

GORAN VESIĆ A BOOK ABOUT  
BELGRADE  
2

Translated from Serbian by ANGELINA ČANKOVIĆ POPOVIĆ

# BELG

Illustrations by  
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G O R A N   V E S I Ć

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# Contents

Foreword . . . . .	8
Milunka Savić, Serbian Heroine . . . . .	12
The Lumière Brothers in Belgrade, Forever . . . . .	16
Belgrade's Mystery Townsman . . . . .	21
Terazije Terrace . . . . .	26
The Little Rose Church. . . . .	30
Krsmanović Mansion. . . . .	35
The 'Town Gate' Neighbourhood . . . . .	40
Berghaus, a National Benefactor. . . . .	45
Anna Pavlova in Belgrade . . . . .	49
A European Man with Serbian Soul. . . . .	53
Master Jevrem's Town . . . . .	57
The Monument to King Aleksandar. . . . .	62
The Lacking Cathedral. . . . .	66
The Nascence of the Serbian Healthcare System . . . . .	71
From Business Deals to Dealing with Covid-19: Belgrade Fair . . . . .	76
The Little Market and the Savamala Quarter . . . . .	81
Neimar Built by Neimar Co. . . . .	86
Princip's Shooting. . . . .	91
Ali Riza Pasha and Belgrade's Townspeople. . . . .	95
March as a Symbol of the Nation . . . . .	100
Belgrade Years of 'Uncle John the Dragon' . . . . .	105
The Story of Žarkovo . . . . .	110
Sterija in Belgrade. . . . .	114
The Serbian and the German Belgrades. . . . .	118
The Trolleybus in Belgrade's Public Transportation . . . . .	123
Some of Belgrade's Toponyms: Bitpazar, Bulbudere and Jalija . . . . .	128
Notes of an Old Belgrader. . . . .	133
The Ecclesiastic History of Belgrade . . . . .	138
The Written-Off Fighting in the Occupied Belgrade . . . . .	143
Tito's Funeral . . . . .	148
Mayor – by a Twist of Fate. . . . .	153



Before and After March 27, 1941: A Historic Drama . . . . .	158
In Memory of the Destroyed Monuments . . . . .	163
Seven Serbian Patriarchs . . . . .	168
Belgrade in the Time of Despot Stefan. . . . .	173
The <i>Sokoli</i> Movement in Belgrade. . . . .	178
The Glory of the Haiduk Fountain. . . . .	183
The Heroes of the Battle of Mojkovac . . . . .	188
The Significance of Saint Andrew's Day . . . . .	192
Telling Figures: Rapid Interwar Growth. . . . .	197
Two Funerals of Josif Pančić . . . . .	202
Belgrade as a Municipality . . . . .	207
The Metropolis of Various Cultures and Peoples. . . . .	212
Fire Brigades . . . . .	217
The First Learned Serbian Policeman. . . . .	222
When Bells Kept Tolling for a Whole Week . . . . .	226
The Elephant that Ate Hundreds of Watermelons. . . . .	231
Belgrade Style in Literature . . . . .	236
An Ambassador Awaiting Our Remembrance . . . . .	241
The First Manager in the Serbian Culture . . . . .	246
The Renaissance Prince of Television . . . . .	251
The Serbian Rudolph Valentino . . . . .	256
The 5 <sup>th</sup> Centenary of Belgrade's Fall under the Turkish Rule . . . . .	261
Chilandari – the Serbian Treasury . . . . .	266
A Gem of Socialist Architecture . . . . .	270
Keeping Abreast of the European Fashion . . . . .	275
A True Story of Tričko and Uroš . . . . .	280
Dubrovnik's Serbs. . . . .	285
The Family of Ignjat Bajloni . . . . .	290
<i>Somun</i> Loaves from Oven Houses . . . . .	295
Notes about the Authors	
Goran Vesić . . . . .	300
Nebojša Djuranović. . . . .	302











# Foreword

FOUR YEARS AGO, in 2018, I started to write a column in Belgrade's daily *Politika*. No thought of a book occurred to me at the moment. My articles about the rich history of Belgrade proved increasingly attractive to the readers, which naturally led to assembling of a book. Following the edition in the Serbian language, translations into English, Russian and Chinese appeared. Moreover, we witnessed a second edition of the book, and a pocket-sized one intended for sale at newsstands. The book provided basis for the documentary TV series *Priče o Beogradu* (*Stories about Belgrade*), while several texts about the former mayor Branko Pešić served as ground for the script of the documentary film *Gradonačelnik* (*The Mayor*). In the year 2021, the book *Varoš beogradska i druge priče* (*The Township of Belgrade and Other Stories*) was published. All in all, I have enjoyed the support by more than 25,000 readers!

