

SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

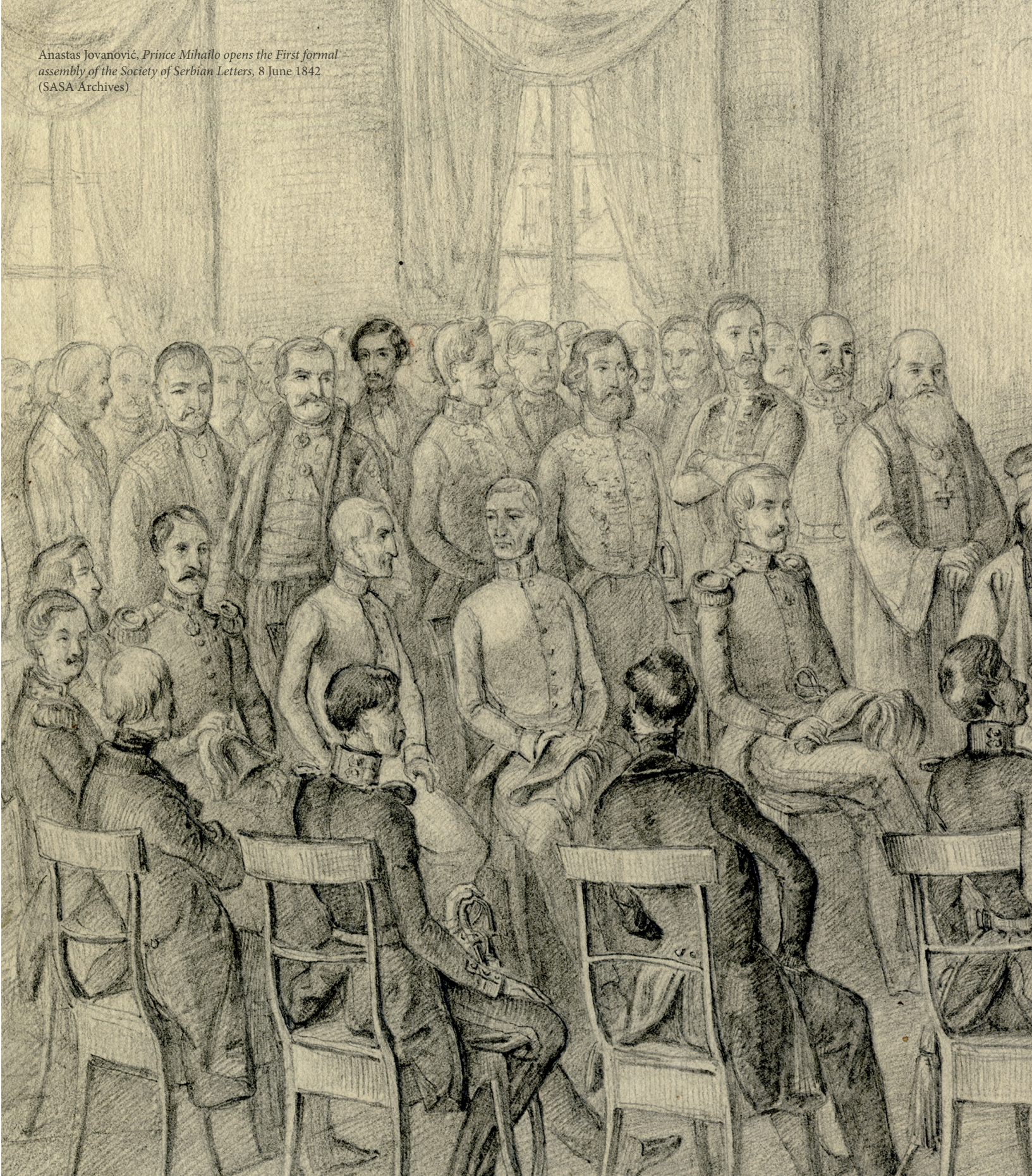
1841—2016



SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS  
1841–2016

A SHORT HISTORY

Anastas Jovanović, *Prince Mihaïlo opens the First formal assembly of the Society of Serbian Letters*, 8 June 1842  
(SASA Archives)







## THE SOCIETY OF SERBIAN LETTERS

(1841–1864)

The Society of Serbian Letters (SSL) was founded in Belgrade on 7 November 1841<sup>1</sup> upon recommendation from Jovan Sterija Popović and Atanasije Nikolić, professors at the Lycée. The proposers called the society The Serbian Academy of Sciences and prepared draft constitution, rules and regulations and the seal. The Government accepted the proposal but suggested that the name Serbian Academy of Sciences – appraised too ambitious by some members – should be changed to the Society of Serbian Letters.

