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HIGHER SCHOOLS FOR GIRLS IN SERBIAN LANGUAGE IN THE REGION OF BANAT MILITARY BORDER IN THE PERIOD OF HUNGARIAN RULE

Abstract: After the establishment of Hungarian power several schools for girls in Serbian language were founded, for the girls who wanted to continue their schooling after finished four-year primary school. Special place among them belongs to higher schools for girls in Pancevo, even though the so called schools for housewives and old trade schools were also important.

Key words: Banat border, Voluntary Cooperation of Serbian women, schools for housewives, Trade school for girls, Serbian higher school for girls.

Schools went through their renaissance period in the 18th century of baroque and Enlightenment. Even then, this was not the case with all schools in all parts of the world – but it was true for those within the empire of Maria Theresia and her successors. It was a lucky circumstance for Pancevo that, due to its geographical position, it adopted the feature of a (border) town at the time. The greatest progress was made with the beginning of schooling of female children.

In the time of shift from feudal to capitalistic social period, significant reforms in the field of education were initiated and carried out by the respectable, educated Serb, Uros Nestorovic (1765-1825), the founder of the first preparatory schools (the so called preparandije) – Serbian, Romanian and Greek (1812). Apart from being dedicated to translating and writing of first notebooks for new school, he was also the initiator of first educational-labour institutions for girls attended by Orthodox female youth (Gavrilovic 1987: 66, Ivanovic 2006: 2).

In 1866 the Regency council of Hungary issued a Decree on special primary school for girls, while such institutions had already existed in the Banat border: German from the beginning and Serbian from the middle of the 19th century. In 14th of April 1804, the eparchy of Timisoara issued a decree ordering female children to be educated, as well (Tomandl 1953). Since the fourth decade of the 19th century girls attended primary school together with boys even in villages, while in Pancevo and smaller towns this was the case much earlier. During the 19th century a number of private schools for girls worked in Pancevo; however, after the establishment of Hungarian rule, this was no longer allowed.

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Serbian Higher School for Girls in Pancevo

In 1860s 85% of young girls in the region of Banat military border were almost uneducated, and the highest level of education in the case of female children referred to the 3rd grade of primary school (Pancevac, 1869, 21). Primary school education was no longer suitable for the needs of society, so that the richer citizens started sending their female children to schools for young girls, as well as various institutes in the country and abroad. These were mainly private schools addressing the needs only of a small number of female students; as a consequence, they were constantly criticized. Secondly, there was the need for school of girls in mother tongue, so that Svetozar Markovic, as well as associations *Mlada Srbadija* (Young Serbs) and *Pokret za obrazovanje zena u Vojvodini* (Women Education Movement in Vojvodina) exercised a powerful influence on public opinion and the council to create and introduce higher and more comprehensive upbringing of female citizens (The report on Serbian higher school for girls in Pancevo for 1899/1900 (1970); Pancevac No. 86). At the same time, in the nearby principality of Serbia the Higher school for girls in Belgrade had already been established, whose influence on the foundation of similar institutions for their female compatriots in Hungary was – undisputable.

The appeals for further school of children could be heard everywhere and were becoming increasingly louder. The narrow circle of well-situated women from the middle class of Pancevo, the life of border market, as well as educational centres came forward with their representatives speaking openly in public, for example in Serbian Church Choir, the theatre Djurkovic, at the Third Youth Assembly, or with the appeal to the Council in Karlovci, suggesting foundation of nursery school and kindergarten, as well as higher school for girls. Tereska Baric, who published *An open letter of a woman patriot*, where she advocated for the establishment of a cooperative “in order to help good, honest and gifted girls to learn and become good teachers and nursery nurses”, immediately after the decree, made a petition to the parish to found higher school for girls at its own expense. Pancevac commented on the initiative positively and sympathetically, emphasizing that such an institute would be for poor girls who are going through a difficult period since “they have no other choice but to beg or live as burdens to their families or go to a public market” (On higher education of girls (1972), *Mlada Srbadija* No 18, page 286).

Crucial role when foundation of Higher schools for girls is in question was played by a lawyer and politician from Pancevo, Dr Svetislav Kasapinovic. Novi Sad and Pancevo, called Athens of Serbia and Sparta of Serbia respectively, got their higher schools for girls simultaneously, in 1874. Girls enrolled it after finishing primary school and passing the entrance exam. Poor families were not obliged to pay the fees. Serbian Higher school for girls in Pancevo, focusing on and realizing basic ideas of education, national sense and praising maternity, had in its teaching core certain mixture of religious-moral upbringing and knowledge useful for practical life, deserves a special and privileged place. The institution was a nursery of a number of respectable, educated and patriotic women, a centre gathering exceptional professors and grounded on the highest achievements of the time in regard to didactics and teaching methodology (Tomandl 1940: 22-32).

