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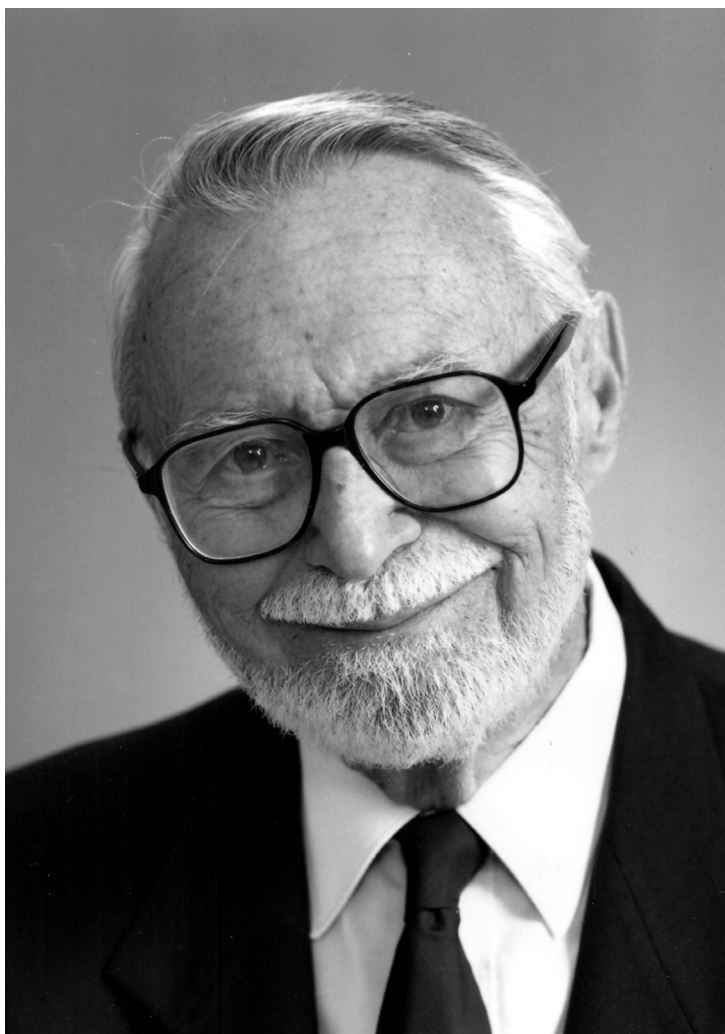
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A TRIBUTE TO DIMITRIJE V. DJORDJEVIĆ
(1922–2009)

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Dimitrije V. Djordjević, a founding member of the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade



DIMITRIJE V. DJORDJEVIĆ (1922–2009)

Leading Serbian and Serbian-American expert on Balkan history

by Dušan T. Bataković

Dimitrije Djordjević, one of the foremost Serbian and Serbian-American scholars, a renowned specialist in the Balkan history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was born February 17th, 1922, in Belgrade, Serbia, in what then was the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He came from a distinguished Belgrade family which gave Serbia important businessmen and, on the maternal side, renowned scholars and generals. In his own words, he had a “cozy, protected childhood and adolescence in pre-World War Two days”. He learnt French from his Swiss governess, took English lessons from an early age, mastered German at school and subsequently learnt Russian to be able to fully pursue his research. In his productive life, which spanned most of the twentieth century, Djordjević, a respected Belgrader, a Westerner devoted to European values, experienced all manner of hardship, from the terrors of war and post-war persecutions to his strenuous struggle to earn a place in the academic world. A supporter of the *Serbian Cultural Club*, an elite patriotic organization which was founded on the eve of the Second World War (1937) and assembled leading Serbian intellectuals under the presidency of Professor Slobodan Jovanović, Djordjević adhered to the antifascist line of Yugoslav politics with youthful enthusiasm and believed in determined resistance to the growing threat posed by Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy. The Serbian Cultural Club was actively committed to defending Yugoslavia against the aspirations of the revisionist powers and, in domestic politics, to advocating the concept “strong Serbia, strong Yugoslavia”.

