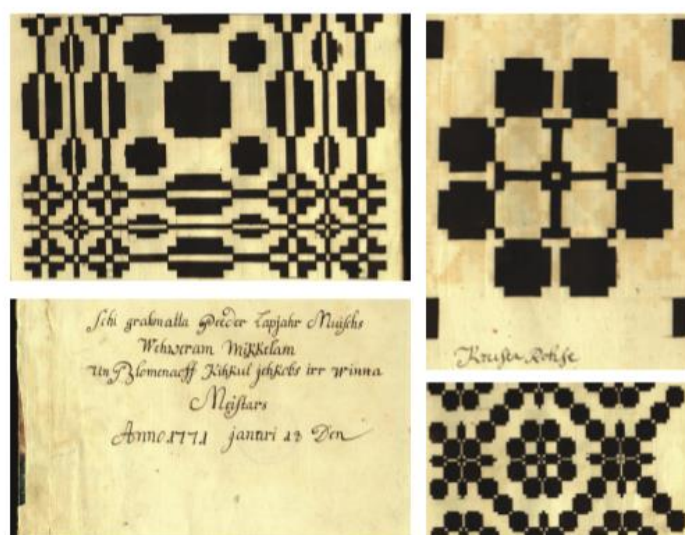
Dr. hist. Harry Tumm's  
lecture «The Napoleon  
Expedition and Ancient  
Egypt: The Interaction of  
Two Cultures»





To engage visitors with exhibition, the Library created a lecture cycle. Professors and researchers who represents different scientific fields, was invited to tell their story about engravings and have a discussion with visitors. In discussions participated vice rector, professor of geology Dr. geol. Valdis Seglins (Valdis Segliņš) – he has participated in archaeological excavations in Egypt. The Library invited professor of history, Dr. hist. Harijs Tumans - who research field includes time of Napoleon and his personality. Gentlemen's were joined by art historian Vita Ozolina (Vita Ozoliņa), who works as curator of Education at the Art Museum Riga Bourse, and University of Latvia library director and researcher Marite Savica (Mārīte Saviča).

That was an interdisciplinary approach to tell story about engraving from different point of views. These discussion evenings were very well attended and the Library received personal feedback from the audience. Through these experience librarians understood how important is communication about rarities, historical manuscripts and collections that is stored by the library. Nowadays it is not enough with a traditional exhibition, educational annotations or guided tours the Library need to offer something more, lectures, discussions, workshops, something that will educate as well as create emotions. Through exhibitions librarys need to create and tell stories that will attract visitors. Otherwise librarys are losing audience, because the offer in this field is huge - librarys are competing with museums, art galleries and other facilities that offer intelligent entertainment.



Manuscript of ornaments dated by 1771.



In other case the Library was working with unique manuscript from eighteen century. It is a collection of ornaments, that was created by fabric weaver. Manuscript was exposed together with works of applied art masters, that continue folk art traditions and represent ornaments in their artworks.

Working with this exhibition librarians came to conclusion that sometimes less is more. In large expositions, with many books and manuscripts – if the visitor don't have a base of knowledge and he can navigate himself through the exhibition, he gets lost and don't engage with the message of exhibition. It doesn't matter how many annotations or guides there are. In this case the Library were concentrating only on one item – manuscript – and telling its story with help of other art objects, that visualize the content of manuscript.



## Exhibition: «Ornament path»



Also in this case important aspect was our partners, sometimes the Library need to think outside the box and look for partners in other fields. Someone who can enrich the Library story. And in this case the Library reached a good balance between objects of art and manuscript. They complemented each other. The Library have a long-term cooperation with professors and researchers of University of Latvia. This time creative team of exhibition went out of their comfort zone and looked for new partners, that are using ornament in their daily work. And this cooperation made us and the Library visitor to look at the manuscript from another point of view. To see the ornaments from pages reborn in work of arts.



## Scientific conference: «Reflection of Latvian values in the material and spiritual culture»



A manuscript and exhibition was an inspiration for scientific conference: “Reflection of Latvian values in the material and spiritual culture”, that gathered scientists from different fields and applied masters from different places of Latvia to analyze ornaments and their usage in Latvian folk art, ancient religion and daily life through centuries.

The Library were used to work with large expositions, that includes many items. In these exhibitions overall context can be given, but in these conditions it is hard to tell the story of each book or manuscript. In many cases it is much more effective to work with one or few items instead of large exposition. It is much easier to engage visitor in interaction, to tell the story of the item, and reach visitors with our message.

Other thing that the Library have learned is importance of communication, through conversations, lectures, workshops that are intended for different audiences. It is important that visitors can take active part.

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