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**Breaking into the Men's  
World: First Female  
Students' Experiences  
at the Royal University  
of Francis Joseph I  
in Zagreb**



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## **Breaking into the Men's World: First Female Students' Experiences at the Royal University of Francis Joseph I in Zagreb**

The paper delves into stereotypes and prejudice surrounding the initial female students at Zagreb's Royal University of Francis Joseph I during the early 20th century. Across the region, including Croatia, access to universities was a challenge for women due to debates concerning their perceived roles. Although women gained admission to the University in 1895, it was limited to part-time status. However, a positive turn occurred in September 1901, allowing women to enroll as full-time students at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb. Examining contemporary stereotypes and prejudices, this contribution explores whether these women conformed to prevailing biases or navigated past them based on their experiences. Additionally, the paper will explore the reactions triggered by their presence at the university. Drawing from private sources like correspondence and memoirs, the paper will shed light on the firsthand experiences of these pioneering female students in an academic setting predominantly male. It aims to discuss women's higher education in Croatia within the context of prevailing European stereotypes, particularly in Central Europe.

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### **KEYWORDS:**

women's history, history of women's higher education, University of Zagreb, social history, 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century

The focus on women's education in Croatia as a subject of scholarly interest has notably heightened in recent generations of domestic historiography. Recently, several titles dealing with this topic have been published. This paper will focus on one aspect of this issue – the personal experiences of the first domestic female students at university in the period since girls gained access to higher education, i.e. at the beginning of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup> The focus of this paper will be put particularly on a girl's perspective. The research so far has mainly dealt with the attitude of others about women's higher education, general public opinion, and the perception of the professional public, professors, and students about their female colleagues.<sup>2</sup> Here female university students will be observed from their perspective. Correspondences and autobiographies of the first Croatian female students will be analyzed. The students in question are Zdenka Marković, future writer and translator,<sup>3</sup> Elza Kučera, future psychologist and first female librarian in

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<sup>1</sup> Here is a selection from the relevant literature: Meghan Hays, "Valjane majke i blage kćeri – Odgoj i izobrazba žena u nacionalnom duhu u Hrvatskoj 19. stoljeća," *Otvim* 4, no. 1-2 (1996): 85-95; Dinko Župan, "Uzor djevojke: obrazovanje žena u Banskoj Hrvatskoj tijekom druge polovine 19. st.," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 33, no. 2 (2001): 436-52.; Tihana Luetić, "Prve studentice Mudroslovnog fakulteta kr. Sveučilišta Franje Josipa I. u Zagrebu," *Povijesni prilozi* 22, (2002): 167-208; Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, "On uči, ona pogađa, on se sjeća, ona prorokuje – pitanje obrazovanja žena u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj krajem 19. stoljeća," in *Žene u Hrvatskoj – Ženska i kulturna povijest*, ed. Andrea Feldman (Zagreb: Institut "Vlado Gotovac," 2004), 157-79; Dinko Župan, "Viša djevojačka škola u Osijeku (1882.-1900.)," *Scrinia Slavonica* 5, (2005): 366-83; Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, "Odgovorne pred historijom. Prve učenice Privremenog ženskog liceja," *Historijski zbornik* 59, (2006): 69-92; Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, Ida, "Otvaranje ženskog liceja u Zagrebu," *Povijest u nastavi* IV, no. 8, 2 (2006): 147-76; Tihana Luetić, "Počeci visokoškolskog obrazovanja za žene u Hrvatskoj i usporedba sa stanjem u susjednim zemljama," *Historijski zbornik* LIX, (2006): 61-68; Suzana Jagić, "Jer kad žene budu žene prave... Uloga i položaj žena u obrazovnoj politici Banske Hrvatske na prijelazu u XX. stoljeće," *Povijest u nastavi* VI, no. 11, 1 (2008): 77-100; Dinko Župan, *Mentalni korzet. Spolna politika obrazovanja žena u Banskoj Hrvatskoj (1868-1918)* (Osijek – Slavonski Brod: Učiteljski fakultet u Osijeku – Hrvatski institut za povijest, Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2013); Tihana Luetić, "Studentski časopisi početkom 20. stoljeća o ženama na Kr. Sveučilištu Franje Josipa I. u Zagrebu," in *Žene kroz povijest. Zbornik radova sa znanstvenoga skupa Dies historirae 2012.*, eds. Matea Jalžević and Petra Marinčić (Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Hrvatski studiji, 2014), 103-27; Zima, Dubravka, *Djevojka u gradu: djevojaštvo u 19. stoljeću* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2022), 206-26.

<sup>2</sup> See the relevant literature in the first note.

