

Research Prohibited! The Activities of the Archival Sector of the Restricted Access Department at the Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR 1974 –1989

Anne Valmas

Academic Library of Tallinn University

The foundations for the holdings at the Expatriate Estonian Literature Centre at the Academic Library of Tallinn University were laid in 1974 with the creation of an archival collection at the Library at the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, which became a sector of the Restricted Access Department. Although the sector was technically a subdivision of the library, its work was never reflected in any of the library's reports. The sector was not open to the public and the library staff weren't aware of its activities. Likewise, the library catalogues did not include literature from the Archival Sector.

Renovations undertaken in 2009 resulted in an unexpected surprise in the form of documents found in a remote corner. These documents shed light on the activities of the archival collection during the Soviet times, of which previously little had been known.

One of the first records to mention the establishment of a special archival collection at the Library of the Academy of Sciences is a letter dated 1974, sent from the functionary of the Communist Party, H. Tomingas to the vice president of the Academy of Sciences: "I would like to ask for Your consent to have all the Estonian and Baltic exile literature as well as anti-communist propaganda gathered into one place, an archival collection at the Library at the Academy of Sciences. These materials are indispensable tools in the fight against anti-communist propaganda."

And that is exactly what happened. A closed collection was established, to which access was granted through special permission only. This lasted for 15 years (1974-1989).

In order to organise the work with the collection, several documents were compiled. It is unfortunately no longer possible to ascertain which ones were approved and which weren't, as many of them come in different versions and without signatures.

One document carries the heading "The Sector for the Study of Western Ideological Trends" whose activities were directed by the Vice President of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, V. Maamägi and the Director of the Institute of Language and Literature,

E. Sõgel. The work was directed by the head of the sector. “The task of the Sector is to analyse currents, tendencies, groupings and conflicts among the Estonian émigrés. Manuscripts should be compiled which propagate the accomplishments of the Estonian SSR, illuminate the bourgeois period and the German occupation in a defensive political manner, expose the anticommunist frauds in émigré publications, etc.. An archival collection would serve as a basis for this sector, where staff would be obligated to give thorough assistance in the selection and acquirement of publications.”

Endel Sõgel, the Director of the Institute of Language and Literature, was appointed supervisor of the archival collection according to the work regulations of the Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR. The work was to be carried out by the Library’s Head Bibliographer and Head of the Archival Sector Andrus Roolaht, who performed this task with great enthusiasm. The task of the subdivision was to gather publications by émigré Estonians – books, brochures and periodicals. Annotated bibliographies were produced based on this literature, as well as a card index on “...those Estonians abroad whose activities did damage to the development of the Estonian SSR and who required particular monitoring upon arriving in Estonia.”

Who was the Head of the Sector, Andrus Roolaht? Roolaht was born in Tartu in 1914 and passed away in Tallinn in 2004. He studied at the Faculty of Theology at the university of Tartu, but never graduated. He served in the Red Army and worked at the newspaper “*Noorte Hääl*” after the war, when he also studied Estonian language and literature at the university of Tartu, but they were also left unfinished. In 1958 he began working for the newspaper “*Kodumaa*”. Following its establishment in 1960, he became an active member of the Society for the Development of Cultural Ties with Estonians Abroad – *VEKSA* –, and in 1971 a member of the Communist Party. Between 1970 and 1973, Roolaht worked at the newspaper “*Sirp ja Vasar*”. In 1973 he commenced work at the Restricted Access Department at the Academy of Sciences, where he remained until 1989. He had a facile pen and was an able man of letters.¹

When “*Eesti Ekspress*” Pekka Erelt interviewed Andrus Roolaht in 2002 and asked how much the KGB controlled his work, Roolaht replied to him with conceit: “They didn’t. I did what they wanted. I was on very good terms with the head of the KGB, general August Pork.

¹ Ivo Juurvee has described A. Roolaht’s activities in more depth in “Idabloki eriteenistuste võitlustest Külma sõja ajaloorindel Andrus Roolahe ja Julius Maderi näitel”, *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, 2009, 1-2, pages 47-76.

