

# READING UNDER SURVEILLANCE: IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL AND READER CHOICES IN SOVIET LITHUANIA'S SPECIAL HOLDINGS DEPARTMENTS, 1960s – 1980s

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## Abstract

This article examines the role of Special Holdings Departments (*specfondy*) in Soviet Lithuania from the 1960s to the 1980s, focusing on their function as tools of ideological control and information restriction. By analyzing archival materials from the State Library of the Lithuanian SSR, the study explores the types of literature stored in *specfondy*, the mechanisms of access regulation, and the social dynamics of readers who were granted access to restricted materials. The article reveals that *specfondy* were not merely passive repositories of censored literature but active instruments of social stratification and ideological management. They housed a wide range of publications, including interwar Lithuanian works, émigré literature, and Western periodicals,

which were deemed ideologically dangerous by Soviet authorities. Access to these collections was tightly controlled, with permissions granted primarily to academics, students, and professionals aligned with state interests. The study also highlights the paradoxical nature of *specfondy*: while they were designed to suppress dissent, they inadvertently became spaces where restricted knowledge circulated through informal networks and academic citations. By shedding light on the operation of *specfondy*, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of Soviet censorship practices and their impact on intellectual life in Lithuania.

**Keywords:** Soviet Lithuania, censorship, *specfond*, ideological control, restricted literature, information access

## Abstrakt

Článok skúma úlohu tzv. Špeciálnych fondových oddelení (*specfondy*) v sovietskej Litve v období 60. a 80. rokov 20. storočia so zameraním na ich funkcie, ako ideologickú kontrolu a reštrikciu informácií. Pomocou archívnych materiálov pochádzajúcich zo Štátnej knižnice Litovskej SSR je poukázané na zloženie tlačí uložených v *specfonde*, prístup k nim a skupiny čitateľov, ktorým bol tento prístup umožnený. Tieto fondy neboli len pasívnym uchovávateľom cenzúrovaného materiálu, ale ukazuje sa, že aj aktívnym nástrojom na ideologickú prácu s rôznymi skupinami obyvateľstva.

Vo fondoch sa uchovávala, napr. litovská medzivojnová a emigrantská literatúra, či západné časopisy, v podstate všetky publikácie, ktoré sovietsky režim vyhodnotil ako „ideologicky závadné“. Prístup do týchto fondov bol obmedzený a kontrolovaný. Povolený bol len pre akademikov, študentov a odborníkov spriaznených s režimom. Napriek tomu, že účelom *specfondov* bolo nepohodlným osobám obmedziť prístup k informáciám, neúmyselne prispeli k tomu, že cenzúrované informácie cirkulovali prostredníctvom neformálnej siete a akademických citácií. Prostredníctvom témy fungovania *specfondov* ponúkne článok aj pohľad na zmysel sovietskej cenzúry a jej vplyv na intelektuálne vrstvy v Litve v sledovanom období.

**Kľúčové slová:** sovietska Litva, cenzúra, *specfond*, ideologická kontrola, zakázaná literatúra, prístup k informáciám

During the Soviet era, the control of information was one of the primary instruments of state power in ensuring ideological hegemony. Reading, a crucial cultural process linking individual experience to societal values and meanings, became integral to this control. The Soviet system developed a complex structure of information regulation, designed not only to censor subversive ideas but also to shape a restricted public sphere. One of the key elements of this system was the establishment of special repositories for restricted literature, known as *specfondy* (officially termed Special Holdings Departments, abbreviated as *spetskhran* in documents, or *specfond* in Lithuanian). These sections housed books and materials considered unfit for general readership, with access granted only to a limited group of vetted readers. Evgeny Dobrenko, in his thorough examination of the USSR (particularly Soviet Russia), highlights the central role of libraries as ideological institutions in shaping the Soviet reader.<sup>1</sup> Their primary function extended beyond providing access to books; it aimed to cultivate a politically loyal and ideologically 'correct' readership. Libraries were charged with monitoring, regulating, and influencing reading practices, ensuring literature's contribution to the formation of Soviet political consciousness.<sup>2</sup> As part of this broader mechanism of ideological control, *specfondy* provide valuable insights into the practical functioning of censorship and the impact of restricted knowledge on those granted access.

These structural formations of the Soviet regime, which first appeared in Russia in the 1920s, were later established across all Soviet-occupied territories. In Lithuania, *specfondy* were introduced in 1945 following a directive from the Lithuanian Communist Party. Their purpose was to remove anti-Soviet literature, including publications from the German occupation period, and to restrict public access to these materials. Despite their significant role in controlling information and shaping public discourse, *specfondy* remain an understudied topic in historiography. Existing research has primarily focused on the early phase of Soviet rule, particularly the large-scale destruction of books, which is widely regarded as a key aspect of ideological repression.<sup>3</sup> Within this context, *specfondy* are only briefly mentioned, primarily as one of the instruments in what some scholars have termed the 'genocide of books'—a metaphor for the systematic destruction of literature. Other studies on Soviet ideological censorship have predominantly examined the role of Glavlit, the central agency responsible for overseeing censorship.<sup>4</sup> In such analyses, *specfondy* are often portrayed as passive mechanisms, merely

<sup>1</sup> DOBRENKO, Evgeny. *The Making of the State Reader. Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> DOBRENKO, ref. 1, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> SINKEVIČIUS, Klemensas. Šešiabriaunio spaudos imperija. In: *Tarp knygų*, 2000, nr. 5-10; SINKEVIČIUS, Klemensas. *Uždrausti autoriai ir leidiniai: pirmieji sovietinės okupacijos metai, 1940.06.15-1941.06.21*. Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka, 1994; STONIENĖ, Vanda. *Lietuvos knyga ir visuomenė: nuo spaudos draudimo iki nepriklausomybės atkūrimo 1864 – 1990*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2006; VĖLAVIČIENĖ, Silvija. *Draustosios spaudos pėdsakai*. Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> TRUSKA, Liudas. Glavlitio veikla Lietuvoje 1940 – 1947. In: *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis*. 1996, p. 214-241; SKORUPSKAS, Andrius. Sovietinės ideologinės cenzūros raida Lietuvoje (1964 – 1989 m.). In: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*. 2005, nr. 1(17), p. 100-127; PUKINSKAITĖ, Jurgita. Glavlitas Lietuvoje 1953 – 1964. In: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*, 2004, nr. 2(16), p. 124-144; STREIKUS, Arūnas. Ideologinė cenzūra Lietuvoje 1956 – 1989 m. In: *Genocidas ir rezistencija*. 2004, nr. 1 (15), pp. 43-67; STREIKUS, Arūnas. Minties kolektyvizacija: cenzūra sovietų Lietuvoje. Vilnius: Naujasis židinys-Aidai,

implementing Glavlit's directives to enforce ideological control. While this perspective underscores the subordination of the specfondy to higher ideological institutions, it fails to explore their autonomous operation or internal mechanisms.

