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THE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
OSLO

*A brief survey of its history,
collections and building*



OSLO 1947
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UNIVERSITETSBIBLIOTEKET I OSLO

NORGES RIKSBIBLIOTEK

I. STATUS

The kingdom of Norway unfortunately has no institution with the official name of the Royal or National Library. The explanation of this exceptional situation may be found in the historical fact that the country had no royal court or central administration within its own boundaries during the long union with Denmark. When the two countries were separated in the year 1814, the Library of the Royal Frederik University, founded only three years before, had to take over some of the obligations of a national library. The trend is indicated by the separation of its budget from that of the university, and by the right to use the words „Norges Riksbibliotek” as an additional denomination. The University Library is also in other ways recognized as the Norwegian National Library, being the legal depository for the Norwegian literature as well as the central lending research library for the whole country.

II. HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The library was founded together with the university of Oslo in 1811 by a royal charter of King Frederik VI of Norway and Denmark, and was not yet in function when the two countries were separated in 1814. The first chief librarian was a pupil of the famous scholar and librarian Chr. Heyne of Göttingen University Library, professor *Georg Sverdrup* (1813—45), renowned in Norwegian history for his participation in the free constitution of Norway in 1814.

The nucleus of the collections was a stock of 29.000 duplicates from the Royal Library in Copenhagen and some minor private collections. On moving into the first building of its own in 1817 the Library could muster 63.000 volumes. It then had the universal polyhistoric character of the eighteenth century with a preponderance of the humanities. From the time of the separation from Denmark in

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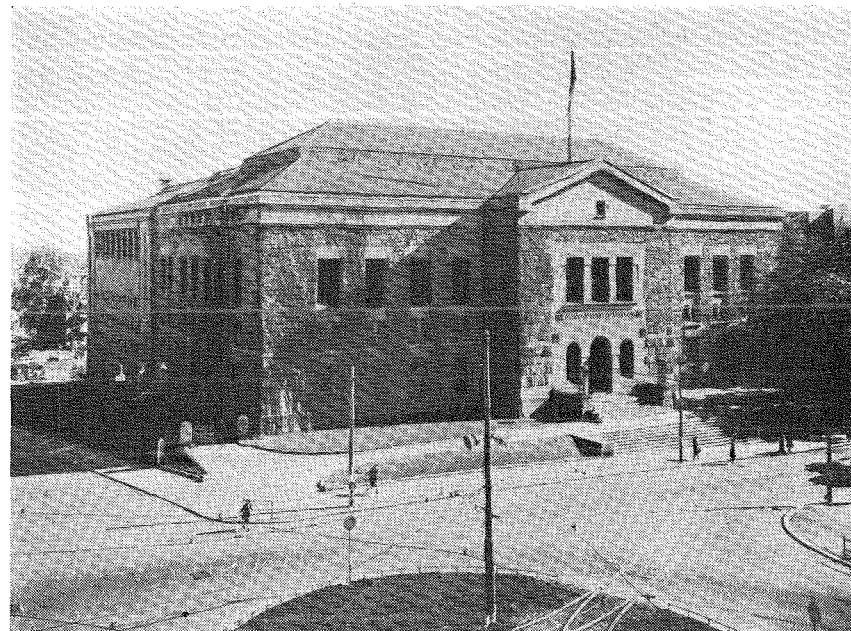
1814 the University Library was the legal depository for all issues from the Norwegian presses. As two other copies were to be delivered to the King and to the Ministry of Police, the deposit law became very unpopular, as implying a sort of censorship, incompatible with the freedom of the press. In 1839 therefore the new liberal trade legislation did away with the whole copy tax, and for fortyfour years Norway was without a legal depository library.

Under the three following chief librarians *F. W. Keyser* (1845—63), the prolific literary editor *P. Botten Hansen* (1863—69) and the scholarly historian *L. Daae* (1869—76), later professor of history, no attempt was made to reinforce copy privileges for the University Library, which developed mainly along the oldfashioned lines of an intern university institution.

The great reformer was the fifth chief librarian *A. C. Drolsum* (1876—1922), born 1846, died 1927, who with youthful initiative and energy started to develop the library into an active, modern library of a national scope. He succeeded in his first ten years of office in reintroducing the deposit law in 1883 (remodelled 1939), increasing the budget and the staff, extending the international exchanges, planning a subject catalogue, etc. Since 1851 the library had occupied the western building on the present university campus on Karl Johans gate, constructed on the gallery system. When its capacity of 250.000 volumes was exhausted, Drolsum managed to convert some of the lofty book halls into something like a modern stack and an inner courtyard into a large skylighted reading room. Ultimately however the building was hopelessly overcrowded and on the point of breaking down under its burden; he then succeeded in securing grants for a new modern building, which has been the home of the University Library since 1914 (see p. 10 ff.).

In 1922 Drolsum was followed by the present director.

In the later decades the library has been growing with accelerating speed, both in volumes and duties. Special collections of music, rare books, papyri and orientalia have been created, new alphabetical and subject catalogues with information service for the public, photoduplication and microfilming of fragile material have been established. The copyright department has taken over the publication of the national quinquennial catalogue: *Norsk Bokfortegnelse*, with the support of the Norwegian Publishers' Association, and several special bibliographies have been issued.



