



Oval hall

The history of our library began **27th May 1795** when the empress Catherine the Great approved the project of this building. The project was designed by the architect Egor Sokolov. Today 27th May is celebrated as the National Libraries Day throughout the country. For our library and for the Presidential library 27th of May is also a birthday.

In 1794 Alexander Suvorov (famous Russian general) brought from Poland the library of the Załuski brothers. This collection served as a base of the Imperial Public library book fund. Zaluski brothers were polish noblemen and activists in the Age of Enlightenment. They were collecting books in European language. There were only 8 russian books in their book collection. But Catherine the Great conceived the idea of a Russian national library. How to find Russian books for the library?

Alexander I, grandson of Catherine the Great, found the answer to this question. In 1810 he published «The law on legal deposit». According to this law, the national library should get two free copies of every book, published on the Russian land, with compulsory free delivery. This law is still in force today and this is the main source of new acquisitions to our library.

Alexander I planned to open the Imperial public library in 1812, but the beginning of the Napoleon war changed his plans. The opening took place on **14th January 1814** right in this hall.

In the 18th century this hall looked different. Here were statues, portraits, columns. Later the architect Vasilij Sobol'shchikov reconstructed this hall. All columns, statues, portraits were removed from here. After the renovation the hall became more spacious and more bookcases were established here. But let us return to the 14th January 1814.

The opening of the Imperial public library was a very significant event for the Russian Empire. Over 200 people attended this ceremony. There were such famous persons as poet Derzhavin, painter Kiprenskij, architect Stasov, fabulist Krylov.

Ivan Krylov was a well-known fabulist, he wrote a number of fables. Nowadays Krylov's fables are included in Russian school programs. But only a few people know that he used to work in this library for more than 30 years as a keeper of the Russian collection. He put forward a number of innovative ideas. For example, so called Krylov's bookmarks which we use today not only in reading rooms of our library, but in reading rooms of other Russian libraries as well. Krylov lived in a Library's flat at 20 Sadovaya street. Unfortunately, nothing connected with Krylov remained in this building, because of numerous renovations over the passed years. But if you happen to be on 20 Sadovaya street have a look at the Krylov's memorial plaque established on this building.

Ivan Krylov was working under the guidance of Aleksej Olenin who was the first director of the Imperial public library of Russia. Aleksej Olenin was the president of the Academy of Arts, historian, linguist and talented manager who created a wonderful team of people in the first public library of Russia. Aleksej Olenin remained on his post till his death in 1843.



Nowadays russian books published **from 1725 to 1957** are stored here, in this building. Library's Russian collection contains more than 28 million depository items. And now we are going to see how these books are kept in our library. These bookcases were designed by architect Vasilij Sobol'shchikov (this architect had also redesigned this hall). Bookcases are equipped with special items which facilitate librarian's job. Each book has a code, which determines its place on the shelf. Books in the Russian collection are placed according to their format. Small books are on higher shelves, larger ones – they are called folios – on lower shelves.

Take notice of the bindings. In the 18th and 19th centuries books were sold without bindings. Every book buyer had to bind books according to their means and needs. A public library also needed to bind books and for this purpose a book binding workshop was established. Even today this workshop is still operating. Nowadays old bindings are repaired there. So most of the old books have standard binding edge with golden letters IB (Imperial Library) embossed on it.

The library did not have specifically designed reading rooms until the middle of the 19th century. Readers read their books next to the book shelves. The rooms were dark, since candles were not allowed due to the fire risk. It was good neither for readers, nor for the books. The first reading room was opened in the middle of the 19th century, and we are about to enter it.



Hall Of Lenin

The first reading hall of the Imperial public library of Russia was opened in 1862. This hall was built in accordance with the modern requirements of the 19th century. Large windows let in a lot of light, and large tables allow the readers to work comfortably with big format editions. Gas lighting was provided. This hall allows up to 200 of people and it was designed by the architect Vasilij Sobol'shchikov. (The same architect who designed bookcases which we are using for keeping the books from our Russian fund).