Specfondy are increasingly being recognised in scholarly studies that explore the impact of information control on daily life and the cultural environment of Soviet society. In his research on Soviet everyday life, Tomas Vaiseta proposes a fresh perspective on these restricted book collections.<sup>5</sup> His analysis suggests that specfondy should be seen not only as a tool of censorship but also as a mechanism reinforcing social hierarchy and exacerbating informational inequality in Soviet society. Valeria D. Stelmakh builds on this perspective by examining specfondy within the broader context of Soviet reading practices.<sup>6</sup> She argues that in a totalitarian society, censorship was intrinsically linked to restrictions on social, cultural, and economic development. She argues that restricted-access book collections were not just isolated tools of censorship. Instead, they shaped a closed informational space, limiting access to knowledge and hindering societal progress. These analyses reveal that specfondy were not merely technical tools for isolating subversive literature. They also functioned as a social phenomenon, influencing ideological control, social stratification, and the management of information in Soviet society.

In this context, specfondy have become a key focus in analysing the Soviet information control mechanism. The existence of specfondy not only demonstrates the regime's efforts to restrict information circulation and create a tightly controlled public sphere but also offer valuable insights into the practical workings of this control. Specifically, research on specfondy reveals how literature was selected, what principles governed access restrictions, and which social and professional groups were permitted to use these collections.

The aim of this article is to examine the operation of the Special Holdings Department (specfond) of the State Library in Soviet Lithuania. First, it seeks to identify the types of literature selected and stored in the specfond, analysing how ideological requirements and censorship practices shaped these decisions. Second, it explores the operational mechanisms of the specfond, focusing particularly on the restrictions placed on information and the regulation of access. Finally, it investigates the main groups of specfond readers and their needs, aiming to determine who had access to restricted literature and under what conditions.

This study focuses on the period from 1963 to 1988, tracing the evolution of the Special Holdings Department (specfond) at the State Republican Library from its stabilisation to its decline. In 1963, the library relocated from Kaunas to Vilnius, a move that highlighted its role in Soviet Lithuania's cultural and ideological infrastructure

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2018; ШТРАЛІЕ, Айна. Закат цензуры в Советской Латвии 1985 – 1990 гг. In: *Knygotyra*. 2006, nr. 47 pp. 122-141.

<sup>5</sup> VAISETA, Tomas. Nuobodulio visuomenė: vėlyvojo sovietmečio Lietuva (1964 – 1984). Doctoral Dissertation. Vilniaus universitetas, 2012. [online]. [cit. 2025-01-09]. Available from: <https://www.lvb.lt/permalink/f/16nmo04/ELABAETD2094750>; VAISETA, Tomas. Informacijos hierarchija vėlyvuojų sovietmečiu: bibliotekų atvejais. In: *Informacijos mokslai*. 2012, p. 116-134.

<sup>6</sup> STELMAKH, Valeria D. Reading in the Context of Censorship in the Soviet Union. In: *Libraries & Culture*. Vol. 36, no. 1, 2001, pp. 143-151. [online]. [cit. 2025-01-09]. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25548897>

and solidified the *specfond* as a fully operational censorship mechanism. By 1988, the *specfond* entered a new phase, marked by the gradual dismantling of its structures and the transformation of the Soviet information control system. The large-scale transfer of restricted publications from the *specfond* into general library collections during this time symbolised the decline of the *specfond* as a censorship tool. Previously inaccessible to the public, these publications became available to a wider audience. At the same time, the first articles revealing the existence of *specfondy* began to appear in public discourse.<sup>7</sup>

The study's primary sources are archival documents from the Special Holdings Department of the LSSR State Library.<sup>8</sup> These materials – including meeting protocols, inspection reports, activity reports, Glavlit directives, and reader registration books – provide a comprehensive basis for analysing the department's operations and the social background of its visitors. However, since Soviet documents often contain ideological rhetoric, their analysis requires a critical approach to account for potential distortions. Additionally, the study incorporates archival records from other libraries with *specfondy*, offering a broader context for understanding their role in Soviet Lithuania.<sup>9</sup>

### Literature in Isolation: The Collection

During the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania (1940 – 1941), mass purges of library and bookstore collections began. These purges served as a key tool for totalitarian regimes in controlling information and enforcing ideological dominance. Although institutions received lists of banned literature, the implementation guidelines were vague. As a result, some publications were destroyed, while others were moved to separate storage areas. This chaotic approach suggests that Soviet authorities in Lithuania had not yet established a centralised system for managing 'dangerous' literature. While exact figures on destroyed books are limited, records reveal that on 8 June 1941, the State Paper Factory received 39,000 kilograms of 'archival waste paper' – books destined for pulping.<sup>10</sup> Despite lasting only a year, this occupation caused significant damage to Lithuania's interwar book culture (1918 – 1940).

After the Second World War, during the second Soviet occupation (1944 – 1990), special holdings departments (*specfondy*) were introduced in Lithuania. These sections,

<sup>7</sup> VAITKUS, E. Reabilituotos knygos. In: *Naujos knygos*. 1988, nr. 7, pp. 6-7. GRUMADAITĖ, R. Knyga iš *specfondų*. In: *Kauno tiesa*. 1988, nr. 57, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Documents from the Special Holdings Department of the State Republican Library are preserved in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department of the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania (Lietuvos nacionalinės Martyno Mažvydo bibliotekos Retų knygų ir rankraščių skyrius, hereinafter: LNMMB RKRS), F. 178.

<sup>9</sup> Documents from the Special Holdings Department of the Vilnius State V. Kapsukas University Library were found in the Vilnius University Manuscript Department (Vilniaus universiteto rankraščių skyrius, hereinafter: VU RS), F. 47. Documents from the Library of the Party History Institute under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania were found in the Lithuanian Special Archives (Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas, hereinafter: LYA), F. 3377. Documents from the Library of the Academy of Sciences are preserved in the Manuscript Department of the Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences (Lietuvos mokslų akademijos Vrublevskių bibliotekos rankraščių skyrius, hereinafter: LMAVB RS), F. 75.

<sup>10</sup> SINKEVIČIUS, Klemensas. *Uždrausti autoriai ir leidiniai: pirmieji sovietinės okupacijos metai, 1940.06.15 – 1941.06.21*. Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinė Martyno Mažvydo biblioteka, 1994, p. 18.

first developed in the Soviet Union during the 1920s, were later implemented in occupied territories.<sup>11</sup> Their absence during the first Soviet occupation (1940 – 1941) resulted from institutional chaos, limited resources, and a focus on direct political control. Post-war, Soviet authorities adopted a centralised model to more effectively isolate ideologically unacceptable literature. The first specfondy in Lithuania were established in 1945, following Communist Party directives to remove anti-Soviet publications and materials from the German occupation period.<sup>12</sup> Under Glavlit's supervision, specfondy coordinated the purging of library collections and selected 'harmful' literature for restricted storage. However, by 1950, some libraries remained uninspected, and specfondy were still refining their role within the Soviet censorship system.<sup>13</sup> Initially, their main task was to 'cleanse' library collections based on Glavlit's lists.