Front view, with the east wing.

The University Library now is the centre for bibliographical information and is by far the largest library in Norway, covering not only the fields of the scholarly and scientific research work of the university, but also other subjects not represented in any other state library.

Its collections amount in round figures to about 1.100.000 volumes, 26.000 bound newspapers, 6000 manuscripts (mostly modern), 132.000 letters, 2600 music manuscripts, 1650 papyri, 170 oriental manuscripts, 4600 atlases and maps, 468 incunabula, 2400 volumes of prints, 1100 volumes of registered biographical press-clippings—besides large collections of portraits and prints and of pamphlets and tracts in portfolios.

The total length in gross of the book shelves proper measures 42.000 running metres (26 English miles).

The budget for the fiscal year 1947—48, voted by Parliament (Storting) is about 1.000.000 kroner, of which about one half is spent on salaries for the ordinary and extraordinary staff, some 80 persons. The grant for books, bindings and supplies amounts to 290.000 kroner, to which may be added about 6.500 kroner from special funds.

III. ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

The University Library is administered by a director ("overbibliotekar") who is responsible to the Senate of the University, which again is under the resort of the Ministry of Education. The budget is voted annually by the Storting under a separate heading. No administrative connection links the special departmental libraries of the University to the main library. Voluntary cooperation with the libraries of the other learned institutions has been established.

The director is appointed by the King at the recommendation of the Academic Senate, which also appoints the librarians and permanent employees at the proposal of the director. Appointments and other matters of major importance are discussed in council with the head librarians.

The staff is from July 1947 composed of

- 1 director ("overbibliotekar")
- 4 head librarians („førstebibliotekarere", heads of departments)
- 24 librarians ("bibliotekarere")
- 14 clerical and subprofessional assistants
- 18 student assistants ("aspiranter", mostly apprentices on half time work)
- 8 attendants and janitors ("betjenter")
- 6 building attendants (chief engineer, stoker, cloak women)
- 2 catalogue printers
- 2 photographers
- 4 bookbinders.

IV. RECRUITMENT

There is no higher library school in Norway. The University Library therefore has to educate its young personnel in a sort of "in-service training". Graduate students from all schools of the university enter library service as paid part-time workers, "aspirants", while they continue their subject studies for academic degrees. After a short introduction in the management of the library they serve 3½ hours a day on a threeyears' training "turnus" with six months in each of the following services: Bookfetching, cataloguing, copy deposit department, loan desk, reading room reference, and catalogue room information.

After finishing the 'three-years' term some of the aspirants leave the library, while others take full time service as extraordinary assistants or substitute librarians, and apply for coming vacant positions as ordinary librarians. Of the present 24 librarians 2 have taken their degree in theology, 1 in law, 1 in medicine, 2 in natural sciences, 15 in humanities and 3 have been appointed owing to bibliographical works.

The clerical and subprofessional assistants have mostly graduated from a business college or the one-year library school.

V. DEPARTMENTS

The administration is composed of the *Secretariate* with correspondence, mail, supplies and supervision of the building, the Bindery, the Printing Shop and the photostatic and microfilm studios.

The *Acquisition* service is divided in the Order Bureau, the Periodical Bureau, and the International Exchange (1100 foreign contacts).

Norske Avdeling (The Norwegian Department) comprises books coming in from printers and publishers under the copyright privileges, and foreign books referring to Norway and Norwegians. Kept under the supervision of a head librarian as a separate collection, which is now practically complete as far as national literature is concerned; only in the newspaper files there are still serious gaps. Prepares the official quinquennial Norwegian book catalogue "Norsk Bokfortegnelse" and serves as the literary Norwegian information centre. Special divisions are the the Newspaper Office, the Bjørnson-Room (see p. 8) and the War Collection (clandestine newspapers in nearprint 1940—45, etc.).

Utenlandske Avdeling (The Foreign Book Department) comprises the main book stock, which is arranged systematically on the stacks in subject classes A—U. The head librarian is in charge of the cataloguing, classification, printing of catalogue cards and their filing in the different catalogues.

The cataloguing procedure may be described as follows: Every incoming book is checked and recorded in a loose-leaf accession protocol in the Order Bureau, the accession number is inserted on the back of the title page and a progressing slip (følgeseddel) with the date, the accession number and the catchword for cataloguing is enclosed. This slip accompanies the book through the different

phases of cataloguing and the dates and the initials of the officials who handle the book are checked here.

The descriptive cataloguers typewrite a full title entry on the back of the slip, and the classifiers add subject headings and call number and also a list of the cards needed for the various catalogues.

The slip is sent to the Printing shop, where the entry is stanced on an Adrema-plate and printed beside the title entry on the slip. After being duly revised the necessary number of copies are printed on cards. The cards and the slip pass to the Filing office, while the book with a card inside goes to the Bindery for binding and stamping.

Håndskriftavdelingen (Manuscript Department) contains manuscripts, mostly modern, oriental, papyri, and letters and also a collection of unprinted material deposited as loan or for sake of safety. Two librarians are in charge of the collection and a special study room with 14 seats.

Kartsamlingen (The Map Collection) contains the largest collection of maps and atlases in Norway.

Billedsamlingen (Prints and Drawings Collection) mostly topographical pictures and Norwegian portraits in lithography and photography.

