



Serbian books and libraries in Kosovo and Metochia

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Meeting:

78. Library History SIG

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 75TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL
23-27 August 2009, Milan, Italy

<http://www.ifla.org/annual-conference/ifla75/index.htm>

Abstract

This article gives an overview of Serbian library collections in Kosovo and Metochia at the actual moment of serious political changes following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. Careful consideration is given to the library collections of Peć Monastery - the historic residence of Serbian Patriarchs, Veliki Dečani Monastery and Gračanica Monastery; the Library of Serbian Orthodox Theological College Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Prizren, temporarily in Niš; and the National and University Library "Ivo Andrić", presently in Belgrade.

SERBIAN BOOKS AND LIBRARIES IN KOSOVO AND METOCHIA

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Kosovo and Metochia covers the surface of 10,849 km², or approximately 12% of Serbian territory. According to the results of the regular republic census in 1991, Kosovo and Metochia had 1,956,196 inhabitants: Albanians made up 82,2% of the province's population, whereas among the other 23 nationalities and ethnic groups most were the Serbs, Muslims, Roma, Montenegrins, Turks and Croats. According to UNMIK's¹ approximate 2002 demographic estimate, Kosovo and Metochia has between 1,7 and 1,9 million inhabitants: 88% Albanians, 6% Serbs, 3% Slavic Muslims (Gorani, Bosniacs, etc.), 2% Roma and 1% Turks. The Serbs who now live in Kosovo and Metochia, as well as the Serbian Government, operate with the number ranging between 115,000 and 124,000 Serbian inhabitants of KiM, but also with the number from 215,000 to 255,000 persons of Serbian nationality temporarily displaced from Kosovo and Metochia.

¹ UNMIC = United Nations Mission in Kosovo; in Kosovo and Metochia since summer 1999.

Europe, Serbia, Kosovo and Metochia



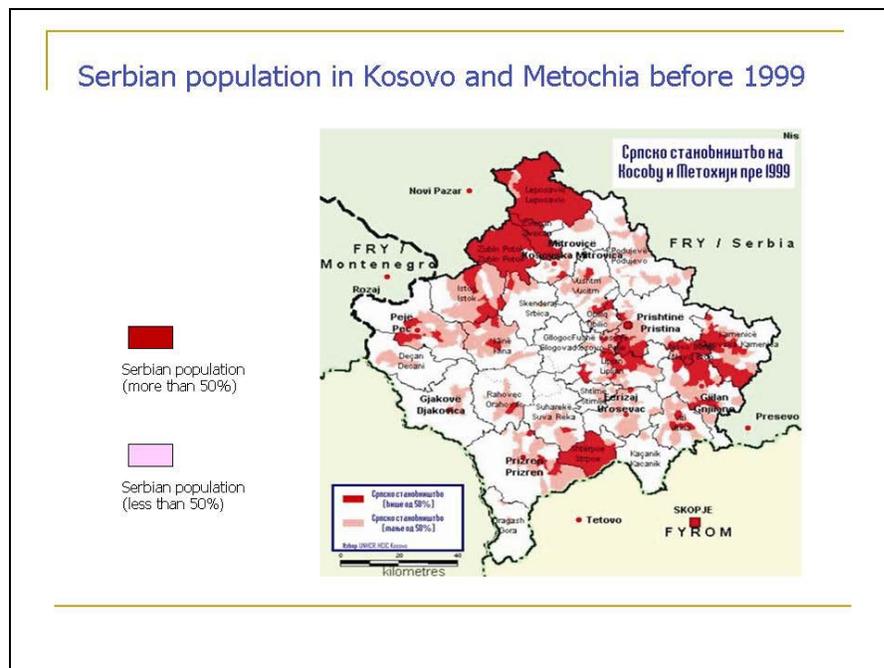
According to the July 2007 *World Bank Report*², Kosovo is economically on the very bottom of the ladder in Europe, characterized by extreme poverty and unemployment. Among other things, the *Report* states that 15% inhabitants live in extreme poverty, and that 38% of population survive with EUR 1,40 a day; that the unemployment rate reached 72% working age population, and that there are 40% young among the unemployed. Every fifth inhabitant of KiM is illiterate, every third has not completed elementary education; annually about 20,000 high school graduates and 2,000 university graduates complete their schooling and start looking for a job, with not much chance to success. Due to high unemployment, poverty and lack of perspective, the United Nations Development Programme Report³ states that almost half of the young population, regardless of ethnicity, would leave KiM, i.e. emigrate.