Thanks to him, I got to travel abroad as much as I liked and of course at their expense. I was highly thought of. Altogether I received an envelope with money twice a year.”

The journalist also enquired: “You wrote sharp propaganda books aimed at émigré Estonians. Do you regret this today or not?” Roolaht’s reply was: “Everything that is in them is correct. Everything relies on archival documents or personal memory. Remove the derogatory statements, and what remains is perfectly objective historical material.” This was of course not the case; many of Roolaht’s books contain fantasies, slander and selectively picked compromising stories about people and events.

Usage of materials in the Archival Sector was strictly regulated. Members of the Working Group for Research on Western Ideological Trends, those who had been assigned a research task directly from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Estonia or researchers who had a safe research theme from the previously mentioned working group were allowed access to printed matter. A permit was needed to access the literature.

In 1984, Roolaht writes the following in a document: “In order to avoid the distribution of anti-communist slander² and obstruct the access of random individuals to materials containing anti-Soviet slander, the *Glavlit* decided to gather printed matter of this kind which arrive in the Estonian SSR into a single place, the Archival Sector of the Library of the Academy of Science of the ESSR, where the premises correspond to the instructions and requirements of the *Glavlit*, and forbidden and strictly forbidden publications are stored behind three iron doors which are locked at the end of each working day and where the staircases and lobby are under permanent guard.”

Strict rules given by the *Glavlit* (the Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the USSR Council of Ministers) also applied to books.

Forbidden or strictly forbidden publications were marked accordingly with stamps; which kinds of publications were forbidden and strictly forbidden is not explicitly explained anywhere. In 1984, it is also noted that there are no longer any materials containing state secrets in the fonds of the archival collection, as they according to this act were given over to the First Department of the Chairmanship of the Academy of Sciences. All material had been controlled by the *Glavlit*, classified and stamped by the censors. The co-operation between the Archival Collection and the *Glavlit* was very harmonious and intensive. Once a year, the

² This is how he described the literature in the archival collection, mainly Estonian émigré literature.

auditor from the *Glavlit* Central Office in Moscow travelled over and inspected the work of the Archival Sector. The auditor's judgement was favourable and laden with superlatives. The auditor gave the following judgement for the year 1983: "The work of the Restricted Access Department at the Library of the Academy of Sciences of the ESSR is exemplary and corresponds to the applicable regulations."

The usage of all publications was strictly supervised and followed very specific rules: "The materials in the archival collection are very rarely lent out for reading on site, and only to those who need such archival materials for their research work or in order to refute the slander of our ideological enemies."

Forbidden materials carried a hexangular censor's stamp and required an application approved by the Director of the Library of the Academy of Sciences. The application form had to be the institution's own and marked with the reader's reason for requesting the materials, and always had to be signed by the head of the institution. The paper had to carry the institution's official round stamp.

Strictly forbidden materials carried two hexagonal censor's stamps and were lent out using the form mentioned above, but it had to be approved by the Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Estonia, or his deputy. The application was presented for approval by the head of the Archival Sector.

The gauntlet did not end there. If the application was approved, the reader was informed of the applicable rules in the Archival Sector – rules, which also included entries on criminal liability. After that, the reader had to write 'I have been informed of the rules applying to the usage of materials in the Archival Sector' on the application.

All the researcher's notes were preserved in the archival fonds and were given to the researcher only after the work had been finished or until the Head of the Archival Sector had looked at them.

It was the right and duty of the staff of the Archival Sector to control notes taken by the researcher. If the notes did not conform to the topic put forward in the application, they were rendered illegible or the entire note book with the corresponding data was confiscated.

As Roolaht remarks in a report, an incident occurred where the department head confiscated a note book and annulled the reading permit. The library's administration gave the notebook containing anti-Soviet slander to the KGB.