Norsk Musikksamling (Norwegian Music Collection) founded on private gifts in 1927, contains about 7000 musical standard works, 2600 music manuscripts and an enormous mass of music scores, not yet catalogued. Office and reading room (15 seats).

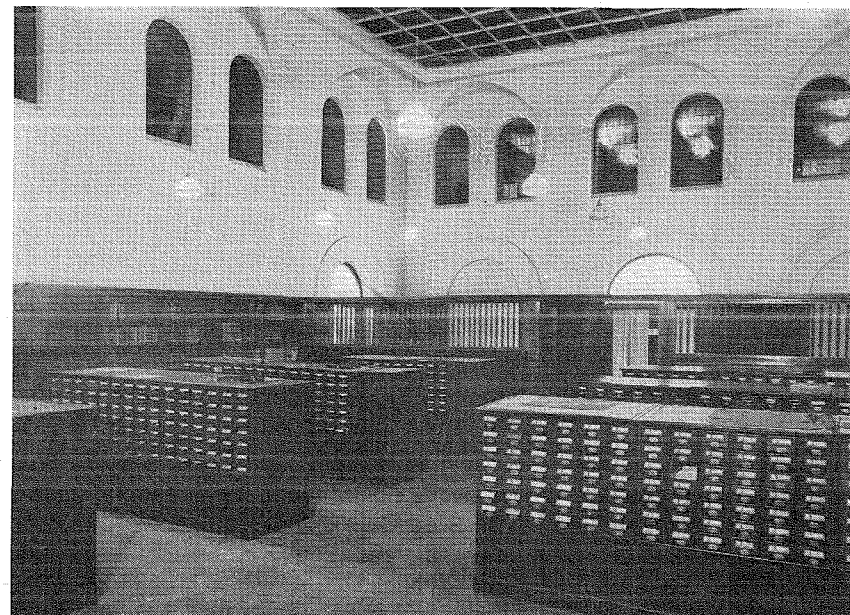
Bjørnson-samling (The Bjørnson Collection). A nice and cosy memorial room is devoted to the work of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832—1910). Around the walls are shelved about 4500 volumes: editions and translations of his works, and books on this central figure in Norway's literary and political life. In portfolios and boxes are kept his manuscripts and 22.000 letters and articles in original or photostates. Founded 1933 on private gifts.

Teaterrommet (The Theatre Room) is a small room on the gallery of the Main Reading Room. It contains dramaturgical literature, bequeathed by the theatre managers Bjørn Bjørnson (from him also the furniture) and Johan Fahlstrøm.

In addition to these departments the library building houses the following independent institutes and archives:

Norsk Folkeminnesamling (Norwegian Folklore Collection).

Norsk Folkelivsgransking (Norwegian Ethnological Survey).



The Public Catalogue Hall 1946.

Norsk Stadnamnarkiv (Archives of Norwegian Place Names).

Norsk Målførearkiv (Archives of Norwegian Dialects).

Norrøn Ordbok (Old Norse Dictionary).

Norsk Ordbok (Neo-Norwegian Dictionary).

Litterær Ordbok (Norwegian Literary Dictionary).

These institutes occupy a file of workrooms on the ground floor and have staffs of their own.

VI. CIRCULATION SERVICE

A head librarian is in charge of the whole service to the public, which comprises three divisions: Delivery, Reading Rooms, and Public Catalogue Hall.

Utlånet (Delivery) is under the immediate supervision of the Head Librarian, who has at his side a librarian for the fetching and redistribution of books from the main stack. Books are lent for use in the Reading Rooms, and for home use, and are also sent to



institutions and individuals all over the country, if the books are not to be found in a nearer library. Books are also lent to foreign libraries on condition of reciprocity. The office answers book searching and bibliographical questions and provides photostate- and microfilm copies at cost price. The loan office is open during the university terms from 9 A.M. to 3.30 P.M. Requisitions may also be given over the telephone.

Lesesalene (Reading Rooms) are superintended by two reference librarians alternating on duty in the Main Reading Room. This has 188 seats and a reference collection of 8.000 volumes. Connected with this is the Periodical Reading Room (40 seats), *Studiemagasinet* (The Study Stack) with 70.000 volumes on open shelves, 31 *klever* (carrels) and 10 closed studies, typewriting, conference and film projector rooms. Adding to this the Manuscript and the Music Reading Rooms and the Library Seminar Room, the total capacity of the public study facilities amounts to 330 seats, exclusive of 56 seats in a temporary undergraduate reading room (The Exhibition Hall).