The World Bank's enormous investments into the development of Kosovo and Metochia over the past fifteen years have not yielded the appropriate results regarding the population's economic standard, nor have they contributed to democratisation of society and freedom of citizens. The diminished number and obscured presence of Serbian books in Kosovo and Metochia today have various causes: from five centuries' enslavement by the Turks (1459–1912), raids, lootings and dispersion of books on

² Kosovo - Poverty assessment (Vol. 1 of 2) : Accelerating inclusive growth to reduce widespread poverty, <http://www.worldbank.org/kosovo>, and <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/kosovo> (accessed April 24, 2009)

³ Kosovo - Youth in jeopardy : being young, unemployed, and poor in Kosovo - a report on youth employment in Kosovo, <http://www-wds.worldbank.org/kosovo> (accessed April 24, 2009)

many excuses (even *for scientific research*), through large-scale migrations of population, two world wars and interethnic conflicts in the last decade of the 20th century, to the declaration of the independent state of Kosovo. There is no European nation nowadays whose libraries in one part of its territory are more endangered than the collections of Serbian books in Kosovo and Metochia, which can be verified by inspecting the current state of monastery, university and national collections in those parts. This paper does not discuss the genesis of the process in which the Kosovo-Metochia libraries were sharply divided by national criteria into: 1) Albanian libraries and 2) Serbian and others, or pass political judgement and implications of the recent events, but appeals to thinking about the extent to which those events influence the level of intellectual, informational, ethnic, religious and, generally speaking, democratic freedom of all citizens of Kosovo and Metochia.



MONASTERY LIBRARIES IN KOSOVO AND METOCHIA – SILENT GUARDIANS OF LITERACY, RELIGION AND IDENTITY

Kosovo, the territorial, political and cultural epicentre of the medieval Serbian state, still offers many testimonies to the centuries-old presence of the Serbs on this territory: 1,352 buildings belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church, 534 old Serbian cemeteries, remains of 96 old cities and fortresses, and the remains of 14 castles of mediaval Serbian nobility make up a total of 1,996 Serbian toponyms on Kosovo's present-day map.⁴ Out of 115 registered monasteries four are on the UNESCO World Heritage list:

⁴ Ljubiša Gvoić. Serbian Cultural Heritage in Kosovo and Metochia. Belgrade : Novosti : JP „Železnica Srbije“, 2007.

The Patriarchate of Peć

113 manuscripts
(13th to 18th century)
collected in the
18th and 19th century



was so immense that it took 9 horses to carry it away. Only two years later, Patriarch Arsenius III Čarnojević took part of the books from Peć Monastery, in the course of the

Peć Monastery Library

<http://digital.nb.rs/collection/ru-pec>



Four Gospels by scribe Romil,
late 14th c. Heading at the
beginning of Lukes' s Gospel

Manuscript of the *Dioptra*,
page with a heading
1st half of the 15th c.

