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"DR DRAGINJA DRAGA LJOCIC – THE FIRST FEMALE DOCTOR IN SERBIA"

Short title:" The Heroine of Medicine"

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**Introduction**

Draginja Draga Ljocic was born on February 22, 1855 in Sabac, Serbia and comes from a wealthy merchant family which experienced a great injustice (1).

Civic life of Serbia at that time "was coloured" by Aromanians, capable merchants and craftsmen, who were distinguished by their wealth, language skills and ambition, so they differed from natives because they educated children and did not make traditional differences between male and female children (2).

Draga's father, Dima Ljocic, fought for their family property, leading a multi-year lawsuit with a prominent family from Sabac and then he was left without money for life. Since he had suffered the great injustice in life, he borrowed five thalers and paid the clerk to ring the bell. Answering the question asked by a citizen from Sabac: "Who died?", Dima said: "Justice died and I am burying it today". He was punished for this act and sentenced to 25 beatings. Once being a wealthy merchant, Dima Ljocic now became a poor "bunner" with the income of only seven thalers. In spite of having two sons, he decided to educate a daughter (2).

This injustice done to her father announced what would happen to Draga Ljocic, which is to persistently fight for the rights of women in medicine, shown in the figure 1.

![Figure 1. Dr Draginja Draga Ljocic – The Heroine of Medicine](Photo: sabacturizam.org Source: www.svetplus.com)

**Main part**
Draga finished elementary school in her hometown. Her teacher, Persida Pinterovic, recognized her as a gifted person, and accepted her to live with her in Belgrade, where she finished "Great school". She had no doubts about the choice of the University. The only choice was "The University of Zurich", where from 1860s, as being the only place in Europe at the time, girls were able to study. As an ambitious and hard-working woman, she was successfully studying, constantly struggling with severe shortages. Her brothers helped her occasionally, and since 1874 she had been using the scholarship of forty dinars per month, which the merchant Jevrem Pantic left to good students in Sabac. It is revealed from her diary that she returned the money later, which had been borrowed during the study time (3).

In June, 1876 because of her strong patriotic feelings, she interrupted the studies and as medical assistance joined the Serbian-Turkish war in which she obtained the rank of medical lieutenant. She was dedicatedly treating the wounded at the Military Academy and at Hospital in Svilajnac. She took part in the war battles of Sumatovac (3).

After the truce declared in 1877, Draga returned to Zurich, continued the studies and by the end of 1878 successfully graduated. She wrote a final paperwork i.e. a doctoral dissertation entitled "Contribution to the operational therapy of uterus fibromyoma" at the University of Zurich, which was published the same year in Zurich (3), shown in the figure 2.
Figure 2. Draga Ljocic’s doctoral dissertation, “Contribution to the operational therapy of uterus fibromyoma”, The University of Zurich, 1878.

(www.srpskilegat.rs, riznicasrpska.net)

At the age of only twenty-four she became a doctor of medicine, surgery, obstetrics and eye diseases, and later she opened a private consulting-room as a "doctor of medicine, obstetrics and eye diseases". At that time she was the first woman doctor in Serbia. Just then, her continuous and excellent fight for the equal rights of men and women in medicine began (3).

On February 26, 1879, Draga Ljocic required a permission from the Ministry to deal with a medical call but got rejected, despite the fact that at that time there were only 79 doctors in Serbia, mostly foreigners. Because of the intermise of Dr Vladan Djordjevic, the chief of Sanity, amenable minister assented. It was decided that Draga Ljocic should pass the civil service examination. If she showed enough knowledge, medical practice would be allowed to her. The Committee gathered was made up of doctor Vladan Djordjevic (envoy of Duchess Natalia), and doctors Mladen Jankovic, and Djordje Klinkovski. Dr. Draga was asked theoretical and practical questions in anatomy, physiology, prescribing of medicaments, gynecology, obstetrics and internal medicines. Some of the questions were: "What are you going to do in a crossbirth, when one arm of the baby fell out?", "What
opiates do you know?" What are the poisons, that people most often poison, and what are the antidotes? ” The Commission went into detail to find her objectionable. She successfully answered all the questions.