Today, dear Reader, you are holding my second *Book about Belgrade*. Its appearance is yet another triumph of ours: for, had you not read the first volume, and had you not given me support, I would not have found the strength and will to write another one.

Here are 60 more stories about Belgrade:

You are going to read about the forgotten first-world-war heroine Milunka Savić and the role of Mayor Branko Pešić in conferring on her the status of a 'distinguished citizen of Belgrade'; you will learn that mere five months after the Parisians, Belgraders enjoyed the magic 'motion pictures' produced by the Lumière brothers, in 1896, and that their original camera is safeguarded in our Film Archives; you will 'meet' the national benefactor Wilhelm Berghaus (Velimir Teodorović), extra-marital son of Prince Mihailo Obrenović. Like in a movie, you will 'see' dozens of thousands of Belgraders and many Russian émigrés welcoming – on March 23, 1927 – the world ballet star Anna Pavlova who in a Belgrade antique shop found a carpet from her St. Petersburg flat. Other readers' 'discoveries' and insights found in the book include: Banovo Brdo ('Ban's Hill' neighbourhood) was named after Matija Ban, a Catholic Serb from Dubrovnik; the reason why Prince Miloš 'the Great' entrusted the town shared by Serbs and Turks to his brother Jevrem; within 10-years' period, beginning in 1941, 132 monuments to King Aleksandar Karadjordjević and 68 to his father, King Petar, were destroyed on the territory of Yugoslavia (which accounts for the lack of monuments to Serbian rulers in our city). Here is a story about the lacking imposing Catholic cathedral dedicated to the defender of Belgrade against the Turks (1456) St. John of Capistrano, planned in 1930's. In order to grasp the shooting at Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo (1914), one has to be familiar with Gavrilo Princip's life in Belgrade. The story about the last vizier of Belgrade Pashalik Ali Riza Pasha tells about the change in Turkish policy in an attempt to persuade the Serbs into staying within the Ottoman Empire.

You will see how – at the Nobel Prize Award for Literature ceremony – Ivo Andrić presented the Serbian composition “The March to the Drina” to the world, and how President Tito took advantage of this act. I hope that the readership will find some details about ten Belgrade years of the poet J. J. Zmaj interesting enough, as well as the reasons why the school-reformer and great playwright Jovan Sterija Popović was accused of being a *nemčkar* (importer of German/alien culture) and forced to leave Belgrade. That Belgrade was of interest to Europe can be seen from the description of ‘Serb Belgrade’ and ‘German Belgrade’ during the Christian ‘Kingdom of Serbia’ under the Habsburgs in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Another story reveals that in late 1960’s Belgrade almost lost its trolleybuses. On May 8, 1980, President Josip Broz Tito was buried twice, and the mortal remains of the scientist Josif Pančić were honoured with two farewell processions. This book also gives answers to the following questions: Is Žarkovo really older than Čukarica? Why has the Terazije Plateau remained deprived of an architectural solution? How was the Neimar development built? What secrets have been kept in Krsmanović Mansion at Terazije? How was Savamala’s Little Market, sung about, established? Why was the ‘Little Rose Church’ (*Ružica*) the first church reconstructed after the Turkish retreat from Belgrade Fortress? What was the atmosphere like after the *Hatt-ı-şerif*, when bells kept tolling from Belgrade’s churches for one whole week? Where have the last seven Serbian patriarchs been buried? I believe that the readers will like the story about Nebojša Djukelić as the ‘Renaissance prince’ of Serbia’s TV, and the one about the largest-scale concert in the history of Belgrade, the one held by the Haiduk Fountain. I have also written an article about the Serbian Rudolph Valentino.

The second volume of *A Book about Belgrade* would not have come into being if the daily *Politika* had not kept publishing my Friday column regularly; I feel grateful to the editors for their trust. Even today, like four years ago, I go through anxious moments when sending a new article: is it going to justify the honour given to me, the honour of writing for *Politika*? My acknowledgment is due to my friend, the painter Nebojša Djuranović, who has enriched this *Book about Belgrade* with his marvellous paintings; without these, it would not have been complete, so he is an author thereof as much as I am. I am very proud of the support given me by two men who have been of exemplary importance to me – the writer Milovan Vitezović, President of the Writers’ Association of Serbia, and my professor at the Faculty of Law Dr. Sima Avramović, currently Ambassador of Serbia to the Holy See. It is also my honour to have the book published by Zoran Kolundžija and his *Prometej Publishing House* in Novi Sad. The articles from my column have been selected for this edition by Dušan Radonjić and proofread by Mirjana Todorić; the preparation for the printing in *Politika* – with possible abridgements when I get carried away by a topic – has been entrusted to Daliborka Mučibabić and Julijana Simić.

