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Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Library & Information Centre: A new-old library

Keywords: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Library & Information Centre, History, Collections, Services.

Summary: The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Library and Information Centre (AUTh Library) is a rather new library, 90 years old. Yet, its collections go back till the 10th century AD thanks to donations by professors, donors and other benefactors. This paper shortly presents the history of the AUTh Library.

The establishment of the University

The Modern Greek state was formed gradually since its definition as an independent kingdom in 1832. The establishment of a Greek university in Athens was considered as a landmark for the intellectual development of the Greek nation. Therefore, after the liberation of Thessaloniki from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, two Greek scholars, Constantin Carathéodory and George Streit envisioned the establishment of a second Greek University. Constantin Carathéodory was a mathematician and a professor at the University of Munich. The lawyer George Streit was also a professor and served as a legal advisor for King Constantine and as a Minister of Foreign Affairs. Their vision for Thessaloniki to host the second biggest higher education institution was based on the history of the city. Thessaloniki was the biggest city after Constantinople during the Ottoman Empire and the biggest city in the Macedonia region. Moreover, Thessaloniki has been a great economic centre in the region with a great cultural history, near the birth place of Aristotle.

Their plans were cancelled due to the First World War (1914-1918) and the involvement of Greece on the side of Allies. After the end of the WWI, a new Greco-Turkish war (1919-1922) burst with Greeks trying to liberate territories in Asia Minor. Greeks inhabited these areas since antiquity and there were many vibrant Greek communities there, such as Smyrna, Kydonies, etc. According to the then Greek Prime Minister, Eleftherios Venizelos, the second university of Modern Greece should be established in Smyrna, while the third university was to be established in Thessaloniki. Yet, the war was lost, Smyrna was burnt in 1922 and more than one million refugees from Asia Minor, Black sea region, Eastern Thrace and Constantinople came to Greece. The majority of these refugees were established in Thessaloniki and in northern Greece to reinforce the Greek identity of the area. Moreover, there was an urging need for educated public servants in the "New Lands" of Greece that could enact for well-organized public services in northern Greece. A Greek university in Thessaloniki could additionally boost the local economy and culture. For all these reasons, Prime Minister Alexandros Papanastassiou decided to found a university in Thessaloniki in 1924. The *University of Thessaloniki* started operating in 1925 and the *University Library* was founded in 1927. All schools of the University including the Library were located in a building right next to the Jewish cemetery. The mansion on the Ethnikis Amynis St served as

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International Cartographic Association, Commission on Cartographic Heritage into the Digital
Proceedings 14th ICA Conference *Digital Approaches to Cartographic Heritage,* Thessaloniki, 8-10 May 2019

Editors C. Boutoura, A. Tsorlini, E. Livieratos
AUTH CartoGeoLab, 2019, ISSN 2459-3893

the 2nd Military Hospital of the city during the WWI and hosted the university administration and the library till the 1970s.

The Jewish cemetery and the Chair of Jewish Studies

Thessaloniki has been a multicultural city with a vibrant economy. The port of the city was a hub not just for Thessaloniki but for the Balkans too. Many traders from Italy, France, and Bulgaria lived in Thessaloniki operating their businesses. Moreover, Thessaloniki is known as the *Jerusalem of Balkans* with a major Jewish community, mostly Eastern Sephardim, constituting at times more than half of the population of the city (Veinstein, 1992: 42-45; Benmayor, 2014). It is the only known example of a city of this size in the Jewish diaspora that retained a Jewish majority for centuries. The Jewish cemetery contained more than 300.000 graves (Benmayor, 2014) in an area just outside the walls of the city. The cemetery was an obstacle for the expansion of the city. Therefore, during the Nazi occupation in Thessaloniki, the Jewish cemetery was destructed and after the end of the 2nd World War the University of Thessaloniki expanded its campus on the remains of the cemetery.

Due to the Jewish presence in Thessaloniki, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki held a Jewish Studies Chair. The Chair operated from 1930 to 1935, and it was later suspended by Metaxas' dictatorship. After the Holocaust and the end of the 2nd World War, the Chair did not operate for nearly seventy years. In 2014, the Greek state and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki decided to re-establish it. The then Rector of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Ioannis Mylopoulos inaugurated two monuments, one in the administration building, and another outdoors in the centre of the AUTh campus.