According to the conducted protocol, the exam was held on April 6, 1879 in City and District Belgrade Hospital. Having passed the exam and showed that she obtained the necessary medical knowledge completely the same as men doctors, she got the right for private medical practice, but not the opportunity to work in the civil service, on the grounds that women did not serve the army (4).

At that time higher education of female children wasn’t usual and desired. Nevertheless, Draga Ljocic refused to live in accordance with the rigid principles of the "Balkan time", rejecting dogmas and prejudices of the environment. She acquired the highest education and deservingly became the first woman doctor - a Serbian and Yugoslavian, respectively the Heroine of Medicine (5).

When she later became a member of the Serbian Medical Society, due to serious health problems, she went to the sanatorium in Crimea, near Yalta, where she was being treated for a while. Only on July 6, 1882, the new minister, Milutin Garasanin set her to be a medical assistant in the General State Hospital, the largest acknowledged treatment center in Serbia at that time. Almost the entire 1883 was the turning point in the private life of Dr Draga Ljocic. She married Mr. Rasa Milosevic, one of the founders of the people's radical party, thus breaking another prejudice of her time by keeping her maiden name. Shortly after getting married, she got a daughter. After that, the hardest days of her life followed. Rasa Milosevic was politically sentenced to six years in prison, while Draga stayed alone with the baby, burdened with many worries and troubles. Working very hard in medical practice, in many different ways she tried to provide material existence for her family, dignifiedly enduring difficult days of Rasa’s imprisonment (2).

During the wars in 1885, while the Serbo-Bulgarian war was going on, the discrimination against women doctors was decreasing. Dr Draga was working then as the only doctor in three Belgrade hospitals: General State Hospital, the Infectious Disease Hospital and the Hospital for the wounded, located in the Great School in Belgrade, headed by professor Josif Pancic (5).

War defeats on Slivnitsa led to the change of the political climate in Serbia, and convicted radicals were pardoned and released. Draga's husband returned to the family
home on January 1, 1886. At the end of the same year, they got another daughter. Dr Draga and Mr Rasa Milosevic had four daughters - Radmila, Spomena, Zora and Olga (2, 5).

In December, 1886, the minister Milutin Spromoted Dr Draga to an assistant doctor, but her rights were still not the same as the rights of her colleagues. She was affected by this injustice and discrimination, so she addressed to the minister demanding equal rights with men in the service. She suffered another humiliation afterwards, for she was required to show her index and diploma, which normally was not the custom in any doctors’ advancements. She was asked to evince the certificate of maturity examination, which was impossible to enclose, because at that time, when Dr Draga finished Higher school for women, maturity examination did not even exist in Serbia. And the needed opinion of the chief of Sanity about Dr Draga’s request was negative. Even the compellation to King Milan or to the State Council didn’t help to overcome the injustice. As a response to her request she was fired (2, 6). The cancellation didn’t harm her reputation because patients had recognized a good person and a good doctor inside her long time before that. She continued private practical and part-time work in the Department of Monopoly. During 1904, she founded the "mother organization" with Sara Karamarkovic in order to reduce infant mortality and to take care of abandoned children. Thanks to her perseverance and dedication, the organization received a building in the Student Street in Belgrade, where "Home for the foundlings" was later opened. Without any material compensation, Dr Draga was treating students of the Workers schools and for money she only worked in the factory of tobacco and matches for more than thirty years. From her diary entries we know that among these workers she was the favorite and that they called her "our mother" (6). Dr Draga was the first president of the Society of Belgrade women doctors which was established in 1919/1920 and which was very active in raising funds for the construction of the first hospital for women and children, in which it was planned only female doctors to work. The Scottish Women's Society provided assistance, but the construction of this hospital was slow, because the resources were financially low, and the Dr Elsie Inglis - Memorial Hospital was named after the devotion to the brave doctors of the Scottish Mission (6).