The constitution earmarked three categories of members: full, corresponding and honorary. The Minister of Education presided over the Society.

The essential tasks of the Society were: the standardisation of the Serbian language and a glossary of terms used in the sciences taught at the Lycée.

The activity of the Society was burdened by interventions of the ruling authority regarding the issues of orthography, but also by the political events in the country and two changes of the ruling dynasties in Serbia.

Due to the sharp opposition of Vuk Karadžić, a corresponding member, to the activities of the Society in the area of terminological standardisation further activities were interrupted and the focus was shifted to studies of the country and its history. Sources for Serbian history were gathered in big

archival centres: Dubrovnik, Venice, Paris and Buda. In addition, materials about popular customs and beliefs were also compiled. Special attention was paid to the bibliography of books printed in Serbia and later to the bibliography of books on Serbia. The results of the research were published in the *Glasnik Društva srbske slovesnosti* (*Herald of the SSL*) for 1847. Owing to its extended performances the Society established five departments in 1849: Language Department, History Department, Law Department, Philosophy Department and the Department for Natural Sciences.

After the elections of 1862 a group of young liberals joined the Society. They wanted to reorient it towards social activity, contrary to its previous concentration on history and confinement within the national framework. They believed that general sciences could help in overcoming poverty and backwardness. The Society fell under the influence of that current and there were more frequent critical remarks about the regime and the general situation in the Principedom. Confrontations within the Society were also frequent. They culminated at the January meeting of 1864, when the liberals proposed well-known European revolutionaries and democrats to become members of the Society. The meeting was discontinued and the Society was suspended the day after. Liberal leaders were dismissed from their jobs and transferred into small provincial places.

<sup>1</sup> All dates are according to the Julian calendar.

## THE SERBIAN LEARNED SOCIETY

(1864–1892)

The Serbian Learned Society (SLS) was founded by the “highest edict of the Prince“ on 29 July 1864, and the activity of the Society of Serbian Letters was continued under a new title. The members remained in the same categories and full members were given a month to state their preferences for the department they wanted to join; those who failed to do that were classified as honorary members. The Society was then placed under the control of the Ministry of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs; the president was appointed by the Prince from among the membership. The Minister had to give his assent for each newly appointed full member.

The Society had four Departments: for Ethical, Linguistic and Literary Studies, for Natural History and Mathematics, for the Studies of History and the State and for the Arts. Each Department could have five to twenty members and because of insufficient numbers the Department for the Arts began its official activity only in 1869. The authorities established the tasks of the Society: “...to be engaged in sciences and the arts that most closely concern the Serbs” but the Society was free “to determine the way and the means to accomplish these tasks”.

The Society was not satisfied with the By-laws and in 1869 new Rules and Regulations were passed securing a greater autonomy for the Society. Its tasks were extended: “The Serbian Learned Society studies and improves sciences and arts, and particularly those that concern the Serbs and Southern Slavs in general”.

The Society was particularly focused on the gathering of historic, geographic and ethnographic materials, old manuscripts and documents, detailed studies of monasteries and important architectural

edifices, as well as on improving the methodology of research to comply with contemporary trends. It was proposed that meteorological data should be recorded regularly in a new geographical map of Serbia. Serbian bibliography was also much more systematically compiled than before.

In June 1877 the main task of the Society was set with the new By-laws in the following way: “The Serbian Learned Society studies and perfects sciences and arts, engages in independent research in natural and social sciences, linguistics, historic and artistic studies related to the Serbs and the Slavs, as well as physical, physiological and psychological sciences in general”. The Society elected their president independently, the departments were renamed into committees, and the fifth was then founded – the Committee for the Popularisation of Sciences and Literature. However, that Committee did not last for long since the Ministry of Education prevented its access to regular financing and special funds for its operations were not allotted. This was again a reflection of intensified confrontations between the conservative and liberal groups. Conservative members gave firm support to scholarly work and liberals insisted on education and enlightenment as their primary obligation.

