

DIFFICULTIES FOR WESTERN NATIONS IN OBTAINING PUBLICATIONS FROM OTHER NATIONS

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1. PROBLEMS

For science librarians in the developed nations of the West, the difficulties of obtaining publications from other parts of the world seem to center around two interconnected factors: the number of copies printed of each publication and the availability of timely information about publication plans. For example, as quite a few people in today's audience are aware, many advanced research publications from the Soviet Union are issued in relatively small quantities. As a result, libraries in the West must often order Soviet books in advance of publication in order to have a reasonable chance of obtaining them. By the time a specific title from the Soviet Union gets listed in the national bibliography, Knizhnaia letopis', copies are no longer available for purchase. With respect to periodicals, the limited number of copies has an effect both on new orders and on claims. An order to initiate a subscription must be submitted several months in advance of the first issue of the volume which is to start fulfillment of the subscription. Otherwise one or more issues will be missed; only those issues actually published after the subscription has taken effect will be received by the subscribing library. After a subscription is firmly established, there is always a possibility that a particular issue may not be received by the subscriber. Libraries in the West are accustomed to sending in a claim for each missing issue, but this is seldom effective in the instance of Soviet periodicals, since few (if any) extra copies are printed.

Given the small size of the print runs, it obviously would be very useful for would-be purchasers to obtain information on forthcoming books and new periodicals as early as possible. Many Soviet books are indeed listed in Novye Knigi and other catalogs far in advance of publication, but the listings are not inclusive of all publications. Furthermore, the availability of Novye Knigi and other bibliographic tools is not equal for all astronomical libraries. Those libraries attached to university library systems will experience relatively little difficulty in obtaining the vital information, but this is much more of a problem for

observatory libraries which lack direct contact with specialists in non-Western languages and publications. Thus it is a common experience for librarians in the West to learn of a relatively new Soviet publication only after it has become effectively out-of-print.

(Although these comments have used the Soviet Union as an example, the same difficulties with limited printings and belated publication information occur in a number of other nations as well.)

2. SOLUTIONS

Happily, the cited problems occur less often in the field of astronomy than in some other subject areas. Much astronomical literature is distributed on an exchange basis; this assures the rapid dissemination of new publications automatically by the issuing agencies. Exchange agreements are especially valuable because they may be expanded beyond their original scope. If a library maintains exchange relations with libraries abroad, it is often possible to ask the exchange partner to search for a particularly needed title; or, lacking the availability of a title in the original paper format, to microfilm a copy for the requesting library. The latter expedient is useful both for filling gaps in one's serial collection and also for acquiring the texts of monographs which have been printed in very small quantities. However, not all observatories and universities with interests in astronomy have publications of their own to use as exchange material. Furthermore, even in astronomy some publications must be obtained by purchase.

Several large countries in the West do have vendors who specialize in publications from eastern Europe or from other parts of the non-Western world. On occasion a much-desired publication will turn out to be available from the back stock of one of these vendors, but this is very difficult to predict. Even if specialist vendors are used, it is still very advantageous to submit orders well in advance of the publication date of the wanted items.

Another possibility might be an increase in the exchange of timely information among astronomers and astronomy librarians. Advanced information about details on certain publications, such as the International Astronomical Union's Symposia and Colloquia, are published in each issue of the I.A.U.'s Information Bulletin. It might be interesting to explore the benefits of publishing data in the Information Bulletin about other astronomical materials--those books and new periodicals that are most likely to be "elusive" and difficult to obtain outside their country of origin.