

The humanities section of the University Library of Toulouse in the Great War

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In an effort to raise the level of higher education in the country, and in view of the importance of libraries in achieving this goal, the Third Republic undertook, through an abundance of regulatory production, to organize university libraries. In Toulouse, these efforts resulted in the creation, in 1879, of a unified university library. But it was not until 1891 that the definitive organization was established with, to serve the four faculties, two geographically distinct sections: science and medicine in the alleys of Saint-Michel, and humanities, including law, on the premises of the law school, currently called "former faculties".

The humanities section soon became too cramped and moved in July 1910 to 56, rue du Taur, on the premises of the former great seminary of Toulouse. The facility consisted of a 32 by 9 meters reading room with a gallery overlooking a garden, as well as an office for the chief librarian, another for the librarian and a catalogue room; then, in the wing along rue de Périgord, the equipment room; all completed by several book depots. One could think that the humanities section finally had adequate operating conditions.

However, a few months later, following the fire that ravaged the science and medicine section in October of 1910, it had to make room for its surviving collections, as well as the many donations that flowed in to replenish the library. In the summer of 1914, when the redevelopment of the science and medicine section on the alleys of Saint-Michel was on the horizon for October, the entry of France into the war ruined all hopes of a quick return to normalcy.

The mobilization immediately hit the staff assigned to the library.

The technical staff then included: Jacques Crouzel, Director and Chief Librarian; Gustave Ducos, Deputy Chief Librarian in charge of the science and medicine section; Louis Vié, Librarian; and Henri Crouzel, son of Jacques Crouzel, Auxiliary Librarian. All four were trained jurists and holders of the certificate of proficiency as librarians. In addition, nine library aides were responsible for the maintenance of the premises, the monitoring of the reading rooms, the conservation and the communication of the tomes.

As they had been born in 1852, 1861 and 1868 respectively, neither Jacques Crouzel, nor Gustave Ducos, nor Louis Vié could be mobilized. Henri Crouzel had been declared unfit for military service in 1907 due to weak constitution. On the other hand, the library aides were immediately affected, with, starting in August, the mobilization of four of them: Joseph Mallet, Gaspard Latapie, Eugène Dufour and Joseph Sablayrolles, also guardian of the humanities library. Of the remaining five aides, Paul Saissinel was left alone to manage the small temporary science and medicine depot that had been instituted at the medical school in unprotected premises, while the other four (Jean Milhau, Auguste Lacamp, Jean Brousse and Belou) served on rue du Taur.

Although Joseph Mallet was honorably discharged in February 1915, Jean Milhau and Jean Brousse were mobilized in turn in early 1915, and left the library to serve in the auxiliary services.

Moreover, Louis Vié and Gustave Ducos in August 1914, and Henri Crouzel in September 1914, volunteered to work part-time as secretaries in various hospitals. Henri Crouzel was mobilized on December 11, 1914, and was no longer able to participate at all in the activities of the library, where he was in charge of cataloging. He would never return, having died in September 1918 of an illness contracted on the front. As it happens, this was the only death that the library had to mourn during the conflict. Louis Vié, on the other hand, returned to the library full-time at the beginning of the academic year 1915, to compensate for the drop in the number of aides.

The premises too would be involved in the war effort. Seeking to shelter the treasures of the national collections of the capital, the State asked the University of Toulouse to host a depot of the National Library. At the same time, part of the Louvre's collections, including the Mona Lisa, were entrusted to the city of Toulouse. Under the supervision of library inspector Pol Neveux, starting in September 1914, 90 crates holding 5,063 collections, 138 boxes and 868 individual pieces were sent to the humanities section.

To set up this depot, it was necessary to make room in the bookstores, but also to create a soldier's outpost for surveillance. For the winter months, the chief librarian had to install a central heating appliance and let the boiler run day and night, without respite either on Sundays or during holidays. This had a massive impact on the library's budget.

At the beginning of the winter of 1917, the boiler broke down and could not be replaced until the spring of 1918. The temperature having dropped below zero in the reading hall, it was necessary to temporarily relocate in a place in which a stove would not be a fire hazard. Eventually a hall was cleared in the tour Mauran, both for the staff to work and for the readers to borrow books. On-site consultation was suspended until Easter, but the library avoided complete closure.