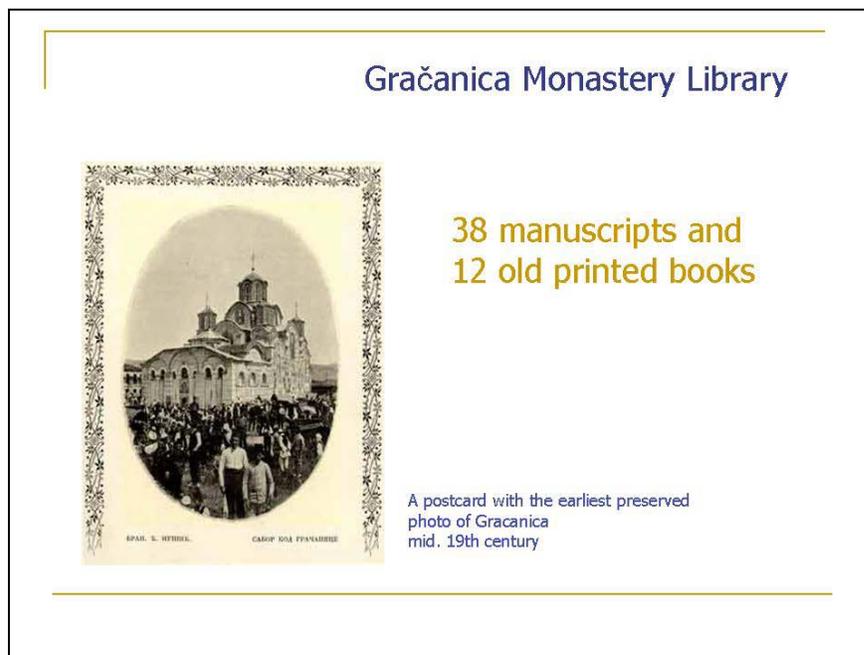


great Serbian migration to the lands in the then Habsburg Monarchy. This migration, which caused 70,000 Serbs to leave Kosovo fearing the Turkish retribution, also meant the transfer of the patriarchal see, first to Sremski Karlovci, later to Belgrade. The books that the Patriarch took to the new fatherland on that occasion served as the basis for

forming the present-day Patriarchate Library in 1706, now Belgrade's oldest library. This library still houses a dozen books brought in the Great Migration.

Today the Peć Patriarchate has a collection of 113 manuscripts, collected in the 18th and 19th centuries. The oldest book is a 13th-century parchment Gospel according to Luke and John. It also houses a copy from the first half of the 15th century of the *Dioptra* by Michael Psellus, an 11th-century Byzantine author and statesman. *Romil's Gospel*, from the late 14th or early 15th centuries, the Four Gospels by deacon Simon from 1562, as well as the Cetinje-printed *Five Voice Octoechos* dating from 1494, are also part of the inventory.⁵

Gračanica Monastery, close to Priština, was built as King Milutin's endowment between 1315 and 1321. Nowadays the Church of the Holy Virgin's Ascension is the only preserved object of the mediaeval monastery complex, and the western wall of its



southern lateral chapel holds the extant founder's charter with King Milutin's signature. Gračanica had a library ever since its foundation, but it suffered losses very early, during the Turkish raids and fires of 1379–1383. Therefore it does not hold the oldest manuscript books, and the monastery treasury does not possess icons from King Milutin's age and luxurious gifts presented to the monastery by Milutin's educated wife, Byzantine princess Simonis. According to a record from 1388, "The books have burned in the pyrgos and lot of people with them," after which the library was restored, when a scribe "started copying the books from the beginning."⁶ The event showed that the

⁵ Vladimir Mošin. „Peć Patriarchate Manuscripts“. *The Antiquities of Kosovo and Metochia*, 4-5 (1968–1971): 5–55.

⁶ Vladimir Mošin. „Manuscripts of Gračanica Monastery“. *Antiquities of Kosovo and Metochia*. 1 (1961):17

usual placement of books in the monastery tower as a place secured from robbery and fire, became very perilous, because the raiding Turks first destroyed the fortificational, defensive parts of monastery complexes.