The core of the Special Holdings Department's collection consisted of publications deemed unacceptable by the regime. These included interwar periodicals, books from 'fascist' and 'clerical' organisations, and materials labelled as 'criminal' or 'pornographic'.<sup>14</sup> Glavlit, as the primary censorship body, interpreted terms like 'fascist', 'clerical', and 'harmful' loosely, broadening the scope of ideological control. The transfer of publications to the specfond was not left to libraries; Glavlit oversaw the entire process. Beyond compiling lists of banned books, Glavlit also reviewed newly acquired materials. Libraries were required to submit lists of these publications, after which Glavlit determined which items required restricted access. For instance, in 1974, the State Library sent Glavlit a list of books acquired via post or antiquarian sources.<sup>15</sup> Using a red pencil, Glavlit marked a 'hexagonal'<sup>16</sup> symbol next to selected items, resulting in 16 out of 54 publications being moved to the specfond.<sup>17</sup> This process highlights Glavlit's centralised control, ensuring the systematic identification and isolation of ideologically unacceptable materials. At the same time, it removed any autonomy libraries might have had in evaluating new acquisitions.

Based on the inventory books of the specfond in the LSSR State Library, several key categories of publications can be identified. One of the largest groups included works from the Lithuanian National Revival, the interwar independence period, and the Nazi occupation. These publications were censored for contradicting Soviet ideology. Control measures included lists such as the 'Summary List of Obsolete Publications' issued by the LSSR Book Chamber in 1954, which contained 2,975 ideologically unaccept-

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<sup>11</sup> LOTMAN, Piret. *National Library of Estonia 1918 – 2018*. Tallinn: National Library of Estonia, 2018, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> SINKEVIČIUS, Klemensas. Šešiabriaunio spaudo imperija. In: *Tarp knygy*. 2000, nr. 4, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Destruction of Book Collections in Public Libraries of the Lithuanian SSR. LNMMB A. b. 435, l. 69.

<sup>14</sup> Book Removal in Public Libraries of the Lithuanian SSR. LNMMB A. b. 453c, l. 69.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from V. Jurgaitis, Director of the Lithuanian SSR State Library, to the Head of the Lithuanian SSR Glavlit. LNMMB F178-50, l. 20.

<sup>16</sup> The censorship symbols used by Glavlit indicated different levels of accessibility: a "triangle" meant that the publication was available to the public, while a „hexagon“ signified that the publication had to be stored in the Special Holdings Department. SINITSYNA, Olga. Censorship of Art Books in the Soviet Union and Its Effect on the Arts and on Art Libraries. In: *Art Libraries Journal*. 1999, vol. 21, no. 1, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> List No. 3 of Publications Without Censorship Marks. LNMMB F178-50, l. 21.

able titles – mostly related to religion, nationalism, or the interwar political system.<sup>18</sup> Many of these works were moved to the specfond in its early years, but the collection continued to grow, with an average of 146 publications added annually until 1988. This category of literature was also highly mobile, frequently moving in and out of the specfond. During the post-Stalin ‘Thaw’ in 1956, the LSSR Council of Ministers reviewed materials in the specfond, reclassifying some works and returning them to public collections. Officially, these were described as having been ‘withdrawn without grounds’<sup>19</sup>—a phrase hinting at a reassessment of earlier censorship policies. This review process reflected a limited compromise between maintaining ideological control and acknowledging political liberalisation. However, despite these efforts, ideologically unacceptable publications remained censored, and the review process was often slow and inconsistent.

The second category of publications included works published in the USSR that were removed from public circulation due to their authors’ ideological positions or political affiliations. Glavlit exercised centralised control by issuing directives to transfer such works to the specfond. As Arūnas Streikus notes, during the late Soviet period, lists of undesirable authors grew rapidly, encompassing dissidents, émigrés, and those who had sought political asylum.<sup>20</sup> Between 1970 and 1988, Glavlit ordered the removal of books by around 60 authors who had either lost Soviet citizenship or been convicted of political crimes.<sup>21</sup> These measures were likewise implemented in the Lithuanian SSR, where existing censorship mechanisms were adjusted to the local context. Three Lithuanian authors exemplify this trend: Aušra Sluckaitė, Tomas Venclova, and Saulius Tomas Kondrotas. Sluckaitė’s works were removed following her husband Jonas Jurašas’s conflict with Soviet authorities.<sup>22</sup> After she emigrated in 1974, the LSSR Glavlit ordered her books withdrawn from libraries and bookshops on 24 April 1975. Venclova’s case was more directly tied to political opposition<sup>23</sup>—his works were removed after he emigrated to the West in 1977. However, not all émigré authors faced the same treatment. Books by Giršas Ošerovičius, Icchokas Meras, and Mejeris Elinas-Eglinis remained in library collections despite their emigration to Israel in 1971 – 1972. While

<sup>18</sup> *Pasenusių leidinių, nenaudotinių viešosiose bibliotekose ir knygų prekybos tinkle, sąrašas nr. 1* (5). Vilnius: LSSR Knygų rūmai, 1954.

<sup>19</sup> LSSR State Library Act No. 11 on the Transfer of Publications, March 16, 1966. LLMBA F. 178-66, l. 1.

<sup>20</sup> STREIKUS, Arūnas. *Minties kolektyvizacija: cenzūra sovietų Lietuvoje*. Vilnius: Naujasis židinys-Aidai, 2018, p. 189.

<sup>21</sup> On October 30, 1974, the USSR Glavlit ordered the removal of works by four authors from libraries and bookstores. Among them was Aleksandr Galich, whose works were targeted after being published abroad, deemed an ideological betrayal. Galich was expelled from the USSR Writers’ Union, and following his forced emigration in 1974, his works were transferred to restricted collections, effectively erasing them from public access. For more details, see: ALEXEYeva, Liudmila. *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious, and Human Rights*. Wesleyan University Press, 1987, p. 392.

<sup>22</sup> For more details on Jonas Jurašas’s conflict with Soviet censorship: GIRDZIJAUSKAITĖ, Audronė. Jono Jurašo karštas penkmetis Kauno dramoje. In: *Menotyra*. 2006, Nr. 4 (45), pp. 16-23.

<sup>23</sup> For more details on the case of Tomas Venclova’s emigration: MITAITĖ, Donata. *Tomas Venclova: biografijos ir kūrybos ženklai*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2002, pp. 88-100.

some historiographical accounts claim their works were transferred to *specfondy*,<sup>24</sup> archival records show no evidence of this in LSSR Glavlit orders or the State Library's *specfond*. This discrepancy reflects a nuance of Soviet policy: repatriation to Israel was not classified as a criminal offence, so there was no formal justification for censoring these authors. Instead, their works were likely removed from public circulation through 'silent elimination'. Libraries, publishers, and book distributors used informal practices to gradually restrict access to their works.

