

# Future apparent from book-rich past

National Library Director Roman Motulsky studies Belarusian books' roots

By Victor Andreev

Mr. Motulsky wrote his *From the Past to the Future: Libraries of Belarus* collection at home and in his office, often working at night. The result is certainly worth all his efforts, being not just a monograph but a reflection of the country's journey via the books written and printed by our forefathers. Mr. Motulsky tells us about the roots of Belarusian books.

Greek missionaries brought the first books to Belarus from Byzantine, along with Christianity. Unsurprisingly, the words 'biblioteka' (library) and 'Biblia' (Bible) are similar: the first work — recorded and then printed — was the word of God. Since then, the church has preserved and multiplied its editions over the centuries. The first libraries were founded at monasteries and cathedrals and the first book collection was compiled at Polotsk's St. Sophia Cathedral, in the 11th century. Its preserved manuscripts are now kept in Warsaw and Lvov.

Belarus was once the most advanced Eastern European state in terms of book publishing. In the 16th century, it released 400 books; Ukraine had only 30 and Russia just ten. Russian researchers mention these figures and I rely on

their objectivity. Moreover, our Frantsisk Skorina launched book printing among Eastern Slavs. Judging by the great numbers of books published in Vilno in Old Belarusian, we can conclude that our culture influenced that of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

**Do you think that books have been usurped in our modern society? It's not fashionable to collect books any more. People seem more interested in spending their money on designer label clothes.**

It all depends... In ancient times, each folio was viewed as an expensive pleasure — without exaggeration; only wealthy people could afford them. Old manuscripts boast leather covers decorated with precious stones. How-

ever, after Gutenberg's revolutionary invention, books became more common place. We simply throw away brochures after reading them, without thinking twice. However, this doesn't mean that books will dis-

appear. When the new National Library building was being built, many doubted our need for it, asserting that the Internet would soon replace printed editions. However, unlike electronic texts, books have exclusivity; their circulations are falling while prices are rising. Moreover, publishing houses now pay special attention to each book's appearance. It's no surprise, as

history tends to be cyclical.

**What inspired you to study the history of Belarusian libraries? Your text is worthy of a doctorate...**

I'm already a doctor of pedagogical sciences, which is enough for me. Our society feels the need to know about its past. Books are a fundamental cornerstone of modern civilisation.

**What has been your major 'discovery' regarding past libraries?**

We once had a rich book culture but only a small part remains in Belarus. For example, we know little about the Polotsk Jesuit Collegium's book collection. In the early 19th century, it numbered 40,000 books, which was huge for that period. Importantly, the Collegium's status equalled that of a university; it was actually the first higher educational establishment on the territory of modern Belarus, with its own 'university' library.

**Your book contains interesting tables on the number of libraries in the 19th century. Have you compiled them independently?**

My first thesis work focused on statistics. I love figures, as they never lie. Using various sources, I've managed to calculate that, in the late 19th-early 20th century, about 8,000 libraries operated in Belarus. Clearly, quite a

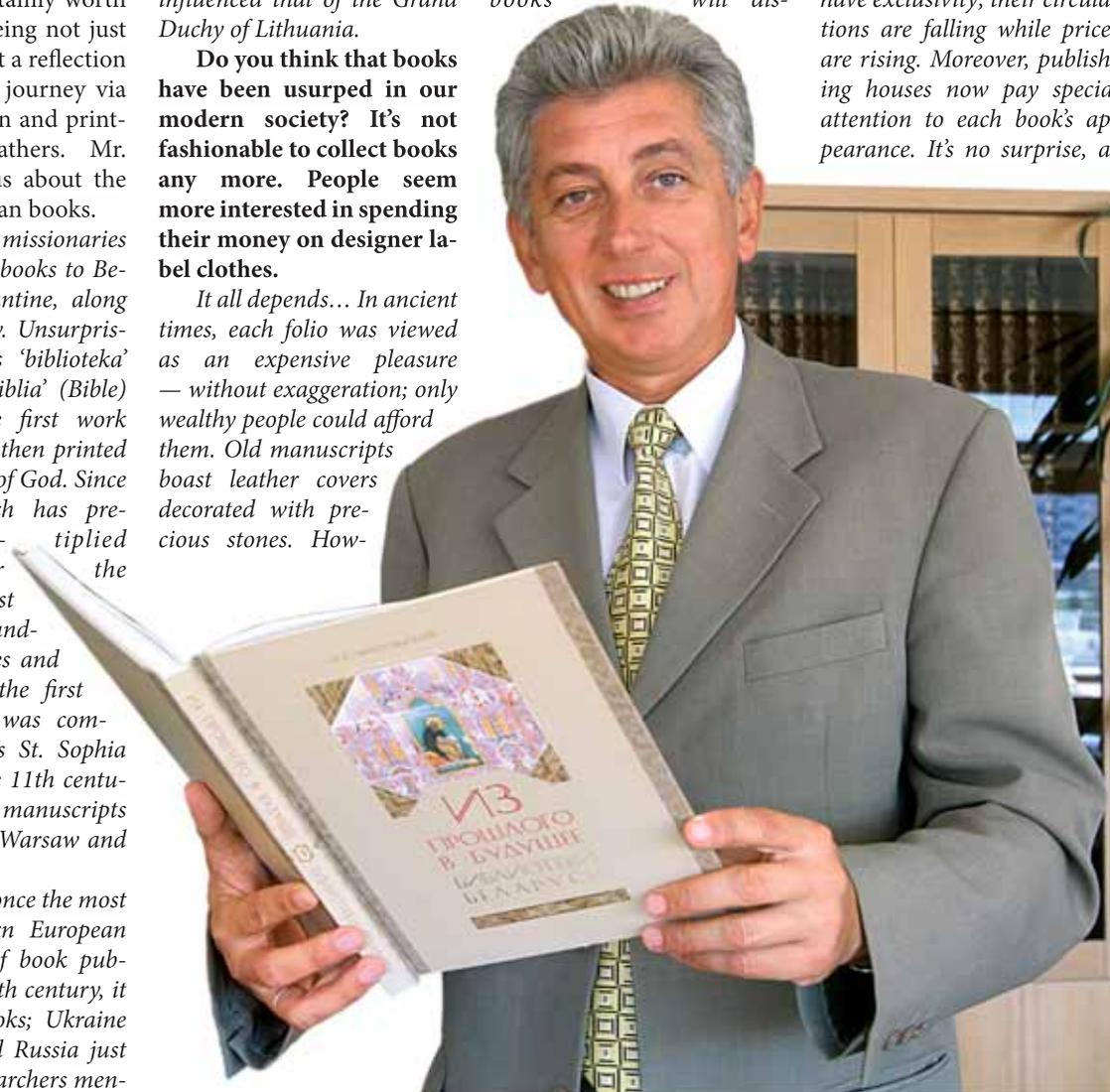
number of literate people lived at that time.