The AUTh Library

Collections

The AUTh Library started operating in 1927 with an almost zero budget. The need for scholar information motivated professors and Greek scholars from diaspora to actively engage in enriching the library's collections. The initial core of the Library collection was the donation of G. Konstantinidis, books from school libraries, namely Gymnasium of Thessaloniki, the All-Male Teacher Training School and the Education Academy of Thessaloniki. To this initial core more books from school collections were added; books that were initially collected for the "Frontistirion" of Trebizond (K. Konstantinidis' donation) but never reached Asia Minor due to the destruction of 1922 and books from other Asia Minor schools saved from destruction and transferred in Thessaloniki by the "Fund for Exchangeable Property". Georgios Konstantinidis was a former National Library of Greece Director (1890-91, 1895) and donated his library of 8.000 books to the Aristotle University. Gymnasium of Thessaloniki was a Hellenic school operating during the Ottoman occupation in Thessaloniki and its books were mostly Ancient Greek literature classics. All-Male Teacher Training School was a 3-year school operating during 1914-1929. Its books were mostly historic and travel books. K. Konstantinidis was a rich trader from Trebizond (1856 - 1930) that worked hard for the creation of an independent Democracy of Pontos. Library's collection further developed through printed journals subscriptions and important private collections either donated or purchased, such as N. Politis, A. Svolos, A. Delmouzos, A. Papanastassiou, M. Triantafyllidis, A. Pallis, I. Trikoglou collections.

Thanks to all these efforts, the AUTh Library collections go back in time presenting diversity in terms of language, place, genre, and format. Some collection highlights include 113 manuscripts dating from the 10th century, rare books dating from 1495, and maps from the 16th century. Nowadays, the library's collection includes more than 1.302.000 printed and electronic books, access to 16.000 electronic jour-

nals and 64 bibliographic databases (AUTh Library and HEAL-Link consortium subscriptions). The AUTh Library actively supports the Open Access Movement since 2003. Hence, digitization and open access to theses and dissertations awarded from AUTh are two ongoing services reaching in total more than 4.000.000 million pages (archival collections, books, articles, newspapers, doctoral & postgraduate dissertations, research papers published by AUTh Faculty, etc.).

Communities and important Greek scholars continue to enrich the collections. Professors leaving on pension often donate their collections and papers to the Library. In 2014, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki was offered access to the Visual History Archive (USC Shoah Foundation, c2019), a collection of interviews of Holocaust and other genocides' survivors. In 2018, the Visual History Archive became a Proquest company product. The perpetual access to the archive was donated to Aristotle University of Thessaloniki by the German Consulate in Thessaloniki as a tribute to the 60.000 Jews from Thessaloniki that were deported to Nazi concentration camps. In 2016, professor I. Megas and poet N. Christianopoulos donated their collections to Aristotle University containing thousands of postcards, art items, books, manuscripts, correspondence, interviews, journals, etc. In 2019, the Central Macedonia Regional Unit and its Cultural Centre have donated the "Centre for the Study and Development of Hellenic Culture of the Black Sea" archives and the library. The Black Sea Centre was founded in 1996 and operated until 2011. During its operations, the Black Sea Centre developed a series of cultural activities, it actively recorded the presence of Greeks in the area in terms of monitoring the numbers of Greek education schools and teachers, and clubs. Moreover, it gained copies from former USSR archives or State Archives from Black Sea countries that involved the Greek presence in the area. The Endowed Chair of Pontic Studies took the initiative for this donation and the transfer costs were covered by the Charitable Foundation of Ivan Savvidi.

Recueil des cartes de partie des isles de l' Archipel, 1687

Digenis Akritas Manuscript, [1632]

Aldus Manutius Venice, 1503

Figure 1: Highlights from the AUTh Library collections

Space and Services

The Library collections and services are hosted in the Central Library and its 45 branches. The Library was initially housed in the old Faculty of Philosophy building. In 1974, it moved to its own four-storey premises in the heart of the university campus. This building was designed by the architects K. Papaioannou and K. Phines, and now houses the administrative services of the library and the Students' Main

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Reading Room with a capacity of over 1300 seats. The new Central Library building was inaugurated in 2000 (Davey, 2002). It was designed by the architects A. Kotsiopoulos, M. Papanikolaou, and I. Sakel-laridou. It houses the open stacks, the reference and loan services.