Around 1530 there was transcribing activity in Gračanica, with modestly talented masters; in 1539, at the behest and efforts of Novo Brdo Metropolitan Nicanorus, a printing office was installed at Gračanica, at which time the library was probably also restored. Metropolitan Nicanorus, who was the initiator of the work on printing the *Five Voice Octoechos*, the only book of the Gračanica press, also had a valuable private library. The Gračanica library must have been very rich as early as the beginning of the 19th century, Vladimir Mošin considers, and brings out the information that in itself speaks enough about the path of the books and the ways of impoverishing Serbian monastery libraries in that century:

"From there Mihanović took away two vast valuable books of the chanter's *Mineos* from the 14th century that now adorn the Yugoslav Academy collection in Zagreb (III s 22 and III s 23); in 1857 the Gilferding collection (now in Leningrad) was enriched by the Gračanica *Ritual Book* No. 21 from the 14th century, fragments from the parchment *Gospel* (No. 68) from the late 13th or early 14th century, fragment from the *Homilies of Euphrem Syrian* from the 14th century (No. 77), fragments from the *Pandecta* by Nikon of the Black Mountain from the 14th century (No. 78), and perhaps some other fragments whose provenance he did not evident. From there to the Khlud collection (now in Moscow) came mineos No. 146 from 1388; to the collection of the Serbian Academy of Sciences came the *Nomocanon* with the 1631 transcription (No. 28, Stojanović's catalogue No. 123); to the former National Library in Belgrade⁷ came the miscellany *Panegyric* from 1580 (No. 28); to the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad came the December mineos of Metropolitan Nicanorus (No. 13.1.16). As late as the end of the last century Lj. Kovačević managed to transcribe the mentioned 1388 record on the mineos in the monastery, and Yastreboff made and published a number of records no longer extant.⁸

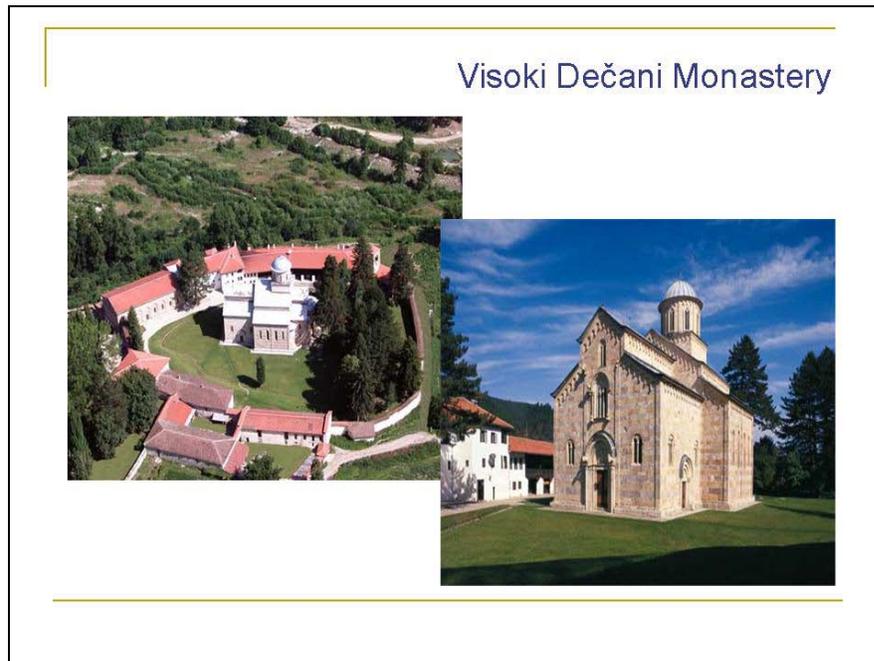
According to Mošin's inventory of Gračanica's old books made in 1961, a total of 38 manuscripts and 12 old printed books were preserved. All manuscript books are in the Serbian recension, but only 15 are preserved integrally, whereas the others are fragmentary. Most of them date from the 16th (22 monuments) and 15th centuries (11 monuments). Today not a single copy of the *Octoechos* printed in Gračanica is kept there.