<sup>3</sup> Zdenka Marković studied Slavic studies, art history and philosophy in Zagreb and Fribourg, where she received her doctorate in 1914. She became a writer and worked as a teacher in Zagreb high schools [Ana Batinić, "Plemkinje duha: Marija Jambrišak – Jagoda Truhelka – Zdenka Marković," *Nova Croatica: časopis za hrvatsku književnost i kulturu* 2 (32), no. 2 (52) (2008): 197-215; Tea Rogić Musa, Martina Kokolari, and Ana Šeparović, "Marković, Zdenka," *Hrvatski biografski leksikon* (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2022) <https://bl.lzmk.hr/Clanak/12106> (accessed March 8, 2023).

Croatia,<sup>4</sup> Božena Kralj, future high school teacher, journalist, and editor,<sup>5</sup> and Ljuba Kernic, future high school teacher.<sup>6</sup>

### Women's Entry into the World of Higher Education in Croatia and Central Europe – Historical Context

Before delving into students' experiences, let's briefly review the history of women entering the male-dominated space at the University of Zagreb. The matter of women's university education in Croatia saw a positive resolution in September 1901, when a government decree permitted women to enroll as full-time students at the Faculty of Philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Namely, since 1895, women could be admitted to the University, but only as part-time students. The request didn't come from politicians or institutions, but rather from "below," i.e., from female teachers from the rest of the Monarchy. Teachers of the Female boarding school in Zagreb (*lyceum*) were the first to encourage the discussion about female university education. *Lyceum* was the first female educational institution in Croatia where girls could get higher general education to prepare for studies.<sup>8</sup> They submitted a request to the Academic Senate for university admission in 1895, outlining their intentions: "This request is not led by a vainglorious desire for glory or to emphasise our person, but a serious effort to promote the interests of the things we serve and to which we have dedicated our lives – namely the education of our female youth. Unstoppable progress in the mental field, as well as major changes in the social field, are increasingly demanding universal education for women."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Elza Kučera studied philosophy and psychology in Vienna and continued her studies in Zagreb and Zurich, where in 1909, as the first woman from Croatia, received her doctorate in psychology. She was also the first woman librarian in Croatia. Lada Šojat, "Kučera, Elza," *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, vol. 8, (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2013), <https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=10783> (accessed: 8 March 2023.); Luka Boršić and Ivana Skuhala Karasman, "Elza Kučera između filozofije i psihologije," in *Filozofkinje u Hrvatskoj*, eds. Luka Boršić and Ivana Skuhala Karasman (Zagreb: Institut za filozofiju, 2017), 145–62; Ivana Skuhala Karasman, "Elza Kučera – prva hrvatska eksperimentalna psihologinja," *Suvremena psihologija* 21, no. 2 (2018): 189–200; Luka Boršić, "Elza Kučera kao filozofkinja," *Prilozi za istraživanje hrvatske filozofske baštine* 45, no. 2 (90) (2019): 491–513; Luka Boršić and Ivana Skuhala Karasman, *Dr. Elza Kučera* (Zagreb: Institut za filozofiju, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Božena Kralj studied philosophy and Slavic studies in Zagreb and Moscow; received her doctorate in Slavic studies in 1919 (Nevenka Jednačak, "Deželić, Božena, rođ. Kralj," *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, vol. 3, Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 1993, 358; Tihana Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!" – 'sveučilištarka' i prva 'Domagojka' Božena Kralj," *Croatica Christiana periodica* 38, no. 73 (2014): 127–43.

<sup>6</sup> Ljuba Kernic studied German and Slavic studies in Zagreb and Leipzig and completed her studies in Zagreb in 1923. She was first female full-time student of German studies at the University of Zagreb. About her see in: Ivana Cvijović Javorina, *Germanistika u Hrvatskoj: nastava njemačkog jezika i književnosti na Sveučilištu u Zagrebu 1876.–1918.* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2022), 73, 119–20, 153, 159, 161, 414.

<sup>7</sup> *Naredba kr. hrv.-slav.-dalm. zemaljske vlade, odjela za bogoštovlje i nastavu od 9. rujna 1.901. br. 14.290., kojom se na osnovi previšnjega rješenja od 29. kolovoza 1.901. određuju uvjeti, pod kojima se ženskinje mogu kao redovne ili izvanredne slušačice upisati u mudroslovni fakultet kr. sveučilišta Franje Josipa I. u Zagrebu* (Luetić, *Prve studentice*, 198–99).

<sup>8</sup> More about the foundation of *lyceum* see in: Ograjšek Gorenjak, "Otvaranje ženskog liceja," 147–76. For an analysis of the different structures of *lyceum* students, see: Ograjšek Gorenjak, "Odgovorne pred historijom," 69–92.

