

Doors to the Distant Past

The yellowed pages of a folio, encased in leather binding, and on which the breath of history has been imprinted, along with notes in the margins. Is there any symbol more significant to our national cultural history?

In times past it took many years, if not whole decades to create a book. Now we can hastily tap at the keyboard; they traced out each letter painstakingly. These editions now hold great value. The Rare Books section of the National Repository has been working on building up the stock of antique manuscripts over the past year. The Statute (The Eye of the Church), published by Anisim Radishevsky in 1610, the oldest of them, is the central symbolic focus of the collection. This volume cannot be lifted as it

is so heavy. The Old Believers Collection, Kryuki Festive Chants and two volumes of research on late 18th century history by the renowned German historian, Johann Galeta, are among the rarities collected by these Belarusian experts. Connoisseurs of antiquities may feel envious on hearing these titles, but even a casual reader would recognise the excitement of opening a volume which acts as a door to the distant past.

The Rare Books Dept. of the National Library has over 70,000 manuscripts and early printed copies.

By **Lyudmila Ivanova**

Unique publications replenish the book repository of the National Library of Belarus