The attitude the authorities had towards higher schools for girls was not stable. The council in Sremski Karlovci adopted in 1st of July 1971 a Decree on Serbian higher schools for girls, confirmed by the Crown Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Public Education. The Decree of Hungarian authorities acknowledge these schools as public institutes. The new school decree was adopted by the Council in 1892; however, it was disputed by the baron Banfi, the president of Hungarian government, having in mind that there had not been a unique statute on the legal issue of autonomy of Serbs in Austro-Hungary. In 1898 the first permanent and unique decree regulating higher schools for girls in Hungary and in 1911 there was a new one, according to which the schools should be organized not as higher, i.e. secondary schools, but as state civil schools for girls, with the accent on national subjects. In such a way an unusual phenomenon was legitimized, for these schools to last for four years and teach natural and social sciences, art and languages – but not to have the rank of secondary school. The Council in Karlovci did not give up and insisted on their intention implying national character of Serbian secondary schools; as a result there was a new draft in 1902 resulting in the autonomous school regulation for Serbian schools (Miladinovic 1897: 475; Acigan, 1979).

After half a century of work of higher schools for girls in Serbian language, it became clear that the attitude of the authorities was such that they were allowed, but under the condition that the parishes are able to support them on their own. If this was not the case, they were exposed to strong hungarization and their survival was questioned.

Schools for Housewives

Special type of schools for girls referred to schools for housewives. Their primary task was to: raise and educate female citizens and prepare them for reasonable, respectable and tidy housewives through theoretical and practical teaching.

There were public and private schools for housewives and both had to fulfil the same conditions in view of equipment, number of pupils and size of the school building and estate. The schools were managed by the management who supervised, took care of order, implementation of council decisions, preservation of the property, possible absences, incomes, expenses and budgets, reports in the end of the school year, stricter punishments of pupils and servants, correspondence with authorities and other schools, regulations and interior arrangements. The jurisdiction of the teaching council referred to teaching and discipline, moderate punishment of pupils, fulfilment of the school's main role, paying attention to its importance for the environment, responsibilities of teachers (warnings to teachers who did not carry out their duties, ranging from reprimands, loss of payment from 5 days to 4 months, transfer without covering moving costs to demission). Teachers who worked in these schools had the finished course of a school for housewives and they had all the rights given to primary school teachers – free lodging and heating, food at the cost of food for the school referent, scientific and practical professional improvement at courses. The school lasted for only one year, from 16th of August to the end of June. Teaching subjects taught in these schools were as follows: mother tongue, calculation with basic book keeping, physical exercise and mental health, agriculture, physics and chemistry, geography and history, hygiene, science on domestic economy,

domestic household, handwork of women, weaving and tailoring, nice handwriting and drawing and singing.

The precondition for girls to enrol the higher school was to have finished primary school, to be 14 years of age and to be healthy. Girls were living in a boarding school, where they had all they needed available, except from clothes and shoes; if their parents paid less than 25 dinars of tax, they did not pay lodging, food, heating and the rest. The marks were notified every two months, according to exam results (A decree on regulation of schools for housewives, IAP, Fond Dobrovoljne zadruga Srpkinja pancevackih, 242).

School for housewives and poultry school in Bavaniste was founded in 1907, as a Economic branch school. It is important that the institution was established in such a small village, having in mind that it was a contribution to schooling of female children and development of the region, which needed exactly this type of school.

Apart from the estate, the School also owned horses. Harvesting and threshing in the fields which belonged to school were carried out with the help of day labourers. Beans and potato were produced for sale, and the rest, grain, hay and clover were produced in the amount necessary for school functioning. Surplus of the cattle was also raised for sale, and milk was sold to school staff, but for half a price. In 1920 sale of surplus cattle was forbidden, even though the school had 22 heads. Dried corn was sold at the market price.

