

Endangered Photo Collections about the Participation of Preindustrial Bulgaria in Three Wars in the Beginning of the 20th Century

Dr Valeri Katzounov

Sofia 1040, 15 noemvri №1
vgk@abv.bg

Abstract. The resources of the modern technology presuppose an initiative development in order to unite the efforts and activities for the collaboration in digitalization of the most important pieces of cultural and historical heritage. In a number of cases they have received the support of scientific projects for the creation of an open communication environment with a purpose of promoting the cultural values of the community.

This report presents work on a research project for the conservation of cultural heritage at risk. The problem is with national priority and occupies a significant place in the European integration process. The two collections with which we apply in the British Library need special attention due to their poor structural condition even at the time of their transfer to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences more than 50 years ago. The first collection was created by Colonel Petar Darvingov and consists of 3100 black and white old photos, maps and sketches. The second collection of Aleksandar Bozhinov contains 2050 old photos, sketches, caricatures and cartoons with pencil and ink. The documents have an exceptional historical and informational value, but their physical conditions hinders their scientific use.

The creation of digital copies will enable working with them, which in turn will protect the originals from further damage. The copied documents will build a distinct insurance fund and the institution will be able to broadcast scientific information through various forms of promotion of the fund – exhibitions, presentations, etc.

Keywords: archive, research project, preservation, photos, documents, digital copies

The resources of the modern technology presuppose an initiative development in order to unite the efforts and activities for the collaboration in digitalization of the most important pieces of cultural and historical heritage. In a number of cases they have received the support of scientific projects for the creation of an open communication environment with a purpose of promoting the cultural values of the community. This is opportunity for their use as objects of national researches, material source in the educational process, exhibitions, editorial initiatives, when participating in national and international forums. The efforts of many cultural and educational institutions are

aimed at achieving actual results, more specifically – growth and recognition of virtual repository of electronic records of cultural artifacts from our past.

This report presents work on a research project, which was won by the Scientific archive of BAS and approved by the British Library. The project is for the preservation of cultural heritage at risk by skanning. The Programme is not designed to support conservation work in the technical sense. It is designed to preserve the integrity of archives by removing them from a hazardous or neglectful environment, relocating them into safer circumstances, and copying them to preserve their contents and make them more accessible. The problem is with national priority and occupies a significant place in the European integration process.

The Scientific archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is the oldest national archival institution in Bulgaria. It was created in 1869 – a decade before the restoration of the Bulgarian state, which is unprecedented in the history of Europe. The archive keeps and owns one of the oldest private funds of Bulgarian scientists, public figures and politicians. The archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is part of the National Archives Network of the Republic of Bulgaria.

For the Project we offer two collections, representing photo and graphic illustrations of the pre-industrial development era of the country.

The first collection was created by Colonel Petar Darvingov, a senior officer and Chief of Staff of the Bulgarian Army, commander of the occupation corps in Moravia (what is now the Czech Republic and Serbia). As a direct participants in the events, he captured moments of the military actions led in the Balkans and Central Europe during three wars - the Balkan War, the Second Balkan War and World War I (1912-1918). Colonel Darvingov created a large volume of photos from different fronts – positional photos of infantry and artillery units, fighting marches, sanitary units, front-line parades and prayers, aviation and motorized units, moments from tactical exercises, building of trenches, laying of roads and telephone wires, views of settlements, etc. Preserved are also the portraits, group and individual, of the entire command staff of the Bulgarian army during the wars. The photographs record the military life not only at the front, but also at the rear – the camps and bivouacs, clothing, supplies, military equipment and everyday life of the Bulgarian soldier. Many of the backs of the photos have explanatory notes which carry additional information about specific events and characters. They include initiations, names and sometimes short biographical data on individual persons, information on photo studios, etc.

The collection also includes military business cards with author's notes, operational sketches of battlefields, sketches of the Bulgarian headquarters where the Serbian and Bulgarian troops were positioned during the Balkan Wars, relations of warfare during World War I, sketches of military sites, etc.

The second collection contains photos, cartoons and caricatures created by the renowned artist and photographer Aleksandar Bozhinov. He was one of the first significant cartoonists of the 20th century and a war correspondent during the wars. A considerable amount of photos of military positions different from those registered in the first collection is preserved in his World War I archives. He has also documented the social life in the Balkan villages and towns in the time of war – daily life, work, calendar and festive rituals. The photographs were created with the help of an on-site

mobile field equipment, registering exceptional historical moments of national and European importance.

The portrait photos of the authors and their families and prominent Bulgarian scientists, writers, artists, politicians, public figures and soldiers of these years complement the palette of the preindustrial Bulgarian society. The studio portraits of the country and Europe carry additional useful information for the development of photography during that period.

The creative materials from the collection of Bozhinov – sketches and caricatures – are both the originals and those published in albums and newspapers from the early 20th century. The copies of the Balgaran comic newspaper, whose author, publisher and artist is Aleksandar Bozhinov, are preserved only in this collection. His archive also contains original pencil and ink drawings in sketchbooks, on separate pieces of paper, the backs of restaurant menus, theatre programs and others.

In the composition of documents proposed for digitalization as part of the collections is included a limited number of photographs created before 1900 and after the wars up to 1930.