Finally, a few words to account for my ‘storm’ into the Serbian literature, together with the 25,000 readers so far. I have been writing these stories about Belgrade because I want to save from oblivion some distinguished people and

significant events without whom/which the history of our city is not imaginable. If my efforts prove fruitful with regard to at least one person or event, my readers and I can claim victory. But some will remark that to write about Belgrade's history is not a difficult job, since – as my 'senior colleague' Momo Kapor once said – "there is no other city in the world like Belgrade, one in which each day is – historic".

*Author*







# *Milunka Savić, Serbian Heroine*

IT WAS ONLY ON THE OCCASION of honouring the Serbian first-world-war heroine Milunka Savić by the Serbian and French Presidents Aleksandar Vučić and Emmanuel Macron that we the Serbs grasped to what extent she has enjoyed respect worldwide to this day. Unfortunately, the brave warriorress from the Balkan Wars and the First World War, the 'Serbian Joan of Arc', received due recognition by our State as late as forty years after her death, that is, in 2013, when her mortal remains were laid into a grave of the Alley of the Greats at Belgrade's New Cemetery.

The most famous and most intrepid Serbian warriorress fought in the wars from 1912 to 1918 as a voluntary. She was and has remained an example of daring and bravery. Despite her wounds, she would resume fighting, and her courage was talked about with respect by the Serbian and French generals and the press of the Allies. Heavily wounded, she was lying in the French military hospital at Bizerte, Tunisia, in the spring of 1916 when the French Admiral Guépratte entered her room in order to see with his own eyes that the brave Serbian girl did exist. He sat by her bed considerately, so as not to disturb her, caressed her head with his big hands in a fatherly manner and said: "Get well, my child, as soon as possible, France is begging you!"

Milunka was given the rank of a sergeant in the Serbian Army, one of the first armies worldwide which used to confer the ranks of non-commissioned officers and officers on females. Yet it seems as if Serbia needed heroes in wartimes only. In reality, it somehow turns out that – regardless of the social or political system in the country we live in – heroes fall into oblivion in times of peace.

The new kingdom, established in 1918, which consisted of both the victorious and the defeated, seemed unwilling to spotlight or foreground the Serb heroes so as not to hurt the feelings of the defeated in the Great War. Thus, Milunka Savić was demobilized, to remain with no incomes whatsoever, on the streets. The war hero, the awardee of the Serbian Order of the Star of Karadjordje and the French Légion d'Honneur, the intrepid and experienced warriorress, went from one house of the civil servants to another, asking for



a chance to clean their houses and thus earn living for herself, her daughter Milena and the girls she had adopted. It was only when Belgrade's press gave publicity to the issue that she was offered the job of a junior cleaning woman at the State Mortgage Bank, then housed in the present-day National Museum edifice. Modest as she was, Milunka accepted this poorly paid job. Although offered a high pension and a comfortable house in France, as a deserving soldier of the Allied Forces, Milunka chose to stay in her homeland and raise family here. The State would only remember her at celebrations, through the stories of her bravery told by cabinet ministers and generals. After such brief moments of her refreshed glory, Milunka would withdraw to her modest, small and crumbling house, back to her children. She also took care of her orphaned remote relative, Obrad Radičević, her daughter Milena and three adopted girls.

The German Nazis and quisling authorities wanted to take advantage of her popularity, but she refused them. She lived an honourable and modest life, providing for her children by her work and sharing the destiny of her fellow-citizens in the occupied Belgrade. The enemies respected her, too, so nobody disturbed her, despite her refusal to be at disposal to the head of the quisling regime, General Milan Nedić. During the war, she provided a hiding place in her house for the communists Bora Tomić and Bebel Minkov.