The cases of Venclova and Sluckaitė highlight the regional specificities of censorship in the Lithuanian SSR. One striking feature was the delay in transferring their works to *specfondy*. For instance, when Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was expelled from the USSR, Glavlit ordered the removal of his works from libraries within two days.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, instructions regarding Venclova and Sluckaitė were implemented only after a year in the Lithuanian SSR. This delay may reflect bureaucratic inefficiency, uncertainty, or the relative autonomy of regional institutions. Meanwhile, Saulius Tomas Kondrotas' books were removed within months of his emigration in 1986, indicating a swifter response and a shift toward more formalised censorship processes. These examples demonstrate that regional censorship was not simply the passive execution of central directives, but a complex mechanism shaped by local political and cultural contexts.

The third category of publications consisted of émigré works published in Lithuanian (in Western Europe, the United States, South America, and Australia) as well as foreign-language 'bourgeois' literature. This group included a wide range of materials, from news and academic journals like *Time*, *The Economist*, and *Slavic Review* to popular culture magazines such as *Vogue* and *National Geographic*. Soviet authorities considered these publications ideologically unacceptable because they contradicted Marxist-Leninist doctrine. However, there were notable exceptions. First, works of literary classics – whether in their original languages or in translation – remained accessible to all readers. The USSR Glavlit compiled special lists identifying which publications were permitted for public access. A second exception emerged in the 1970s, when certain Western scientific and technical periodicals, such as the *International Journal of Biochemistry* and *Review of Plant Pathology*, were exempted from Glavlit's oversight.<sup>26</sup> This policy shift was closely tied to the Soviet Union's growing technological gap with the West. In an effort to remain competitive, particularly in military and industrial technology, authorities acknowledged the need to grant scientists access to the latest scientific publications. However, these materials were available only to a restricted group of specialists, with strict control mechanisms in place to prevent their dissemination to the wider public.

<sup>24</sup> MAČIANSKAITĖ, Loreta. Holokausto tema. In: *Sovietmečio lietuvių literatūra: reiškiniai ir sąvokos* / Compiled by Algis Kalėda, Rimantas Kmita, Dalia Satkauskytė. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2019, l. 296.

<sup>25</sup> On February 12, 1974, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was arrested, stripped of his Soviet citizenship, and exiled to West Germany. On February 14, 1974, a USSR Glavlit order was issued for the removal of his books from libraries. The order also reached the State Library of the Lithuanian SSR: Order of USSR Glavlit No. 10-dsp dated February 14, 1974, on the removal of works by A. I. Solzhenitsyn. LNMMB RKRS F. 178-8, l. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Appendix No. 1 to the 'List of Scientific and Technical Periodicals from Capitalist Countries Exempt from Glavlit Control,' Moscow, 1973, a publication of the USSR Glavlit. VUB RS. 47, b. 2473, l. 1-26.



An analysis of the growth dynamics of this category within the Special Holdings Department of the State Library reveals several key shifts and underlying causes contributing to its expansion. Notably, the early 1970s saw a significant increase in the number of publications added to the *specfond*. This growth can be attributed to two primary factors. First, after 1972, ideological control intensified, leading to stricter inspections of publications and increased scrutiny of incoming shipments. As a result, more confiscated books and periodicals were redirected to the *specfond*. Second, a major shift occurred in 1981, when the *specfond* began accumulating periodicals from Poland, including *Kurjer Polski* and *Życie Literackie*, among 27 other titles.<sup>27</sup> This development reflected the political events in Poland associated with the rise of the Solidarity movement. Although these publications were not directly linked to Solidarity, they provided political and social context that diverged from Soviet ideological narratives and could be perceived as a threat to the regime. Consequently, they were placed in the *specfond* as part of broader efforts to control access to politically sensitive information.

### Literature in Isolation: The Collection Formation

The formation of the Special Holdings Department's collection reflects two primary processes: mandatory and autonomous acquisition. Mandatory acquisition was driven by Glavlit's orders and shipments, which specified the books and periodicals to be placed in the *specfond*. This process was not a result of the department's own operations but rather a centralised control mechanism, requiring library staff to perform a formal administrative role. Only one clearly documented case of mandatory acquisition has been identified—the confiscation of publications belonging to Zigmas Toliušis.<sup>28</sup> In 1967, the State Security Committee sent a letter to the director of the State Library, instructing that 30 books and periodicals, published in interwar Lithuania and seized during a search of Toliušis's home, were to be transferred to and stored in the *specfond* in accordance with Glavlit regulations.<sup>29</sup> While this is the only explicitly recorded instance, it is likely that similar methods were used to transfer other publications to the *specfond*. However, documentation of such materials was often classified, leading to their disappearance within the general influx of incoming publications. This example not only illustrates the functioning of mandatory acquisition mechanisms but also highlights how the *specfond* served as a tool of repression, targeting political opponents of the regime and individuals deemed 'ideologically dangerous.'

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<sup>27</sup> Data from the inventory book of the Special Holdings Collection of the State Republican Library, titled 'Pu'. LNMMB RKRS F178-42,43.

<sup>28</sup> Zigmas Toliušis (1889 – 1971) – a statesman, public figure, and jurist in independent Lithuania. Arrested by the NKVD in October 1944, he was imprisoned in Kaunas and Vilnius until June 1945 and again from June 1946 to November 1947 (sentenced to five years of imprisonment in early 1947). In 1951, he was arrested once more and sentenced to ten years of exile in the Krasnoyarsk region by the Special Council of the Ministry of State Security. Toliušis returned to Lithuania in 1955 but remained under KGB surveillance and interrogation. [cited 2025-01-19]. Available from: <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/zigmas-toliusis/>

<sup>29</sup> Deputy Chairman of the State Security Committee under the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR, J. Obukauskas' letter to the Director of the Republican Library, V. Jurgaitis, dated June 11, 1967. LNMMB RKRS F.178-58, l. 90.

Despite the mandatory mechanisms, autonomous acquisition played a significant role in the department's operations. The department's regulations<sup>30</sup> allowed for supplementing collections with missing publications, which could be acquired through the library's acquisition and exchange departments. Although this process required approval from Glavlit censors, it displayed a degree of independence, as the department retained some autonomy in deciding which publications to acquire. The primary methods of autonomous acquisition were purchasing publications from antiquarian bookshops and exchanging materials with other libraries.