According to the school calendar, the haymow of wheat was in the end of June and the beginning of July, and the class for volunteering nurses was organized in 29th of June. Apart from the Eastern, there were other holidays: Saint Kirilo and Metodije, *Spasovdan* and *Duhovi*, *Vidovdan*, *Tjelovo*, Catholic and Orthodox *Petrovdan*, *Ilindan*, *Velika* and *Mala Gospojina*, *Svi Sveti*. May was scheduled for cultivation of corn and for work in vegetable garden, the whole July was foreseen for works in the garden, the end of August for digging of potatoes, the end of September for harvesting of corn, the beginning of November for digging of beet. The timetable was the following: in the morning: Monday – laundry, Tuesday – national language, history, handiwork, Wednesday – poultry, theory of cooking, handiwork, Thursday – gardening and work in the orchard, hygiene, handiwork, Friday: national language, upbringing, handiwork, Saturday: practice in the institute. In the afternoon: Monday – theory of tailoring and singing, Tuesday – dairy and drawing, Wednesday: accounting and housework, Thursday – physics and chemistry, beekeeping and sericulture, Friday – history and geography, gymnastics.

Teaching contents involved the following fields: calculation: operations; physics and chemistry: heat, lime, sugar and starch, sulphur, phosphorus, iron, copper, mercury, tin, natural and artificial colours, soda, glass, salt, iodine, proteins and fats (vitamins), water, sound and other physical phenomena; hygiene with biology: body, periods of life and day, nursing, birth-giving; Serbian language: folk poems, Vuk Karadzic, Glisic and Veselinovic, Santic. There was a correlation between the teaching of Serbian language and history (e.g. Starina Novak and Deli Radivoje within Serbian language in the same time when haiduks and concealers are thought. Teaching of history and geography referred to: old Slovenes, south Slovenes and neighbours, Cyril and Metodije, first Serbian

states, Croatia, the Nemanjic family, Battle of Kosovo, Despot kingdom, life under Turks, uprisings, Obrenovic and Karadjordjevic families, Austro-Hungary, and then Balkans wars and the First World War, Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In the scope of handiwork, the pupils of the School for housewives mastered the following skills: sewing of pillows, curtains, pillows and shirt embroidery, using a sewing machine, folk motives embroidery, table cloths, aprons, dresses. Along with all the rest, practice involved ironing and mending. The school was subscribed to the magazines *School* and *Village* (IAP, Fond domacicke skole, 21).

The girls were supposed to pass an exam in November, first the oral part and the next day the written part, and on the third day a display of works was organized. Apart from the acquired general knowledge, harvested fruits, what and money earned through the sale of milk, the exhibition was the crown of a one-year-lasting schooling in the school for housewives (Ibid).

Trade School for Girls

In order to study Trade school for girls in Pancevo, which was founded in 1903, it is necessary to get familiar with the Voluntary Cooperative of Serbian women from Pancevo, having in mind that it initiated the establishment of the Trade school for female children in order to meet the needs of Serbian female youth (Todorovic, Hes 1990: 33-37). From time to time the Trade school is mentioned under the name *Radenicka* in the sources. The idea on the establishment of the Voluntary Cooperative of Serbian women from Pancevo was suggested by the professor of Serbian higher school for girls in Pancevo, Jovan Popovic. As an editor of the magazine "Vesnik" he wrote in 1893 about the need to found a voluntary cooperative consisting of women. In the next 1894 there was a founding assembly of the cooperative in the premises of Serbian higher school for girls, when Jovan Petrovic read the draft of the Regulations, which were with small moderations submitted for approval to the Royal Hungarian government. The birthday of the Cooperative is May 30th, the day when in 1984 a printed manifesto was issued inviting members to join the organization titled *To Dear Serbian Sisters from Pancevo and Nearby Places*. In the end of 1894 the Cooperative consisted of 167 members, out of which 130 regular members, 33 supportive members and 4 voluntary. Their motive was to morally and educationally support Serbian, especially female youth and their range of activity was rather broad and versatile (Todorovic, Hes 1990: 33-37).

The initiative for founding the Trade school for girls was in February 10th 1902 submitted to the assembly by the vicar Dusan Radulovic, as a secretary of the Voluntary Cooperative of Serbian women from Pancevo. The suggestion was accepted and the school was opened in January 2nd 1903. The cooperative was responsible to provide trained teachers from the Higher school for girls. An appeal was sent to Serbian parents, with respect and emphasize on the importance of the school and a warning that its survival depended on the response of pupils. In the first year the enrolment lasted to September 12th and the applications were submitted to the vicar Radulovic. The appeal, composed on the Orthodox holiday *Saint Mother Angelina* was signed by Anka K. Milutinovic, the president of the association *Zadruga Srpkinja Pancevackih* [Voluntary Cooperative of Serbian women from Pancevo] (IAP, Varia, 1770). The Trade school for girls in Pancevo existed until 1944,

as long as the above mentioned association, the Voluntary Cooperative of Serbian women from Pancevo. (IAP, Fond Dobrovoljne zadruge Srpkinja Pancevackih, 131, 153, 205).