The library at **Visoki Dečani monastery** keeps 173 books made from the 13th to the 18th centuries. There are 155 books on paper, while the others are on parchment. They

⁷ By former National Library in Belgrade Mošin named the library which was burned to ashes on April 6th 1941 during the German air-raid of Belgrade.

⁸ Ibid.: 18

are largely liturgical books written in Old Slavonic, although there are several written in the Russian Slavonic and Bulgarian Slavonic recensions, and two manuscripts in Greek.



A research into the watermarks and ductus of particular scribes led to reliable data that at least 10 out of 57 monastery paper manuscripts from the 14th century were made at Hilandar⁹ and that they were transcribed by the educated Hilandar scribes Joseph (he also signed his name as Damjan) and Job. However, in the first two decades of the 15th century, when Gregory Camblak was abbot at Dečani, the scribal and transcribing activity was flourishing at Dečani itself.¹⁰ In the second half of the 16th century, the Dečani scriptorium again took the leading position in Kosovo and Metochia's territory, and the manuscripts produced there were exceptional both in transcription quality and in number.

Having in mind the fact that the elementary liturgical set for chanting in Serbian temples ranges between 9 and 11 books, and the numerous churches and monasteries as well, the number of codices that were over the past centuries used for this purpose in Kosovo and Metochia can certainly be estimated to around ten thousand. The endowments of Serbian rulers, high aristocracy and church dignitaries also safeguarded care for the cults of rulers or families in them. As Serbian rulers were buried in their endowments, and later without exception sanctified and canonised, the monasteries

⁹ Hilandar is the Serbian monastery at Mounth Athos (Greece), founded in 1198.

¹⁰ Nadežda Sindik, „Codicological Notes on Some Dečani Manuscripts“. *Archaeographic Proceedings*, 19 (1997): 93–105.

Visoki Dečani Monastery Library

<http://digital.nb.rs/collection/ru-dec>



Manuscripts of the Dečani Library

The Dečani Monastery Foundation Charter
written by St. King Stefan of Decani,
beginning 14th century



were not just “the places of active and constant pilgrimages,”¹¹ but *workshops* as well where the entire process assumed its lasting, written form. By preserving the ruler cults, monasteries strengthened the historical consciousness of the people who visited them, and by preserving literacy, they enabled that consciousness to overcome the

¹¹ Dimitrije Bogdanović. *The History of Old Serbian Literature*. (Belgrade: SKZ, 1980): 96

limitations of time and place. The centres of religious life, Serbian monasteries in time became a school of Christian and popular tradition in its own right, and strong ties with the people made them considerably different from both Byzantine and West European monasteries.

Nowadays Serbian monasteries in Kosovo and Metochia are surrounded with barbed wire, and preserved from the part of hostile Albanian population by the soldiers of international military missions. From the arrival of NATO troops in Kosmet in 1999 to 2003, a total of 112 churches and monasteries were burned, ruined, desecrated and demolished, and in two days' riots, on the 17th and 18th March 2004, another 36 Orthodox holy objects were destroyed. Among the destroyed holy objects was the 14th century Cathedral of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviš, which had been converted into a mosque during Turkish rule, and restored in 1950, only to reveal frescoes of exceptional beauty because of which it was put on the World Heritage list. Individual books that did not meet this fate, as well as the library collections of Peć Monastery, Gračanica and Dečani, are no longer in Kosovo and Metochia, but at the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade. In the process of digitisation of Serbian cultural heritage, the National Library of Serbia has digitised the majority of manuscripts from the Peć Patriarchate and Visoki Dečani Monastery.¹²

THE LIBRARY OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF ST CYRIL AND METHODIUS – AN EXTINGUISHED LIGHTHOUSE OF PROGRESS