Antiquarian bookshops were crucial in expanding the Special Holdings Department's collection. While Glavlit's lists of banned publications applied to all book trade venues, antiquarian bookshops were permitted to sell prohibited publications exclusively to libraries. However, this process was not entirely transparent, as an informal practice of 'under-the-counter' sales existed, whereby banned books were sold only to trusted buyers. For example, Albinas Vaičiūnas acquired all nine volumes of the *Lietuviškoji enciklopedija*, published in Boston, which was strictly prohibited from public circulation in the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> The State Library's records indicate that antiquarian bookshops primarily provided individual missing issues of interwar periodicals or books that supplemented the specfond collection. Nonetheless, the scale of these acquisitions remained limited, with libraries obtaining no more than 300 volumes per year through antiquarian purchases and exchanges. However, such acquisitions could lead to disputes. In 1977, the director of the State Library appealed to the LSSR Minister of Culture for compensation regarding a set of *Darbas* newspapers from 1937, purchased from an antiquarian bookshop in Kaunas.<sup>32</sup> The dispute arose when it was discovered that the acquired materials bore stamps from the State Central Bookstore (the name used for the LSSR State Library during interwar Lithuania). While the library considered these publications its property, the Ministry of Culture sided with the antiquarian bookshop, and the library received no compensation.<sup>33</sup>

These processes reveal not only the systematic control imposed by Soviet censorship but also the limits of its flexibility. Antiquarian bookshops, while operating within the official system, paradoxically functioned as intermediaries for restricted literature. This ambiguous situation highlights the dual nature of the Soviet system, which not only regulated but also created spaces where ideological boundaries could be selectively applied. It reflects the regime's efforts to isolate ideologically unacceptable literature as well as the subtle ways in which these books continued to circulate within intellectual networks.

Exchanges were another key aspect of the specfond formation process, enabling more effective management of existing collections and contributing to their specialisation.

<sup>30</sup> Regulations of the Special Collections Department of the Lithuanian SSR State Library. LNMMB RKRS F. 178, b. 2, l. 47.

<sup>31</sup> KMITA, Rimantas. Skaitymas sovietmečiu kaip neoficialus literatūrinis gyvenimas. *Nevienareikšmės situacijos. Pokalbiai apie sovietmečio literatūros lauką*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2015, p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> Lithuanian SSR State Library Director's Letter to the Lithuanian SSR Minister of Culture J. Bielinis, May 16, 1977, No. 03/53. (Lithuanian Archives of Literature and Art, hereinafter: LLMA) LLMA F. 342, ap. 1, b. 3054, l. 94.

<sup>33</sup> Lithuanian SSR State Library Report, March 23, 1977. LLMA F. 342, ap. 1, b. 3054, l. 95.

Exchanges operated in two directions: domestic and international. Domestically, exchanges occurred when libraries held surplus copies of publications. For instance, the 1974 deaccessioning guidelines of the State Library stipulated that no more than three copies of a single publication should be retained. Any surplus copies were transferred to other libraries with *specfondy*.<sup>34</sup> This mechanism not only ensured more efficient collection management but also allowed institutions to tailor their holdings to the needs of their readers. A notable example of collection expansion occurred in 1971, when the *specfond* of the Latvian SSR State Library transferred over 1,000 publications to the *specfond* of the Lithuanian SSR State Library.<sup>35</sup> During the same period, exchanges between *specfondy* increased significantly. Although not directly regulated by Glavlit, these exchanges allowed libraries to address their specific collection needs. This trend became particularly evident in the 1970s, as efforts to refine the specialisation of *specfondy* intensified in response to institutional functions and reader interests. One example of this specialisation can be seen in the *specfond* of the Institute of Party History, which, following an inspection, received a recommendation to transfer all outdated and non-specialist literature to other libraries.<sup>36</sup> This included materials on natural sciences, technology, medicine, literary studies, and even fiction—amounting to approximately 30,000 to 40,000 volumes. This exchange process not only underscored the need for coordination among *specfondy* but also highlighted their specific role within the Soviet library system. These exchanges reflect attempts to optimise collection management and reinforce ideological control through a more targeted distribution of restricted publications.

### Information Restriction: Access to Prohibited Literature

During the Soviet era, libraries were portrayed as open and accessible to all; however, this image concealed a highly controlled information system. Official discourse made no mention of Special Holdings Departments (*specfondy*), where censored publications were stored. These sections remained invisible even during library-organised tours,<sup>37</sup> and any public reference to them was subject to censorship. As Tomas Vaiseta notes, Soviet information control operated within a strict hierarchy – not all citizens had equal access to the same knowledge, and the availability of censored literature was restricted based on ideological criteria.<sup>38</sup> The only known case in which the concept

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<sup>34</sup> Order of the Director of the Lithuanian SSR State Library, “On the Transfer of Specially Restricted Publications to the Special Book Storage Department,” July 1, 1976. LNMMB RKRS. F. 178, b. 2, l. 37.

<sup>35</sup> Acts of Transfer of Publications from the Latvian SSR State Library to the Lithuanian SSR State Library, April 12, 1971 – September 27, 1971, a total of 10 acts. LNMMB RKRS F178-58, l. 133–167.

<sup>36</sup> Lithuanian SSR State Library official letter addressed to Comrade R. Šarmaitis, Director of the Party History Institute under the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party, dated January 3, 1967, titled „Remarks on the Work of the Library of the Party History Institute under the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party.” LYA F. 3377, ap. 43, b. 26, l. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Sample Routes for Foreign Tourists at the Lithuanian SSR State Library (April 12, 1976). LNMMB RKRS F178-229, l. 2.

<sup>38</sup> VAISETA, Tomas. *Nuobodulio visuomenė: vėlyvojo sovietmečio Lietuva (1964 – 1984)*. Doctoral Dissertation. Vilnius universitetas, 2012, p. 176 [online]. [cit. 2025-01-09]. Available from: <https://>

of specfondy slipped past censorship occurred in 1975, when the newspaper *Vakarinės naujienos* mentioned the specfond of the Central Library of the LSSR Academy of Sciences.<sup>39</sup> This breach was attributed to a Glavlit censor's oversight, as the article had been approved without proper review. This episode illustrates that while the Soviet regime publicly promoted the accessibility of information, access to certain sources was tightly controlled and restricted. Despite strict regulation, readers still became aware of the existence and holdings of specfondy. This occurred through three primary channels: references in academic works, library catalogues, and personal networks.

One way to learn about publications held in specfondy was through footnotes in academic works. Although scholars were officially prohibited from citing anti-communist or reactionary texts, some still referenced specfond-held materials, particularly interwar press, in their research.<sup>40</sup> An analysis of 25 academic publications and bibliographies, cited as reasons for reader visits to specfondy, revealed that restricted publications, especially interwar periodicals, frequently appeared in footnotes. For instance, bibliographies referenced *Aleksandrynas*, a work compiled by Vaclovas Biržiška, which had been marked with Glavlit's 'hexagonal' symbol, indicating restricted access, despite being officially banned from citation.<sup>41</sup> This suggests that censorship was not always strictly enforced and that the limited academic readership of such works allowed them to circulate within scholarly discourse. The accessibility of specfond-held materials is also evident in a case where a reader submitted a complaint to the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR, arguing that he was denied access to literature cited in publicly available academic works.<sup>42</sup> He claimed that this situation contradicted the USSR Constitution. However, the response of the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR maintained that specfond regulations remained in force and that access could only be granted through special permission from an ideologically reliable institution.<sup>43</sup> While this is the only known instance of such a complaint, it demonstrates how references to restricted literature in academic publications could indirectly draw attention to the existence and content of specfondy. It also illustrates that, despite strict censorship policies, their practical implementation was inconsistent and raised broader questions about the right to information.