<sup>9</sup> The petition was signed by Marija Horvat, Marija Jambrišak, Camilla Lucerna, Jagoda

This move by the Croatian government took place in the context of the liberalization of female education throughout the Monarchy. Crucial steps forward in female education in Croatia happened shortly after this happened at the other Central European universities that were predominantly male institutions. In the European context, in the 1870s the doors of the universities opened to women in Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.<sup>10</sup> In 1875 Italy opened its universities to female students.<sup>11</sup> In the context of the region, girls' access to university was slow and not without difficulties. Hungary and Austria were latecomers in particular. Before 1895 at some universities, women could attend lectures only as guests, but only until the end of the century, they enrolled as full-time students in humanities, pharmacy, and medicine in several Austrian universities. After 1872, girls in Austria could take their matriculation exams in male gymnasiums, but only as external students, and still were not allowed to enroll in colleges.<sup>12</sup> The *Austrian Association of Female Teachers and Educators* won access for women to higher education. As a result of their dedication, the first grammar school for girls, the only institution preparing girls for higher education, was established in Vienna in 1892. In general, feminists in Vienna (several women's associations) succeeded in gaining access to university studies, facing the political opposition and the resistance of the conservatives at the turn of the century. Finally, in the Austrian Half of the Dual Monarchy, women could enroll at the Faculty of Philosophy in 1897 and from 1900 they were allowed to study medicine and pharmacy. In Hungary as well, Hungarian girls were allowed to enter the university in 1895, when they could enroll in the Faculty of Philosophy and Medicine.<sup>13</sup> For Serbian women, it was theoretically possible to study at the University of Belgrade from 1864. However, female students were fully integrated at the University in Belgrade in 1905.<sup>14</sup> The

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Truhelka and Natalija Wickerhauser. They sent the request to the Academic Senate on October 1, 1895. (Arhiv Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, fond: Spisi Dekanata Mudroslovnog fakulteta, henceforth: AFF, *Spisi*, 231/1895.). See more in: Luetić, "Prve studentice," 172.

<sup>10</sup> Simonetta Polenghi, "Striving for recognition: the first five female professors in Italy (1887-1904)," *Paedagogica historica* 56, no. 6 (2020): 749.

<sup>11</sup> Polenghi, "Striving for recognition," 752.

<sup>12</sup> Gary B. Cohen, *Education and Middle-Class Society in Imperial Austria 1848-1918* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), 73

<sup>13</sup> Read more about the beginnings of higher education for women in Austria and Hungary in: Waltraud Heindl, "Die Studentinnen der Universität Wien: Zur Entwicklung des Frauenstudiums. Eine Projektbeschreibung," in *Bildungswesen und Sozialstruktur in Mitteleuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert/Education and Social Structure in the Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Viktor Karády and Wolfgang Mitter (Köln: Böhlau, 1990), 259-76; Maria M. Kovács, "Hungarian Women Entering the Professions: Feminist Pressures from left to right," in *Bildungswesen und Sozialstruktur*, 247-57; Waltraud Heindl and Marina Tichy, eds. "Durch Erkenntnis zu Freiheit und Glück ...;" *Frauen an der Universität Wien (ab 1897)* (Vienna: WUV-Universitätsverlag, 1990); James C. Albisetti, "Female Education in German-speaking Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, 1866-1914," in *Austrian Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, eds. David F. Good, Margarete Grandner and Mary Jo Maynes (Providence - Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996), 39-57; Éva Vámos, "It has been 100 years now that women can study in Hungary," in *Universitas Budensis 1395-1995*, eds. László Szögi and Júlia Varga (Budapest: Archiv der Loránd Eötvös Universität, 1997), 477-86.

<sup>14</sup> Ljubinka Trgovčević, "Obrazovanje i modernizacija. Osnove za poređenja u okviru

University in Sofia<sup>15</sup> admitted women first as auditors in 1895 and as full-time students in 1901. They were allowed to study at the Faculty of History and Philology, the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, and even at the Faculty of Law (which was not the case at the Austro-Hungarian universities). The two Romanian universities, in Iași and Bucharest, admitted women as auditors in 1894.<sup>16</sup> By the late 1890s, many German universities accepted women as guest students. Finally, between 1900 and 1909, various German universities allowed women to enroll as regular students.<sup>17</sup>

In the academic year 1901/1902 first three female students enrolled at the University in Zagreb as full-time students at the Faculty of Philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Until the First World War, from 4 to 18 full-time female students enrolled annually. In total, they made up an average of 10% of the student population.<sup>19</sup> A total of 158 female students were enrolled in this period.<sup>20</sup> As was the case in other universities, the first female students belonged to a predominantly bourgeois socio-economic profile: the share of female students from the families of civil servants was 64%, while 11% of them were from commercial and craft families, 10% from the families of landowners, and 3% each were daughters of lawyers and Orthodox priests.<sup>21</sup>

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Jugoistočne Evrope," in *Dijalog povjesničara – istoričara*, eds. Hans-Georg Fleck and Igor Graovac, vol. 2 (Zagreb: Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, 2000), 129-30.