In this mediaeval Serbian imperial town, which in the second half of the 19th century was the seat of several consulates, the Theological Seminary was established in 1871, through the dedication of Russian Consul Ivan Stepanovich Yastreboff (1871–1875, 1879–1886) and the benefaction of Sima Andrejević Igumanov (1804–1882), a wealthy Serbian merchant, native of Prizren. Igumanov, a great benefactor of monasteries and schools, gave away his estate in downtown Prizren, had the first buildings erected and secured the money, but he also set the foundations for the Seminary library. After the death of his only son, Igumanov brought his son's library to Prizren and presented it to the Seminary as the core of the future holdings. The library included leatherbound Russian classics up to 1865, works in Greek and all official organs of the Serbian Learned Society¹³ that had been printed by that time. Every bound book also had the inscription: "To the Prizren school from Manojlo Simeunović-Igumanov."¹⁴

The newly founded Seminary library had a great donor in the person of consul Yastrebof. In his study of literature he acquired many works in various languages, and

¹² Collection of cyrilic manuscripts of the Patriarchate of Peć, <http://digital.nb.rs/collection/ru-pec>
Collection of cyrilic manuscripts of the Visoki Dečani Monastery, <http://digital.nb.rs/collection/ru-dec>

¹³ The Serbian Learned Society (1864–1886) is one of the historical forerunners of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade.

¹⁴ Vladimir Bovan, *Prizren Theology Seminary*, (Niš : Serbian Orthodox Seminary, 2007):36

after reading them he promptly dispatched them to the library with the inscription "To the Prizren Seminary – Yastreboff." The subsequent Russian consuls looked up to him, as well as Serbian intellectuals and associations: Dr Vladan Đorđević, who sent his *Fatherland* journal to the Seminary free of charge, Ljubomir Kovacevic, who donated 80 copies of the Novi Sad *Matica Srpska Almanac* to the library, and the St Sava Society, which sent its publications regularly.



The burned Seminary of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, and burned Monastery of the Holy Archangels, Prizren, april 2004

The Seminary's annual report for the 1891/1892 academic year¹⁵ indicate that the library possessed 2,063 books: 1,285 in Serbian, 527 in Russian, and 251 in other languages. In terms of Kosovo, where after two large-scale migrations of Serbian population (in 1690 and 1735) and a complete suspension of literacy, the first elementary schools were opened only in 1810 (Prizren 1810, Vucitrn in 1812, Kosovska Mitrovica in 1836, Pec in 1820-1830?), which liberated itself from Turkish rule only in 1912, this was an unimaginably large library. Besides this one, there were just modest school collections, which began forming after 1863, since the Educational Committee had been formed in Belgrade that sent school books to these parts.

Theological Seminary, the first secondary school in Kosovo, gave the strong impetus to cultural development of Prizren: the Regional Printing Office was established there in 1871 as the first printing office in Kosovo's modern history and the first Serbian-Turkish periodical, *Prizren* (1871–1875) began the struggle for the use of Serbian in public communication. The Regional Printing Office, which was transferred to the region's new

¹⁵ The Prizren Theological Seminary occasionally published reports on its work for the academic year, and report for the 1891/92 is one of them.

administrative centre Priština in 1881, published the first Serbian *Primer for Elementary Schools* in 1884.

The Seminary library was burned down by the Bulgarian army in World War I, after occupying Prizren in 1915. More precisely, out of approximately 9,000 works in 13,000 volumes that the Library possessed, the Bulgarians selected about 3,000 and took them to Sophia, destroying all the rest. In 1919, after World War I and the reconstruction of the devastated complex, the Seminary continued its operation, parallelly forming new initial holdings of 825 books. The Bulgarians were required by the negotiations to return 2,300 books (in 1922), and according to the report on the school's operation in 1929/30, it is expressly stated that the library had 3,423 books in the teacher's section and 7,127 books in the students' section.¹⁶ The same report testifies that the Library was used by students from other Prizren schools and by Prizren citizens as well, who numbered 3,065. Although in the decade immediately preceding World War II the Library practically worked as a public one, had a professional librarian, modern housing and organisation of materials, it did not reach the size of the holdings from early 1915. After World War II, during socialist rule, the Theological Seminary as an institution was marginalised, its library in the 1960s rose to 18,000 volumes, but it never regained the importance that it had when it was the most comprehensive and famous Serbian library under Turkey.