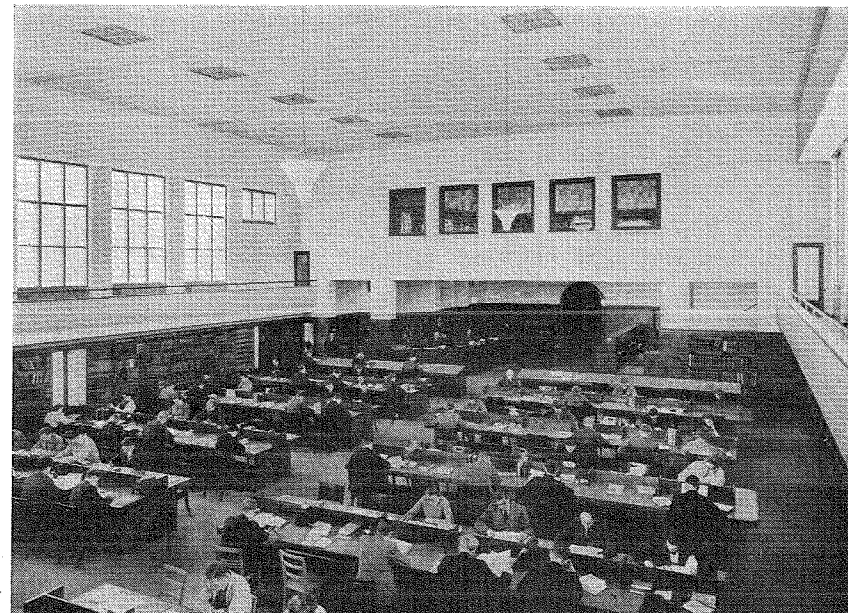
The Reading Rooms are open on work days from 8.30 A.M. to 8 P.M., on Saturdays 8.30 A.M. to 3 P.M., on Sundays 5—8 P.M. During the vacations the opening hours are reduced.

Katalogsalen (Public Catalogue Hall) contains an alphabetical and a subject card catalogue in 1300 trays and a bibliographical book collection. Other bibliographies may be consulted in the Cataloguing Rooms. At the information desk a librarian or a senior assistant is on duty until 3.30 P.M.

Bibliotekseminaret (The Library Seminar) is a special study room (24 seats) with a collection of about 5000 volumes bearing on book and library subjects in general. It is intended to stimulate the professional interests of the staff and is also open for book lovers. It is also used for instruction and smaller staff conferences.

VII. BUILDING

The present building (Drammensveien 42 B) is the library's third home, dedicated 1914. In its original shape it presented the result of a thorough cooperation between the late director, *A. C. Drolsum*, and the architect, *H. Sinding-Larsen*. The structural problems were



The Main Reading Room 1946.

solved in a very economical and quite novel way. The grouping of the great public halls under skylights in the middle of the compact block has later inspired the Swiss National Library in Berne of 1931.

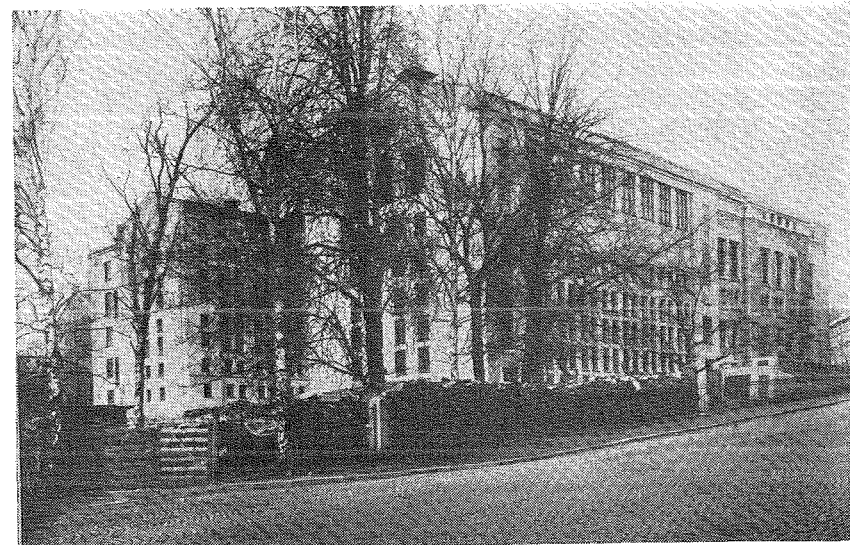
The main frontage, built in rough blocks of red granite, faces a busy traffic circus and is placed on a low ridge sloping to the rear, which makes it possible to put book tiers in the stackwings below the main entrance level. Originally the building was shaped like an L, where the shorter leg represented a stack of eight tiers. As the rapid growth of the library called for extensions, the architect and the present director after a study trip to U.S.A. in 1930 made up a project, which to a certain degree was to make the old wing broader on the outer side by adding files of offices and work rooms on six floors. The various departments came to be situated on different levels, but were connected vertically through elevators and got the possibility of growing unobstructed by each other in the future by lengthening the wing. On the top are two mess rooms (cafeteria) for the staff with kitchenette and a roof terrace.

The next step was taken in 1938 with the construction of a parallel wing (27×19 m). The second World War hampered the work in many ways, but the new wing has gradually been taken into use, even if the finishing of the interior still will have to wait for some final equipment and furniture. This "East Wing" contains a solid stack of seven tiers, with a total shelving length of 20700 metres. The two tiers at the bottom are below surface and are equipped for newspaper shelving. The topmost tier is an open shelves study stack (with carrels and studies) in connection with the Main Reading Room, which covers the upper part of the entire wing. The main building was also made broader and higher at the courtyard side. After the death of H. Sinding-Larsen in 1938 the construction was continued by his associate, the architect *H. Petersen*.