The socialist Yugoslavia and the new ideology did not need the heroes like Milunka but those from the just-finished Second World War. So Milunka fell into oblivion, and the official authorities no longer invited her to attend the celebrations which now glorified some other battles and triumphs. However, the new authorities could not fail to show respect for her deeds in the First World War and during the occupation, so she was given state pension as of 1945. The communists found it important to demonstrate respect for old heroes and thus win the approval by Belgrade which was prevalingly burgher class-oriented; by the said act, President Josip Broz Tito showed that he cared for the old Serbian soldiers more than the Serb generals and politicians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Milunka still lived in her small house, modest and proud. She socialized with her companions from the Great War and received visits by historians, journalists and analysts who recorded her memories of the wartime. That was her routine until the year 1970, when the legendary Mayor of Belgrade Branko Pešić decided that a small flat should be allocated to Milunka Savić in the new development named after the Jerković Brothers<sup>1</sup>. Shrewd enough, Pešić knew that there was no other way to honour her but to obtain a corresponding decision of the City Assembly based on proclaiming Milunka a 'Distinguished Citizen of Belgrade' owing to her merits in the Great War. He also saw to it that Milunka's flat was supplied with furniture, home appliances, paintings and books. The officials of the city administration were present when she was handed in the keys of her new home. That is how Belgrade, owing to its resourceful and daring mayor, payed respect to the

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<sup>1</sup> Dušan and Nebojša **Jerković**, brothers, were pre-second-world-war teachers and communists, and during the war distinguished themselves as partisan leaders. Dušan was killed in combat in November 1941, and Nebojša, with his comrades, committed group suicide to avoid being caught under a hopeless attack and tortured – several months later. – *Translator's note*.

Serb heroine and promoted her into a “distinguished citizen” – yet ‘by the back stairs’. It was in this flat, three years later, that Milunka passed away the way she had lived – busy: she was found in an armchair, with a piece of handicraft in her hands. She was buried in the family tomb, without any honours.

The attitude of our society toward this heroine tells much about the local mindset, our ingratitude to war heroes and the tendency to forget. We are a nation which does not know the accurate number of the first-world-war victims, we lack a list of the martyrs killed at Jasenovac<sup>2</sup> in most monstrous ways, we do not know the names of the victims killed in the 1999 NATO aggression. Small wonder then that the social milieu behaved in the said manner in the case of Milunka Savić. Since 2013, Milunka has been resting in the Alley of the Greats and the injustice done her has been rectified posthumously. Yet if we want to know whether we truly remember and respect her, we should find out the number of our school children aware of Milunka’s heroism. I fear the answer.

September 6, 2019

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<sup>2</sup> **Jasenovac** is a village in the region of Slavonia, Croatia, but the name here (and usually) stands for the system of concentration camps established in its vicinity during World War Two. Operating under the Ustashe rule in the wartime Independent State of Croatia from August 1941 to April 1945, it was an extermination camp referred to as ‘the Auschwitz of the Balkans’ or ‘the Auschwitz of Yugoslavia’. The majority of the victims were Serbs; others included Jews, Roma and a number of political dissidents. The postwar estimates cited about 700,000 victims, while the Jasenovac Memorial Site currently offers the figure of between 80,000 and 100,000. The worst characteristics of the massacres were the unparalleled number of children and the personal/non-‘industrial’ methods of torturing and killing. – *Translator’s note.*





Н. Г. ПАНОВ



# *The Lumière Brothers in Belgrade, Forever*

MERE SIX MONTHS after screening of the earliest 'motion pictures' produced by the Lumière brothers in Paris, the citizens of Belgrade were given a chance to personally see this miracle of engineering. The films *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* and *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* by Auguste and Louis Lumière were officially presented in Paris on December 28, 1895. The date is taken as the birth of cinematography. As soon as in May of 1896, Belgraders had an opportunity to see these films among the first audiences worldwide, owing to "the device which serves to produce and watch shows", to quote the newspapers of the day. Provided we trust the publicist Pera Todorović and his *Male novine* ('Little Newspapers'), the films were projected by the Lumière brothers in persons. However, those who knew the work of Todorović and his newspaper, especially in the aftermath of his ruined meteoric and eventful political career within the People's Radical Party (which almost placed him in front of a firing squad), will be aware of his tendency to frequently exaggerate in his paper, the first Serbian tabloid. Many believe, though, that in Belgrade the said films were presented by a representative of the brothers, a Mr. Promiot who was on a journey from Vienna to Constantinople by train and who decided to take some rest in Belgrade and to present the moving images to the locals. What all agree about is: whoever projected the movies, stayed in Belgrade for six months. Truth is, we have always been hospitable to visitors.