It is little known that in its 128 years' operation in Kosovo, the Seminary has educated about 2,500 students, teachers among them outnumbering priests. Nowadays the Prizren Theological Seminary is not on the territory of Kosovo: damaged in the 1999 bombing, the building was for some time the headquarters of the German KFOR¹⁷ units and a shelter for the exiled Serbian population. In 1999 the school was moved to Niš (central Serbia), where it works under the name Serbian Orthodox Theological Seminary of St Cyril and Methodius in Prizren, temporarily in Niš. In March 2004 the Seminary building was burned down, and in 2006–2007 reconstructed by the Serbian Orthodox Church, whose head officially administers Sima Andrejević-Igumanov's foundation. However, there is no activity in the reconstructed building: according to the latest data on record, there are 12 Serbs living in Prizren now.

THE NATIONAL AND UNIVERSITY LIBRARY OF KOSOVO – REALITY OR CHIMERA?

The National and University Library of Kosovo was officially established by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 1970. For a decade before that, the function of this regional library as central to the southern Serbian province had been in the process of formation, with the right to the obligatory copy of publications from the territory of Serbia since 1963 and with the right to the obligatory copy from the territory of the entire former Yugoslavia since 1965. As the Government of Serbia passed the University

¹⁶ Vladimir Bovan, *Prizren Theology Seminary*, (Niš : Serbian Orthodox Seminary, 2007): 134.

¹⁷ KFOR- Kosovo Forces

of Pristina Foundation Act on November 18, 1969, the Priština library assumed the function of the university library as well.

National Library, Priština



The seventh and eighth decades of the 20th century were a time of uncommonly rapid progress of librarianship in Yugoslavia, so Kosovo was also, though the least developed part, fostered in the efforts to organise a larger number of libraries of all types, to enrich its library holdings, to accept the international standards for library material processing, to establish a professional association and a trade library journal, and to move on to the path of professionalising library activities. A stimulus in that direction was the construction of a new, specified-purpose building for the Library, which was completed in 1981, with a holding capacity for 2 million books and 400 user seats in the reading rooms. The regular supply of new materials allowed the NUL of KiM to enter the last decade of the 20th century with an almost one million books, organizational structure of 11 departments and over 100 employees. The automatisisation of labour at the Library began in 1989.

The National and University Library in Priština, which was in the meanwhile renamed after the Serbian Nobel Prize winner, Ivo Andrić, in the last decades of the 20th century became a scene of intense interethnic conflicts between the Serbs and the Albanians, and accusations that in that period the opponents' library materials were systematically destroyed or favoured could be heard on both sides. Nowadays, when there is not a single Serb employed at the Library and when the Serbs do not live in Priština at all, the Serbian librarians have no contact with the Albanian colleagues. According to the data from March 2003, the NUL of KiM had 87 Albanian and 1 Bosniac employees, and the Library possessed about 600,000 books, Albanian and Serbian alike.

At the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade, where the seat of the NUL of KiM was nominally transferred after the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, the obligatory copy for the central library of Kosovo was stored for an entire decade. Part of those books were presented in 2007 to the University Library of Priština, temporarily located in Kosovska Mitrovica, opened on June 28, 2008, the newest opened library in Kosovo.

Since the curriculum in Albanian was one-sidedly separated from Priština University in the 1991/92 academic year, a parallel educational system was formed in KiM. The former Priština University was sharply divided by nationality of the staff and students, adding that the buildings and property remained in Priština, and the Serbian population was forced to retreat to a Serbian-inhabited territory. Despite the many difficulties that it faced, Priština University, now with the seat in Kosovska Mitrovica, has managed to consolidate itself, remain inside the educational system of the Republic of Serbia and become a higher-education institution of exceptional importance in these region. With the status of state-run university, whose founder is the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia and which is financed from the republic budget, it employs 746 teachers and associates and about 350 non-teaching staff members, with more than 10,000 students. Like elsewhere throughout Serbia, all 10 faculties of this university are in the process of coordinating the curricula with the demands of the Bologna process.