Misunderstandings between the Society, with a strengthened liberal fraction, and the Ministry of Education brought about a new suspension in 1886 (13 May 1886 – 25 June 1887). Between 1886 and 1892 the Society with a reduced membership existed parallel to the newly founded Serbian Royal Academy (SRA), with a continuous conflict over privileges and assets. After the agreement on its merging with the Academy was adopted, the Society chose eight members as full members of the Academy and the rest became honorary members.



# THE ROYAL-SERBIAN ACADEMY AND MERGING WITH THE SERBIAN LEARNED SOCIETY (1886–1892)

The period when the Serbian Learned Society and the newly founded Royal-Serbian Academy existed in parallel was marked by a series of problems in the functioning of these institutions and the situation could not be maintained as such. The Society had lost some of their most eminent members because they joined the Academy, while the annual state subsidies were reduced to a symbolic amount. Under those conditions, the Society was not able to accomplish much, the funds were insufficient even for the printing of the already prepared *Glasnik (Herald)*. On the other hand, the Society had kept all its assets including the valuable collections and materials gathered at the time of the Society of Serbian Letters.

After five years of conflicts about the privileges and assets, the Minister, Andra Nikolić, who later (1897) became a member of the Academy, proposed the merging of these two institutions under certain conditions. In 1891 the plan was accepted by both

parties – with a little resistance. New Amendments to the Law on the Academy were prepared on the basis of that agreement and adopted in February 1892. The category of honorary members was introduced and the total number of academicians was raised from twenty-five to thirty-four. The amendments were related to the most important stipulation of the agreement which required from the Society to choose eight of its members who would be accepted as full members of the Academy. All other full members, corresponding and honorary members of the Serbian Learned Society became honorary members of the Academy (a total of 134). The name of the institution – Serbian Royal Academy – introduced by the *The Operating Procedures* of 1887 was made official at that time.

The merging of the two institutions confirmed the continuity in the activities of the Academy and the previously existing societies.





## THE SERBIAN ROYAL ACADEMY

(1886–1947)

On 1 November 1886 the Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbia passed the *Basic Law on the Royal-Serbian Academy* and King Milan Obrenović made it public. The first sixteen academicians were nominated by the King and other members – up to the total of twenty-five full members – were chosen by the academicians. It was permitted to double the number of corresponding members to fifty, but the number of members was limited in order to secure the high scholarly and artistic level of the membership. Professional advancement and social enlightenment were in charge of specific associations “with the protection and assistance of the Academy”. The Royal-Serbian Academy comprised four professional academies: natural sciences, philosophical sciences, social sciences and the arts. The first *Operating Procedures* (1887) specified that it should publish only original scholarly papers, adding the publishing of *Godišnjak* (*Annual Report*) to the already listed serial publications: *Glas* and *Spomenik*. The scope of publishing was significantly extended owing to the activities of the Academy members.

According to the Law, the Academy had an important place in the management of scientific and cultural policy. By the same Law it had control over the National Library and the National Museum. The subsequently founded Museum of Serbian Lands (Museum of Natural Sciences) was also put under its control.

*Amendments to the Law on the Academy* of 10 February 1892 were adopted in order to carry out the merging with the Serbian Learned Society. The category of honorary members was introduced and the number of full members was raised from twenty-five to thirty-four. The name was then changed to Serbian Royal Academy.

*The Operating Procedures* of the Academy from 1895 stipulated financial support for certain projects and also awards for “projects in the area of sciences and arts”. Also, systematic long-term research was initiated. In addition to the *Dictionary of the Serbian Vernacular Literary Language* (and