The whole library building as it stands today forms a horse-shoe. New wings may in the future be added to the rear, where there is about 7000 sq. metres free ground. The building has a total floor area of 17.800 square metres, the cubic content is 46 000 m³. The original west stack wing is constructed on the Lipman stack system with an axial distance of 175 cm. The new east wing has adjustable bracket shelves constructed by Kværner Bruk, Oslo, with a distance of 135 cm. The free height of the tiers is in both stacks 220 cm; in the carrel tier 250 cm.

The accompanying plans of four of the twelve floors make it superfluous to describe the rooms at length. It should only be borne in mind that the floors (tiers) are numbered from the ground floor in the front building (main entrance level) upwards from I to VIII, and downwards from U I to U IV. The offices etc. have as a rule the height of two tiers, the large halls of three.

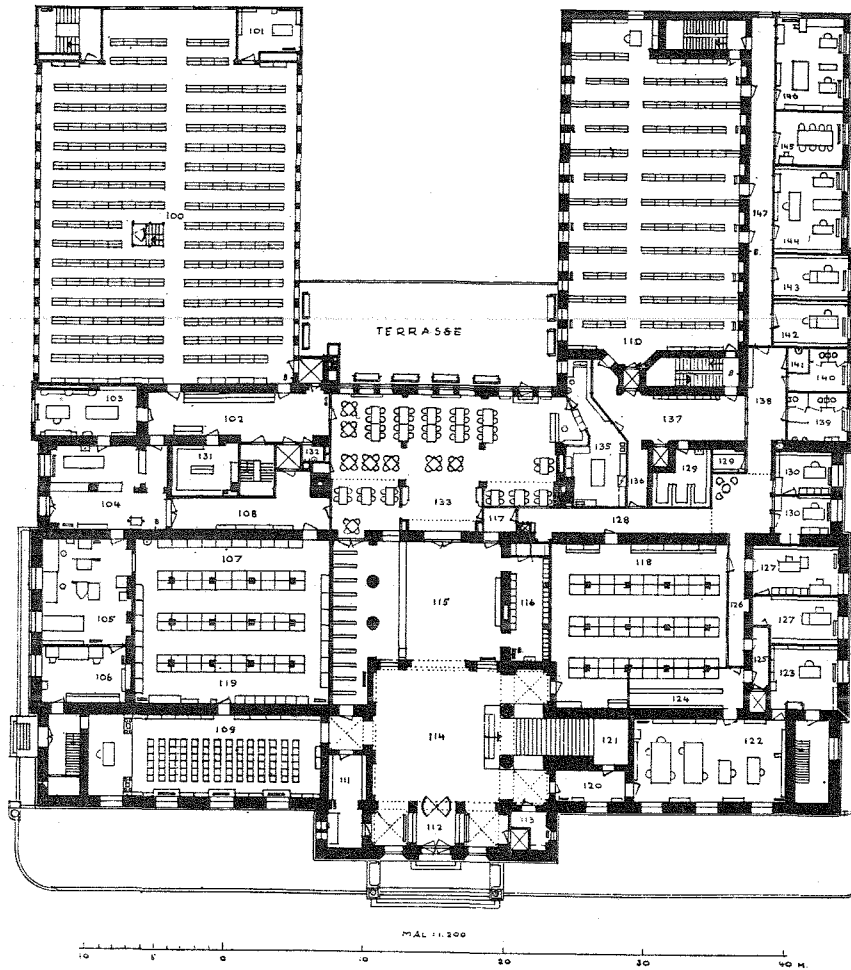
The public comes into the library through the main front entrance to a vaulted *Vestibule* with frescoes by *E. Vigeland*. At the back of this room is the *Cloak Room* (400 pegs) with adjoining *Boxroom* (174 lockers to hire), and further back is a cafeteria, called *Andhrimner* (after the cook in Valhall) and an open terrace.—To the left of the vestibule lies an *Auditorium* (84 seats) for lectures and social staff gatherings. On the opposite side is a public elevator and the entrance to the *Folklore Collection*. The other special, mostly lexicographic, institutes have their work rooms and a common conference room in a file on the southwest side. On the northeast side are four rooms for the Bindery with delivery platform.



The rear of the building under construction 1945.