After the sudden Nazi attack on Yugoslavia in April 1941, backed by pro-Axis supporters, and the ensuing rapid dismemberment of the Yugoslav Kingdom, Dimitrije Djordjević and his younger brother Mihailo, as many other young democratic patriots from the Serbian Cultural Club, sought to join the nascent resistance forces hiding in the mountains of Serbia. The brothers soon became devoted followers of Colonel Dragoljub “Draža” Mihailović, leader of anti-Nazi royalist resistance in occupied Serbia and Yugoslavia, and joined his fledging troops in Ravna Gora Mountain in central Serbia. The Djordjević brothers became members of Youth Command 501 (*JURAO 501* or *Omladinski Štab 501*), a special task force within the Yugoslav Home Army (*Jugoslovenska vojska u otadžbini*) assigned with ex-

panding the resistance network among the royalist anti-Nazi Serbian youth in Belgrade and the rest of central Serbia. Considered as “mercenaries of the West” by the pro-Axis “Zbor” of Dimitrije Ljotić, and as “Greater-Serbian chauvinists” by Tito-led communists, the young followers of Draža Mihailović (who was promoted to the rank of general and in early 1942 appointed war minister by the London-based government of Yugoslavia headed by Prof. Slobodan Jovanović) agitated for the common Allied cause with the Western Allies and their missions in Serbia and Montenegro.

In 1942 Dimitrije Djordjević was captured by the Gestapo and, like many other Serb war prisoners, sent to the notorious Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Djordjević survived its horrors, was transferred to other Nazi-controlled camps, fell gravely ill along the way and was eventually released. However, upon his return to occupied Serbia and his reunion with his family in Belgrade, Dimitrije Djordjević rejoined General Mihailović’s forces in central Serbia. They were involved in various anti-Nazi activities, including military cooperation with the Allies, military sabotage in urban centres and sustained cultural activism aimed at gaining wider support among the resistance-minded Serbian youth.

In October 1944, after the decisive military support of Stalin’s Red Army, the communist-led and Moscow-backed partisan forces of J. B. Tito entered Belgrade and took control over Serbia. As a result of Churchill’s strong pressure on the government of young King Peter II in London, the undefeated royalist armies of General Mihailović at first were invited to join Tito’s partisans, only to be abandoned by the Western Allies as Yugoslavia was abandoned to the Soviet sphere of influence. Supported by Stalin, Tito eventually established communist dictatorship in the whole of Yugoslavia in 1945. After the Yugoslav communists, backed by Soviet troops, established control in Serbia, General Mihailović’s followers were labelled Nazi collaborators and faced massive arrests and long-term prison sentences in the gulags of Tito.

Dimitrije Djordjević managed to survive the initial, and deadly, phase of “Red Terror” launched both against democrats and royalists in Serbia during the communist takeover, but did not escape the mass persecutions unleashed in the early post-war years (1944–1947). Amidst the Red Terror, Djordjević and a group of Serb democrats and patriots from Belgrade were so courageous as to set up a clandestine democratic organization (National Revolutionary Serbian Organization) made up mostly of high-school and university students. After being uncovered, members of the anticommunist democratic youth were arrested and, as “enemies of the people”, sentenced to long-term imprisonment. Thus Djordjević was once again incarcerated, this time in two of the most notorious prisons in Serbia, Zabela and Sremska Mitrovica. Released under the general amnesty proclaimed by the Titoist

regime in 1947, he rejoined his impoverished family in Belgrade and began to make plans for his future.

Because of his stubborn resistance to the Titoist regime, Dimitrije Djordjević had much trouble finding employment and enrolling at the University of Belgrade. Despite his pre-war wish to study law and become a lawyer, he ended up studying history at the School of Philosophy (*Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu*), from which he graduated in 1954. His first monograph, *Serbia's Access to the Adriatic Sea and the Conference of Ambassadors in London 1912* (*Izlazak Srbije na Jadransko more i Konferencija ambasadora u Londonu 1912*), was self-published in Belgrade in 1956¹ at the cost of a family flat in downtown Belgrade. The monograph was a success among Balkan historians because it followed the example of excellent diplomatic history writing set in pre-war Serbia by the work of Vladimir Ćorović, Grgur Jakšić, Dragoslav Stranjaković or Vasilj Popović. Dimitrije Djordjević showed both talent and erudition in treating many intricate aspects of the complex diplomatic negotiations during and after the Balkan Wars, using both published and unpublished source materials in several languages. His scrupulous work did not go unnoticed by the person he thought of as his role-model, Professor Slobodan Jovanović (Yovanovich), former Prime Minister of the Yugoslav Royal Government in Exile (1942–1943). Although the communist takeover of 1945 made it impossible for Prof. Jovanović to return to Serbia, turning his exile into a lifelong one, he remained the leading worldwide authority on Serbian history, which was recognized by his election as a *membre d'Institut* to the French *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*.