Since May 12th 1903 the first venue of the school was in the house of Church municipality. Then the association *Prva pancevacka zajednica za vadjevinu* gave a flat to the School and so the School was provided with all it needed, i.e. the space with enough light and at appropriate place. In 1906 the Credit bank offered the school a venue in the house of foundation of David Zivadinovic. Having in mind that the number of the female pupils had in the meaning time increased, it needed larger premises. As a result of reorganization, the whole side in the street was at school's disposal, so that all the classes had their own separate classrooms (IAP, Zbirka profesora Zivanovica 79, 87, 97). The school moved several times between the two world wars.

It is worth mentioning that, apart from the enrolment and other fees, the Voluntary Cooperative of Serbian women from Pancevo supported its school financially, while the help was also provided by the Church municipality and philanthropists. The Credit bank in Pancevo gave 400 crowns to the school each year. The department for underwear was advancing each year, since there were a lot of orders. The department for dresses had very little work, having in mind that the parents of middle and lower classes considered that their children should train for tailoring and sewing dresses at private dressmakers. The customers were reluctant to have their dressed made by novices. As a consequence, the department had to close in 1910/11. Such a decision was also a result of the fact that the Church municipality cancelled its monthly support of 840 crowns (IAP, Zbirka profesora Zivanovica, 154). When in 1912 Mita Topalovic died, a musician, choir conductor and a professor in Higher school for girls, the members of the Cooperative went to his funeral and gave a speech, in gratitude to all he had done and for having gifted 100 crowns to the Cooperative, intended for the Trade school, in memory of his wife, Marija, who had been a councillor of the Cooperative for many years (Petrovic 1995: 72).

There were two classes, i.e. departments in the Trade school, one for underwear (until 1919), embroidery and other services and another for dresses. The school lasted for three years, and the program of professional subjects was classified according to school year (1st, 2nd and 3rd) in the following way:

- 1) Various basic handiwork of women, like, for example, knitting, simple embroidery, crochet, noting patterns, plain stitches made by hand, white embroidery, points drawing;
- 2) In the first class underwear and embroidery: tailoring and sewing of underwear, using sewing machine, drawing, variety of needlework; in the second class: female dresses, taking measures, making patterns and tailoring, sewing by hand, as well as using sewing machine.
- 3) In the first class underwear and embroidery: practical work, taking measures, drawing patterns, tailoring.

Apart from professional subjects there were other subjects taught in the school referring to general education: Christianity science, Serbian language, calculation and housekeeping. These subjects were taught by the teachers from Serbian Higher school

for girls: Danica Ilic, Isidora Sekulic, Mara Maksimovic, Vukosava Letic, Jovanka Damjanovic and Zorka Neskovic. Religious education was taught by Dusan Radulovic, the principal.

Starting from October 1st 1908 conversation in German and Hungarian language was introduced. These two subjects were a part of the curriculum with 3 lessons a week in the afternoon between 4 and 5 PM. The fee for attending one conversation was 2 crowns a month. Conversation in German language was taught by M. Kranjcevic and in Hungarian language D. Ilic (IAP, Fond Dobrovoljne zadruge Srpkinja pancevackih, 55).

There were regular and private pupils. Regular pupils were those girls who were of good health, conduct and poor, who had finished the Higher school for girls. They were not obliged to learn general-educational subjects. Girls attending the 2nd year of Higher school for girls, i.e. those attending the 6th grade of primary school could also enrol the Trade school for girls; as an exception, the girls who finished the 4th grade with very good success and 12 years old could also enrol the Trade school for girls, but they had to attend all the classes in all the subjects within the curriculum regularly. Regular pupils attended the School for free. Excellent pupils even received 30% of the amount they earned through their own work. Regular pupils, who paid two crowns a month, could do the work they brought from home ten days a month. Private pupils had to pay six crowns a month.

The first teacher for underwear was Mara Cvijanovic. She graduated from the Professional school in Zagreb and was trained for "a teacher teaching handiwork for underwear sewing and stitching and all other types of additional handiwork" (IAP, Zbirka profesora Zivanovica, 79). In 1905 she was succeeded by Mara Nikolic who had graduated from the same school. She signed a contract with the association the Voluntary Cooperative of Serbian women from Pancevo and received a yearly salary of 840 forints. She was under obligation to submit a report each month to the school principal, and in cooperation with another teacher and according to the approval of the Board, she had to organize an exhibition of pupils' works in the end of the school year. Due to the fact that Mara Nikolic's treatment of the pupils was rather harsh, the Board had made a decision to dismiss her in July 14th 1905. According to the suggestion and intervention of the Board, Jelena Purkarevic, who had finished the Trade school in Pancevo with excellent results, was in the subsequent year sent to State professional school in Zagreb to finish it within a year. Her working place as a teacher was waiting for her in Pancevo. In the meantime, Irena Miscevic was teaching the subject in question. In school year 1907/08, Jelena Purkarevic started working as a teacher, since she succeeded in graduating from the professional school in Zagreb with excellent marks. When the class, i.e. department for dresses is in question, it was first taught by Danica Brankovic, and then by Ljubica Purkarevic (Todorovic, Hes, 1990: 24-25).