Another indirect source of information on publications held in specfondy was library catalogues. Although specfond catalogues were kept confidential, some restricted publications could still be recorded in the general library catalogue.<sup>44</sup> This meant that

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[www.lvb.lt/permalink/f/16nmo04/ELABAETD2094750](http://www.lvb.lt/permalink/f/16nmo04/ELABAETD2094750)

<sup>39</sup> Report of the Secretary of the Primary Party Organization of the Lithuanian SSR Glavlit for the Year 1975 [classified as secret]. LYA F. 7758, ap. 2, b. 15, l. 48.

<sup>40</sup> Rules for the Use of Literature Stored in the Lithuanian SSR State Library's Special Holdings Department, 1979. LNMMB RKRS. F178-4.

<sup>41</sup> ŽUKAS, Vladas and Patricija VITKAUSKIENĖ. *Antanas Strazdas: bibliografija*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1969; ŽUKAS, Vladas. *Lietuvių bibliografijos istorija (iki 1940 m.): metodinis leidinys*. Vilnius: Vilniaus V. Kapsuko universiteto Leidybinis skyrius, 1976.

<sup>42</sup> E. Birman's letter to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR, A. Barkauskas, dated August 28, 1979. LLMA F. 342, ap. 1, b. 3291, l. 123.

<sup>43</sup> Deputy Minister J. Glemža's letter „On the Rules for Using Special Holdings in Libraries,“ dated August 21, 1979. LLMA F. 342, ap. 1, b. 3291, l. 125.

<sup>44</sup> Information on the Lithuanian SSR State Republican Library's Special Literature Holding Department, November 27, 1975. LNMMB RKRS, F. 178-2, l. 22.

attentive readers could discover traces of banned literature, even if it was officially inaccessible. Specfond catalogues were designed to restrict access to literature according to strictly defined rules. However, the presence of specfond entries in the general catalogue created an ambiguous situation: while forbidden literature remained restricted, it became accessible to those actively searching for specific information.

The third way readers became aware of specfondy was through personal connections and informal information sharing. Academic supervisors, colleagues, or library staff unofficially directed students and researchers to specfondy, advising them on how to obtain permissions or where to look for necessary sources. According to a respondent in a published interview on the field of Lithuanian literature, there were instances in which lecturers at Vilnius University recommended students to search for required publications in the specfond.<sup>45</sup> Such networks are also indirectly reflected in official documents, particularly in relation to the role of lecturers in transmitting information about specfondy to students.<sup>46</sup> Since these connections were not recorded in official documentation, their scale and impact remain only partially understood. To reconstruct the role of personal contacts in the specfond access system more accurately, oral history methods would be necessary—testimonies from former readers, librarians, and members of the academic community could help clarify how informal networks functioned as an alternative access mechanism.

In conclusion, while the Soviet library system publicly promoted openness, in practice, it operated as a tightly regulated mechanism of information control. Specfondy were deliberately concealed from the public, yet knowledge of their existence still circulated – through academic works, library catalogues, and informal personal networks. These access strategies reveal that the censorship system was not absolute: attentive readers could identify ways to access restricted literature, but doing so required not only intellectual effort but also the right social connections. Thus, although specfondy functioned as tools of ideological control, they also became spaces where the dissemination of certain information, though limited, continued to take place.

### **Legal Reading of Prohibited Literature: The Readers**

The analysis of specfond readers was based on two primary sources: reader requests, which reflected officially stated purposes, and registration books, which recorded actual visits, and the publications used. Comparing these sources revealed the extent of access to restricted literature, in addition to exposing the control mechanisms that may have led readers to declare motivations that did not fully reflect their true interests. This performative aspect was characteristic of the Soviet library system – readers seeking access to publications were required to submit ideologically neutral or censorship-approved requests. To identify long-term trends and changes in reader demographics, the study focused on the period from 1970 to 1979, a time marked by relative political stability and a largely homogeneous readership.

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<sup>45</sup> KMITA, Rimantas. *Nevienareikšmės situacijos: pokalbiai apie sovietmečio literatūros lauką*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2015, p. 353.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Domas Kaunas, a lecturer at the Department of Library Science, frequently visited the special collections of both Vilnius University and the State Republican Library. His students, under his supervision, also accessed these restricted sections.

The operation of *specfondy* reveals a paradoxical dynamic – while these sections were designed to control and restrict access to ideologically dangerous literature, library administrations were simultaneously required to maintain a certain level of visitor activity to meet bureaucratic planning requirements. The Special Holdings Department had to register no fewer than 170 readers annually,<sup>47</sup> a figure that not only served as an official metric but also functioned as a measure of the department's efficiency. Since actual visitor numbers did not always meet this target, an average of 20 to 50 fictitious readers were added each year, their visits existing only in official reports.<sup>48</sup> This highlights the dual nature of *specfondy* – they operated as instruments of ideological control while also adapting to an administrative system where library performance was assessed based on quantitative rather than qualitative indicators. This suggests that the analysis of *specfond* readership is not merely a collection of statistical data; rather, it reveals broader mechanisms through which Soviet libraries navigated between censorship requirements and the formalised demonstration of efficiency.

In this study, *specfond* readers were categorised based on their primary purpose for visiting, which typically correlated with their professional activities and institutional affiliations. While in some cases these categories overlapped – for example, journalists accessed the *specfond* for professional reasons as well as for academic purposes, and students later returned as lecturers—this classification helps differentiate the roles of various reader segments. Based on this principle, five main groups were identified: lecturers and researchers, students, librarians, information dissemination professionals, and a miscellaneous category ('other'), which included readers who did not fit into any of the previous groups. This classification not only clarifies which readers had access to restricted materials but also reveals how different professional communities engaged with censored literature and the purposes for which it was utilised.

Lecturers and researchers, as the largest group of *specfond* readers, accounted for a significant share of visitors (39% of all readers), with their visits primarily driven by academic research needs. Most came from the institutes of the LSSR Academy of Sciences and Vilnius State University—institutions that had their own *specfondy*. This suggests that their internal resources did not always meet researchers' needs. The *specfond* of the Republican Library stood out for its broader collection, which may have led researchers to use it as an additional research resource. About a third of this group

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<sup>47</sup> The Annual Activity Plans of the Special Holding Department of the State Library of the Lithuanian SSR outlined varying numerical targets. For example, after the department's relocation to Vilnius and the stabilisation of its operations, the projected number of readers was set at 120 per year until 1966. This figure gradually increased: from 1970 onwards, the annual quota was raised to 170 readers, and in 1973, it was further adjusted to 180. However, by 1974, the requirement reverted to 170 readers per year, a standard that remained consistent in subsequent years. Source: Annual Activity Plans of the Special Holding Department of the State Library of the Lithuanian SSR, 1963 – 1990. LNMMB RKRS, F. 178-129, 130.