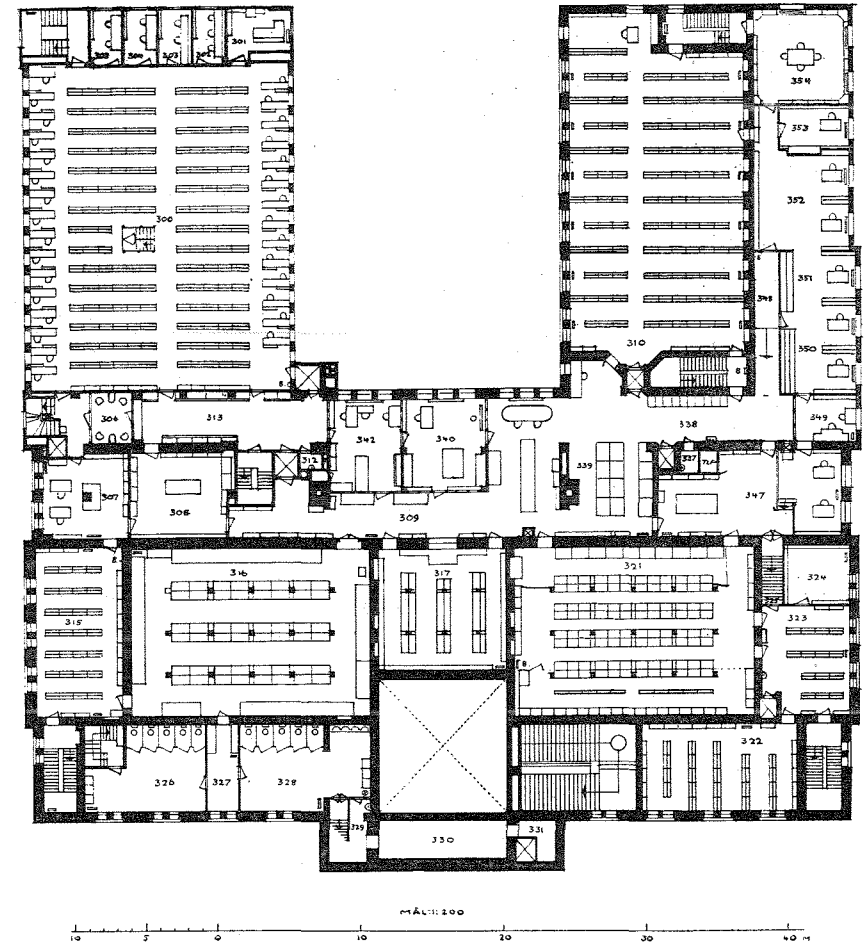
The staff entrance is on the floor below (U I), with the chief engineer's lodge and a janitor's room to the right, and locker rooms with toilets and baths for the male and the female staff separately.—On the second basement floor (U II) is the main delivery for trucks, with shipping rooms for the Exchange Service. On the third and fourth underground levels (U III, U IV) is the heating plant (oil furnace), and four air-shelter rooms for 200 persons. A special strong room with emergency receptacles for catalogue trays is situated under another part of the building.

Starting from the Vestibule again we ascend the main staircase to the Upper Vestibule. The wall frescoes need perhaps a brief explanation. They are inspired by the old Norse mythology (*Voluspá*): *A. Revold* has painted the gods playing at Idavellir; in the centre are the three Norns (*Parces*) writing on golden tablets under the life-tree, *Yggdrasil*. On the wall in the middle *Per Krohg* has painted his rather modernistic conception of Ragnarok or the destruction of the old world, and on the window side again *A. Revold* has featured the first couple of human beings in the new world finding the golden tablets again. The accompanying text is verses in Old Norse from *Voluspá*.



FIRST MAIN FLOOR (I)

- | | | | |
|----------|----------------------------|--------|---|
| 103-06 | Bindery. | 142-47 | Institutes for Norwegian lexicography. (Below on floor U I Engineer's lodge, on floor U II: Charwomen's rooms.) |
| 102, 137 | Elevator landings. | | |
| 109 | Auditorium. | | |
| 111 | Store room for chairs etc. | | |
| 112 | Main entrance. | | |
| 113 | Public elevator. | 133-35 | Andhrimner (Cafeteria) with kitchenette and Terrace. (Below on floor U I Shipping room, on floor U IV Heating plant.) |
| 114 | Vestibule. | | |
| 115 | Cloak room. | | |
| 116 | Box room, Telephone boots. | | |
| 120-24 | Folklore Collection. | | |
| 127 | Ethnological Survey. | | |



THIRD FLOOR (III). MEZZANINE

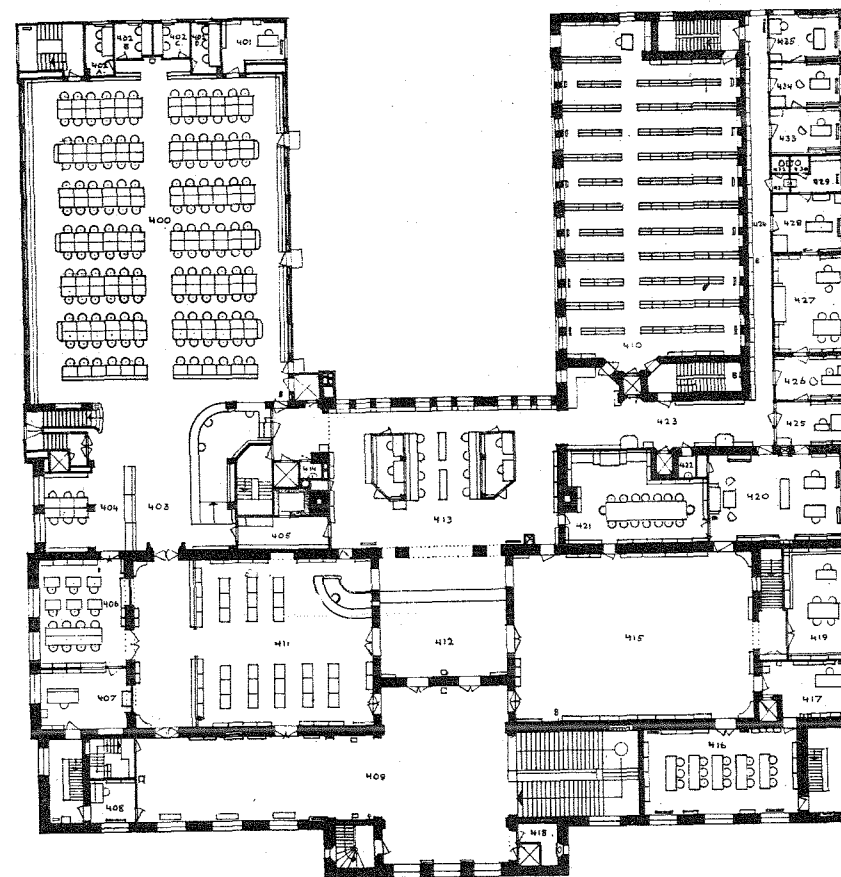
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|----------|--|--------|---|
| 301-05 | Studiemagasinet (open stack with carrels). | 321 | Newspaper stack I. |
| 306 | Conference room. | 347-54 | Norwegian Department (Copyright deposit). |
| 307-08 | Papyri and East Oriental Collection. | 347 | Receiving. |
| 315 | Manuscript stack I. | 350-52 | Cataloguing. |
| 316 | Prints and drawings. | 353 | Head librarian. |
| 317, 342 | Newspaper office and sorting room. | 354 | Bjørnson Memorial Room. |
| 318 | Map rooms. | 338-40 | Special collections. |

