

## SERBIAN MEDICAL SOCIETY'S MUSEUM OF SERBIAN MEDICINE

### MUZEJ SRPSKE MEDICINE SRPSKOG LEKARSKOG DRUŠTVA

Jelena Jovanović Simić\*

#### SUMMARY

*The tradition of collecting objects related to medicine and health care in Serbia is 162 years old. It began in 1844 with the founding of the Museum of Rarities at the Military Hospital in Belgrade.*

*1872 saw the foundation of the first Serbian professional association, Serbian Medical Society, initiated by a young physician Vladan Đorđević. The Society's collection dates from the same year, and mainly consisted of pathoanatomical macroscopic preparations, looked after by Dr Josif Pančić, a naturalist of European reputation.*

*The Serbian Medical Society's Museum of Serbian Medicine was founded on 6 November 1955, within the Department of the History of Medicine and Pharmacy, chaired by an eminent historian of medicine, Professor Vladimir Stanojević.*

*This standing exhibition had the aim to present the development of Serbian medicine from the Middle Ages to the end of the Second World War.*

*Since 1989, Serbian Medical Society and its Museum have moved to the building of the First City Hospital, a beautiful Belgrade building of the 19<sup>th</sup> century built between 1865 and 1868.*

**Key words:** History of medicine, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> century, museum, Serbia

---

\* Medical School, Veljka Dugoševića bb, 11 000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia.  
Corresponding address: Jelena Jovanović Simić, dr. med. Jovana Subotića 5, 11 080 Zemun;  
Republic of Serbia; E-mail: jtj204690@eunet.yu; lekarsld@bvcom.net

The tradition of collecting objects related to medicine and health care in Serbia is 162 years old. It began in 1844 with the founding of the Museum of Rarities of the Military Hospital in Belgrade [1]. The museum exhibits were divided in three collections: Pathology, Objects from the Animal Kingdom, and a Mineral Collection. Even though the Pathology Collection counted the fewest artefacts (fourteen in 1852, as opposed to 56 in the Animal Kingdom Collection, and 218 in the Mineral Collection),



Figure 1 Former town hospital building in Belgrade, now the seat of the Serbian Medical Society and its Museum of Serbian Medicine (photo by Miloš Jurišić)

*Slika 1. Zgrada Varoške bolnice u Beogradu, danas sjedište Srpskog lekarskog društva i Muzeja srpske medicine SLD-a (foto: Miloš Jurišić)*

it was a forerunner of future health and medicine museums in our country?" [2].

Serbia in 1872 saw the foundation of the first professional society, Serbian Medical Society, initiated by a young physician Vladan Đorđević. That same year, the Society began collecting exhibits, and their number gradually grew with donations from the Society's members from all over Serbia. The collection mainly consisted of pathoanatomical macroscopic preparations, and was looked after by Dr Josif Pančić, a naturalist of European reputation and a professor at the Great School, which was the forerunner of Belgrade University (1905) [3]. Because the Serbian Medical Society had no building of its own until 1932, the Collection was kept in the Nature Cabinet of professor Pančić at the Great School and was probably incorporated in the Museum of the Serbian Land when it was founded in 1895.

The Serbian Medical Society's Museum of Serbian Medicine was founded on 6 November 1955, within the Department of the History of Medicine and Pharmacy, headed by an eminent historian of medicine, Professor Vladimir Stanojević [4].

By that time, the Society regained foothold and adapted to political changes and demands of the new age, which granted its survival. It recognised the need to save whatever was left for saving, seeing that valuable documents had irretrievably been lost to the world wars, including entire personal and family records, personal objects, and libraries of Serbian doctors. A number of archives had also lived to see this grim end, such as the National Library of Serbia, hit by a bomb and burnt to the ground in 1941.

Three halls in the building of the Serbian Medical Society in Belgrade were given to the Museum of Serbian Medicine [5]. The building was built in 1932 from the funds donated to the Serbian Medical Society by Dr Stevan Milosavljević, the first Serbian medical doctor who was the native of Serbia. The museum mainly lived on donations of Serbian doctors or their families, and partly on acquisitions. The aim of this standing exhibition was to present the development of Serbian medicine from the Middle Ages to the end of the Second World War. The museum was run by volunteers who were the members of the Department of the History of Medicine, but the conservation of artefacts, their collection, safekeeping, and display, as well as communication with the public could not have been accomplished without expert help.



Figure 2 Exhibits of the Museum's permanent display

*Slika 2. Dio stalnoga muzejskog postava*

In 1984, the Serbian Medical Society received the building of the First City Hospital from the Town Hall of the City of Belgrade for permanent use. This building is particularly important because it is one of the representative buildings of Belgrade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was built to be the city hospital between 1865 and 1868. Today, it is a cultural property of great significance. During its construction, interesting technical solutions were applied in ventilation, water supply and heating systems [6,7]. Many important figures and events are linked to this building. It speaks about medical and technical development of the time, and is an invaluable asset for the history of medicine, history of architecture, and national history of the Restoration Serbia of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

When the Serbian Medical Society moved to the building in 1989, it gave the museum about 340 sq m of the ground floor in its left wing. Exhibits chronologically follow the development of Serbian medicine from the Middle Ages till today. The exhibition was set up by Dr Budimir Pavlović, the president of the Department of the History of Medicine and the museum custodian. Exhibits are arranged in the following groups: Anthropology, Middle Ages, Medicine of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Serbian

Medical Society, University School of Medicine, Medical Apparatuses, Serbian Military Medical Corps, and Serbian Red Cross.