Djordjević was dismissed from the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences on account of his anticommunist biography, but showed maturity as a historian through his monograph on the diplomatic history of the Balkan Wars. This enabled him to join the Historical Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences (*Istorijski institut Srpske akademije nauka*) as a researcher. Over the following decade, Djordjević published a number of scholarly studies and articles in various Serbian and Yugoslav journals, covering many aspects of Serbia's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history from a broader Balkan perspective and often tackling issues of pre-1918 Serbian politics and society which the communist *nomenklatura* found ideologically undesirable, encouraging instead the study of the workers' movement or socialist ideas in pre-First World War Serbia.

In 1962, Dimitrije Djordjević published an outstanding biography of Milovan Dj. Milovanović, a foremost politician and diplomat of late

¹ Cf. Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 36, no. 87 (June 1958), 580–581.

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Serbia and the architect of the Balkan League of 1912.² Written in an accessible style, this biography of Milovanović remains an exemplary combination of a history of mentality with a social and political history. There followed his PhD thesis on the “Tariff War” between Austria-Hungary and Serbia (*Carinski rat Austro-Ugarske i Srbije 1906–1911*), published by the Historical Institute the same year. Based on ample documentary sources and completely free of empty Marxist phraseology, it offered a sophisticated analysis of the complex interplay between the internal political dynamic in democratic post-1903 Serbia and Austria-Hungary’s mounting external pressure thwarting the independent foreign policy of Serbia, formerly her client state under the previous Obrenović dynasty. This outstanding study, covering a wide range of diplomatic, political and military events in the turbulent decade of Serbia’s history preceding the Great War, was praised among experts as the best post-1945 monograph on modern Serbia.³

In 1965, Dimitrije Djordjević published in French a remarkable synthesis of the nineteenth-century national revolutions in the Balkans, which established him as a noteworthy expert on modern Balkan history.⁴ It demonstrated that Djordjević was an outstanding mind capable of systematizing his vast knowledge and providing perceptive historical interpretations. Moreover, a balanced and unbiased historian with a wider European perspective. The dynamic of the national revolutions, scrutinized comparatively, revealed the Balkan nations’ strong dependence on the European concepts of nationalism, sovereignty and modernization.

An important moment in Djordjević’s scholarly career took place at the 1965 world congress of historians in Vienna. In the heated debate over Serbia’s alleged responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War, he promptly and convincingly presented fact-based counterarguments and valuable interpretations in several languages. The strong impression his discussion made on many foreign scholars resulted in his being invited to deliver lectures across Western Europe and the United States.

Dimitrije Djordjević also had remarkable organizational skills and effectively promoted Serbian scholarship and fostered the reestablishment of Balkan mutuality across the boundaries imposed by the Cold War. He should be given credit for re-establishing scholarly ties with leading Greek institutes and universities after a long, ideologically motivated break

² Dimitrije Djordjević, *Milovan Milovanović* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1962).

³ Review by Wayne Vucinich, *Slavic Review* 23, no. 2 (June 1964), 354–355.

⁴ Dimitrije Djordjević, *Révolutions Nationales des peuples balkaniques, 1804–1914* (translation Margita Ristic) (Belgrade : Institut d’Histoire 1965, 251 p). Cf. the review by Gale Stokes, *Slavic Review* 29, no. 1 (March 1970), 115–116.

(Djordjević, by the way, is the author of the only history book on modern Serbia, from 1804 to 1918, ever published in Greek, in 1970), thereby paving the way for a dynamic collaboration with the Thessaloniki-based Institute for Balkan Studies (IMXA) and related institutions in Central and Western Europe, from Vienna and Munich to Paris and London.

After some fifteen years as a fellow of the Historical Institute, Dimitrije Djordjević enthusiastically took part in the founding of the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1969. By reviving the tradition of the pre-war Balkan Institute (*Institut des Etudes balkaniques*), the newly-founded institute reintroduced a multidisciplinary approach and a Balkan perspective to Serbian scholarship, historiography most of all.