Vasilij Sobol'shchikov was not an ordinary person. He worked in the Library for 40 years. He worked as an architect, librarian and bibliographer. Before the building of the first reading hall began, he was abroad and studied architecture of European libraries. Vladimir Lenin was a reader of the Public library as many other students in the end of the 19th century.

In 1970 Lenin's centenary was celebrated. In the context of celebration the reading hall of the Public library was named in honor of Lenin.

In 2017 the hall was renovated. There was an idea to rename this hall in honor of Vasilij Sobol'shchikov (the architect who built this hall). But 100 anniversary of the October revolution was celebrated and the opening of the renovated hall took place on 7th November (the day of the October revolution). In this context the hall stayed named in honor of Lenin.

Hall Of Korf

Have a look at the tablet over the entrance. This hall is called in honor of Modest Korf, who was the third director of the Imperial

Public library. The Imperial public library flourished under Korf's guidance. He promoted a number of innovative projects.

The launching of the Rossica collection was one of these projects. Rossica collection contains books about Russia in European languages.

The books from Rossica collection were stored here, in this hall, where Korf's office was.

Korf and his colleagues used to travel abroad

to purchase new books for the Rossica collection. Every year the collection increased from one to two thousand books. Later the Rossica collection was moved from this hall to the main collection. Nowadays we can see reference books on the shelves around us. The Rossica project is closed, we don't replenish it any more.

Korf was the first to introduce catalogues in the Imperial public library. Launching catalogues was a useful and prospective initiative.

Note the curious fact that Modest Korf finished lyceum with Alexander Pushkin. They were not friends but when Pushkin was looking for materials on Peter the Great reign he came to Korf in 1836. Pushkin was surprised by rich knowledge of his former classmate. Also both Pushkin and Korf rented flats at 12 Moika. While Alexander Pushkin rented an ordinary flat on the second floor, Modest Korf rented a luxurious flat on the first floor. So Pushkin and Korf were not friends, but they were neighbors.



Department of prints

This hall was designed by Rossi.

Russian emperor Nicolas I visited this hall in 1835 and called it in honor of merchant Peter Larin. Why Peter Larin? Because this merchant had made generous donations to the library. Thanks to his donations this hall was built.

Nowadays the department of prints is situated in this hall. Art catalogues, art albums, postcards, photos, engravings are kept in this department. Here are more than 1.5 million exhibits. So it's really a museum.

In 2013 this hall was opened after renovation. Historical interiors were re-created and we can enjoy them now. This hall is one of our exhibition areas.



