

The Arson in the Library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev

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1. On 25 May 1964 the UPI, Reuter, and AFP brought from Moscow the news about the fire in the Library of the Academy of Sciences of Ukrainian SSR in Kiev stating briefly that since 23 May 1964 the Library was on fire, that there were however no official announcements to this effect, and that according to information received in Moscow many books had been also destroyed by water of fire-brigades. The same dispatch mentioned also that the Library contained 6 million books, over 10 million newspapers and magazines, ~~and~~ about 200,000 manuscripts, and about 140,000 music sheets.

Actually, those data referred to the year 1958, since then the library was continually growing and only in 1960 received additional 500,000 publications.

Based on the dispatch of the UPI, Reuter and AFP the same news about the fire was mentioned in short notes by "Neue Zuericher Zeitung" of 27 May 1964 and "Salzburger Nachrichten" of 26 May 1964.

"Neue Zuericher Zeitung" mentioned additionally that among destroyed treasures were also many manuscripts and works of art.

2. The full official title of the Library since 1948 was "The State Public Library of the Academy of Sciences of Ukrainian SSR".

The mentioned by "Neue Zuericher Zeitung" department of manuscripts was of invaluable importance, particularly. It contained very rare memorials of original Ukrainian writings of 10th C, "Universals" of Khmelnytskyi and other Hetmans, and historical documents of XVI, XVII, and XVIII CC. In it there were also deposited manuscripts, correspondence and other personal documents of Ukrainian classics like Skovoroda, Gogol, Marko Vovchok, Lesia Ukrainka, P. Kulish and others.

3. For several days Soviet sources were completely silent about the fire. Only on 28 May 1964 "Radyanska Kultura" of Kiev brought a short note

based on a RATAU-despatch which read:

" A fire broke out on May 24, 1964 in the State Public Library of the Academy of Sciences of U.S.S.R. Thanks to the tireless action of the Kiev Fire Department the fire was localized and put out. According to the authorities of The Academy of Sciences U.S.S.R the entire manuscript department and card index are intact, and the basic book departments have suffered little damage and can be restored from duplicate reserves. An official commission has been appointed to investigate the cause of the fire and to take measures to rebuild the library". (Page 4.)

/ This seems to be the first official announcement of Soviet authorities on the subject though one should not exclude the possibility that "Vecherniy Kiev" might have mentioned it before. There was, however, no confirmation to this effect so far. /

On 29 May 1964 "Vechernaya Moskva" in its despatch from Kiev wrote that approx. 10 % of all materials were destroyed by the fire and among them also all documents and other materials pertaining to the period of 1918 - 1930. The same correspondence from Kiev mentioned a mentally disturbed female employee of the Library as the incendiary.

"Literaturna Gazeta" of 4 July 1964 in its correspondence from Kiev stated only that according to the statement of the chief of ^{the} Foreign department of the Library -- K.D. BAKULIV , the fire had done no damage to his department and the exchange of publications with abroad will continue as usual.

3. According to one of our Sources who stayed at that time in Kiev the fire destroyed the entire basic books department and there was a strong suspicion among population that the fire was a premeditated arson organized by Soviet authorities.

Another Source of ours (in the letter from Lviv dtd 16 July 1964) stated; "We had a very sad news; on 24 May 1964 a hostile hand(of Jewish faith), out of vengeance, set on fire our library in Kiev. The historical archives of invaluable importance, also the transferred from Lviv to Kiev library - burned down. At that time even hydrants 'went out of order'. Still another black mourning day of our history..."

4. According to Reuter, UPI, AFP, and the Sources that stayed at that time in the Ukraine , the fire lasted for two days: on 23 and 24 May 1964. This fact supported additionally the general conviction of the population in the Ukraine that the fire was an arson planned and organized by authorities well in advance including even 'the sabotage' of hydrants.