- <sup>15</sup> Read more about the beginnings of higher education for women in Bulgaria in: Zhorzheta Nazarska, Универзитетското образование и българските жени 1879-1944 (Sofia: Imir, 2001), 76-96; Krassimira Daskalova, "Women, Nationalism and Nation-State in Bulgaria (1800.-1940s)," in *Gender Relations in South Eastern Europe: Historical Perspectives on Womanhood and Manhood in 19th and 20th Century*, eds. Miroslav Jovanović and Slobodan Naumović (Belgrade, Graz: Institut für Geschichte Universität Graz, 2002), 15-38; Georgeta, Nazarska, "Girls as Members of an Educated Elite: The Bulgarian Case, c. 1850-1950," in *A History of the Girl. Formation, Education and Identity*, eds. Mary O'Dowd - June Purvis (Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 143-61.
- <sup>16</sup> Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, "Women's and Gender History," in *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700*, eds. Bylirina Livezeanu and Arpad von Klimó (London: Routledge 2017) (<https://people.ceu.edu/sites/people.ceu.hu/files/profile/attachment/1634/daskalovazimmermann2015-20140922shared1.pdf>).
- <sup>17</sup> Edith Glaser, "Emancipation or Marginalisation: New Research on Women Students in the German-Speaking World," *Oxford Review of Education. Writing University History* 23, no. 2 (1997): 169; Patricia M. Mazón, "Fräulein Doktor': Literary Images of the First Female University Students in Fin-de-Siècle Germany," *Women in German Yearbook* 16, (2000): 130-31; Patricia M. Mazón, *Gender and the Modern Research University. The Admission of Women to German Higher Education, 1865-1914* (Stanford University Press, 2003).
- <sup>18</sup> These were Milica pl. Bogdanović, student of history and geography and Milka Maravić and Vjera Tkalčić science students. Girls were allowed to enroll to the other faculties of the University of Zagreb after the First World War. Thus, it was not until 1919 that we find the first enrolled female students at the Faculty of Law, Faculty of Medicine (founded in 1917) and the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry (Luetić, "Počeci visokoškolskog obrazovanja," 63).
- <sup>19</sup> About the movement of female students' number throughout the academic years and their share in the entire student population at the faculty, see more in Luetić, "Prve studentice," 176-79.
- <sup>20</sup> There were 86 regular full-time students and 72 of them were irregular students (Luetić, "Prve studentice," 176).
- <sup>21</sup> See more about the social structure of the first female students in: Luetić, "Prve studentice," 182-84.

## The Public Opinion on the Higher Education for Women at the Turn of the Century

The XIX century bourgeois society as a natural place of affirmation for women recognized almost exclusively the private sphere. As one of the first students wrote: public opinion was that teaching girls would distract them from their true natural calling, to be wives and mothers. Generally, a patriarchal tradition considers too much education 'unfeminine'. An educated woman has often been portrayed as "unnatural," as a negation of femininity. The introduction of higher education for girls was also considered the greatest threat to their normal psychophysical development.<sup>22</sup> This apprehension was emphasized by Zdenka Marković, one of the first female students at the University of Zagreb, in her memories of her high school education at the Zagreb *Lyceum*, mentioning its opening: "It was said then that learning would distract girls from their true natural calling, to be wives and mothers, that's why the lyceum was only temporarily opened, to see if it would fulfill its purpose. And this one was for the girls to get a higher general education, and on the way to prepare for the eventual passing of professional exams and for listening to university studies."<sup>23</sup>

In the professional part of the public, there were also various negative opinions on why women should not be admitted to the university. Considering their abilities, opponents commonly used the widespread theory about girls' lower intellectual capacity presented and popularized by German physician Theodor Bischoff<sup>24</sup> who claimed that the anatomy of the female brain proves their inferior intellectual abilities.<sup>25</sup> Other, much stronger arguments that needed more strength to refute were related to the political implications that women's higher education would lead to (the question of the right to vote, participation in the work of political parties), the standards and the level of knowledge regarding women's secondary education, moral standards of the time of strictly defined gender roles, the possibility of employment for female university graduates and so on.<sup>26</sup> In these circumstances, the most acceptable opinion was that the study was almost an ideal solution for those

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<sup>22</sup> Marion A. Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 137; Polenghi, "Striving for recognition," 748.