The Upper Vestibule opens into a gallery for temporary exhibitions. Here is the public circulation focus. To the right are, through a skylighted *Exhibition Hall* (provisionally used as an emergency reading room for undergraduates), entrances to the *Music Collection*, the *Rare Book Room*, the *Library Seminar*, and to the file of administrative offices. A staircase leads down to the *Norwegian* (copy deposit) *Department's* file of work rooms.

In the centre is the *Delivery* with the loan desk, opening into a spacious work room for the circulation staff. Four elevators, placed in pairs on both sides, and a booklift in the middle, connect the work room with the stacks.

From the Exhibition Gallery an entrance leads to the public catalogues and reading rooms. The skylighted *Catalogue Hall* was formerly the old reading room; it is now equipped with double mahogany cases, 130 cm high, in eight ranges, and an information desk. Crossing this hall we enter the *Main Reading Room*, which measures 563 square metres, including the tribune at the far end. The colour is bright yellow with frames and curtains in light green. The tables and bookcases are in dark Norwegian birchwood (sycamore maple). The ceiling is equipped with sound-absorbing plates, which reflect the indirect lighting from six chandeliers. The double-sided tables are wired for the installation of individual lamps on the partition or in a continuous through along the centre, but this has not yet proved necessary. The bookcases are lighted from a continuous row of lamps, concealed under the side balconies. These serve also two other technical purposes: facilitating cleaning of the high windows and carrying the heating ducts. They are not intended for bookshelving. The tribune at the end of the hall, which has some reading tables and the small Theatre Room (see p. 8), was a structural necessity in order to avoid columns.

Left of the main entrance is a dictionary catalogue of the reference collection, and the door to the Manuscript Study Room and offices. To the right is a long, elevated desk for the superintendent and his two assistants. From their places they can control the access to the Main Reading Room, the Manuscript Room and the opposite staircase and elevator to the Periodical Room above and to the open stack below. Back of them are books on reserve and a safe vault.



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PRINCIPAL FLOOR (IV)

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|--------|---|--------|---|
| 400 | Main Reading Room. | 415 | (Future) Exhibition Hall. |
| 401-02 | Conferences, typewriters, reading projectors (above on floor V: Tribune, Theatre Room). | 416-17 | Music Collection. |
| 405 | Sorting room with safe (above on floor V: Archives). | 419 | Rare Book Room. |
| 406-08 | Manuscript Department (above on floor VI-VII: Manuscript stacks). | 420 | Reception Room. |
| 409 | Upper Vestibule with Exhibition Gallery. | 421 | Library Seminar. |
| 411 | Catalogue Hall. | 425 | Stenographer-typewriter. |
| 412-13 | Delivery. | 426 | Secretary. |
| | | 427-29 | Director's office and workroom. |
| | | 433 | Superintendent of stacks. |
| | | 434 | Superintendent of Reading Rooms. |
| | | 435 | Head librarian for circulation service. |

Descending the staircase we enter the open stack, *Studiemagasinet* (floor III) with some 70,000 volumes on the ranges in the middle, two rows of *klever* (carrels) along the windows and at the far end five closed studies for cooperating workers. The carrels are 180 cm deep, but by breaking the partitions and placing the chairs alternating on the outside and inside, the architect has achieved a width of 155 cm, although the uniform column distance in the stack is only 135 cm.—From this stack a staircase leads down to the *Medical Stack* (floor II), which has desks for privileged workers at the east end, next to the medical librarian's office in the corner.

