

IT'S TIME FOR EMBARKING: THE EMBARK PROJECT

Tamara Butigan-Vučaj*
National Library of Serbia, Belgrade

The meaning of the acronym of the EMBARK project is associated with the main goal of the project, which is «embarking» of certain number of Cyrillic manuscript books into the Manuscriptorium¹ – European digital library of written historical resources. The full name of the EMBARK project, Enhance Manuscriptorium through Balkan Recovered Knowledge – confirms that by the end of the project the Manuscriptorium will be enriched by the parts of the Balkan cultural heritage.

The EMBARK is a 20 months project (September 2010 – April

2012) of the European Commission, in the framework of the programme Culture 2007-2013, approved in the frame of the part I, Support for cultural actions, section 1.2.1, Cooperation / Short term projects. European Union grant for this project is 50% maximum, which means that self-financing by the coordinator and co-organizers is also 50%. The EMBARK project responds to the following objectives of the Culture 2007-2013 programme: encouraging of the emergence of European citizenship, promotion of the transnational mobility of people working in the cultural sector, as well as the strategic objective of the Pro-

¹ <http://manuscriptorium.com>

*tamara@nb.rs

gramme, which is production of such results that can be a solid foundation for the long-run cooperation and encouragement of future initiatives for cultural cooperation at European level. It is interesting that the Culture is a relatively new sphere of action for the European Union (EU), at least from a legal standpoint: the legal basis for EU action in this field was only introduced in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty. This action is aimed at encouraging and supporting cooperation within Europe in order to promote the European common cultural heritage. More about the Culture programme can be found in the Programme guide (in Serbian) "Guide through the Culture programme" 2007-2013, published by the Cultural Contact Point Serbia,² within Ministry of culture of the Republic of Serbia.

Coordinator of the EMBARK project is the Czech National Library, Prague, the institution with a huge experience in the European projects, and also the founder of the Manuscriptorium. The partners in the project are the Institute for Bulgarian language, Sofia and the National Library of Serbia, Belgrade. The third partner, Public library in Veria, Greece, has withdrawn from the project at the end of 2010, so the work has continued with three institutions.

The EMBARK project was preceded by two other projects with similar goals, one big project ENRICH³ and the smaller one REDISCOVER.⁴

Manuscriptorium is a unique virtual research environment that provides free access to digital documents related to historical sources: manuscripts, incunabula, first printed books, maps and other. This is also a digital library of over 5 million digital images of historical documents that are accessed through a single interface. Manuscriptorium is intended for researchers, students, teachers, and for the broadest audience. Besides

the digital copies, users have at their disposal rich descriptions of the sources, which include links to other sources and make the documents open in the digital environment. Manuscriptorium is built in accordance with Web 2.0 requirements, namely, users can create their own virtual libraries and share their research results with others. Manuscriptorium with its content is a part of the European Library and Europeana, and also an aggregator of historical resources for Europeana.

The EMBARK project consists of seven groups of activities or work packages:

1. Project management
2. Research on Balkan-Slavic/Central-European topic
3. Development of the national mobility concept, and international mobility of professionals
4. Integration of documents within Manuscriptorium
5. Presentation of results
6. Dissemination of the project information
7. Evaluation

1. Project management

The Czech National Library, the coordinator of the project is responsible for this WP. Besides the management, this WP includes monitoring of progress in order to maintain focus on successful delivery of the expected results. This work package is especially delicate because both partner institutions participate for the first time in a project of this type, and it is necessary to transfer the knowledge and skills of project management.

2. Research on Balkan-Slavic/Central-European topic

The EMBARK project focuses on research of Slavic written heritage in the Balkans and its integration into the European heritage. The aim of this package is to identify the contents of Balkan-Slavic cultural heritage and define a common strategy for the gathering of these materials in digital format and integrating it into Manuscripto-

² <http://ccp-serbia.org/>

³ <http://enrich.manuscriptorium.com>

⁴ <http://rediscover.manuscriptorium.com/>

rium. Part of this package is to create networks of institutions that possess historical sources and are interested in cooperation with Manuscriptorium.

