

ON THE OCCASION OF FIFTY YEARS OF WORK OF THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE IN SARAJEVO

In 1950, the Assembly of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina established the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo. The Institute was established as an autonomous scientific institution with the aim of gathering, preserving and researching all types of archives and written works in Oriental languages. The basis was the manuscript archive of the Zemaljski muzej in Sarajevo. In January 1950, the Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina decided that the Oriental Institute should be established in Sarajevo. In April of the same year a decree was issued on the main tasks of the Institute: to gather and study manuscripts and printed materials in Arabic, Turkish and Persian, and to study Islamic arts. One of the main tasks was to research general and cultural history of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the period of Ottoman rule. The tasks of the Oriental Institute were later expanded, as required by the needs of the community and the research personnel available.

Thanks to the fact that the Oriental Institute employed almost all the best Oriental researchers in the region, this institution developed as one of the most prominent scientific institutions in the field of humanities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. The internal organisation of the Institute was adjusted to its programmes, so that the work was divided into the following departments: Philology, History, Documentation, Middle East and Oriental Arts.

The research fellows of the Institute publish their findings in annual editions of *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju – POF* [*Contributions to Oriental Philology*], a magazine of international standing. Brill, one of the largest European publishers, included *POF* in a list of thirty reference magazines in the field of humanities in the world. This magazine includes only original research, dominated by particular scientific approach, as demonstrated by numerous evaluations. Since its first volume in 1950 until today (a total of 49 volumes), *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* has preserved its scientific and professional profile. Going through the content of previous volumes of *POF*, it is easy to see the significance of this publication, the versatility of research subjects, and a large number of research fellows from the country and abroad. Most of the research is in the field of our history of the Ottoman era, as well as writings of Bosnian people in Arabic, Turkish and Persian, as part of our cultural heritage, the study of Arabic, Turkish and Persian and works written those languages, and the study of Islamic architecture and arts.

In addition to this magazine, researchers of the Oriental Institute publish their work in the *Monumenta Turcica Historiam Slavorum Meridionalium Illustrantia*. This publication includes historical sources significant for the

study of Balkan history. Eleven volumes have been published thus far. Scientific research of the fellows is also published in the *Posebna izdanja* [Special Editions] series, which has included 23 monographs. Some of those are still capital achievements in individual areas of Oriental studies, and are part of reference materials for students and scientists in the fields of language, literature, history and other related areas.

After more than forty years of successful work, the Oriental Institute suffered a tragedy inconceivable in modern European history. At the very beginning of the aggression against Bosnia and Herzegovina, on May 17, 1992, a guided missile from Serb positions set the premises of this scientific institution on fire. In just one day, all the collections of the Oriental Institutes, preserved from many wars, fires and floods, perished. The flames destroyed a collection of 5,263 manuscripts, one of the richest and the most valuable in the Balkans, a rich archive of over 300,000 original documents, a reference library of over 20,000 books. Along with the original documents, the fire destroyed numerous micro-films and photocopies of sources, gathered over decades from archives in the country and abroad, and of enormous value in terms of the material they contained. The loss of the collections of the Oriental Institute, the value of which was never subject to easy determination, is irreparable. This was a loss not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also for civilisation in general. What remains are the scientific results achieved through the use of the archives and collections of the Institute.

The lost collections and manuscripts, documents of immeasurable value, can never be recovered, but it is important that the collections be renewed, by photocopying and micro-film recording of collections from all over the world, as well as by purchasing manuscripts and documents from private collections.

Cooperation with other institutions is in form of exchange of publications and magazines, so that publications of the Institute can be found in a large number of libraries and scientific institutions world-wide. The Institute had cooperated with over 120 different institutions, and these links are being slowly re-established after the war. The library of the Institute is also replenishing its collection through exchange. Thanks to its many friends, the Oriental Institute now has a good reference library.

Since its 50 years of work and continuous publication proved the Institute to be a scientific institution of fundamental value, without whose activity valid research of history and culture of the region would not be possible, and in view of the fact that most of the historiography, manuscripts, archives and other sources are within the competence of the research staff of the Institute, our task will continue to be on the collection of manuscripts and other sources, research and publication, and education of new researchers. Despite all the problems, especially those caused by the barbaric burning of the Institute, our work continues and will follow the research initiated at the establishment of the Oriental Institute in 1950.

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