<sup>23</sup> Zdenka Marković, *Naš licej – o šesedesetgodišnjici njegova osnutka jeseni 1892.* (Zagreb: Ljuba Glaser, 1953), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Theodor von Bischoff (1807-1882), published a study *Das Studium und die Ausübung der Medicin durch Frauen* (1872), a study on the difference between male and female anatomy and the size of the female brain: physically smaller the average female brain meant, according to him, a lack of intellectual ability for any mental work, which was taken as an argument in discussions of women's higher education.

<sup>25</sup> Mazón, *Gender and the Modern Research University*, 2; James C. Albisetti, "Another 'Curious Incident of the Dog in the night-Time?' Intelligence Testing and Coeducation," *History of Education Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2004): 189-90; Michaela Raggam-Blesch, "If a Women Should Be True to Her Natural Destiny, She Ought Not to Compete with Men' Jewish Intellectual Women between Anti-Semitism and Misogony in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna," in *Gender and Modernity in Central Europe. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Its Legacy*, ed. Agatha Schwartz (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2009), 135.

<sup>26</sup> Mazón, *Gender and the Modern Research University*, 2. See also: Luetić, "Studentski časopisi," 109.



girls from the upper classes who did not get married and thus would get a profession that would bring them financial independence.<sup>27</sup>

### **Prejudices and Girls' Initial University Experiences – From Isolation and Solitude to Enthusiasm and Pride**

In such an atmosphere in which the public mindset on higher education for women, with few exceptions, was neither desirable nor encouraged, and viewed as more of an exception in a particular emergency, it was expected that the experience of first girls entering the university to be negative and discriminatory. Once admitted, female students doubtlessly experienced discrimination. However, our sources reveal quite a different experience. This doesn't mean that girls didn't encounter prejudice and inconvenience when they entered university, but what they emphasized is, above all, the positive experience of studying, enthusiasm, and happiness for entering the academic world. Since letters and autobiographies are the most intimate sources, where experiences are openly acknowledged, the negative situations would certainly be highlighted, but here it is not the case. This experience of Croatian female students is similar to those of German girls during the same period, which is confirmed by a survey conducted among female students at the University of Tübingen. The surveyed female students from the University of Tübingen did not consider themselves discriminated against during their studies. In their autobiographies, most of them emphasized the time of their studies as a fulfilling and exciting period in their lives. The individual cases of discrimination mentioned by them fit into the larger story of what it meant to belong to the first generations of girls at the university.<sup>28</sup>

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One of the first prejudices girls faced entering the university was tied to their intentions. Opponents of women's university education accused them of entering the university only to get married. Zdenka Marković wrote to her friend who studied in Vienna: "I ask you, what should I do if one of my colleagues would like to follow me after the lecture? Tell me what to do! Should I respond - no? I can't do that. Help me! It's easy for you where no one knows you, but here... They will comment, maybe that's why I went to university to look for a husband! God, spare me!"<sup>29</sup>

However, the first experience girls recorded is complete enthusiasm, a sense of pridefulness, fulfillment, and happiness in the new world of knowledge and challenges. Girls wrote to each other: "And most importantly, I entered the university. Elza, I'm happy now! Do you believe me? I am so delighted... what I aspired to be fulfilled."<sup>30</sup> "Ah, it's so beautiful now! Now I feel that I am in the right place, as a stream in its riverbed."<sup>31</sup> Zdenka Marković noted in her autobiography: "My soul was craving for hard work, motivation,

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<sup>27</sup> Mazón, "Fräulein Doktor", 130.

<sup>28</sup> Mazón, "Fräulein Doktor," 130-31.

<sup>29</sup> Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica u Zagrebu, Zbirka rukopisa i starih knjiga (henceforth: NSK R), 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October 6, 1902.

<sup>30</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October 6, 1902.

<sup>31</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October 22, 1902.

enthusiasm, wide horizons, deep impressions..."<sup>32</sup> Elza Kučera wrote from Vienna: "Now I feel so free, nothing binds me, I go on my path to my goal, and that path is work, and that goal is to become a man, a complete man."<sup>33</sup> They especially emphasize the enthusiasm for some professors and lectures: "Professor Šurmin talked about syntax, it was wonderful as if it wasn't a grammar, dry, ugly, but something else..."<sup>34</sup> "Psychology started great, about everything, new concepts, new world! Oh, it is beautiful, gorgeous, like a dream!"<sup>35</sup> In the lectures of Izidor Kršnjavi, professor of history of art they wrote: "We both listen to it – pure loveliness, I can't tell you anything else. He talks and talks and we listen as kids listening to a fairytale!"<sup>36</sup> Ljuba Kernic wrote from Leipzig: "I don't have time to go anywhere or do anything, because I'm completely tied down. But never mind, lectures compensate me for everything. They are all very interesting, I look forward to them every day."<sup>37</sup> They also express enthusiasm for new environments, especially those who spent part of their studies in foreign university centers. Elza Kučera wrote to Camilla Lucerna about Vienna: "By the way, Vienna is beautiful and I am free... I go to many places during the day and in the evening, to theaters, to lectures, and back."<sup>38</sup>