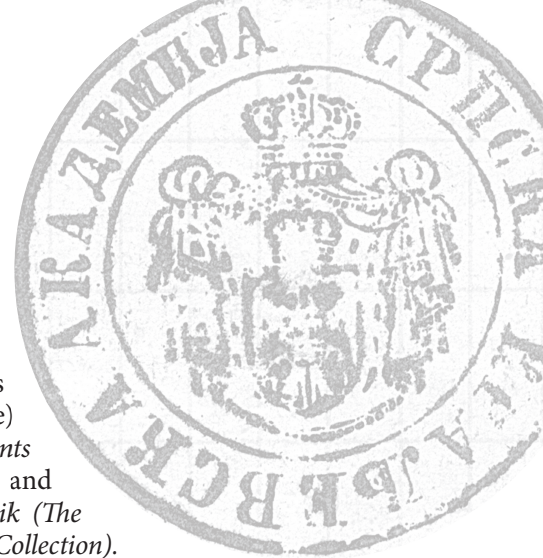
in 1893 the Lexicographical Institute was founded for that purpose) there were *Monuments of the Old Serbian Art* and *Srpski etnografski zbornik* (*The Serbian Ethnographic Collection*).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century it was planned to publish the *Zbornik za istoriju, jezik i književnost srpskog naroda* (*Collection of the History, Language and Literature of the Serbian People*) as a collection of original materials and legal documents. Although without an internal unity and general principles for all of the publications, this collection is the foundation for further development of the historical science in the twentieth century. In 1933 important monograph studies began to be published on Serbian monasteries. Major works of academicians Jovan M. Žujović, Jovan Cvijić, Mihailo Petrović and others were published as *Posebna izdanja* (*Special Editions*).

After the First World War the Serbian Royal Academy had cooperation with the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts and they were both members of the International Union of Academies, engaged in long-term projects such as: *Corpus vasorum antiquorum* (*Corpus of Ancient Vases*), *Glossarium mediae latinitatis* (*The Dictionary of Mediaeval Works in Latin*), etc.

After half a century the Academy had twenty-five active scholarly committees and commissions. In the inter-war period, the Academy was almost the only publisher of scholarly works or historic sources, so that scholars who were not members published their works there if they had cooperation with the Academy or foundations under its management.

During the war and occupation (1941–1944) the activities of the Academy were suspended and reduced to the protection of its assets. After the end of the war, the Academy had to comply to the new social conditions.



## THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

(1947–1960)

**T**he *Law on the Serbian Academy of Sciences* of 30 June 1947 made crucial changes in the structure of the Academy. Six departments were introduced: the Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Department of Technical Sciences, Department of Medical Sciences, Department of Literature and Language, Department of Social Sciences and Department of Fine Arts and Music. The limitation to the number of full and corresponding members was abolished. Corresponding and full members were equal in the passing of decisions, except in the election of full members. The presidency of the Academy comprised the president, vice-president, secretary general, secretaries of the departments and chosen representatives of the departments. It also became possible for institutions outside the Academy to propose their candidates for membership.

The most important change was the establishment of research institutes within the Academy, after

the model of the Soviet Academy. In 1947 and 1948 twenty institutes were founded and thus organisation of researches under the auspices of the Academy became very challenging. *The Law on Scientific Activity* from 1954 made those institutes independent and the Academy remained as the founder of only a few.

Once the institutes were separated from the Academy, it lost to a great extent the character of a working institution. The focus of its activity was transferred to inter-academy cooperation and organisation of scientific conferences. Researches within the Academy were mostly individual projects.

The Academy Palace, the building in which it is located at present, was redone in 1952. The Archive, the Library and twelve institutes were moved into the house. Since then the Archive and the Library, with their precious collections, have been open to the public. The Academy was entrusted with the management of the Patriarchate-Archbishopric Archive in Sremski Karlovci.



## THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS

(from 1960 to the present day)



The Law on the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA), came into effect on 16 June 1960, introduced a new name of the institution – Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts – still in use. The Law also anticipated the category of foreign members and all the members who were not Yugoslav citizens were transferred to that category.

After separation from the institutes, the Academy became a representative institution – its activity was focused on inter-academy cooperation and the organisation of scientific conferences. Research studies in the Academy were mostly individual projects until the programme guidelines were adopted in 1974. Work on projects was a reflection of the endeavour to transform the Academy again into a working organisation and the bearers of the projects were committees which also supervised and realised cooperation with other academies and faculties from the current Yugoslav state and foreign countries.

The foundation of the SASA Gallery in 1968 provided the Academy with an opportunity to organise public exhibitions of its artistic and scholarly accomplishments.