Hall of reference and electronic resources

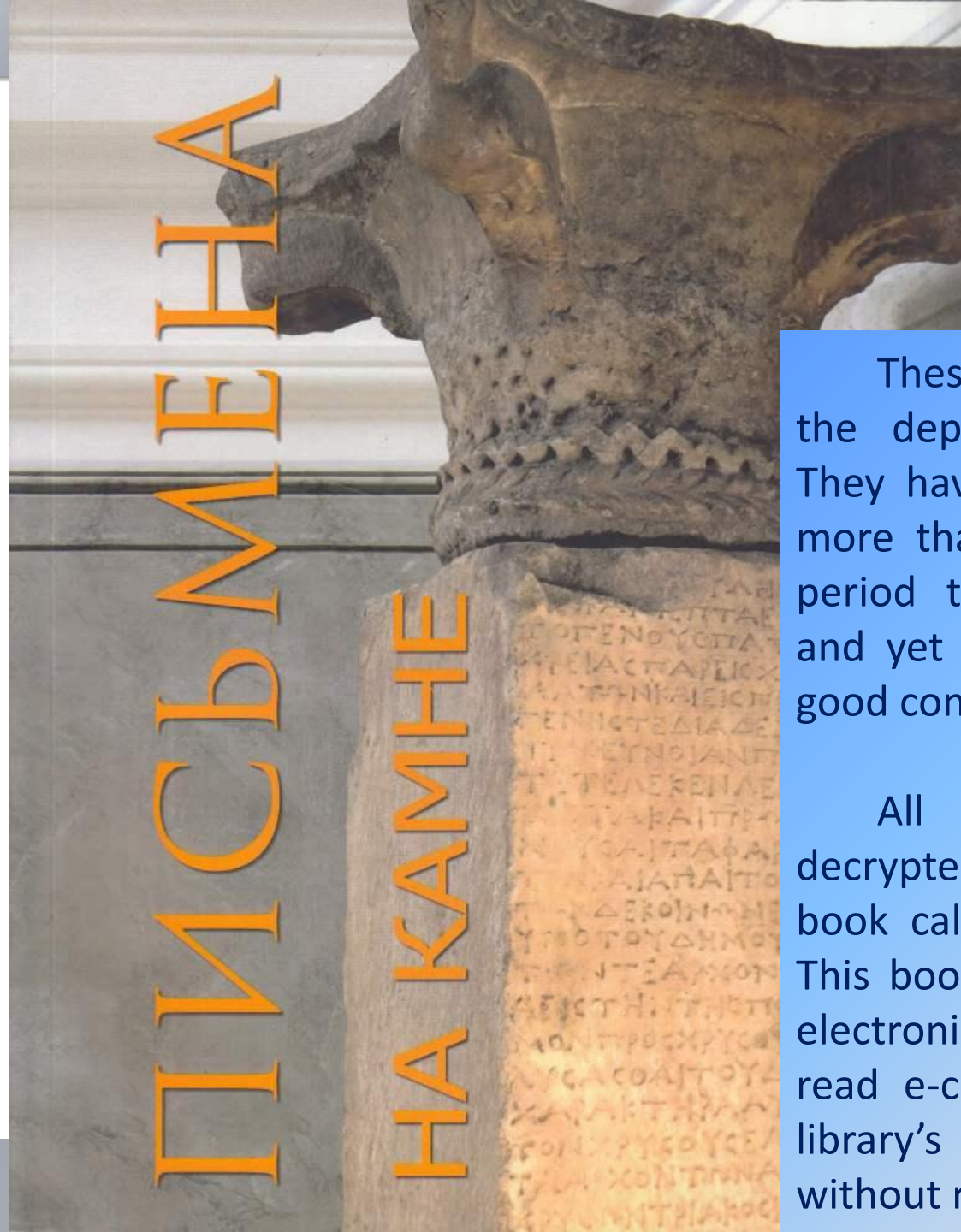
An access to electronic catalogues, collections and databases of our library is provided here. An interesting option is offered for readers in this hall. There is a possibility to order almost any foreign article or book chapter which exists in electronic form online. No matter which publisher placed it on the internet. This opportunity is available thanks to our partnership with the Article Galaxy.

Also there are bibliographers in this hall. They help readers to find literature for diplomas, theses, articles and they help to register in our electronic catalog. There is an electronic order option available on our electronic catalogue. The readers can order our library's books from another location, without entering the library. The registration in our electronic catalogue is necessary for using this remote order.

There are reference library funds in the end of this hall.

Directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias and other reference literature are kept there.

ПИСЬМЕНА НА КАМНЕ



These stone books belong to the department of manuscripts. They have been on this place for more than 150 years. During this period there was no renovation and yet these stone books are in good condition.

All these inscriptions are decrypted and published in the book called "Letters on a stone". This book exists both in print and electronic format. It is possible to read e-copy of this book on our library's web site for free and without registration.

Department of manuscripts

Department of manuscripts is the oldest department of our library. This department was opened in 1805. Recall that Library's official opening ceremony took place on 14th January 1814. So this department was accessible to the readers 19 years before the rest of the library was opened.

In the 19th century this department was called **Depot of manuscripts**.

Peter Dubrovskij was the first head of this department. Why Peter Dubrovskij?

Peter Dubrovskij was lucky to be in France when the revolutionary events of 1789 took place. He got manuscripts from the Bastille archive. After that he travelled round Europe and bought valuable manuscripts from bankrupted French noblemen.