One of the first experiences was partial isolation, solitude, and disorientation during the first days at the university. Zdenka Marković wrote to Elza Kučera: "I was at a lecture for the first time yesterday afternoon. You know how I felt! Happiness and a kind of fear merged in my soul, the insecurity of where to go when I entered the lecture hall... I was greatly confused."<sup>39</sup> Elza Kučera wrote to Camilla Lucerna,<sup>40</sup> her former teacher at a Female boarding school in Zagreb (*lyceum*): "...otherwise, I watch male and female listeners from afar, I haven't met anyone yet, and somehow my heart is not drawn to anyone..."<sup>41</sup> Zdenka Marković also wrote that their colleagues kept away from three of them, and "seemed unfamiliar and distant."<sup>42</sup> Particularly embarrassing they felt when they were alone: "But when I'm alone, then – God help me! A terrible feeling! I sit and stare in front of me, I read my script again and again because of the discomfort, I don't know what to start."<sup>43</sup> Z. Marković also wrote: "I'm not talking to anyone, except one, who is sitting

<sup>32</sup> Vinko Brešić, (ed.), *Autobiografije hrvatskih pisaca* (Zagreb: AGM, 1997), 641.

<sup>33</sup> NSK R 4771a, Elza Kučera's letter to Camilla Lucerna, Vienna, February 1, 1903.

<sup>34</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October 22, 1902.

<sup>35</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October 30, 1902.

<sup>36</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, February 19, 1903.

<sup>37</sup> NSK R 4771b, Ljuba Kernic's letter to Elza Kučera, Leipzig, May 21, 1905.

<sup>38</sup> NSK R 4771a, Elza Kučera's letter to Camilla Lucerna, Vienna, February 1, 1903.

<sup>39</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October 22, 1902.

<sup>40</sup> Camilla Lucerna, writer and teacher at Zagreb *lyceum*, graduated from the Teacher's School in Klagenfurt and then studied German and Slavic Studies in Vienna in 1907. See more in Blaženka Klemar Bubić and Marijeta Rajković Iveta, "Austrijska i hrvatska kultura u profesionalnom i životnom putu: studija primjera Camilla Lucerna," in *Godišnjak Njemačke zajednice DG Jahrbuch*, ed. Renata Trischler (Osijek: Njemačka zajednica, Zemaljska udruga Podunavskih Švaba u Hrvatskoj, 2018), 227–45; Tea Rogić Musa, "Lucerna, Kamila (Luzerna, Camilla)," *Hrvatski biografski leksikon*, Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2018–2021, <https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=11964> accessed March 8, 2023

<sup>41</sup> NSK R 4771a, Elza Kučera's letter to Camilla Lucerna, Vienna, November 16, 1902.

<sup>42</sup> Brešić, *Autobiografije*, 641.

<sup>43</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October 30, 1902.

next to us at the Croatian lessons. I will not introduce myself to anyone, nor start a conversation, let them start if they want!"<sup>44</sup> "During the first lesson my colleagues looked at me strangely, but I didn't pay attention to that."<sup>45</sup> Yet, sources reveal step-by-step progress in the relationship with male colleagues up to the level of friendship. Zdenka wrote that their colleagues spoke to her respectfully.<sup>46</sup> And next year letters reveal she was much more relaxed socializing with those of similar interests.<sup>47</sup> Božena Kralj wrote to Velimir Deželić about the extremely nice admission to the Academic Catholic Society "Domagoj," which until then was exclusively male: "Our lectures in the 'Social Section' and Saturday evenings in 'Domagoj' are nice. 'Domagoj' had a wonderful effect on me. Before, I met different students, who spoke 'freely' in front of me... Even though my whole soul opposed and disgusted me, I did not dare to turn out 'naive'. (...) The members of 'Domagoj' distanced me from vulgar society. Having thus met a truly different society, I wanted with all my soul to join 'Domagoj,' to be a part of that beautiful Christian and social community."<sup>48</sup>

### Girls' Success at University

No discomfort was noted in the professors' attitude towards them (unlike the girls' experiences at some other universities).<sup>49</sup> Firstly, the girls

<sup>44</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October 30, 1902.

<sup>45</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, October, 22, 1902.

<sup>46</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letters to Elza Kučera Zagreb, November 18, 1902 and December 5, 1902.

<sup>47</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, November 10, 1906. and March 30, 1907.