In time, some of the original six departments were divided into smaller units: in 1971 the Department of Social Sciences formed the Department of Social Sciences and the Department of Historical Sciences,

and in 1998 the Department of Natural Sciences and Mathematics was divided into the Department of Mathematics, Physics and Geo-Sciences and the Department of Chemical and Biological Sciences; while in 1969 the Department of Literature and Language changed its name to the Department of Language and Literature. Since 1974 there have also been two vice-presidents instead of one.

A significant change in the life of the Academy happened in 1991, when the agreement on integration with the Vojvodina Academy of Sciences and Arts was put into operation – all members of the VASA were received as members of the SASA in the same status. A Branch of the SASA in Novi Sad was established and its president is a member of the SASA Presidency.

According to the current *Law on SASA*, “the Academy develops and initiates sciences, organises and improves the basic and applied scientific researches, instigates and improves artistic activities and thus gives its contribution to the general welfare of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia and the state.”

Today, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts has 104 full members, 36 corresponding members, 15 non-resident members and 97 foreign members, organised in eight Departments.





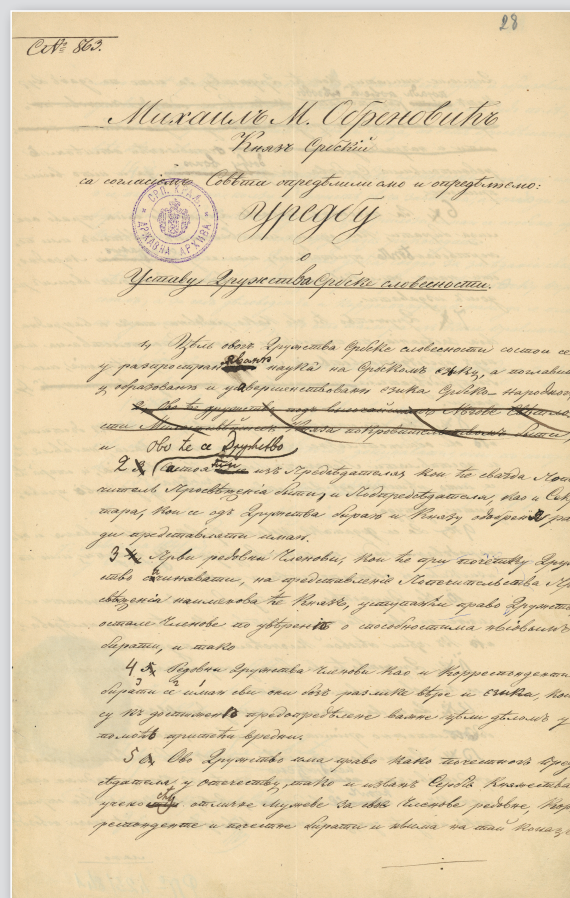
## THE CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS AND ITS FORERUNNERS

The history of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which begun in 1841 by the founding of the Society of Serbian Letters, has been inscribed in its endeavours to meet the needs of the Serbian society in education, science and culture. The most renowned scholars and artists gathered in the institution provided a continuous progress to the present day, a crucial contribution to the development of sciences and culture in Serbia.

Throughout its history the activity of the Academy was changing: from the focus on the language as a necessary foundation of education, over the gathering, publishing and interpretation of historic sources, conducting research in natural sciences, geography and ethnography, to the multiplication of sciences its academicians were engaged in, together with their scholarly accomplishments and accompanying publishing activity. Social circumstances were also changing. On many occasions, sometimes on its own and sometimes under pressure, the Academy changed its structure and organisation, the categories of membership, as well as its name.

Owing to these changes the Academy managed to persist. In the 175 years of its existence it has resisted dynastic changes and changes of governments, the profound change of the social order, world wars, Yugoslav integration and disintegration and, today, under new circumstances, it is again confronted with the challenges of the time, but successfully contending them intellectually.

Numerous events, big names and different contexts have been interwoven throughout the history of the Academy with their scholarly, cultural, social and political dimensions. They cannot be observed entirely through one prism and enumerated according to a single criterion. Every attempt to compile a survey of important dates in that history must be incomplete or inconsistent, just as this one listing crucial events and the basic programme orientations in the 175 years of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and its forerunners.



The decree of Prince Mihailo on establishing of the Society of Serbian Letters of 7/19 November 1841 (SASA Archive)

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