3. National mobility concepts and mobility of professionals

This WP is maybe the most important in the project because it correlates with the main objective of the project, which is making the electronic editions of historical documents in full text and its integration into Manuscriptorium. Therefore each partner country has to develop the national learning concept on the topic contributing to this main objective, and makes the workshop on this topic. There will be three workshops held in Sofia, Prague and Belgrade. Sofia workshop is scheduled for June 2011 bringing the computational linguistics topic: a software tool for automatic annotating and lemmatization of the text TreeTagger. This tool has been developed at the Institute for computational linguistics of the University of Stuttgart in nineties. This tool has been applied to fifteen languages including Bulgarian. Next workshop is going to be in August 2011 in Prague, the topic are software tools for input of documents into Manuscriptorium, for example M-tool, a spreadsheet application with concise descriptions of the content of individual fields, thus enabling all cataloguers of historical resources to create a digital document without the need for experience with XML languages or of working with current XML editors. Documents created in M-tool are in the XML TEI P5 format, the last recommendation of the TEI (Text Encoding Initiative). Third workshop belonging to the mobility of professionals will be held in September 2011 in Belgrade, touching the non-standard characters in electronic text, presenting the software tool *Gaiji bank*, for the solving problem with non-Unicode old Slavonic characters. *Gaiji bank* is created in the frame of TEI, initially for description of Chinese characters used in Japanese, and that is where its

name comes from - “gaiji” meaning “foreign”. All the partners have to create e-manuals for workshops they prepare.

4. Integration of documents within Manuscriptorium

The aim of this activity is to spread the practice of integration of historical resources into the digital environment of Manuscriptorium. To fulfill this goal Belgrade will host another workshop in October 2011. The workshop is designed for the professionals from Serbian and Bulgarian institutions wishing to cooperate with Manuscriptorium and have some historical collections in their possession. This workshop will represent the complete procedure of preparing and integrating the documents into Manuscriptorium, including all national learning concepts. The EMBARK network should generate a group of professionals skilled to share the gained experience with others.

5. Presentation of results

The most important part of the project work presentation will be organization of three simultaneous national exhibitions in Bulgaria, Serbia and the Czech Republic, scheduled for March-April 2012. Presentations will show 20 digitalized documents from each country, while duration of exhibitions will be about six weeks. Printed catalogue and compact disc with theoretical works, as well as with the chosen digitalized materials from each of three countries will cover these exhibitions.

6. Dissemination of information about the project

The aim of this work package is to show to libraries and other institutions the advantage of including their historical collections in Manuscriptorium and to encourage them to join. The web site of the project⁵ will mostly contribute to

⁵ <http://embark.manuscriptorium.com>

this objective, as well as promotional materials, project presentations and so on.

7. Evaluation

The Bulgarian partner is in charge for the final evaluating documents, as well as for the organization of the final, professional conference of the project in April 2012 in Sofia. The conference topic is already known: Slavonic written documentary heritage on Balkans. Each country will be represented by two papers, planned to be printed in conference proceedings.

SEEDI network (South East European Digitization Initiative⁶) was a base for making the EMBARK partnership. The project is implemented by librarians in collaboration with historians, engineers, mathematicians, linguists, and this fact provides a multi-disciplinary character

to the project and adds to it a new value. And that is exactly how the European added value is explained for this project, as the partnership of similar teams from three different countries on a common task, which will encourage and inspire future cooperation. This partnership is designed with great care, taking into account the partner institutions' experience in administration of projects, professional staff and the digitization of documents, which makes the project much better than it would have been possible without European cooperation.

For the National Library of Serbia, the EMBARK project has also a symbolic significance, since participation in the first fully European project makes our Library a part of the European project team and the experience gained from this project will certainly be precious in the future.

⁶ <http://seedi.ncd.org.rs>