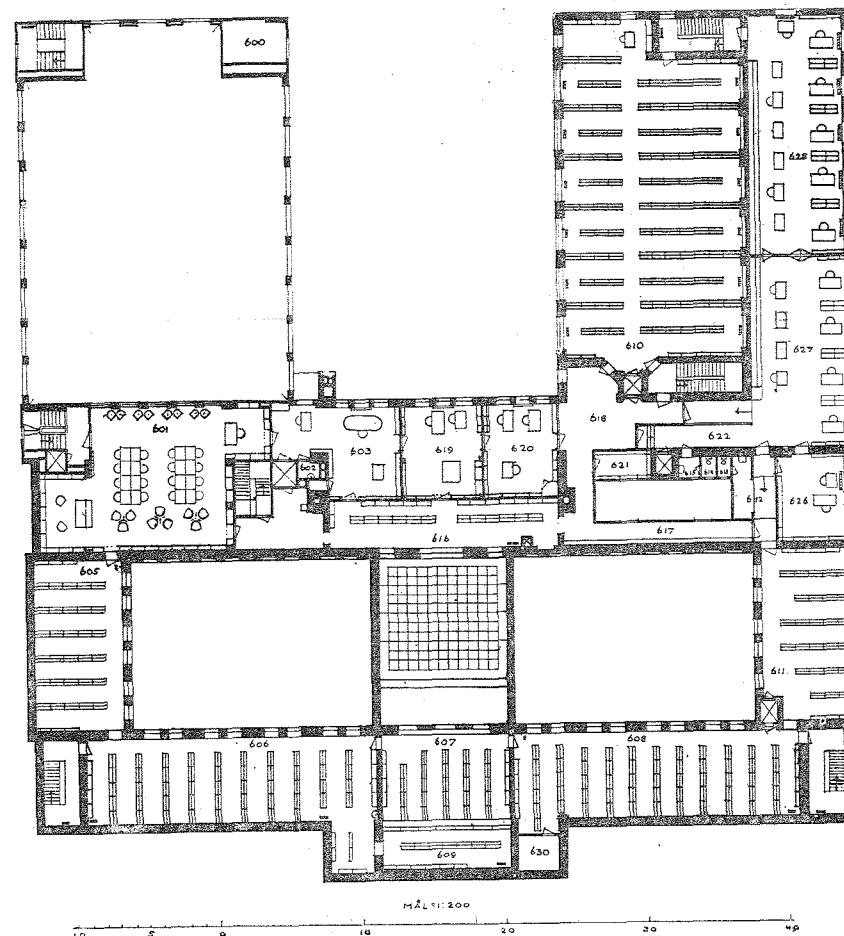
Starting from the Main Reading Room again we ascend to floor VI and enter the *Periodical Room*, which is toplighted and is planned to have some club chairs and lounges. Along the walls in smoked oak are flat shelves (without pigeonholes) for the latest issue of some 1500 current periodicals. For back numbers one has to apply at the adjoining *Periodical Office*.

This office forms a part of the *Acquisition Service*. The next offices are the *Order Bureau* and the *Filing Office*. (The rooms above on floor VIII are the shops for printing, photostate and microfilming.) The third part of the Acquisition, the *International Exchange*, has its office on floor U II in connection with the Shipping Room and the outward exchange stock.

Continuing our way on floor VI we are coming to the *Foreign Department's* cataloguing and classification rooms with ten spacious carrels and the Head Librarian's office. The carrels (3,2 × 2,6 m) are separated by double bookcases for books in progress and a bibliographical reference collection. The inner wall is occupied by the Official Catalogue, started in 1827 and still continued on the original slips (18 × 11,5 cm) in 512 oak trays. (Above the Foreign Department, on floor VII, are the two staff mess rooms with the roof terrace.)

The *Norwegian Department* on floor III occupies the corresponding file and is arranged in the same manner, but with the *Bjørnson Memorial Room* in the corner.

The building has 7 elevators (2 for the public), 2 booklifts, a house dial phone system with 80 stations, 3 pneumatic tubes for order slips and 12 electric clocks. There are charwomen's nooks on all floors, dust tube down to an incinerator, 5 bath rooms, a repair



SIXTH FLOOR (VI)

- 601 Periodical Reading Room.
- 603 Periodical office.
- 616 Accession files.
- 619 Order Bureau.
- 620 Card filing.
- 626 Foreign Department. Head librarian.
- 627-28 Foreign Department. Cataloguing and classification.

THE CORRESPONDING ROOMS ON FLOOR VII

- Above 626-27 Mess rooms.
- 628 Roof terrace.

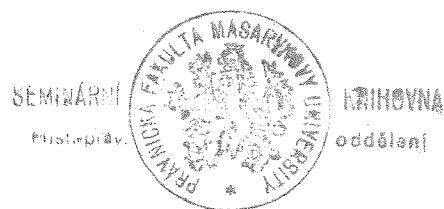
ON FLOOR VIII

- 602, 619 Photostate and Microfilm.
- 620 Printing shop.
- 618 Museum.

shop and a garage. On floor U II the charwomen have a rest room, with electric cooking plate, toilet, bath, supply room, laundry and linen room.

On Sunday, December 19th 1943, a German munition ship in the west harbour, about half a mile from the library, blew up with frightful crashes in a series of explosions. Many buildings in the vicinity broke down and caught fire. In the University Library half an acre of double skylights and 600 windows were smashed, shells exploded in the rooms, window frames, doors and partitions were thrown across the floors. But, fortunately, the fire did not reach the Library, and no life was lost, as it happened on a Sunday.

The building can not yet be completely repaired owing to lack of material. Injuries and scars are as a matter of cause still visible all over the house.



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