**How many libraries are operational in Belarus today?**

There are about 9,500; the figure might be larger were it not for wars and revolutions. Like furniture and pictures, books were viewed as trophies and were often removed, never to return.

**Why did you choose a portrait of Mikhail Muraviev for your cover — nicknamed the Hanger by his countrymen for suppressing the Kalinovsky Revolt?**

Sometimes, a paradox can help us better understand our history. Following Muraviev's order, libraries confiscated from rebels were taken to Vilno, for further dispatch to St. Petersburg. However, Muraviev realised that this would turn the country into an intellectual desert. He personally ordered the opening of a public library in Vilno, featuring expropriated books. In the early 20th century, 300,000 editions were held there; judging by its scale, it could be called the first national library of Belarus and Lithuania. An encyclopaedia by Brockhaus and Efron names Vilno public library as 'the largest' in the Russian Empire, following the Emperor's library in St. Petersburg and the Rumyantsev's collection in Moscow.



Roman Motulsky researches history of Belarusian libraries meticulously

ALEXANDER RUIZHECHKA

## Image of female student becomes symbolic

By Nadezhda Radionova

**Bronze passenger appears at railway station in Molodechno**

You can't help but notice the sculpture of a beautiful young girl who has just disembarked from the train, with her suitcase, upon which sits a little kitten. The image of a female student returning home from her studies is enchanting. The building of the railway station has also been revamped prior to the *Dazhynki-2011* Festival, with a new pedestrian crossing built over the tracks.

The town has acquired a few other interesting sites in preparation for the event, with a vertical monumental stele depicting the Virgin Mary standing at the roadside as you enter from the direction of Minsk. The 'Protection of the Holy Mother of God' bronze composition is 15m tall, weighing around 2 tonnes. It also boasts the town's coat of arms.

Meanwhile, a beautiful fountain, dedicated to the ancient pagan holiday of Kupalle, has been



BELTA

**Kupalle-themed sculpture** unveiled on the square. It depicts a long-haired young girl wearing a crown of flowers and her young sweetheart, dancing in shamrock.

## Unique findings from Stone Age

By Tatiana Ponomareva

**Archaeologists discover new facts about ancient settlement, near Lake Chernoe**

Numerous sensational artefacts from the New Stone Age have been found in Mogilev's Sozh River area during archaeological digs near Lake Chernoe. The dig was conducted by students from the Mogilev University's History Department under the leadership of Alexander Kolosov, who has a PhD in historical sciences. The associate professor of the Department of Archaeology and Special Historical Sciences discovered the settlement back in 2008.

"We've found fragments from a New Stone Age pot, covered with black sand and small pieces of coal," explains the dig manager. "These might be from an ancient fireplace, showing that the dish was used to cook food. Next to it, we discovered flint tools. Apparently, our remote forefathers from the New Stone Age were making household appliances, cleaning animals procured during hunting close to their fireplace. These are very rare finds for Eastern Belarus. After final examination of the pot fragments, we'll begin reconstruction. This will allow us to find the original appearance of the tableware of these first 'potters', revealing how they were

made and defining the precise age of the ancient settlement. We'll radiocarbon date the earth which covered the pot, which should give us an exact calendar date for the first time; finally, we'll be able to speak more confidently about when the craft of pottery began in the Upper Dnieper and Sozh River regions."

Arrowheads have also been unearthed. "We'll be able to say where the hunting and gathering culture in this region began. Were these traditions imported from somewhere or were they locally-born? If the latter is true, we are speaking of a new, presently unknown, archaeological culture," Mr. Kolosov emphasises with joy.

## 'Buslik' to see everything

By Felix Minaev

**Pilotless aircraft to monitor situation in Belovezhskaya Pushcha**

The 'Buslik' automated aircraft, created by the Physico-Mathematical Institute at the National Academy of Sciences, has already made trial flights over the Pushcha, show-

ing its versatility in offering a bird's eye view of the forest.

According to the National Park's employees, the pilotless aircraft will enable fires to be detected early, allowing them to be controlled more easily. Additionally, it will allow damage from storms and other weather surprises to be assessed with ease. Its data will also aid sci-

entific research. 'Buslik' will send its data back to a computer, collecting still and moving footage, alongside atmospheric pressure and temperature readings, besides other environmental measurements.

Its designers have spent several years on the pilotless ultra-light aircraft and now hope to move from trial tests to serial manufacture.