The University Library in Kosovska Mitrovica consists of a central and 10 faculty libraries. The system has at its disposal a specified-purpose equipped space, computer centre, two reading rooms and holdings of 32,000 bibliographic items, out of which 12,515 are a present from the National Library of Serbia, and over 6,000 books are a present from the Matica Srpska Library (Novi Sad). On the occasion of its foundation, the library was also helped by the Belgrade Novosti Company, the Official Gazette, numerous individuals, university professors and citizens. Since March 2008 the library has been a member of the Virtual Library of Serbia – VBS, whose aim is to interconnect libraries in Serbia into a unique information system. That implies the installation of COBISS,¹⁸ library-information system with cooperative catalogisation, cooperative bibliographic-catalogue database, and other functions of the virtual library, in which over 500 libraries in the region participate.

Having developed from a backward town with several hundred houses mostly owing to the construction of the Salonika-Skopje-Kosovska Mitrovica railway (1874), Kosovska Mitrovica today, according to various estimates, has between 18,000 and 30,000 inhabitants. This number refers to the Serbian population, now situated in the northern part of the town. Kosovska Mitrovica became a major centre of the Serbian book in Kosovo and Metochia between the world wars, when 4 bookshops and 4 printing offices were active, which published 5 journals, 2 periodicals and about 50 book titles. Another Kosovo paradox is that there is no printing office in the Serbian part nowadays, but that

¹⁸ COBISS – Cooperative On-line Bibliographic System and Services

it is the seat of as many as two public libraries¹⁹ by the same name of Vuk Karadžić, great reformer of Serbian language and orthography. One is of newer origin, founded by the municipality and works under modest circumstances, and the other, established after the Second world war had worked in the southern part of the town until 1999; it was then transferred to the northern part, into an UNMIK-owned building; USAID and International Organisation for Migrations invested about EUR 100,000, in the renovation and equipment of the library which now has over 30,000 publications.²⁰

Priština University, now in Kosovska Mitrovica



The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia recently announced in the media the return of the Ivo Andrić National and University Library to Kosovo and Metochia. In cooperation with the National Library of Serbia and with UNMIK administration agreeing to support the project, a plan of this institution's return was drafted, and Kosovska Mitrovica was appointed its new seat.

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¹⁹ This paper does not discuss the work of public libraries in Kosovo and Metochia, which begin to develop rapidly after World War I.

²⁰ Milena Tepavčević, "A Few Words about the Vuk Karadžić Town Library in Kosovska Mitrovica," *Public Libraries*, 3-4 (2006): 191–193.

The story of libraries is always a story about the values a society supports, and it is possible to follow an overall cultural development of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metochia on the example of its libraries. Monasteries with their scriptoria, libraries and junior preparatory schools for priests, and libraries at institutions of clerical education paved the way of secular education in the Serbs. When it began developing in the 19th century, humble collections of books for pupils and teachers began to form in elementary and secondary schools. The national liberation of the Serbs from Turkish rule and Kosovo and Metochia's accession into the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes gave a new strength to the culture of books and reading. In the following decades social libraries were established, and after World War II public libraries and the national library were included, with the idea of preserving the books of all Kosovo-Metochia nationalities and ethnic groups. Like in other parts of Yugoslavia, interethnic tensions, political instability, duality of government and war events severed the channels of the book, education and information. The retreat of Serbian books from the territories where they originated, just like disabling the cultural institutions from work, impoverished a bright field of European tradition and left, among other things, too much space for the other media: the minor, third-rate and sensationalist radio and TV stations, misguided information, half-truths and information neglect.

The issue of Kosovo and Metochia is doubtless a political issue. However, it is intolerable to treat as a political issue the rights of citizens to books, reading, information, knowledge, education...and to the tradition the future is built upon.

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