Of particular value are the:

- Anthropological Collection (donated by professor Srboljub Živanović);
- Collection of Roman surgical and cosmetic instruments (donated by the family of the renowned Serbian surgeon, professor Isidor Papo);
- Great electromagnet for the removal of magnetic foreign bodies from the eye (constructed by professor Đorđe Nešić, a doyen of Serbian ophthalmology);
- Dental office from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- X-ray apparatuses, which arrived in Serbia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the first was installed in 1899);
- Collection of diplomas of Serbian doctors of medicine from the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- First medical textbooks published in Serbian (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century); and
- Personal objects of Serbian doctors.



Figure 3 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbian medical diplomas

*Slika 3. Diplome srpskih liječnika (XIX. st.)*



Figure 4 Exhibits of the human pathology collection

*Slika 4. Dio antropopatološke zbirke*

There are also a library and an archive.

The Association of Scientific and Technical Museums of Serbia was founded in 1991, and now counts 17 member museums, including the Museum of Serbian Medicine which joined in from the beginning. This membership has made available expert help to the custodians, expert supervision, organisation of joint exhibitions, and inter-museum cooperation on the preservation of the scientific and technical heritage of Serbia.

In 2005 the Museum of Serbian Medicine celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Our plan to set up a new standing exhibition has been postponed by the long-awaited decision of municipal authorities that the building should be remodelled [8].

And finally, let us try to answer the question if museums are necessary in these times of incredible communication possibilities. Have they become obsolete with the easy access to information over various media?

What one should certainly have in mind is that in the era of globalisation, museums, archives, and libraries are the foundations for the preservation of national identity. To find answers to questions who we are, where we come from, and what the purpose of our existence is, sooner or later we will have to recur to the source documents which are preserved for us in the above mentioned institutions. Then we will no longer doubt that work on the preservation of cultural heritage is our responsibility towards those who left it to us, as well as to those who will come after us.

#### SOURCES AND LITERATURE

1. Arhiv Srbije; Fond Sanitetskog odeljenja Ministarstva unutrašnjih dela, Registar i Delovodni protokol za 1852.
2. Đorđević, S. P. Nastanak srpskih medicinskih muzeja; Arhiv za istoriju zdravstvene kulture Srbije / 1990 / 19 / 1 – 2 / 83 – 95.
3. Zapisnik sa trećeg redovnog sastanka SLD. U: Srp Arh Celok Lek, knjiga prva. Beograd: Srpsko lekarsko društvo. 1874: 15.
4. Stanojević V. Prirodnjački i lekarski muzeji u Beogradu. U: Stanojević V. Zbornik radova saopštenih u Sekciji za istoriju medicine i farmacije. Petnaest godina rada Sekcije i Muzeja. Knjiga III. Beograd: Srpsko lekarsko društvo – Sekcija za istoriju medicine i farmacije, 1966: 5-10
5. Stanojević, V. O postanku Muzeja srpske medicine Srpskog lekarskog društva, Srp Arh Celok Lek / 1955 / 83 / 11 / 1355 – 1361
6. "Vidovdan", br. 46, 01. mart 1869.
7. Đorđević, V. Sanitetski poslovi u Srbiji. Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1872.
8. Dosije Prve varoške bolnice, br. 158; Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture grada Beograda

## SAŽETAK

*Tradicija sakupljanja medicinskih predmeta u Srbiji duga je 162 godine. Započeta je 1844. godine, kada je u Vojnoj bolnici u Beogradu osnovan Muzeum Redkosti.*

*Godine 1872. inicijativom mladog liječnika Vladana Đorđevića, osnovano je prvo strukovno udruženje u Srbiji – Srpsko lekarsko društvo. Iste godine započeto je stvaranje Društvene zbirke koju su uglavnom sačinjavali makroskopski patoanatomski preparati. Zbirka je bila povjerena na čuvanje dr. Josifu Pančiću, prirodnjaku europskog ugleda.*

*Muzej srpske medicine Srpskog lekarskog društva osnovan je 6. studenoga 1955. godine u okviru Sekcije za istoriju medicine i farmacije SLD-a, na čijem je čelu bio ugledni povjesničar medicine profesor dr. Vladimir Stanojević. Stalni muzejski postav koncipiran je s ciljem prikazivanja razvojnog puta srpske medicine od srednjeg vijeka do kraja Drugoga svjetskog rata.*

*Od 1989. godine Srpsko lekarsko društvo i njegov muzej smješteni su u zgradi Prve varoške bolnice koja ima posebno značenje jer je jedno od reprezentativnih zdanja Beograda XIX. stoljeća, a namjenski je građena za gradsku bolnicu između 1865. i 1868. godine.*

**Ključne riječi:** *povijest medicine, XIX. i XX st., muzej, Srbija*

---

This article is an extended and updated version of the essay The Serbian medical society's museum of Serbian medicine published in *Asklepios* 2005;18:42-43, with new figures added.