Moreover, deeply affected by the fire in the science and medicine section in 1910, which had been caused by the breakage of an electric cable, the depot officials banned the use of electric lighting throughout the war.

The safety of the depots was an important concern for Inspector Pol Neveux, who moved to Toulouse to better monitor them. In March 1918, he became irritated by the neglect of the library aides, who, by leaving a tap open, caused a fortunately minor flood. He wrote to Jacques Crouzel: "Les trésors nationaux accumulés au rez-de-chaussée méritent moins de légèreté et moins de négligence. Dans le souci des responsabilités qui m'incombent, je vous serais bien reconnaissant de rappeler vos employés à la stricte observation des consignes auxquelles nul ici dans son domaine – hommes du poste ou garçons de la bibliothèque – n'a le droit de se soustraire. Il faut que vos subordonnés sachent bien qu'ils sont en ce qui les concerne garants de la sécurité et de l'intégrité de nos dépôts. Je ne voudrais pas avoir à le leur faire rappeler par Monsieur le ministre. [The national treasures accumulated on the ground floor deserve less frivolity and less neglect. In keeping with my responsibilities, I would be grateful if you would remind your employees to strictly observe the instructions which no one here in their field – be they soldiers or library aides – may ignore. Your subordinates must know that they are the guarantors of the safety and integrity of our warehouses. I would not like to have the Minister issue them this reminder]."

In June 1918, another 306 crates from the Parisian library of the Arsenal, as well as the archives of the city of Reims, were added to the already stored depots. To house them, the shelves of the Mauran tower had to be dismantled and the volumes of the humanities section stored on the ground in adjacent rooms.

The reduction of budgets was another major impact of the war.

This budget cut occurred in an already difficult situation: in 1913, the annual report written by the director Jacques Crouzel sounded the alarm on the decrease in credits for the acquisition of books (28,293 francs, against 33,750 francs in 1906), then attributed to the increase in operating and binding expenses, but above all to the increase in the cost of subscriptions. The situation was masked for several years by exceptional grants from the university for the purchase of large collections, but came to light when the university could no longer afford these grants, and library fees were reduced at the same time.

Indeed, the massive mobilization of students led to a severe drop in enrolment: in 1913-1914, the university welcomed 2,741 students, which were reduced 838 in 1914-1915, 712 in 1915-1916, to rise back to 1,188 in 1917-1918, and to 1,764 as early as 1918-1919. This mathematically lowered the income from library fees allocated directly to the library.

Although the initial 1914 budget was 39,872 francs, on 8 August the Rector notified the Director of a decision of the Minister formulated as follows: "J'ai l'honneur de vous faire connaître qu'en présence des événements actuels, j'ai décidé que toutes les dépenses qui ne sont pas rigoureusement indispensables en 1914 seraient différées. Quant aux engagements de dépenses actuellement pris et signés, je me réserve d'en ajourner l'exécution. Vous voudrez bien désormais ne me transmettre que les affaires d'une urgence et d'une nécessité reconnues (traitements proprement dits, travaux exécutés, fournitures livrées, etc.) [I have the honor to inform you that, in the presence of current events, I have decided that all expenses which are not strictly necessary in 1914 will be deferred. As for the currently undertaken and signed commitments, I reserve the right to postpone their establishment. From now on, please kindly send me only cases of recognised urgency and need (processing, maintenance work, supplies delivered, etc.).]"

The budget for 1915 had to be revised as early as February, as a result of a decrease of 3,610 francs in the estimated income from library fees and the virtual elimination of the university's subsidy. The total budget thus dropped from 33,187.02 to 29,579.52 francs. The one for 1916 suffered the same fate.

In his October 1917 report, Jacques Crouzel pointed out that the library had lost 10,000 francs from the State subsidy, the entire subsidy from the university, 6,700 francs, and 95% of library fees, or about 10,080 francs, with a total loss of 26,780 francs.

Under these circumstances, the 1918 budget was reduced to 11,058 francs.