The first screening was organized in a private home. The news of the 'moving pictures' spread quickly around the town. Everybody wanted to see this latest miracle of engineering, so a decision on a public projection was passed; it was scheduled for May 25, 1896, in the restaurant room of *Zlatni krst* ('Golden Cross'). That inn no longer exists. It used to be located at present-day Terazije Square, on the site of a building which for decades housed the restaurant *Dušanov grad* ('Dušan's Fort'). The screening was attended by King Aleksandar Obrenović of Serbia. A description of the event was published in *Male novine*: "As of today, in the 'Golden Cross' guesthouse at Terazije, Messrs. Auguste and Louis Lumière of Lyon (France) will present the greatest and almost incredible achievement in photography. That is the so-called 'animized'

photographic work done by cinematograph. Therein, it will be possible to see pictures of creatures and objects in extremely different motions, the movements of a child playing; the motion of a train travelling, and all of that is presented so vividly that it seems you are watching reality and not pictures. Belgraders should not miss the opportunity to see this actually the greatest achievement, and the entrance price is 1 dinar per person. The beginning is at 4 o'clock in the afternoon every day, and it lasts until 9 o'clock in the evening, while Sundays and on holidays there are morning projections, too."

The townspeople of Belgrade, thirsty for novelties and in spite of the expensive tickets, were queuing up, waiting to see the 'moving images'. Yet when Promiot left Belgrade, it took four years before another film screening took place. In the year 1900, 'itinerant cinemas', that is, 'moving pictures' under tents, appeared. Those shows were held at Zeleni Venac, Mali Kalemegdan, Tašmajdan and Trkalište. They were organized by itinerant projectionists such as Henrieux, and Aleksandar Lifka of Subotica. Permanent cinemas were established as late as in 1909. The first ones were *Hajduk Veljko* in present-day Knez Mihailova Street, *Takovo* on the site of today's Albania Palace and *Crna mačka* ('Black Cat') in present-day Nemanjina Street. These earliest cinemas did not look like those of today: there were no seats but benches for the viewers, while the projector was placed in the middle of the room. The screen would be spread between two columns/piers, and a piano would be placed behind it, for a pianist used to provide musical accompaniment to the film 'story'. The films were short, so each show consisted of up to five movies. Toward the First World War, some exclusive cinemas similar to European ones sprang up: *Moderni bioskop* run by the Savić brothers in today's Kolarčeva Street and *Koloseum* in the auditorium of the present-day movie theatre *Zvezda* ('Star') in Kralj Milan Street. Along with these, longer films appeared, coming mostly from Germany and Austria.

Cinemas were then established in other towns around Serbia and film soon gained immense popularity. It did not take long before domestic films were produced. The Serbian film producer Svetozar Botorić was a pioneer in the field; this owner of the cinema *Pariz* employed French cinematographers for the production of newsreels reporting on the events in the capital city. The first Serbian feature film – *Život i delo besmrtnog vožda Karađorđa* (*Life and Deeds of the Immortal Vozhd Karadjordje*) – was shot in 1911, and its director was Ilija Stanojević<sup>3</sup>. The work on documentary movies was intensified in the times of the Balkan Wars and the Great War. Namely, the power of film in the service of promotional and propaganda activities was realized by the Govern-

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<sup>3</sup> **Ilija Stanojević Čiča** (1859–1930) was mostly known as a stage actor. Preceding the shooting of the said movie, he and the owner of *Pariz* Cinema Svetozar Botorić founded the Union for the Production of Serbian Films. Stanojević was helping in the composition of the screenplay and, in addition, played two roles – of the Turkish pasha and of Karadjordje's assassin. – *Translator's note*.









Н. Н. П. Р. А. Н. О. В. И. К. 2021.



ment of Serbia and the Serbian Army. After the Great Retreat of the Serbian Army across the mountains of Albania [in the winter of 1915/16], a film section was instituted, attached to the Military Headquarters, with the task to present the Allies' films to the Serbian soldiery and to shoot the war events within the Salonica Front. The head of the section was Mihailo Mihailović, one of the film pioneers in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

We cannot say with certainty whether the Lumière brothers visited our city, but in the building of the Yugoslav Film Archive their original camera from 1896 is exhibited. It is thought to have arrived in Serbia in that very year, to be kept in Niš by Sotir Nedeljković and Miroljub Stošić. It was used for filming the 1944 liberation of Niš. Today, the Yugoslav Film Archive is one of the modernest institutions of the kind, one we take great pride in. But it was not always so: it suffered and survived some hard times, especially during the reconstruction works in its seat at Uzun Mirko Street. With a bad grace yet proudly, the then-Director of the Archive Radoslav Zelenović declined the offer of a French collector to personally write down any amount on a bank check and sell him the camera of the Lumière brothers; the amount could have solved all the problems of the Archive. But in this way, the famous brothers, the founding fathers of world motion picture, have stayed in Belgrade – forever.

September 27, 2019