As a result Peter Dubrovskij manuscripts collection was unique and valuable. England was highly interested in buying this collection. But Russian emperor, Alexander I, not only paid money for this collection, he also made Peter Dubrovskij the keeper of the Manuscript depot. At the same time Peter Dubrovskij was provided with a living accommodation and pension appropriate for his position. In 1811 Aleksej Olenin became the director of the Imperial library and he ran an inventory of the depot of manuscripts. After the inventory it was obvious that Dubrovskij had sold some rare and valuable manuscripts from the library's fund. He sold them without the library's authorities permission. As a result he was fired.

The department of manuscripts boasts first dated Russian handwritten book, which is called 'Ostromirovo Evangelie'. Have a look at facsimile copy of it. Note high quality of the ink. Nine centuries have passed but we still can read these letters. The original book is kept in a safe. It is preserved in the specially designed wooden box.





Voltaire's library

The Russian empress Catherine the Great didn't want her correspondence with Voltaire to be published for everyone to read. And this was the reason for buying this library. Catherine the Great paid a huge sum of money (it was possible to buy several villages) to Madam Denis (niece, heiress and lover of Voltaire). But unfortunately there was no correspondence in the Voltaire's library which Catherine bought. Bommarshe published this correspondence and this edition of Beaumarchais was strictly forbidden in the Russian empire. Voltaire's library was brought to the Hermitage and it was placed in the same order as in Ferney castle with the help of Jan Luis Vanier (Voltaire's secretary; Voltaire's library counts up to 7 000 books).

Voltaire's library contains books of all subject areas, in French. Voltaire was an active reader, and he used to make notes on the book margins. Nearly 2000 of his books contain his notes. These notes have been studied and published by Oxford University.

Here is bronze copy of a marble sculpture by Houdon. Above the door there is a portrait of Catherine the Great. If we look through the window we will see a monument of Catherine the Great. So there is a legend that at nights, when there is no one in the library, Catherine II and Voltaire continue their dialogue.





Rare books department

The national library has the biggest incunabula collection in Russia (nearly 7000 of books). This wonderful collection is kept in the special room which is called “The study of Faust”. This study was designed by the architect Vasilij Sobol'shchikov. The same architect who designed the first reading hall (The hall of Lenin) in our library.

So Faust's study was built like Middle Ages Library. There is a pentagram near the entrance. According to the Middle Ages legend crossing this pentagram enables purification. There are big stained-glass windows, a bronze copy of Johann Gutenberg statue (the original statue is in Mainz next to the “Book museum”). All books on the shelves are chained. It was a tradition to chain books in all libraries of middle Ages. There were not book codes. But still each book should be on the same place where it was taken after the reading.