Djordjević spent an academic year as a visiting professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Upon his return he naturally expected that his international renown and high scholarly achievement would be enough to earn him the position of a professor at Belgrade University. However, his application for professorship in 1970 was rejected on account of his anticommunist activity and his past involvement in General Mihailović's royalist movement. It was then that he finally made the decision to leave communist Yugoslavia. Offered prestigious positions by several American universities, he eventually opted for the University of California, Santa Barbara. Djordjević (known among his colleagues as Dimitri) created the Graduate Program of Balkan Studies at its History Department and taught modern and contemporary Yugoslav, Balkan, Russian and European history for two decades. As a professor, Djordjević was very proud of his nineteen PhD and nine MA graduates, the famous "Balkan family" as he used to call them. Many of them are now university professors and scholars all over the world. Upon his retirement in 1991, his grateful former students prepared a Festschrift in his honour.⁵

Once he settled in California, Djordjević untiringly continued his work on a number of projects. With Stephen Fischer-Galati as a joint author, he published an enlarged and revised version of his history of the Balkan revolutions, which remains a reference book on nineteenth-century Balkan history.⁶ In 1985, he organized a conference on the Balkan Wars in Belgrade. The resulting volume edited by him and Bela Kiraly and published as part of the East European Monographs series (1987), has been

⁵ *Scholar, Patriot, Mentor: historical essays in honor of Dimitrije Djordjevic*, eds. Richard B. Spence & Linda L. Nelson (Boulder, CO.: East European Monographs, 1992; New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press).

⁶ Dimitrije Djordjevic and Stephen Fischer-Galati, *The Balkan Revolutionary Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

exceptionally useful for taking a fresh look at the changed realities caused by the collapse of Ottoman central authority in the Balkans on the eve of the Great War.⁷ His lifelong affection for the Institute for Balkan Studies inspired him to organize a conference at Santa Barbara devoted to migrations in Balkan history. The resulting collection of papers was subsequently published under the same title.⁸ Yet another frequently cited collection of papers submitted at a scholarly conference held at Santa Barbara, tracing the origins of the Yugoslav idea and various approaches to Yugoslav unification prior to and during the Great War, was published under his editorship.⁹

By assembling teams of foremost experts on Balkan, Yugoslav and Serbian history through various projects, Dimitrije Djordjević joined the distinguished group of Serbian-American scholars, such as Wayne S. Vucinich, Traian Stoianovich, Michael Boro Petrovich, Alex N. Dragnich, Milorad M. Drashkovich, George Vid Tomashevich, Vasa D. Mihailovich, Tanya Popovich, Andrei Simic and many others, whose work has marked the splendid advancement of Serbian and Balkan studies in the latter part of the twentieth century. Djordjević was also the editor of the journal *Serbian Studies*, and president of *The North American Association for Serbian Studies* (1986–88), which has been assembling scholars of Serbian origin employed at universities and scholarly institutions in the USA and Canada.¹⁰

Apart from his work on Serbian and Balkan themes in the USA, Djordjević continued to publish in his native Serbia. He contributed several chapters on early twentieth-century Serbia to the ten-volume *History of the Serbian People*,¹¹ and published two very influential collections of his

⁷ Béla K. Király and Dimitrije Djordjevic, eds., *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars* (Boulder CO: Social Science Monographs; Highland Lakes NJ : Atlantic Research and Publications, 1987).

⁸ Dimitrije Djordjevic & Radovan Samardžić, eds., *Migrations in Balkan History* (Conference on Population Migrations in the Balkans from Pre-History to Recent Times, Santa Barbara, Cal. 1988) (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1989).

⁹ Dimitrije Djordjević, ed., *The Creation of Yugoslavia, 1914–1918* [papers presented at a conference held in Santa Barbara, Calif., 1978, sponsored by University of California, Santa Barbara and the Center for Russian and East European studies, UCLA] (Santa Barbara–Oxford: Clio books, Calif., 1980).

¹⁰ Another useful insight into Dimitrije Djordjević's life is available in a book of interviews he gave to Miloš Jevtić, *Četiri života Dimitrija Djordjevića* (Valjevo: Agencija Valjevac, 1995).

¹¹ *Od Berlinskog kongresa do ujedinjenja 1878–1918*, vol. VI-2 of *Istorija srpskog naroda*, ed. Andrej Mitrović (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1994).

essays on Balkan¹² and Serbian history¹³ respectively, previously published in US, British, German and French historical journals and various edited volumes.

