



Libraries are a result and an indicator of cultural maturity of a society. This particularly refers to national libraries which are the temples and treasure troves of the written heritage of their nations; in this sense, National and University Library in Zagreb is the temple and treasure trove of the Croatian people. It should be emphasized that the Croats built new premises for their national library on two occasions in the 20th century, which can hardly be matched anywhere else. First they did so at the beginning of the 20th century, i.e. in 1913 immediately before the 1st World War, and the second time in the last decade of the 20th century, which makes Croatia unique not only in Europe but also in the world, particularly when one bears in mind the socio-political position of Croatia in the century in which it survived three wars. All this clearly testifies to the status of this institution in the Croatian national consciousness. The first library building was built during two and a half years on the model of the then most famous European national library and according to the then contemporary principles for construction of national libraries. Indeed, not only does its external appearance, its monumentality, but also its vestibule bear witness to the fact that it was genuinely a national institution, a temple of Croatian culture that was classified generally as one of the most beautiful secessionist buildings. It was undoubtedly a first-rate event not only for Croatian librarianship but rather for the entire Croatian culture. Commitment and dedication of the Croatian people were also evident in that the library was decorated with paintings of the most famous Croatian artists of that period. All this was most adequately expressed by the contemporary S. Petrović: „Croatian people, first in the Slavic south, founded their home of education... a stately center of culture... a real gem of the Croatian people“. The major part of the new, present library building, whose construction began at the end of the 1980's, was built and furnished during war and aggression against Croatia, which is certainly a unique example worldwide of the construction of national library premises. Besides, its construction was actually result of a specific plebiscite of the Croatian public of that period. The ceremony of its opening was held on 28th May 1995. Just as the old library premises are reminiscent, by their monumentality and particularly by their vestibule, of a temple – a temple of culture, the new library building, erected and furnished according to modern principles and criteria for construction of such institutions, seems – with its entrance hall like outstretched hands – to invite us to make use of the written treasure that it keeps and that has, due to current information and digital technology, become available not only within it but everywhere in Croatia and further afield. Information sources of the National and University Library, a member of the European Library – Europeana, are currently indeed the integral component of the European cultural and information treasure.

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