What had in time become the basic feature of the Trade school for girls and made its mark permanent was the existence of the course dealing with the weaving of rugs typical for the region of Banat. Merits for the introduction of the course belong to the professor Jovanka Poznan. Aware of the value of the rugs as recognizable hand made product of Serbian national space, as well as the authenticity of Banat rugs, she considered it a responsibility of her own and of the generation whose upbringing she was part of – to

preserve and promote the tradition of weaving. The Trade school in Pancevo became well-known for its workshop for making typical Banat rugs and numerous girls enrolled the school because of the workshop. The public was carefully following their creativity, and the exhibitions of works became regular and expected with joy and impatience. Rewards were also part of the story. At agricultural exhibition in Pancevo in 1905 they were rewarded with golden diploma, and since their hardworking and imaginative efforts continued in the time of Kingdom Yugoslavia, the Chamber of crafts from Belgrade rewarded the School in 1938 with the Diploma for participation in the First World Crafts Exhibition (IAP, Fond Dobrovoljne zadruge Srpinja pancevackih, 131, 153, 154, 204).

At the meeting of Serbian Orthodox national school council in January 24th 1912 in Sremski Karlovci, a decision was made for Voluntary Cooperation of Serbian women from Pancevo to, in agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church municipality, transform the Trade School for women into a prolonged course of Serbian Higher school for girls, monitored by the School council and this happened in 1919 (Todorovic, Hes 1990: 24-25).

The Trade school from Bela Crkva, whose documents were unfortunately not preserved, was founded along the lines of the school in Pancevo and supported by the Voluntary Cooperation of Serbian women from Bela Crkva. It worked even during the period of the First World War (IABC, Dosije Fonda belocrkvanskih skola).

Girls and women spent their time in weaving, crochet, embroidery, knitting, sewing, reading (French, German, English works...), music, visual arts, Above all, the women considered their handiwork to be a rest and a refuge from hard work in a cooperative or household and they invested a lot of love in it. As a consequence, trade (craft) schools where, apart from the basic knowledge referring to Serbian language and history, geography, calculation and Christianity, they studied fine women handiwork and tailoring of underwear or women dresses, were closest to them.

A new age started in the history of schools for female children, as well as for those in Pancevo. Higher school for girls and Trade school for girls in Pancevo continued their work after the First World War in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. What these and related schools contributed to the new state could be measured by the decades of existence and the number of pupils they prepared for life, as well as the designed curricula; on the other hand, the mark of the first secondary and higher schools for girls is much more profound, possible to consider and important only when compared with schools that had existed before them, and with the environment.

An attempt to count the girls from the region of Banat military border who did not finish only the mandatory four-year-primary school, could result in the data subject to various explanations, ranging from discouraging number to admiration for the very beginnings of education of female children. At the beginning of the 20th century, an attitude prevailed that there was no reason for content: on the contrary, only slightly more than one third of Serbian children were in schools, while in Pancevo a decrease was easily noticed, explained by the increased number of "poor households" (Curic 1961: 117). At the whole space of Banat border there were 28 girls who have obtained higher education. Out of all the pupils of Serbian higher school in Pancevo, during its existence in Austro-Hungary,

77 of them became teachers, one graduated from medicine, one finished conservatorium, two were postal clerks and two were book-keepers. (Izvestaj Srpske vise devojacke skole 1920, IAP).

The existence of other schools for girls, trade schools and schools for housewives and the fact that some daughters were sent to foreign countries, could lessen but not significantly change negative impression. It seems difficult to find reasonable justification for the fact that the majority of families actually ignored the appeals of schools and efforts of the state, the church and respectable citizens. Referring to material reasons sound more like an excuse, having in mind that the policy of schools implied help to the poor.

Conclusion

Prejudices about an educated woman were slowly weakening and disappearing, while the efforts of the state and the readiness of the elite of Serbian society in Hungary to accept the spirit of time – deserve all respect. The influence first educated women had on the public and private life was great and encourages to further research.

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