



Oriental Department in the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" – Sofia

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ABSTRACT

The Oriental Department consist of manuscripts, old-printed books and archive documents in Ottoman Turkish, Persian and Arabic. 4000 handwritten codes are stored in the collection, as well as 2000 volumes of old-printed books and about 1 million sheets of documentary records, organised in 342,000 archive units. Archival documents cover the period from the 15th century to the beginning of the 20th century and shed light on a wide range of political, economic, social and cultural topics.

Keywords: National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius", Sofia, Oriental Department, archives.

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I. Introduction

The Oriental Department is one of the oldest in the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius"- Sofia. It dates back to the founding of the library itself in 1879¹. As its name implies, its purpose was to collect and preserve Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman-language manuscripts and prints, created over the centuries, mainly by the Ottoman administration and other institutions and people. In Europe and other continents this type of publication was dictated by the fact that by the end of the First World War 1914-1918, the Ottoman Empire was one of the largest in the world as it extended to three continents - Europe, Asia and North Africa. For Bulgarians, the attitude towards these editions was dictated by completely different reasons, namely that since the end of the fourteenth century Bulgaria fell within the boundaries of the empire itself and as such constituted part of its social and political life.

Here we will not dwell on the question of the social

status of the Bulgarians, because in fact in our historical science there is no disagreement on it.² According to the statutes of Sharia, they are assigned to the category of "rayah" like any other ethnic groups in the non-Islamic religion.

II. Objectives of the Study

The Ottoman documentation, for us is essential from another point of view – as a source for revealing the existing orders in the empire, which were obligatory and for the Bulgarians. This is also the main reason for the creation of a special department in the National Library.

¹ Nedkov, B. The Oriental Department of the State Library "Vasil Kolarov" – Notifications of the State Library "Vasil Kolarov" for 1954, Sofia, 1956, pp. 113-120.

² Tsvetkova, B. The Turkish feudal order and the Bulgarian people. Sofia, 1962.



Fig. 1. National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius"- Sofia, in which the Oriental Department is

As head of one of the first Bulgarian governments after the Liberation, in 1880, Dragan Tsankov handed over to the Library - 31 Fermanns and 43 other pamphlets in the Ottoman-Turkish language.³ The documentary and book wealth of the Oriental Department is based and on the proceeds from the libraries of Husref Pasha from Samokov.⁴ In 1881, the library director sent a report to the Ministry of Education, announcing that she already owned more than 4 000 volumes of books and books. The "miscellaneous archives" of the former Turkish government. This documentary and literary wealth has been highlighted as an occasion to request the appointment of a person who is well-versed in Arabic, Persian and Ottoman Turkish to take care of his use in any order.

Apparently, his request was not granted, since the first appointment of a curator in that department was made only in 1900, when Diamandi Ihchiev (1854-1913),⁵ who was not an Ottoman but well-versed, was invited to this post Until the beginning of the twentieth century. The only activity undertaken by the Public Library with regard to Ottoman documentary treasures was the search for and collecting new ro inventories and books.

In 1887, V. D. Stoyanov,⁶ as its director, submitted to the Ministry of Education a proposal for collecting different types of Osmano-Turkish books from the cities of Plovdiv, Sevlievo, Samokov, Sliven, Aytos, Kazanlak, Haskovo, Varna, Shumen, Eski Dzhumaya (now Targovishte), Osman market (now Omurtag city), Silistra, Razgrad, Ruse, Dobrich, Svishtov, Pleven, Vratsa, Berkovitsa, Vidin, etc., which were scattered from different quarters of state and municipal institutions, which were not private property. In all likelihood, his request was heard, since during that year the Ecclesiastical Office appointed a committee composed of Nestor Markov (1836-1916), a famous enlightened and public figure during the Renaissance and after the Liberation.⁷ Stoil Popov and Mahmud Nedim (a Turkish official), with an assistant to

review the Ottoman assembly. A few days later, Stoyan P. Dzhansovzov (1842-1914), a Revival and post-liberation education activist, was invited to the commission to review the materials from the library of Osman Pazvantoglu. The committee ended its work in February 1888. The report prepared by it to the Ministry of Education stated that the library in question contained over 2664 volumes of books. Of these, she allocated 650 tonnes to the Public Library, without specifying the criteria by which the selection was made, and the remaining 2014 books were handed over to Mahmoud Nedin, but on what grounds, it is not mentioned.

After completing the issue of collecting books from the library of Osman Pazvantoglu, in 1889 a donation was received from the former Bulgarian Exarch Antim I at the Sofia Public Library. Among the various books in it was the Sultan's take from 1872 for the appointment of a high priest, elected by the first Church-People's Council of 1871, as head of the Bulgarian Exarchy.

Despite new donations, there has been no change in the Oriental Department's activity – books and manuscripts continue to be packed in separate crates, which again made them virtually inaccessible to readers of the Public Library.