In the face of a sharp decline in revenue, expenditures had to be readjusted. Some were nonetheless incompressible, such as those generated by heating. Not only did the heating have to be maintained continuously throughout the winter months, for the reasons mentioned above, but the price of coal also increased sharply. For the year 1916-1917, the cost of heating thus amounted to 6,600 francs, compared to 1,825 before the war. It was also necessary to provide for the rental of a bed and the remuneration of the aides responsible for operating the boiler overnight, library guardian Joseph Sablayrolles having – as we have seen – been mobilized since the beginning of the hostilities. For these expenses, the library charged the State and the City of Paris, considered responsible for the additional costs. The subsidy

obtained had to be readjusted several times.

As a result of the budget cut, the possibilities of purchasing books over the period were reduced, despite a partial transfer of the subscription budget (sums released by the non-renewal of German journals) to that of books. Fortunately, Jacques Crouzel writes, the requests are also moderate. On the register of requests, very few acquisitions are in fact marked as refused. Two books are marked as "wait", but that is due to them being German publications.

While before the war the library spent about 22,000 francs on books and 17,000 francs on subscriptions in all sections, during the war the library spent about 2,500 francs on books (new books and collections). As for subscriptions, they fell below 4,000 francs.

In addition to the paid acquisitions, the library had several other opportunities to enrich its holdings. Exchanges with foreign institutions, learned societies and universities continued despite the war, with the obvious exception of those of enemy countries. For this purpose, the library had dozens or even hundreds of journals published by the university. It also circulated, on a reciprocal basis, [the theses defended](#) at the University of Toulouse.

Another enrichment solution is based on donations, which are shown in the registers and represent, with the normal fluctuations from one year to the next for this type of entry, between a hundred tomes and about three hundred. The Bressolles donation of September 1914, for example, is made up of numerous legal works – a gift probably due to the family of Gustave Bressolles, a teacher of the law school who died in 1892, or directly to his son Joseph Bressolles, then a teacher at the same faculty. Some books also came from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. But it was the ministry itself, through its regular mailings, which was the biggest provider of new entries.

At the end of the academic year 1917-1918, the University Library's collections included 152,442 volumes of monographs, 91,263 of which were in the humanities section.

As for the internal work, alongside the acquisitions we have just mentioned, the technical staff of the library was keen on continuing the work of registering entries and drafting catalogue files. In 1916, at the request of Director of Higher Education Lucien Poincaré, a registry of journals owned was even drawn up, in order to contribute to the constitution of a collective French catalogue. That same year, thanks to Louis Vié's return to the library full-time, the cataloguing of manuscripts was completed, and the records published in the General Catalogue of Manuscripts of Public Libraries..

The annual stocktakings, with the exception of the one in 1915, were completed.

In terms of lending and communication of works, the activity was reduced by the scarcity of readers, deeply tied to mobilization. However, the war had brought a new type of readership: first, women, whose proportion increased during the war, and for whom Jacques Crouzel even had a dedicated reading room set up, in June 1915, on rue du Taur; but also refugees or soldiers stationed in Toulouse, such as gunner Baurès, "exercising in civilian life the functions of public prosecutor in Gourdon", who asked permission to attend the library in May 1916. Of course, this did not compensate for the drop in the number of readers, from 11,928 in 1915-1916 to 6,132 in 1917-1918.

Leaving in a hurry, many mobilized borrowers did not take the time to return their books to the library. At the beginning of the hostilities especially, but also throughout the war, efforts were made to recover these volumes. As one might suspect, it was a complicated process. During the session of April 16, 1915, the library commission (a body bringing together representatives of the faculties and the librarian around the rector) wrote the following in their report: "Nous nous sommes occupés de faire rentrer les volumes prêtés, surtout ceux qui ont été prêtés avant la guerre, ou, en ce qui concerne les professeurs de faire renouveler les prêts anciens. Le succès n'a pas couronné nos efforts. [...] Les parents des jeunes gens mobilisés ont rendu un certain nombre de volumes ; la plupart n'ont pas répondu, ou ont répondu qu'ils ne trouvaient pas chez eux les volumes réclamés, ou que les volumes étaient dans la chambre de l'étudiant dans une autre ville, etc, etc. [We took care to return the loaned books, especially those loaned before the war, or, regarding the teachers, to renew the old loans. Our efforts were not successful. [...] The parents of the mobilized youths returned a number of volumes; most did not respond, or replied that they did not find in them the books claimed, or that the volumes were in the student's room in another city, etc., etc]." Sometimes, the response made by the family brings news of a death on the front line. Once again, the request of the library sparked protests, such as those of Sergeant Jacques Maury, on July 27, 1917: he replied that, if necessary, he would sort the books from his notes for his thesis on his next permission, and that he would then bring back "ces ouvrages que j'espère toujours utiliser [...] dans quelques mois et qui me manqueront peut-être le jour où j'en aurai enfin besoin [those works which I hope I may still use [...] in a few months and which I may miss on the day I finally need them]."