<sup>48</sup> The trend was identified through an analysis of the annual reports of the Special Holding Department of the State Library of the Lithuanian SSR and its reader registration records. The data was refined to distinguish unique readers, eliminating repeated visits by the same individuals. For example, the 1970 annual report stated that 237 readers had visited the department, while the actual number of unique readers was 181. Similarly, in 1971, the reported number was 211, but the real count of unique readers was 187. The data was collected from annual reports (LNMMB RKRS, F. 178-130) and readers' registration books (LNMMB RKRS, F. 178-85-88).

returned to the specfond in subsequent years, usually for long-term research projects or ongoing academic work related to lecture preparation and publications. This recurring use indicates that the specfond was not merely a place for one-time visits but was integrated into the research process.

A thematic analysis of visits reveals that the humanities dominated the vast majority of requests, comprising approximately 70% of all inquiries. Research in literature, history, theatre studies, and linguistics was particularly prominent. This focus suggests that specfondy functioned as archival equivalents for many scholars—offering access to historical materials that were otherwise difficult to obtain due to censorship restrictions. Social sciences constituted around 15% of requests, with sociology, political science, and pedagogy being the most frequently studied fields. Natural sciences researchers accounted for approximately 10%, mainly focusing on the historical development of specific disciplines, as seen in studies such as *The History of Lithuanian Forestry*.<sup>49</sup> Scholars in medicine, engineering, and exact sciences were rare visitors, and when they did access the specfond, their work was also primarily historical in nature. These findings indicate that the specfond was not just a tool of political censorship but also an essential academic resource that, in certain respects, influenced the direction of research. It became a space where restricted historical and cultural information was concentrated and archived – information that was particularly relevant to humanities scholars.

Students constituted a significant portion of the specfond readers at the State Republican Library, accounting for 20% of all visitors. Their visits were directly linked to academic assignments, as most accessed the specfond while preparing coursework and final theses. The majority of students came from Vilnius State University and Vilnius State Pedagogical Institute. Notably, the latter did not have its own specfond, which meant that both its students and lecturers actively relied on the resources of the State Republican Library's specfond. This indicates that, despite strict access restrictions, the information provided by specfondy was essential for certain academic communities. Similar to the lecturer group, students primarily focused on humanities-related topics. The dominant fields of study included literature, history, linguistics, theatre, and art studies. Students from other disciplines – such as social sciences, natural sciences, and technical fields—represented a much smaller share of visitors, and their research topics often had a historical focus. One defining feature of student visits was their seasonal pattern. The highest levels of activity were recorded in spring, coinciding with peak academic workloads during coursework and thesis preparation periods. In contrast, visitor numbers declined sharply in winter and summer, likely reflecting holiday periods and reduced academic demands. Another notable trend was that most students visited the specfond only once, suggesting that they required access for a specific academic purpose. However, approximately 10% later returned as lecturers or researchers, indicating that access to specfond resources may have influenced long-term academic trajectories and future research activities.

Librarians, information dissemination professionals, and publishing house representatives formed a distinct group of specfond readers, whose visits were primarily driven

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<sup>49</sup> Request from the Lithuanian Academy of Agriculture to grant Samuelis Karčiauskas access to the Special Holding Department's literature, citing the reason – a scientific study titled "Features of the History of Lithuanian Forestry". LNMMB RKRS F. 178-130, l. 149.

by professional responsibilities and work-related tasks. Librarians, who accounted for 16% of all visitors, primarily accessed the *specfond* to compile bibliographies, prepare exhibitions, and produce other informational publications. Book Chamber employees were particularly active in *specfondy*, tasked with reviewing restricted collections and systematically compiling information on specific topics. Additionally, some staff members of the State Republican Library had exclusive access to *specfond* materials for professional use without the need for formal requests, while senior library management members were even permitted to take publications to their offices. These aspects suggest that librarians not only acted as custodians of restricted literature but also contributed actively to the analysis, systematisation, and adaptation of these materials in accordance with institutional priorities.

Information dissemination professionals – journalists, television and radio reporters, and film industry representatives – formed a notable segment of *specfond* readers, accounting for 9% of all visitors. Their visits were primarily motivated by the need to produce articles, reports, or visual materials. Cultural publication journalists, particularly editors of *Švyturys*, *Nemunas*, and *Literatūra ir menas*, were especially active in consulting restricted-access literature, frequently visiting the *specfond* to research literary topics. In contrast, editors of major propaganda outlets, such as *Tiesa* and *Komunistas*, primarily accessed the *specfond* of the Institute of Party History. Their main focus was on émigré press, which was less available in the *specfond* of the State Republican Library and typically arrived there much later. These differing areas of interest highlight how ideological perspectives shaped the interpretation of censored texts – some sought academic analysis, while others engaged in selective extraction for propaganda purposes.

Another distinct subgroup within this category consisted of film and television professionals, who accessed the *specfond* for archival materials to use in their productions. For instance, during the production of *Daiktai ir žmonės* (Objects and People),<sup>50</sup> the director consulted and borrowed issues of *The Times*, *Life*, and *Stern* magazines<sup>51</sup>. These publications were later repurposed as propaganda props to visually reinforce narratives critiquing the capitalist world.

A relatively small but significant group of *specfond* readers consisted of publishing house employees (3%), whose visits were primarily related to monitoring foreign literature, reviewing forthcoming publications, and planning translations. These professionals not only sought materials for upcoming books but also analysed foreign press to assess which texts could be incorporated into publishers' translation plans. One notable case involved a representative from the Vaga publishing house, assigned to track developments in foreign literature and recommend works of fiction for translation into Lithuanian. Even for ideologically regulated institutions such as publishing houses, *specfondy* provided a space for following global literary trends. The materials consulted, including *World Literature Today* and *The New York Review of Books*, indicate that this

<sup>50</sup> Director Algirdas Tumas, *Daiktai ir žmonės*, 1970 [online]. [cited 2025-01-09]. Available from: <https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/24619/dokumentinis-filmas-daiktai-ir-zmones-is-kino-juostos>.

<sup>51</sup> Lithuanian SSR Film Studio's request for permission to use special holding department publications needed for the production of the film "Daiktai ir žmonės", September 9, 1970. LNMMB RKRS. F178-102, l. 134.



access was used not only for information control but also for practical publishing purposes – selecting works that could be adapted for local publishing strategies.<sup>52</sup> The visits of these three professional groups to the *specfond* demonstrate that restricted literature was not exclusively intended for the academic community – it was also actively utilised in public information dissemination. Librarians systematised it, journalists and filmmakers employed it to construct ideological narratives, while publishers monitored which works could be integrated into the Soviet publishing sphere.