<sup>48</sup> Božena Kralj's letter to Velimir Deželić, Moscow, 8 October 1912. [Velimir Deželić, *Kakvi smo bili?, Zapisi moje unučadi. Život zagrebačke obitelji od 1827. do 1953.* (Zagreb: Družba Braća Hrvatskog Zmaja 2011), 674]. Similar experience is described in the research on Catholic societies and Catholic academic women in Germany in the same period. At German universities, student fraternities were extremely active, attracting or repelling female members, depending on the religious background of the society. The author points out that Catholic societies were open to girls precisely because of the values they shared with the girls "deep piety, morality, and serious scholarly endeavors" and because of the construction of Catholic masculinity associated with those values "as opposed to the all-male, duelling-centered, freedom-oriented world of Protestant-dominated fraternities and associations, Catholics organizations carved out a place for women..." The author highlights the paradox of the time: "even if Catholic leaders emphasized the subordination of women to men, in fact aspects of Catholic academic culture—unlike much of fraternity culture—created an opening to allow for the gradual incorporation of women into the informal curriculum of academic life." (Lisa Fetheringill Zwicker, "Catholic Academic Masculinity and Catholic Academic Women in Germany, 1900-1914," *Catholic Historical Review* 105, no. 4 (2019): 729, 733-34).

<sup>49</sup> By citing just a few examples from foreign universities about the inconvenience experienced by first female students, the atmosphere at the turn of the century when girls entered the academic world is pointed out. One of the striking examples happened when distinguished German historian and professor at the University of Berlin, Heinrich von Treitschke, once seeing a girl in the lecture hall, stopped the lecture and escorted her to the exit door (Mazón, *Gender and the Modern Research University*, 1). English female students of psychology at the end of the 19th century also experienced humiliation during lectures: their professor of physiology at the University of Cambridge, Michael Foster, allowed them to sit only in the gallery of his large lecture hall (Paula Gould, "Women and the Culture of University Physics in Late Nineteenth-Century Cambridge," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 30, (1997): 146-47). Helene Rosenbach, a medical student at the University of Vienna, mentions

emphasize their success in the exams with some professors, but also have pleasant conversations, manifesting interest from the other side. Several quotes illustrate this: "Finally, I can live without any worries, I completed the colloquium in syntax and the literature with excellent! Can you imagine - the best paper! Professor Šurmin was such a nice judge. After the job was done, he talked to me about everything. He was interested in what I was doing in general and if I was reading anything. He was very curious! You would never have thought that!"<sup>50</sup> "Recently I had a colloquium in 'Psychology towards Aesthetics' with Professor Marković, and I got an excellent grade. He was very kind and smiled contentedly. He eventually told me that he followed my literary work with enjoyment and complimented it, judging it worthy. I was very happy because his assessment is significant."<sup>51</sup> The statement of professor of mathematics at the Faculty of Philosophy Vladimir Varičak also confirms girls' success at the university: looking for an assistant, emphasized that Marija Lukšić was his best student.<sup>52</sup> She became the first female teaching assistant at the University of Zagreb in 1915.<sup>53</sup> On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Milica Bogdanović's birth, her student testified about the excellent success of her studies, mentioning that professor Franjo Marković, one of her examiners at the doctoral exam, said that it was "a joy and pleasure to listen to her answers."<sup>54</sup>

The success of the first female students at the university is not surprising. First and foremost, the best of the best were enrolled at the university. These girls were mostly educated at the girls' *lyceum* in Zagreb. The teaching staff there was composed of the best teachers, high-school professors, and even the university teachers of that period.<sup>55</sup> After finishing the final exam at this institution, they took a graduation exam at one of the male grammar schools, which was crucial for entering the university.<sup>56</sup> Although some of them dropped out of their studies, for various reasons,

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the inconveniences from the lectures given by Professor Franz Chwostek, who forbade the girls to attend his lectures and exercises at the hospital, although it was technically illegal because at that time they already had permission to enroll at the Faculty of Medicine. He admitted her to the exam but did not look up at her and addressed her as "Herr Rosenbach" (Raggam-Blesch, "If a Women Should Be True to Her Natural Destiny," 139).

<sup>50</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, March 29, 1903.

<sup>51</sup> NSK R 4771b, Zdenka Marković's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb, April 10, 1906.

<sup>52</sup> At the regular session of the Faculty of Philosophy held on 10 July 1915, mathematics professor Vladimir Varičak proposed "that student Marija Lukšić, who graduated from the 6th semester this summer, be appointed assistant to the Chair of Mathematics" (AFF, *Spisi*, br. 421/1915.). The professors' assembly of the Faculty of Philosophy accepted this proposal unanimously, and the dean, Professor Josip Florschütz, informed the Government in a letter dated July 14, 1915, that the faculty's faculty recommended Marija Lukšić for the position of "assistant to the mathematics chair with 1,000 crowns per year" (AFF, *Spisi*, br. 447/1915.). This way she became first female teaching assistant at the University of Zagreb.