For students who were able to continue their education, the daily life at the library as recorded in the archives does not seem very different from what it was before the war. On December 15, 1914, the librarian wrote a report on "seven law students who disturb the order during reading sessions", and the rector consequently forbade them entry until further notice. In February 1917, a candidate for tenure in humanities named Poujade, was brought before the university board for refusing to return his borrowed books according to the regulations, for having "troublé l'ordre en répondant dans la salle de lecture, au bureau de l'employé Lacamp, d'un ton élevé qui a été entendu de l'autre extrémité de la salle [disturbed order by answering in the reading room, at the desk of employee Lacamp, in a loud voice that was heard from the other side of the room]", and having spoken to the head librarian with "a sardonic air" and "a mocking behavior".

The repercussions of the war, which officially ended with the signing of the Armistice, would be felt in the library for many months to come.

The university's report on the year 1918-1919 goes back at length on the years of the world conflict, and points out that "plus qu'aucun des autres établissements universitaires, [la bibliothèque] a souffert de la prolongation de l'état de guerre dans son personnel, ses ressources, son installation et son fonctionnement [more than any other academic institution, [the library] has suffered from the prolonged state of war in its staff, resources, facilities and operations]." In addition, unlike in previous years, the published document incorporated the entire report prepared by the director of the library. At this point in time, it was Gustave Ducos, who succeeded Jacques Crouzel, who was able to retire in June 1919. The position of head of the science and medicine section and assistant to the director thus became vacant, and would not be filled until February 1920 by Mr Gieules. As for the library aides, who were demobilized as the classes were being liberated, they gradually resumed their duties. The team, as a whole, only slowly recovered.

During the last exceptional episode related to the war, the library had to organize in the spring of 1919 to

accommodate [the 1,223 american students](#) who had come, pending demobilization, to resume their studies in Toulouse. A reading room was specially reserved for them. They kept good memories from this stay, which lasted only from February to June, to the point of donating to the library the proceeds of the sale of their journal, the *Qu'est-ce que c'est ?*: precisely, 14,548.54 francs that they intended for the establishment of a French-American library at the University of Toulouse.

Finally, the refurbishment of the science and medicine section interrupted by the war was resumed and completed. The move of the collections housed by the humanities section, representing 190,171 volumes at the end of the reconstitution operations, took place during the academic holidays of the summer of 1919. Since the State stockage had returned to the capital in February 1919, the library on rue du Taur was finally able to deploy fully. The temporary installations were dismantled, the alleys reassembled and the volumes of the humanities section, kept on the floor of the stores to make way for the State stocks, returned to the shelves.

Liberation of premises, increase in budgets, resumption of book acquisitions and subscriptions with the ambition of filling the gaps of the war, increase in students enrolled at the university and as a result of the use of library services: the library was finally ready to move forward and forget the difficult period that was coming to an end.

This is in any case what Jacques Crouzel seemed to push towards. In the historical note he wrote on the university library just before leaving office, he mentions these difficult years only in a terse and at the same time eloquent formula: "La période de la guerre a été à tous les points de vue une période d'inactivité relative, et de pénurie budgétaire. On a volontairement gardé sur elle un silence à peu près complet [The period of the war was in all respects a period of relative inactivity, and budgetary shortage. We deliberately kept a virtually complete silence on the matter]."