CHRONICLE
The archive of the Institute of N. P. Kondakov

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The archaeological institute of N. P. Kondakov unquestionably became illustrious during its not quite thirty years’ existence in the field of Byzantine and related studies and studies of Eastern art and archaeology1. Its archive, preserved at the Czech Republic’s Institute of Art History of the Academy of Sciences, is one of the most important information resources. The institute, or its predecessor, the Cabinet and then Institute for the Theory and History of Art, acquired the archive in a turbulent time, at the early 1950s, when the new Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences was taking shape.

At that time, the institute of Kondakov was struggling to survive. After the Belgrade – Prague split in 1939–1942, destruction of a part of the funds left the institute a debt of 120,000 Czech crowns2. Most of its members dispersed, and it had only two paid employees, P. A. Chmyrnov as secretary and V. I. Nalyvkin as stockroom keeper3. Under the honorary directorship of A. V. Florovskij, the institute was overseen—at least nominally—by a board with seven members, most of whom lived abroad.

The position of the Czechoslovak Republic after the communist coup d’État of 1948 was not in principle hostile for the Institute of N. P. Kondakov. On the negative side, the experiences of post-revolutionary Russian émigrés associated with the institute could not be forgotten. But on the positive side, the institute’s activities suited the growing interest in eastern Slavic and Byzantine culture, in which a counter to the cultural bias of the now oppositional West was sought4. The Kondakov Institute was never markedly engaged in politics and, in fact, never entirely broke off its connections with the Soviet Union5. Some of members, including P. A. Chmyrnov, continued to hold Soviet citizenship. Nevertheless, the Czechs never questioned the institute’s scientific credibility: quite the contrary.

On 17 August 1951, a meeting convened delegates of the Ministry of Education, Sciences and the Arts

1 The list of the basic literature would exceed the extent of this text and given the target audience of the journal would be superfluous. We concentrate rather on publication of some not yet published sources.
2 ČAVU, ref. 231, příčlenené ústavy [affiliated institutes], Archeologický institut N. P. Kondakova v Praze [The N.P. Kondakov Archaeological Institute], box 217, inv. Nos. 305 a 307.
3 Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR [Masaryk Institute and Archive of the ASCR], Česká akademie věd a umění [Czech Academy of Sciences and Art] (hereinafter referred to as ČAVU), ref. III C 852, zaměstnanci [employees], Institut N. P. Kondakova, box 301, inv. Nos. 905 and 906.
4 For the Academy cf. Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, Vládní komise pro vybudování ČSAV [Governmental Commission for the constitution of ČSAV], hereinafter Vládní komise, box 6, 10/3, Hlavní úkoly společenský věd v Československé akademii věd [Main tasks of the social sciences at the CSAV], p. (4).
5 Cí. institutional correspondence in: Ústav dějin umění AV ČR [Institute of Art History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic], odd. Dokumentace [Department of Documentation], Archeologický institut N. P. Kondakova, box 18.
and delegates of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Art (ČAVU) with personnel of the Embassy of the Soviet Union in Prague, represented by the cultural attaché Frolov. The undertaking of the Kondakov Institute by the academy was arranged there as a “gift of the Soviet embassy”6. The real assumption of the institute, with all of its collections and funds, did not occur until 1952; this was carried out under the supervision of a united board of the first and third classes of the academy, to the leadership of which such renowned scientists as professors A. Salač, J. Rypka, M. Paulová, A. V. Florovskij, and Dr. Z. Wirth, were nominated7.

Nineteen-fifty-two was a year of quest for the form of the new Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (ČSAV) as the umbrella institution for scientific research that would, following the Soviet model, administer the research in conformity with the new social order. For this reason, on 17 January 1952, a governmental commission to construct the Academy was created by a government resolution. In the social sciences, aside from the existing and conceptually suitable larger institutes (e.g., the Institute of Archaeology), the transformed institutes in a sense of a bigger universality of focus (e.g., the original State Historical Institute), new institutes and smaller cabinets were formed. These new organizations were founded on a blank slate for their disciplines, which had traditionally lacked a more representative institutional administration. That was the case of the Cabinet—later Institute—for the Theory and History of Art, which was supposed to become, to some measure, the heir of the Kondakov Institute.