It was not until 1894 that the personality of Malaya Lulchev Maleev, a teacher by profession but possibly literate in Ottoman language, was posted to the Public Library with the task of engaging in the review and systematization of the literary wealth of the Turkish Department. According to B. Nedkov, however, he managed to review no more than 1000 volumes, and only books. Why he did not continue his work, the author does not clarify.

This is, to put it briefly, the condition of the Oriental Department until it was headed by D. Ihchiev in 1900. The new curator took to heart his assigned task and, in just a few years, managed to make a complete look at the books and manuscripts he had described, individually on slips, but with a lot of incompleteness in terms of contemporary bibliographic requirements. In fact, he could do no more, since there were still no bibliographic references from any Bulgarian, and the Ottoman paleography was still in its "preparation period", extending from 1615 to 1919.

However, having come across this great documentary wealth, D. Ihchiev does not resist the temptation to make available to the Bulgarian public some of the more interesting materials from his point of view, not only limited to the promulgation of certain parts of them, but goes further further, preparing on the basis of them some of his own publications.

The later heirs of D. Ihchiev find a serious flaw in the translations of the Ottoman documents, that he makes them

³ Kenderova, S. Department of "Oriental Collections" at the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" and its fund. - *Library*, 2016, № 6, p. 197.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 197.

⁵ Bobchev, S. Memorials for D. Ihchiev. - *Bulgarian Collection*, 1914, № 7, pp. 503-505; Diamandiev, A. D. A. Ihchiev. - *Bulletin of the Varna Archaeological Society*,

1937, № 14-15, pp. 188-194; Miyatev, P. Diamandi Ihchiev. 150 years since the birth. - "Historical Review" *JOURNAL*, 1974, № 6, pp. 94-95.

⁶ Tsonev, B. Vasil D. Stoyanov (1839-1910). - *Annals of the Bulgarian Literary Society*, 1911, pp. 54-68.

⁷ Dimov, N. Nestor Markov. - *Annual of the History of Education in Bulgaria*, 1987, № 5, pp. 204-216.

"too freely, in some places too far from the original text", which led to a considerable reduction of their scientific value.

D. Ihchiev left the Oriental Department in 1908, without clear reasons for this – whether it was provoked by his own motives or was imposed by some other circumstances. Either way, with the work he did, he initiated the actual study and promulgation, (albeit fragmentary) of the Osmano-Turkish materials contained in the Sofia Public Library.⁸

The case of D. Ihchiev was continued by Dr. Ivan Dimitrov. The new curator had two advantages over his predecessor – an orientalist education obtained at Berlin University and additional bibliography courses, which he listened to for 9 months at the Munich State Library.⁹

Unfortunately, the trained specialist was unable to apply his knowledge to the work of the Turkish Department, since in the fall of 1912 the Balkan War was mobilized and sent to the front. He also participated in the Inter-Allied War until July 6, 1913, when he fell killed at Sultan Tepe in the Osogovo Mountains.

During his short stay in the Public Library he was able to re-describe the manuscripts and books in his library, correcting the mistakes made by D. Ihchiev, who, due to lack of sufficient preparation, was unable to read the oriental works.

Along with describing and systematizing the documentary wealth of Dr. Ivan Dimitrov also belongs to one another not a small merit – in 1912 he transferred from Kyustendil 264 volumes of books, 30 of which were printed, 4 lithographed, and the rest – manuscripts, which contributed to his further enrichment.

The arrival of Dr. Ivan Dimitrov in the Public Library put her into a completely new situation – in 1909 he passed a law on the national education in the National Assembly, which gained popularity among the Bulgarian public as "Mushanov" after the name of its importer Nikola Mushanov – Minister of National Education in 1908-1910, which also affects the Sofia Public Library. One of the transformations in it is to change the name of the existing "Turkish Department" to a new one – "Oriental Department".¹⁰

Due to the worsened internal political situation in the country after its defeat in the Inter-Allied War of 1913, the question of appointing a new curator in the department was postponed until the next 1914. Dr. Dimitrov's place was entrusted to Vladimir Hindalov. The legacy that the last one in the Oriental Department has found is impressive – 3 869 handwritten and old printed Arabic, Persian and Turkish books of historical, linguistic and religious nature.

Although he did not have the preparation of his predecessor, he embraces his work with heart and makes every effort, in particular, to further enrich the department with new materials. While until now the Public Library has relied mainly on donations (or purchases) of manuscripts and books from the country, the new editor of the Oriental Department is focusing its attention on the Ottoman Empire. Despite the complex relations that had been sparked between the two neighboring countries since the wars of 1912-1913, he managed to make several trips to Constantinople. He was admitted to the Turkish State Archives (Khazine-i evrak), where he records 659 large manuscript pages that he brings with him to Sofia.