Publications containing heavy slander and personal attacks on our leading staff were not lent out at all.

The Archival Sector had a precise overview of who used what materials and when they did it, as the registry book contained information on each publication and each page used. The readers did not see the card index and were hence unaware of which publications could be found in the collection. The head of the sector was the only one who could be consulted in this matter, and he only gave the readers publications relating to the topic put forward in their applications.

Where did the archival collection's literature come from? In one report, the senders are said to be the Department of Foreign Affairs at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Estonia, the *Glavlit*, the KGB within the Council of Ministers of the Estonian SSR, the Foreign Ministry of the Estonian SSR, and a second-hand bookshop. All foreign book parcels were really under the *Glavlit's* control. In the beginning all book parcels designated for Estonia were censored in Moscow, later the Estonian *Glavlit* was trusted with this task. Books arriving in Estonia were mainly directed to the censor point at the Central Post Office in Tallinn, where forbidden books were marked with hexagonal stamps and sent on to the Propaganda Department or the Department of Foreign Affairs at the Central Committee of the ECP, where the final decision of whether to send the parcel on to the recipient or confiscate it was made.

There were also books which arrived at the libraries and reached the readers from abroad, such as translations by the Orto publishing house, several of Ristikivi's novels, etc. But they were relatively few; the activities of the Estonian Writers' Cooperative were particularly repulsive to the Soviet censorship as the Cooperative gathered around itself, it was believed, the most reactionary of émigré authors such as Bernard Kangro, Raimond Kolk, Arved Viirlaid, Arvo Mägi, Albert Kivikas and others.

It is also known that Kangro in one instance attempted to make changes in some of the Cooperative's books in the hope of getting them through the Soviet censorship, but this was in vain.

The archival collection received books confiscated from the post. These books had been sent to different individuals. In 1989, we found dedications left in some books; these books reached their recipients some ten years later than intended by the sender. However, the dedications in many of the books had been made unintelligible, cut out or entire pages torn

out. These books could never be returned to anyone as the intended recipients remained unknown. Many people came looking for confiscated publications, but it was not possible to help them.

Mentioned as foreign partners were Stockholm University's Centre for Baltic Studies, the Finno-Ugric Institute at the University of Uppsala, the publishing house EMP, the Estonian Writers' Cooperative, the Estonian Archives in Australia and some individuals, among others Lembit Kriisa, the owner of the Stockholm bookshop *Välis-Eesti*. These institutions were probably unaware of the fate of their parcels, and obviously hoped that by sending the literature to the Library at the Academy of Sciences it would also reach the readers, that is if it was the library that was the intended recipient at all.

Documentation about the work in the Archival Collection was presented to the Central Committee of the ECP and E. Sõgel. Some extracts from this documentation and from the archival collection's reports:

- The Archival Sector published the books "*Eesti riik ja rahvas Teises maailmasõjas*" volumes XI-XV, 30,000 copies. "*Mineviku teed ja rajad*" (published under the name of Rein Kordes, 6000 copies); "*Eesti emigrantide saatusaastad I-III*" (also under the pseudonym Rein Kordes, 18,000 copies). The real author of these books was Andrus Roolah. The books were skilful works of counter-propaganda and aimed at Estonian émigrés. They did not glorify the Communist Party of Estonia, but rather tried to use the conflicts between the émigré Estonians themselves, including the fact that one could find refugees in the diaspora who were neutral in relation to the Soviet Union and the so-called upper-crust émigrés who directed sharp critique against the Soviet Union.³
- In 1979, the Archival Sector published the third volume of the counterpropagandistic work "*Eesti emigrantide saatusaastad*". The 6000 copies were sent to émigré Estonians. The volume was deliberately compiled before the AABS conference and before ESTO in Stockholm 1980. "*Mineviku teed ja rajad*" was published in 1976 to counterbalance the Baltimore ESTO.
- Annotated bibliographies over émigré literature were compiled monthly each year in three copies for official use, two of which were given over to the Department of

³ More about the books written by Andrus Roolah can be found in the previously mentioned article by Ivo Juurvee, pages 63-66.