Besides the on-site services, the AUTh Library offers electronic services too. The development of modern on-site and electronic services was initially funded by European Union funded programmes, namely EPEAEK operational programmes (EPEAEK I, EPEAEK II), and the ESPA - Digital Convergence operational programme. After the end of the funding programmes, all services are operated by the library staff. Due to the economic crisis and the constant budget cuts, the AUTh Library took the strategic decision to switch most of its library systems from proprietary to open source ones. Therefore, the Online Public Access Catalogue is based on Koha software, the integrated search mechanism for all library tools is based on VUFind, two Invenio installations host the Digital Library (Psifiothiki, digital.lib.auth.gr), and the Institutional Repository (ikee.lib.auth.gr). Two Public Knowledge Project software systems, Open Journal Systems and Open Conference Systems are used for supporting the management and publication of open access journals, and of scientific events. The electronic courses service uses the Moodle learning management system. All online reference questions and interlibrary loan requests are handled using the OSTicket software. The library website (www.lib.auth.gr) uses the Drupal Content Management System; a Drupal module was configured to accept users' registration to the library training seminars organized on a monthly basis.
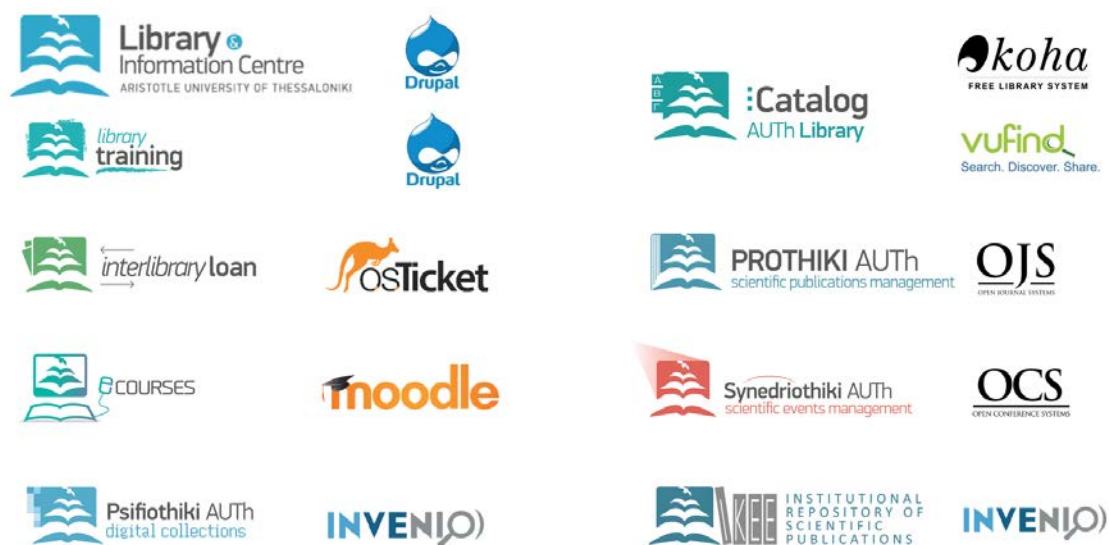

Figure 2: AUTh Library Services and Open Source Software used

Advocacy and Outreach

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Library became from the university community. Thus, it is mostly obvious to return to the community by providing access to its collections and services. It follows the tradition of "being open to the wider public" (Hang, 2013; Wilson, et.al., 2019) promoting the University's institutional openness. Citizens may study and use the library collections onsite. Nevertheless, researchers from Greece and worldwide may have online access to the digitized collections with off-copyright material, and to the scholarly output produced by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki students, researchers, and Faculty.

Important highlights from the collections have been exhibited in various cities of Greece, and in other countries, such as France and Turkey. Two publications with cartographic material (Livieratos, 2017; Livieratos, 2018) have been recently presented to the public receiving really positive feedback. For the purpose of advocating for open science and open access, events are organized in collaboration with the Open Knowledge Greece (c2019) and the Wikimedia User Group Greece on an annual basis. These events include the "Open Access Week" event, "#1Lib1Ref", "Open Data Day", etc. Staff participate in academic and other scientific events presenting the Library, while some publish in journals and conference proceedings regarding library research issues. Last but not least, a new annual event has been added to the AUTh Library's outreach efforts. The AUTh Library collaborates with the AUTh European Educational Programmes Department organizing the Erasmus Library Staff Training Week each May. In the framework of this week and the support of the Erasmus+, and the Erasmus+ International programmes, more than 65 librarians and IT staff from Europe and other non-EU countries have been hosted in the AUTh Library exchanging expertise, ideas and solutions to common problems.

Conclusions

Professor R.David Lankes in a 2012 tweet he mentioned that "Great libraries build communities". In the case of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Library & Information Centre, many communities with inspired scholars and dedicated researchers have worked the other way round; they reinforced the library through money or collection donations. Thanks to this effort, the AUTh Library holds the second biggest collection in the country, after the National Library of Greece. Moreover, it aims to offer its collections and services not just to the AUTh community, but to the wider public through publications, exhibitions, scientific and academic events, and of course through the provision of open access to its printed and digitized collections, and to its onsite and electronic services. This is an ongoing effort, a strategic decision for the AUTh Library and a common vision shared among its biggest asset, the library staff.

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