At other times, he was involved in the library description of manuscripts and books in the Oriental Department. Like D. Ihchiev, he did not resist the temptation to publish some of the documentary material. They put into circulation new facts concerning the rural uprising in Northwestern Bulgaria since 1850, the Union of 1860 and the economic situation of the Danube Villages in the 1960s and 1970s. these publications consisted in the fact that they were devoid of scientific interpretation. But so were his opportunities.¹¹

In 1935, Hindalov was appointed as a curator in the Oriental Department of the National Library by Dr. Peter Miatev. After Dr. Iv. Dimitrov, he is the second Ottomanist to hold this position. In 1931 he graduated from Turkic Studies in Budapest, and then in 1931-1932 earned his specialization in Constantinople. He also had some training as a museum worker, since in 1932-1933 he was a curator at the Archaeological Museum in Plovdiv.¹²

After his admission to the library, he continued to work on the catalogs of printed books, manuscripts and documents and drew up a new catalog of literature in the National Library on the Orient, unfortunately alphabetical, not as a subject.

With a number of articles, the editor introduces the Turkology as a science for the study of the languages, ethnography, arts, lifestyle and religion of the Turkish people.

P. Miyatev left his job at the Oriental Department of the National Library in 1942 after being appointed as a Hungarian language teacher at Sofia University. Despite the wartime situation, the National Library in Sofia does not cease its activities. Departments within it, including the Oriental, continue to operate. Therefore, after Dr. P. Miyatev for new curator he was appointed Dr. Boris Nedkov.¹³ He headed the department until 1955, when he transferred to basic work as a teacher of comparative grammar in Turkish at Sofia University "St. Cl.

⁸ Kostadinova, D. "Development of the Auxiliary History Sciences in Bulgaria after the Second World War. Historiographic and bibliometric analysis". Dissertation, Manuscript.

⁹ Kenderova, S. Department of "Oriental Collections" at the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" and its fund. - *Library*, 2016, № 6, p. 198.

¹⁰ Kostadinova, D., Op. cit., p. 24.

¹¹ Kostadinova, D., Op. cit., pp. 21-23.

¹² Kostadinova, D., Op. cit., p. 25.

¹³ Tsvetkov, A. Boris Nedkov. – *Notifications of the State Library "Vasil Kolarov"*, 1972, vol. 12, pp. 372-373.

Ohridski".¹⁴ From 1971 to 1975 he was also the head of the Department of Oriental Studies at the same University.

In addition to his Oriental department, other Ottomans, including Galab D. Galabov,¹⁵ came to work. Nikola Popov, colleagues of Rusi Stoykov, A. Velkov and St. Andreev, and later – Stoyanka Kenderova, Rumén Kovachev and others.

The staff members of the department together with Ottomans from other institutions – Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", „The Institute of History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences“and „The Institute of Balkan Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences“begin issuing Turkish documents stored in our country, with priority being given to those that reveal some or other aspects of the life of Bulgarians in the 15th-19th centuries, when they were within the Ottoman Empire.

Along with them, a considerable number of other documents are also stored in the Oriental Department, which is an important source for the study of Ottoman paleography and diplomacy – two related disciplines, an interest that are shown by prominent Ottomans not only in Bulgaria but also in a number of other countries.

III. Conclusion

The great abundance of documents also allowed them to be grouped into several departments:

- Archival materials from the Ottoman period. Thematically, they concern problems of economic, political, cultural and religious life not only in the Balkans but also in other provinces of the empire.
- Manuscripts in Arabic, Ottoman and Persian. It includes 3 810 volumes, of which 3 200 are Arabic transcripts.
- Ancient Arabic, Ottoman, and Persian Literature – contains about 2 000 volumes.
- Periodicals of an Arabic letter published in Bulgaria until 1941. According to bibliographic sources, their total number is 77 periodicals, of which the National Library "St. St. Cyril and Methodius" has 48 titles retained.
- Modern scientific literature on Orientalism.

As you can see, this is a huge amount of titles from different periods and with different content. Although the department has been in existence for nearly one and a half centuries, the disclosure of the contents of the various manuscripts is too limited. This is mainly due to the lack of a sufficient number of trained specialists. For this reason, work in this direction will continue in the coming years and decades, so that this great documentary and literary wealth can be made available to all who are interested in the past of the Ottoman Empire, the past of the

Bulgarian people and the problems of the Ottoman paleography and diplomacy.

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¹⁴ Cholov, P. Bulgarian historians. 3 reworked. and ext. ed. Sofia, 2010, pp. 217.

¹⁵ Tsvetkova, B. Galab Galabov at the 80 years old - "Historical Review" JOURNAL, 1972, № 3, pp. 126-130.



Desislava Kostadinova is a PhD from The Institute for Historical Studies - The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria. Dissertation: "Development of the Auxiliary History Sciences in Bulgaria after the Second World War. Historiographic and bibliometric analysis", 2019. The following auxiliary sciences are main subject of attention: Paleography, Ottoman paleography as well as Numismatics sigillography, Genealogy and historical Metrology, Geography and Cartography. Their development has been followed since the end of the Second World War until today. Main achievements have been shown as well as their biggest problems which they are facing these days.