Clearly visible were her zealous efforts to monitor trends and the developments of European medicine and to implant them into Serbian. She translated the book "Raising small children" from the Russian language which was dedicated to mothers, because
bringing up children depends on their knowledge, even society and nations. Dr Draga was interested in developments in gynecology and obstetrics, so she published the newspaper from the French medical journals in the magazine "Serbian Archives of Medicine" in 1885. Dr Draga was 57 years old and of poor health when Balkan wars broke out. Nevertheless, without sparing herself, she worked day and night at the clinic for the public and the poor, as well as in the hospital of Belgrade benefactor Nikola Spasic. From the diary she led, her eternal disagreement with the current views on the status and fostering of women doctors was clearly presented. All her life she struggled with the Balkan understanding of women and women doctors in society. She participated in the creation of the Women Medical Society after World War I and in the establishment of the Women Hospital on Dedinje. When World War I began, her family retreated to Nis, where she unselfishly continued working at hospital. As the war progressed, her husband Rasa and daughter Radmila crossed Albania, went on Corfu, and then on the Salonica front. Dr Draga with three daughters went from Nis to Thessaloniki, then to Athens, and from there via Rome and Nice they arrived in Lausanne. Throughout the war, she was engaged in humanitarian work, organizing sending packages to our prisoners in German and Hungarian camps. It should be noted that in the first private clinic she worked with Dr Jovan Jovanovic Zmaj and Dr Laza Lazarevic, the doctors and famous Serbian writers (7).

Dr Draga in her diary often wrote that the colleagues rarely respected her in terms of professional work. Through her continuous and diligent work, she was trying to show that the expertise and knowledge had nothing to do with gender differences (she was called a feminist, through political struggle for the emancipation of women) (8).

After the Balkan Wars and the First World War, she returned to Serbia and only then she got her title a "real doctor". At the end of 1924 she was entitled to a pension (9).

A few words about Diary: it is consited of three topics: a description of life in Belgrade, two travel books, one about going to Sabac and Bosanska Gradiska, and the other about the travel to Crimea. The diary of Dr Draga is clearly cognisable and it is a valuable source of information for making the whole picture of this remarkable woman’s life, as she speaks about herself, her world and her time (10).

Why do we mention her today? You will certainly conclude that this is from justifiable, essential and humane reasons for the overall and better medical being of today. Much earlier, unjustly neglected and not always professionally respected, Dr Draga
succeeded in fighting for her personal rights, but a much greater significance of her historical way is the fact that she cleared the way to her female colleagues and to all women doctors to be.

Because Europe admired the famous, brave Serbian woman, the first female doctor, a woman officer in the Balkans and the fourth lady in the Old World with a medicine university degree. Because, after Dr. Maria Zibold, who was a major, she was the second Serbian ambulance officer, which was very rare at the time (11).

Today, a reminder to us (Forgotten Serbian women): she encountered many obstacles in her life and professional struggle, in war and in peace, but her enterprise, endurance and strength won in the end.

**Short conclusion**

Her professional contribution to, at that time not very developed, Serbian medicine is immense, and for even greater admiration is the contribution of Draga’s life fighting and all her life's work for the actualization of women's rights.

She died on November 5, 1926 at 71 years old, in her house in Topcider in Belgrade. She was buried in Belgrade and coronalled by the epithet of being the first woman doctor in Serbia or the Heroine of the Spirit. It is believed even today that she had only one flaw – because she was not a man (12).

Fortunately, Dr Draga Ljocic has her descendants, who with love and pride cherish the memory of their great and courageous mother and grandmother, still today after 161 years. Her daughter Dr. Radmila Milosevic was also a highly regarded physician in Serbia and a participant in the wars of 1912-1918. years.

Today, Health Care Center in Sabac proudly bears her name for the memory (not to forget), as she was the first woman doctor in Serbia and the most interesting woman in the modern Serbian history.

On September 29, 2017 the bust of the first female doctor in Serbia, Dr Draginja Draga Ljocic, was erected by the Serbian Medical Society, shown in the figure 3.
Today, there are so many young female doctors and female students in the Serbian Armed Forces, that this manuscript in history of medicine should "enlighten", such as the lighthouse, the female medical population and the professions of all women, who have not become familiar with the Heroine of Medicine.

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