Towards the end of his scholarly career, Djordjević published his three-volume memoirs,¹⁴ a singular testimony to the rise and ordeals of Serbia's urban elites from the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918 until the late twentieth century. The memoirs give an exquisite portrayal of several distinguished Serbian intellectuals, participants in the Second World War, vividly evoke the prevailing atmosphere in Serbian intellectual circles and offer a critical analysis of the Ravna Gora movement, loyalist force of the Yugoslav Home Army under the command of General Draža Mihailović. In Volume II of his memoirs, Djordjević uses the example of his own family and of the generation of young men to which he belonged to describe the post-1945 ordeal of the Serbian democratic elite and the quiet process of their emigration to the West, under the pressure of J. B. Tito's regime. In Volume III, written with warm and positive emotions, Djordjević describes the options and dilemmas the Yugoslav scholarly community was facing and his own arduous but persistent effort to fight his way to a position of pre-eminence in Serbian historiography. Djordjević's reputation for erudition, systematized knowledge, judicious and original interpretation, capacity for both synthetic thinking and meticulous analysis, especially with the harsh ideological constraints and obligatory Marxist approach imposed on scholarship at the time, could hardly fit into the proclaimed dogma of "brotherhood and unity" and the perpetual imposition upon the Serbs of guilt for alleged "Greater Serbian hegemony" in the interwar period.

Djordjević's memoirs were the only book of recollections of the Second World War which saw several Serbian editions during the 1990s. Its shortened English edition, *Scars and Memory: Four Lives in One Lifetime*,¹⁵

¹² Dimitrije Djordjević, *Ogledi iz novije balkanske istorije* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1989), with an afterword by Radovan Samardžić. Cf. the review "Evropeizacija Balkana. Dimitrije Djordjević, *Ogledi iz novije balkanske istorije*, SKZ 1989", *Politika* 106, Kulturni dodatak, 10 Feb. 1990, 17.

¹³ Dimitrije Djordjević, *Portreti iz novije srpske istorije* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1997). His last book in Serbian is a collection of essays and interviews previously published in English and Serbian in various journals and newspapers: Dimitrije Djordjević, *Presudne godine: zapisi i natpisi iz rasejanja* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 2003) with an afterword by D. T. Bataković.

¹⁴ Dimitrije Djordjević, *Ožiljci i opomene*, 3 vols. (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1989–1994; 2nd ed. Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 2000–2001, with an afterword by D. T. Bataković).

¹⁵ Dimitrije Djordjevic, *Scars and Memory: Four Lives in One Lifetime* (Boulder CO: East European Monographs; New York: distributed by Columbia University Press, 1997).

received positive reviews as a significant contribution to pre- and post-Second World War Serbian family histories hitherto virtually unknown to Anglo-Saxon historiography.

Dimitrije Djordjević was elected foreign member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1985 and he felt it to be the crown of his career. In his inaugural oration on peasantry in nineteenth-century Serbia, he gave a suggestive account of Serbia's spectacular transformation from a peripheral Ottoman province into a modern nation within a span of no more than a century, from 1804 to 1914, without failing to stress the importance of the period of 1903–1914, which he rightfully termed the golden age of Serbia. Although turbulent, the period was one of a full-fledged democracy, strict constitutional rule under King Peter I Karadjordjević, cultural achievements which appealed strongly to most of the liberally-minded South-Slav elites, and epic military victories in the Balkans.

An antifascist and a democrat, Dimitrije Djordjević was not just an internationally recognized scholar, author and co-author of fourteen books translated into several major languages; he was a precious witness to an entire era. His accomplished scholarly oeuvre has earned him a prominent place in the pantheon of Serbian scholarship and among the American and world's specialists in Balkan history.

The Institute for Balkan Studies, which he never failed to visit when in Belgrade, was a place where he felt at home not only because he shared the Institute's multidisciplinary tradition, liberal orientation and openness to regional and European cooperation, but also because he saw the strong pursuit of democratic Serbia's reintegration into modern Europe after the dissolution of Yugoslavia as a continuation of the ancestral undertaking which has originated in the nineteenth century and to which he made his own contribution within a broader antifascist movement amidst a violent global upheaval.

"Uncle Mita", as we, his close younger friends and admirers, used to call him, will be remembered not only as an remarkable scholar and a devoted patriot and democrat, but also as a beloved teacher and a kind and gentle person cherished for his outstanding human qualities.

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