

Archival Review: Library and the Department for Documentary Sources at The Institute of National History – Skopje

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ИНСТИТУТ ЗА НАЦИОНАЛНА ИСТОРИЈА

INH's primary task was 'to study the history of Macedonia, the Macedonian nation, and the nationalities and ethnic groups that live within its borders'.¹ In fact, one of the first decisions at the First Session of the Anti-Fascist Assembly for National Liberation of Macedonia (ASNOM)² was realized with the document for establishing the Institute.

Besides opening specialized research departments for studying different historical periods, with the establishment of INH there also arose the need for starting a library as well as a department that would work on locating, collecting, processing and issuing archival materials – various documents of historical value such as journals, newspapers,

The Institute of National History (INH) in Skopje is the oldest national research institute in the Republic of North Macedonia. It was established in July 1948 by a government decree of, at the time, the People's Republic of Macedonia (a federal unit of the former Yugoslav Federation).



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geographical and historical maps etc. – to both the researchers at INH and any interested researchers from the country and abroad. For that purpose, the Department of Documentary Sources, Memoiristic Texts, Bibliography and Library was started, and within it the Department for Documentary Sources and the Library operate as separate units. This department also deals with collecting memoiristic documents. It also stores an abundance of documentary materials secured during research conducted by INH researchers and their study visits to different archives, libraries and similar institutions within the country and abroad.



Part of the book fund of INH Library

The fact that up to the 1990s this department had dozens of employees and a supervisor indicates the considerable attention devoted to this segment of INH's work. They were trained bibliographers who monitored and processed the received literature, prepared daily information about it, and provided assistance to users, primarily the researchers at INH. As time passed, the staff at this department gradually started to reduce in numbers because some members of the staff joined the ranks of researchers and some retired. Today, the Library employs one librarian who monitors and processes the newly received literature,

and the Department for Documentary Sources has no employee at the moment due to lack of finances.

The Library at INH began operating with a relatively modest fund of 3,712 books which in the years and decades that followed increased in a number of ways – through continuous procurement of relevant scientific and specialized literature (originals and copies); through donations; through exchange with related research and higher education institutions and archives within the country and abroad; with works via its own publishing activities, etc. The entire process resulted in a book fund that consists of a respectable number of 35,000 publications, as well as 15,000 periodicals of domestic and foreign provenance that INH has at its disposal today, and the number of publications in the fund continues to increase.



Some of the encyclopaedic editions of INH Library

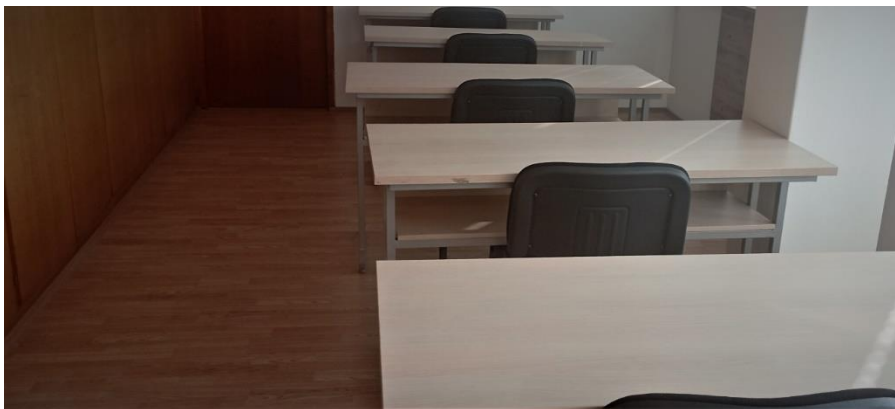
All the publications in the INH library that have been gathered since its establishment to today are recorded in the so-called inventory books,³ and the library fund call numbers have been entered in the specific system for library operations since 2021. The inventory books provide