Already at the second, 21 February, meeting of the department of social sciences of the state commission, the information about the Kondakov Institute was handled by its vice-president and director of the Institute of Archaeology, J. Böhm8. At the sixth meeting, on 27 March, Professor Salač proposed to keep the original name for the world-renowned Kondakov Institute as a department for classical history and Greek philology. Professor Salač then seems to have changed his mind, and at the next meeting, on 3 April, he proposed to establish the Cabinet for Greek, Roman, and Latin Studies. Professor Salač also declared an interest in the Kondakovian library, but at the same time he was aware of the interest from the art historians. At the ninth meeting, on 24 April, Salač filed a detailed elaboration of the proposal and, inter alia, took charge of the premises of the Kondakov Institute, its library, and publication of the monographic series Bibliotheca Instituti Kondakoviani with a broadened interest in the whole of Greek studies. None of the members of the institute figured in the planned staff, however9. While deciding on the inheritance of the institute, the relation to the history of art prevailed, and the Kondakov Institute was thus incorporated in the Cabinet for the Theory and History of Art10. The cabinet even received the premises of the Institute in Haštalská Street11, where it remained until 1993, with P. A. Chmyrnov as librarian.

The session of the board of the Kondakov Institute with the representatives of the academy, of the governmental commission, and of the cabinet, on 24 September 1952, was notified of the affiliation of the institute and decided on the depositary preservation of the collection of icons in the National Gallery12.

From the holdings of the Kondakov Institute, only the library and the collection of icons, and sporadically some other collections, were mentioned in the contemporary sources. The actual archive is mentioned independently under the name Kondakovianum, but only in a synopsis of the structure of the division of social sciences from 24 April 195213 among the archives and as the only archive without direct affiliation to an institute.

For a long time, a place could not be found for the archive in the activities of the Institute of Art History, because the research was focused on completely different subjects with an inadequate staff14. M. Lomičová did the first processing of the archive in 1971–1979, apparently in response to the growing interest in the Kondakov Institute and its activities15. An exhibition and international conference held on the seventieth anniversary of the death of N. P. Kondakov and the foundation of the Seminari-um Kondakovianum further fuelled local and foreign interest in the collection16. In 1999, this multi-part effort encouraged a new organization of the collection by L. Kopecká17, although based largely on an older organization. The collection today, consisting of more than six meters of archival documents, is deposited in sixty-three cartons.

Despite the collection’s importance and relative extensiveness, we cannot consider it a coherent resource for all aspects of the existence and work of the Kondakov Institute. The value varies in structure, information, and time. On the one hand, it is logical that the period of the Seminari-um Kondakovianum is represented much more weakly than the successive period of the Kondakov Institute (from 1931), which,
aside from a quantitative and qualitative growth of activity, brought also a certain formalization and duties of registration of a proper association according to the Law on the Right of Association and Related Directives. However, a great deal is due to institute’s sometimes imprecise and ad hoc building of the archive and to external interference such as the large losses during and subsequent to the Second World War. Part of the collection was probably dispersed along with employees.

If we think of the present situation of the archive as a whole, the greatest potential for research can be found in the unpublished or variously published works of the members of the institute and in the extensive, even if disproportionally preserved, personal and institutional correspondence. Another promising area of material could include proceedings of institute meetings. The economic agenda of the institute may seem rather abstract, but it is no without worth, at least for the economic framework and the given limits of the consequent scientific work.

Concerning the spiritual father of the institute, N. P. Kondakov, we can find—except for the posthumously published work on the Russian icon—only partial, limited, and subjective material. For further study, it is better to refer to his more representative collections18. On the contrary, by far the greatest amount of the personal material of all kinds is related to N. M. Beljajev19, who was an extraordinarily talented and productive young member of the institute, but it is not possible to consider him the most important member.

The archive of the Kondakov Institute is accessible to researchers without restrictions, during the same opening hours as the other collections of the Department of Documentation of the Institute of Art History (ASCR), i.e., after previous reservation during the regular opening hours of the institute, located in the centre of Prague20.

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6 ČAVU, ref. 231, přiřazené ústavy [affiliated institutes]. Archeologický institut N. P. Kondakova v Praze, box 217, inv. No. 305.
7 Ibidem, inv. No. 306.
8 Vládní komise, box 6, 10/1.
9 The text of the concept from April 17th in Vládní komise, sign. 11a, kart. 7. Komise pro studia řecká římská a latinská [Commission for the study of Roman and Latin Greece].
10 It is interesting that the otherwise detailed protocols of the governmental commission are silent about the circumstances of this change of position.
11 Vládní komise, box 6, 10/2. Sekce filosoficko-historická [Philosophical-Historical Section]. Zpráva o plnění úkolů sekce filosoficky-historické (III. čtvrtletí 1952) [Report on the fulfillment of tasks of the Philosophical-Historical Section (3rd Quarter of 1952)]. p. 3.
12 Cf. n. 6.
13 Vládní komise, box 6, 10/15.
19 Box 30–40.