

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AT THE NATIONAL AND STUDY LIBRARY IN TRIESTE

In the last year the Department of History at the National and Study Library in Trieste was discussed frequently in the Slovenian public. News about the existence and activities of this Department are often heard in the wider public, but nevertheless relatively few people truly know the activities of this institution, despite the fact that it has been active since the first post war years.

After the liberation in May 1945 the aspirations and needs for the restoration of the cultural and educational life among the Slovenians in Trieste, in the Trieste region, as well as the wider Primorska region (Slovenian Littoral) were very strong. All of this is evident from the first documents drawn up by the Presidency of the Regional National Liberation Committee for the Slovenian Littoral and Trieste (PNOO), which represented the highest political civilian authority at that time. As stated in the minutes of the session taking place as soon as on 16 May 1945 at 14:00 hours in the headquarters of the PNOO, the following decision was reached: "(...) A decision was made that PNOO shall draw up a proposal and establish a cultural educational commission." The following people were members of the Presidency at that time: president France Bevk, vice president Boris Kraigher, Lavo Čermelj, Branko Babič, Bogdan Breclj, Julij Beltram, Jože Prosen, Erna Poljšak and Eugenio Laurenti. The commission was assembled shortly thereafter. Its sessions took place regularly and frequently. It addressed various topics, all of them important. The minutes of the session taking place on 17 January 1946, attended by Zorko Jelinčič, Ljudevit Taučar, Jože Bevk, Ivan Šavli, Oskar Venturini, Danilo Turk, Josip Kosovel, Drago Pahor, Marija Majnik, Franc Venturini and Ljudevit Peternel, indicate that the following issues were discussed by the commission: the teacher's college in Tolmin, institute for the deaf mute in Portorož, students homes in Trieste and Gorizia, education, pupils, professors, stock of school books, Slovenian Educational Association (Slovenska prosvetna zveza), the activities of the Slovenian National Theatre (Slovensko narodno gledališče) in Trieste, Music Society (Glasbena matica) in Trieste, Radio Trst, the business operations of the Gregorčič publishing house, etc.

In the months after World War II a variety of cultural and other institutions, associations and organisations was established. We are happy to report that most of them still exist and operate today: the Primorski dnevnik daily newspaper, Permanent Slovenian Theatre (Stalno slovensko gledališče), Music Society, Union of Slovenian Cultural Associations (Zveza slovenskih kulturnih društev, at the time Slovenian Educational Association), Radio Trieste, Slovenian Mountaineering Association (Slovensko planinsko društvo), National and Study Library, Slovenian Regional Economic Union (Slovensko deželno gospodarsko združenje (at the time Slovenian Economic Association – Slovensko gospodarsko udruženje), Peasants Association (Kmečka zveza), and so on.

When the Slovenian Educational Association was established in Trieste on 7 October 1945, people responsible for individual departments were also elected besides the members of the management committee. One of these departments was the Department for Reading Clubs and Libraries (Odsek za čitalnice in knjižnice), led by the teacher Tončka Čok. Immediately after the liberation a need for the establishment of a network of libraries, which had been suppressed mercilessly by the fascist regime, became apparent. Soon thereafter it also became evident that the library network would have to be upgraded by establishing the National and Study Library. After this had been discussed and prepared in the first half of 1946, on 4 November 1946 the Regional National Liberation Committee for the Slovenian Littoral and Trieste issued a decree on the establishment of the National and Study Library in Trieste, which was founded on 17 July 1947. Since the decree was issued and until the founding general meeting was convened, all the necessary arrangements were taken care of by the preparation committee with the attorney Frane Tončič, Boris Zajec and organisation secretary Rafael Bačar as its driving force. This committee operated in the context of the Slovenian Educational Association or the Slovenian – Croatian Educational Association. A list of founding members, formally the convenors of the founding general meeting of the National and Study Library, was drawn up. It contains eleven founders: attorney Angelo Kukanja (Trieste), father Virgilij Šček (Lokev), professor Andrej Budal (Štandrež), professor Ante Cervelin (Buje), Peter Peric (Buje), Boris Zajec (Trieste), Vinko Rapotec (Trieste), Rudi Uršič (Trieste), professor Zorko Jelinčič (Trieste), Dr. Stanko Peterin (Trieste), and architect Franjo Kosovel (Trieste). At the general meeting the establishment, statute and previous activities were confirmed, three new members were admitted (writer Vladimir Bartol,

pedagogue Drago Pahor and attorney Frane Tončič), and the management board was elected. At the first session of the newly elected management board (which took place soon after the general meeting) individual responsibilities were shared between president Kukanja, vice president Šček, secretary Zajec, treasurer Rapotec and members of committee Cervelin and Peterin.

The Allied Military Administration acknowledged the establishment and existence of the National and Study Library with a special letter of 11 October 1947, signed by colonel Gardner. On 18 December 1948 the agreement on the property of books and equipment between the National and Study Library and the Slovenian—Croatian Educational Association was signed. As of that moment the activities of the National and Study Library have been completely independent. The issue of facilities has always been pressing. Thus the National and Study Library was initially (until March 1948) located at San Vito 17 street, since April 1948 temporarily at Montecchi 6 street, while since March 1949 until as late as 1977 it remained in the facilities at Geppa 9 street.

Soon after the establishment of the National and Study Library and the beginning of its activities, the preparations for the founding of the Department of History and Ethnography began. We can find information about its origins in the letter of 27 February 1951, sent by Drago Pahor, head of the Department of History and Ethnography, to the Central Committee of the Liberation Front in Trieste: "The Department of History and Ethnography of the Trieste Territory has been established in the context of the National and Study Library. The urgent need for this Department is especially felt now that the Department is primarily concerned with the storage and preservation of all documents, resources and objects, which have any connection with the history of our people. These will aid the professional historians in the scientific exploration of our past (...) With the establishment of the Department of History and Ethnography we have set the foundations for the institution which should, as of this day, collect, manage and preserve all historical materials, thus bringing an end to the time when the preservation of important documents was subject to chance or enthusiasm of individual collectors."

The Department has officially operated since 1951, though some records show that its core had already been active in the end of 1949 and then for the whole of 1950 in the facilities of

the National and Study Library at Geppa street. From there the Department of History and Ethnography moved to the third floor of the building in the Montecchi 6 street, where it remained until 1978 when it moved into larger facilities in the building of the Cultural Centre in Trieste, where it is still located today. Long breaks between individual general meetings of the National and Study Library (1948, 1950, 1952, 1960, 1970) attest to the fact that its position has always been difficult.

The first head of the Department of History and Ethnography was Drago Pahor, in the period between 1951 and 1954. He was aided by Zorko Jelinčič, who took over and managed the Department in the decade between 1955 and 1965, when Drago Pahor was the headmaster of the Trieste Student Home. After Jelinčič's death in 1965 the Department was once again taken over by Drago Pahor, who led it until 1977. In 1978 Milan Pahor became the head of the Department of History. In the last decade of Drago Pahor's leadership the ethnographic part of the Department was taken over and managed by Živa Gruden. After a few years the leadership and coordination of the Department of History and Ethnography's ethnographic activities were taken over by the ethnologist Martina Repinc.

Milan Pahor