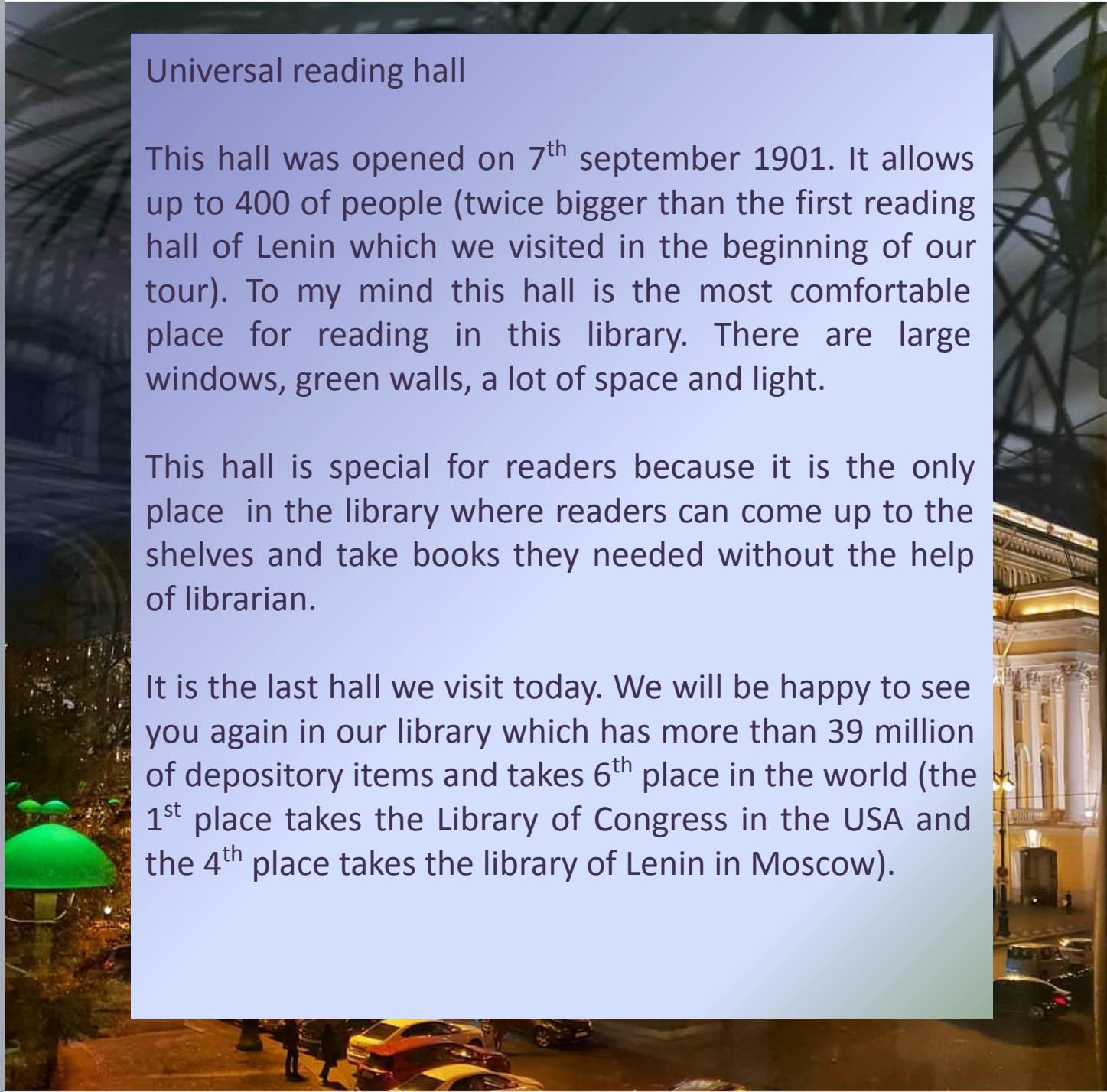
One hundred years after Gutenberg there was an invention of print technology in Russia by Ivan Fedorov. There were not universities and students in Russia. So this invention of print technology wasn't generated by real demand. Mostly it was an artificial demand generated by Russian powers. But still Ivan Fedorov with the help of Peter Mstislavec printed 8 copies of the book called “Apostol”. All original 8 copies are kept in the National library of Russia.

Universal reading hall

This hall was opened on 7th september 1901. It allows up to 400 of people (twice bigger than the first reading hall of Lenin which we visited in the beginning of our tour). To my mind this hall is the most comfortable place for reading in this library. There are large windows, green walls, a lot of space and light.

This hall is special for readers because it is the only place in the library where readers can come up to the shelves and take books they needed without the help of librarian.

It is the last hall we visit today. We will be happy to see you again in our library which has more than 39 million of depository items and takes 6th place in the world (the 1st place takes the Library of Congress in the USA and the 4th place takes the library of Lenin in Moscow).



Matilde Fontain

An exciting tour through history made real. The amazing architecture and collections of a public library opened to everyone in 1812, and still full of library users. Voltaire's library and his margin notes, a book torn by a bullet during the revolution. Talk about Augmented reality! It was a privilege being there.

Отзывы посетителей 😊

31.08.2018
Many thanks for the interesting and
educational tour of the Library - know-
ledgeable and enthusiastic guide.
Thank you!
A. Sobolev
(University College London)



Приходите к нам в гости 🤗