Foreign Affairs at the Central Committee of the ECP. In 1984, 72 issues of these bibliographies had been published, altogether 1026 pages.

- The Sector had several card indexes: two alphabetically ordered indexes over forbidden and strictly forbidden literature (the same for periodicals). The card index over individuals contained more than 2000 names at the time.⁴
- 1981 saw the publication of the counter-propagandistic brochure “*See, millest avalikult ei räägita*” (published under the pseudonym Rein Kordes, 6000 copies). This brochure was really an annotation of August Otsa’s “*Miks kaotasime iseseisvuse*” which had been published in Stockholm. According to Roolah, this work revealed the reactionary and anti-communist subversive activities of the émigré Estonians living in Sweden.
- Data on émigré Estonian organisations and their addresses was sent to *VEKSA*.
- The Sector’s holdings also contained stenographic records of the Estonian-language programmes broadcast by the Voice of America 1963-1981.

The documentation contained information on the activities of Estonians abroad (the Tammsaare jubilee, Estonian song festivals, *suvepäevad* (“Summer Days”), culture days and *metsaülikoolid* (“Forest University”): who the speakers were, the topic they spoke about, etc.)

One of these descriptions carried the heading “On the Ideological Subversions Directed at Soviet Estonia”, in which the following can be read: “The class struggle in the international arena is growing sharper with each year. Ideological subversions are carried out using all kinds of means, radio, TV, periodicals, literature, cultural and scientific co-operation, sport, tourism etc. Ideological attacks are also carried out not only against the Estonian SSR but also against the other Baltic states by the émigré Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian leaders. The country leading this ideological attack is the USA, but also the anti-communist organisations in other countries, which have been created by émigré Estonians in Canada, Sweden, the Federal Republic of Germany, England, and Australia are characterised by their anti-Soviet subversive activities...The Estonian émigré centres receive large sums from more than suspicious sources. With this money hundreds of anti-Sovietic publications are printed, mainly in the English language. These are presented to the leading statesmen of their countries

⁴ The card index on individuals currently contains the names of more than 10,000 famous émigré Estonians. The VEPER database is available online: www.tulib.ee/isik

of residence and to the local press. The tactic used in the subversive ideological acts of the Western imperialists is characterised by biased information, they even spread political anecdotes slandering the Soviet system, etc.”

Replies were also sent to the Investigations Department of the KGB concerning whether any information on certain individuals of interest to them was to be found in Estonian newspapers abroad. Information on the desired individuals was sent and the newspapers and editions containing this information was listed.

Summary:

- The forbidden émigré literature at the Archival Sector at the Library of the Academy of Sciences was practically inaccessible to the readers. Few of those who visited émigré Estonians during this period had read any of these books; the braver brought one or two along and distributed them among their friends, as well as copies of certain books but that was as far as it went. The Soviet politics of concealment closed off a part of the Estonian culture to the people for close to half a century. No surprise, then, that the winds of change in 1989 burgeoned a real boom in the use of Estonian émigré literature.
- Andrus Roolaht’s books hardly influenced or turned any émigré Estonians around. In certain refugee circles this 'game' was actually seen as a joke. He is also called “The No. 1 Counter-propagandist of the Estonian SSR” (Kaljo-Olev Veskimägi), which his publications with their extremely gruesome slander and lies also affirm.
- The documentation, annotations as well as card indexes – particularly those over famous émigré Estonians – were work tools for the KGB (for example, a card index was used to get an overview of individuals considered to pose particular danger to the Estonian SSR and who would require special surveillance when visiting the home country).
- If one is to look for a positive aspect to this, it would be that this was a rather complete collection of Estonian émigré literature for its time, which the present Expatriate Estonian Literature Centre inherited. Today, it has become the most extensive collection of Estonian émigré publications in Estonia and indeed the entire world, and it serves national interests.