us with important data on rare book editions, dictionaries, multivolume lexicographic and encyclopaedic editions, various collection works etc., and the oldest publication registered is from the sixteenth century (*Corpus universal historiae praesentim Bizantinae*, 1567).⁴ There are also two publications from the seventeenth, and nine from the eighteenth century. Most of the fund consists of works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries written in one of the Slavic languages, but there is also substantial literature in French, German, Italian, Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Greek, Romanian, Latin etc. It is literature that treats historical topics of ancient times, the Medieval history – particularly those related to the Byzantine Empire and the Ottoman Empire – as well as European and world history in general. The emphasis, as one would expect, is placed on those works that are related to the history of the region Macedonia in different historical periods, as well as on the history of the Macedonian people. Hence, it could be said that the INH library has in its possession the most complete library fund of historical literature concerning the history of Macedonian people gathered in one place.



Library file cabinets

In order to improve the operation of the library, steps toward its digitalization were made recently and the realization of that idea began with the project 'Digital Library of the Institute of National History'. Its realization started with the financial support from the Ministry of Culture and its Annual Programme for Supporting Projects of National Interest for 2021, but now it is being carried out on a voluntary basis due to lack of funds. In order to continue with the work on this project, financial support will be requested from the ministry next year as well. The project manager is Biljana Ristovska-Josifovska, PhD, and a part of the research and administrative staff of the Institute is involved in the project, although the interest for working on it is increasing. The aim of this project is to digitize the library fund in order to preserve the literary and cultural heritage (the rare editions and the old print books in particular), to enable the professional use of it, as well as popularize it and make it more accessible.



Renovated reading room in the Department for Documentary Sources

As a result of the work done so far, several thematic collections, which continue to be supplemented and expanded, have been formed: antiquity, military history, economic history, local history and ethnography, the Macedonian issue, medievalism, memoiristic

documents, migrations, socialism, oriental studies, philosophical-religious studies, and others.

The concrete results stemming from the work on the project so far are as follows: formation of specialized collections and digital records files which will be continuously supplemented. The process of realization of the idea of INH Digital Library is facilitated by the introduction of modern tools, i.e. connecting INH with the network via a server with processor.

Since 2021, the Library of the Institute has been a member of COBISS, which is an organizational model of joining libraries into a national library-information system with shared cataloguing, mutual bibliographic-catalogue database COBIB, and local bibliographic databases of participating libraries, the COLIB database on libraries, the CONOR authority database, and with a number of other functions.

Users of the library fund have a modern reading room at their disposal, which is a part of the Department for Documentary Sources and which has recently been fully renovated. That way INH tries to make using the literature and materials stored at the Department for Documentary Sources and in the Library easier for all interested researchers.

Endnotes

¹ *40 години Институт за национална историја 1948 – 1988*, Институт за национална историја, Скопје, 1989, 7.

² ASNOM was the supreme legislative body of the Democratic Federal Macedonia in the period from August 1944 to April 1945, when it was renamed to National Assembly of Macedonia. Historical decisions that laid the foundations for the Macedonian state as a federal unit within the new

democratic Yugoslavia were made at its First Plenary Session, held on 2nd August 1944 in “St. Prohor Pchinski” Monastery (today on the territory of the Republic of Serbia), Four of a number of its documents are of nation-building significance for Macedonia. A Presidium consisting of 17 members (later joined by additional 4 members) that functioned as the government of the newly established Macedonian state, was elected in that Session. At the same time, the First Plenary Session authorised the Presidium to continue with its constitution-building and nation-building activities and so in the following several weeks around 50 decisions were made which rounded off the issue of statehood. For more on this see: *70 години македонска држава: Државотворните решенија на Првото заседание на АСНОМ, 2 август 1944*, Македонска академија на науките и уметностите, Скопје, 2014.

³ For the purposes of this article, we have excerpted parts from all 7 voluminous books in which the INH library fund was recorded.

⁴ In the second inventory book on page 146.