The ‘other’ readers accounted for approximately 13% of all visitors, forming a highly diverse and heterogeneous group. They could not be directly classified as members of the academic community, librarians, or publishing professionals. Their interests spanned both professional duties and individual scholarly or creative pursuits. Within this group, several key categories of readers can be identified. One such category consisted of local historians and researchers who gathered materials on regional history, culture, and architecture, often in connection with museum work or heritage preservation initiatives. Another important group included writers and theatre directors, whose visits were linked to creative activities – many sought literature for memoirs, historical books, or theatrical adaptations. For instance, a director from the Tauragė People’s Theatre consulted books published during the interwar period to develop a stage production<sup>53</sup>, while authors such as Jonas Būtėnas visited the *specfond* multiple times to collect materials for memoirs and encyclopaedic articles.<sup>54</sup> Finally, there were independent researchers, including retirees and cultural enthusiasts, who engaged in personal studies on topics related to local history, literature, or broader historical themes. While most of these visitors accessed the *specfond* for one-time research purposes, a number of them returned regularly for long-term projects. For example, Vladas Toločka frequently visited to study the history of the blind movement.<sup>55</sup> The analysis of this group demonstrates that *specfondy* functioned not only as spaces for academic research but also as venues where individuals from diverse social backgrounds could access restricted or otherwise hard-to-find historical and cultural materials. These examples illustrate that censored literature held a broader significance beyond being a mere archive of restricted materials – it functioned as an active source of information, with its content subject to varying interpretations depending on the objectives of its users.

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<sup>52</sup> Juozas Subatavičius was a regular visitor to the Special Holdings Department, with recorded visits spanning the entire research period. On average, he visited approximately 15 times per year. In the request submitted by Vaga Publishing House for permission to access the Special Holdings, specific publications were listed: *Books and Bookmen*, *Plays and Players*, *Books Abroad*, *New York Review of Books*, *Partisan Review*, *London Magazine*, *The Drama Review*, *Sunday Times*, *Life*, *Aidai*, *Metmenys*, and others. Vaga Publishing House request for Juozas Subatavičius to access Special Holdings Department publications, 1970. LNMMB RKRS, F178-102, l. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Request from the LSSR Palace of the People to allow Antanas Naraškevičius to use *specfond* literature needed for staging a play, 1978-07-19. LNMMB RKRS. F. 178-110, l. 43.

<sup>54</sup> Request from the LSSR Writers’ Union to allow Jonas Būtėnas to use *specfond* literature needed for preparing memoirs, 1971-02-10. LNMMB RKRS. F. 178-103, l. 53.

<sup>55</sup> Request from the LSSR Association of the Blind Publishing House to allow Vladas Toločka to use *specfond* literature, along with a reader, needed for preparing an essay on the lives of the blind, 1971-10-30. LNMMB RKRS. F. 178-103, l. 175.

Antanas Jonynas' 1971 visit to the *specfond* of the State Library was an exceptional case<sup>56</sup> that revealed not only the strict control of publications but also the selective nature of censorship. As a blind reader, Jonynas was granted a rare exception – he was allowed to borrow three issues of *Metmenys*, a US-based journal marked with Glavlit's 'hexagonal' censorship symbol and classified as reactionary and ideologically dangerous. Since granting access to this publication constituted a serious violation of regulations<sup>57</sup>, the library's director, Vaclovas Jurgaitis, faced strict disciplinary action, while Jonynas was permanently banned from the *specfond*.<sup>58</sup> This incident highlights two key aspects: first, the nature of the publications themselves was a crucial factor in determining the severity of Glavlit's enforcement, and second, even exceptional physical circumstances did not warrant leniency if the material in question was politically sensitive. Meanwhile, another blind reader, Vladas Toločka, was granted access to the *specfond* without facing sanctions, as the materials he consulted were not considered politically sensitive. Toločka primarily read interwar Lithuanian press, such as *Panevėžio balsas* and *Klaipėdos žinios*, and some of these publications were even permitted to be copied for him.<sup>59</sup> This contrast demonstrates the selective nature of Glavlit's control – what mattered was not the status of the reader but the content of the materials. Furthermore, Jonynas' case illustrates the ambiguity in the regulation of *specfond* – while the rules were strict, their application depended on specific circumstances and contexts. High-ranking individuals, such as library administrators or members of the political elite, were often allowed to take restricted literature to their offices, whereas ordinary readers, even with valid reasons, were denied such privileges. Jonynas' case once again confirmed that Glavlit strictly enforced compliance, and those who violated the rules faced consequences, regardless of the circumstances.

## Conclusion

The study of Soviet Lithuania's Special Holdings Departments (*specfond*) reveals the complex mechanisms through which the Soviet regime controlled information and shaped intellectual life. More than passive repositories of banned literature, these collections functioned as instruments of censorship, systematically restricting access to alternative narratives and reinforcing ideological conformity. By isolating materials deemed dangerous – such as émigré works, religious texts, and Western publications

<sup>56</sup> Jonynas's 1971 visit to the *specfond* of the State Library is frequently mentioned in historiography examining the operation of special holdings departments and their readers. However, this case is typically referenced only in passing, with Glavlit's intervention cited as the primary factor. This case is mentioned in: SINKEVIČIUS, Klemensas. Šešiabriauinio spaudos imperija. In: *Tarp knygų*. 2000, no. 10, p. 31; VAISETA, Tomas. *Nuobodulio visuomenė. Kasdienybė ir ideologija vėlyvuosiu sovietmečiu (1964 – 1984)*. Vilnius: Naujasis židinys-Aidai, 2015, p. 189.

<sup>57</sup> Regulations on Reader Services for Restricted Publications at the State Library of the Lithuanian SSR [approved on 15 February 1980]. LNMMB RKRS, F. 178-3, l. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Order No. 2-305 of the LSSR Ministry of Culture, 19 July 1971. LLMA, f. 342, ap. 1, b. 2217, l. 92.

<sup>59</sup> Request from the LSSR Association of the Blind Publishing House to allow Vladas Toločka to use *specfond* literature, along with a reader, needed for preparing an essay on the lives of the blind, 1971-10-30. LNMMB RKRS. F. 178-103, l. 175.

– the state sought to limit non-conformist thought while maintaining control over intellectual discourse.

The *specfond* collections were dynamic, expanding through Glavlit directives, library confiscations, and acquisitions via antiquarian bookshops or interlibrary exchanges. Their composition shifted in response to political fluctuations: during periods of liberalization, some works were temporarily reintroduced into circulation, only to be reclassified as subversive later. Similarly, the influx of Western periodicals in the 1970s and 1980s reflected both ideological concerns and the regime's ongoing struggle to control information flow.

Although access was highly restricted, the readership was broader than often assumed. Researchers, students, librarians, and even journalists navigated bureaucratic hurdles to consult these materials, frequently relying on informal networks. Academic citations, library catalogues, and personal recommendations created channels for circumventing official restrictions, demonstrating how intellectual curiosity persisted despite censorship.

The legacy of the *specfond* system extends beyond the Soviet era, offering valuable insights into authoritarian information control. It illustrates not only how states manipulate access to knowledge to consolidate power but also how individuals develop alternative pathways to information. By examining these dynamics, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the enduring tension between ideological repression and the resilience of intellectual inquiry.

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