The two collections with which we apply in the British Library need special attention due to their poor structural condition even at the time of their transfer to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences more than 50 years ago. Rescue measures were taken at the time, but they proved to be insufficient. They hold back the negative effect, but do not improve on the poor quality. The physical condition of the materials puts them at risk, and their great historical value requires urgent sparing procedures so that they will not be irretrievably lost. Many of the photos are entirely faded, while others are with faded emulsion layer. Some photos are with torn edges, frayed corners, folded in half and with stains of moisture or of unknown origin. The texts of the author's notes on the individual images are written with pencil or faded ink. The copies of Balgaran cannot be used in the original, because the paper is crumbling. These are the only preserved issues in Bulgaria.

The deepening destruction process of the documents from the collections impedes their scientific use and popularization in Bulgaria, the Balkans and Europe. Possessing authenticity and extremely rich additional information in the form of text, autographs, dating, eventfulness, geographic and local names, etc., the documents are unique for their era.

Complete collections of the era of such size and chronological range made by only one author - direct participant in the events - have never been registered in a Bulgarian record-keeping room before. This is why we provide the archives of these two scientists, members of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, who left an exceptional documentary heritage behind them. As a result of this project this valuable source material will be saved from irretrievable loss. In the form of a digital product with deployed metadata, it will be intended for the research and educational process aimed at revealing the complex and dynamic historical period in the development of Bulgaria, the Balkans and Europe.

The two collections contain a total of 5150 photos, scetches, cartoons, caricatures and cads with small, medium and large sizes. The first collection consists of 3100 black and white old photos, maps and sketches. The second collection contains 2050

old photos, sketches, caricatures and cartoons with pencil and ink. The project aims is to digitalize this documents according to the program standarts. There will be separate stationary workstation for each of the team members. They will serve for the creation and processing of images and metadata listings. Guidelines on them we will get later. A background database of approximately 6000 graphic files and their metadata will be created on one of these workstations. Also planned is a mobile workstation for work in the photo laboratory.

The devices to generate the files are: Scanner (A4); Scanner (A3); multifunctional scanner device; camera for all objects with sizes larger than A3 or for those that cannot be scanned with high quality on other devices – for example, hardcover photo albums with photographs glued on their pages. The obtaining of high-quality images through the camera will be carried out through an available system for reproduction on photographic film with its own lighting, stand and frame, whose photographing head will be replaced with the camera.

Every image will be separated, captured by the camera and listed with its adjacent metadata as a separate object. The use of both methods will be applied according to the specifics of the material.

All scanned or photographed images will be stored on the hard drives of the computers and backed up on a network external hard drive (NAS). The build-up Database will use the same network device for storing the information.

The communication between the computers, NAS, scanners and printers will be realized mainly through a local computer network, but there are also external hard and flash drives provided.

The results obtained from the project will be presented through the multimedia projector and laptop from the mobile workstation.

The materials from both collections are processed using old methods, with limited information about the persons and events reflected in the records. The disclosure of the content imposes the search for additional information, identification and, if possible, establishment of the overall content of the documented objects.

This research activity completely fits into the daily workflow of the team composed of professional historians, archivists and ethnologists. The available and additionally sought information will be considered as consistent data in accordance with the standards of the program.

Plan for distribution of the project's results after its completion: the results will be distributed through various means available.

In the scientific circles:

- Presentation of the project on the Scientific Archives' website for information and monitoring of its implementation and distribution of its results;
- The same project information will be published in the publications of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, which will emphasize on the nature, aims, tasks and current results of the project;
- Publication of articles in specialized journals on the subject and participation in scientific forums with developments.

1. In the educational circles in Bulgaria:

- For preparation of courses, lectures and seminars at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (for History and Archival Science degree), the National Academy of Arts in Sofia, St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo, G. S. Rakovski National Defence Academy;
- Development of the subject for theses and dissertations.

2. In the society:

- Organization of presentation of the finished project;
- Organization of traveling exhibitions in the coming years.

3. In the media:

- Organization of interviews for the print and electronic media after completion of the project.

The Scientific Archive is a scientific and informational department of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Its documentary array is fully and openly accessible. The rules of procedure for its organization and activity do not authorize the moving of the originals out of the premises. The creation of digital copies will enable working with them, which in turn will protect the originals from further damage. The copied documents will build a distinct insurance fund and the institution will be able to broadcast scientific information through various forms of promotion of the fund – exhibitions, presentations, etc.

The original material will be protected through the separation of each photo in an individual bag made of acid-free paper. All documents from the collections will be moved to new premises, the costs for which will be borne by a host institution. This will extend the life of the original documents. A professional restorer from the Laboratory of the Scientific Archives of BAS will check their status periodically.

By digitalizing the documentary heritage of both authors the information array will be brought into prominence. In perspective this will create conditions for development of scientific information networks between the individual record-keeping rooms. The project results will be used in various scientific fields – political, military and cultural history, and will increase the opportunities for future interdisciplinary studies.

The project is being developed by a team of collaborators of the Scientific Archives of BAS:

- Dr Valeri Katzounov
- Dr Anni Kirilova
- Gabriela Vaptzarova
- Darina Ilieva
- Valentin Georgiev.

Their responsible researchers' task which has an important significance for affiliating the Bulgarian culture into European cultural environment.