<sup>53</sup> More about her see in Tihana Luetić and Tihomir Vukelja, "Marija Lukšić, prva asistentica na zagrebačkom sveučilištu," in *Zbornik radova Povijest i filozofija tehnike*, 9. simpozij PIFT 2020, ed. Zvonko Benčić (Zagreb: Kiklos – Krug knjige, 2020), 865–82.

<sup>54</sup> Ljubinka Draškić, "Milica Bogdanović," *Ženski pokret* 13, no. 5 (1932): 66.

<sup>55</sup> Half of the lyceum teaching staff were high school professors, and the other half were male and female teachers. Some of them also taught at the university (Ograjšek-Gorenjak, "Otvaranje ženskog liceja," 165; Marković, *Naš licej*, 5–7).

<sup>56</sup> Luetić, "Prve studentice," 187; Ograjšek-Gorenjak, "Otvaranje ženskog liceja," 158–59, 163.

the majority finished their studies, either by passing the professor's exam or completing a PhD exam. Out of 158 female students who studied at the Faculty of Philosophy from 1901 when girls were allowed to study, until 1914, 15 of them obtained a doctorate, which was 9% of the total number of enrolled female students,<sup>57</sup> and 14 of them passed the exams for secondary school teachers.<sup>58</sup>

### Support and Encouragement

The experience of the first female students was certainly influenced by the encouragement from their families and teachers. As far as the sources allow, it is clear that all these girls who came to study were motivated and encouraged by their parents. Oton Kučera<sup>59</sup> wrote to his daughter Elza while going to study in Switzerland: "My dear girl! Be healthy and happy and enjoy the enormous beauty of science. (...) I look at you, a successful girl, in the heart of Europe, at the university, and I enjoy being together with your mother. (...) So, girl, go on, sharply to the goal! You can imagine, how we swallow each of your cards and enjoy you did so well in Zürich."<sup>60</sup> About her dissertation, he wrote: "You have a big job ahead of you now and I think about it every day. I understand that you are holding on heroically, that you are happy to work in peace, and that is the greatest joy for both of us."<sup>61</sup> Velimir Deželić noted that Božena Kralj had strong support in her family for further education, primarily from her mother, a housewife and an uneducated woman. She set high goals in education not only for her sons but also for her daughters, "outrageous for the environment." She accepted the idea of her daughter Božena becoming a "university student."<sup>62</sup> Professor Jagoda Truhelka was delighted with the enrollment at the university of her former student Zdenka Marković at the Female boarding school in Zagreb: "I see you right now, as you

<sup>57</sup> Luetić, "Prve studentice," 196. Milica Bogdanović was the first to receive her doctorate in 1906. Related to her doctorate defense in the memories of her student the problem with her diploma, printed in Latin was noted: there were problems with the already established Latin text, which was unified only for men (Draškić, "Milica Bogdanović," 66). Complete biography of Milica Bogdanović was written by dr Ivana Spasović: Ivana Spasović, "Prva južnoslovenska istoričarka dr Milica S. Bogdanović (1882-1973.)" in *Julijin balkon s pogledom na slobodu*, (Beograd: Ključ izdavaštvo, 2023), 11-66, in print.

<sup>58</sup> Luetić, "Prve studentice," 195.

<sup>59</sup> Elza's father was Oton Kučera (1857 - 1931), a Croatian astronomer and scientist, playing a significant role in popularizing science and technology in Croatia. He was also the president of Matica hrvatska and the author of several physics handbooks for primary school and a series of popular scientific works in the field of physics, astronomy and electrical engineering. More about him see in *Život i djelo Otona Kučere (1857.-1931.)*. *Zbornik radova znanstveno-stručnog skupa "Život i djelo Otona Kučere" održanog u povodu obilježavanja 150. godišnjice rođenja hrvatskog velikana Otona Kučere*, ed. Tatjana Kren (Zagreb: Zagrebački astronomski savez - Zvezdarnica Zagreb, 2008).

<sup>60</sup> NSK R 4771b, Oton Kučera's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb 20 October 1905.

<sup>61</sup> NSK R 4771b, Oton Kučera's letter to Elza Kučera, Zagreb 23 October 1906.

<sup>62</sup> Božena Kralj was born in a family with seven children. Her family did not belong to the circle of the intellectual elite. Her father Ivan was an officer of the police station and her mother Marija, born Zubčić, originally from Lovinac in Lika, was a housewife, a modest but intelligent woman who set higher goals in education for her children. Božena's excellent success throughout the high school was an indication to her parents to pursue higher education for her. In addition, already at such an early age, she took over the upbringing of her youngest sister Ruža at home (Deželić, *Kakvi smo bili?*, 673; Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!", 135).

enter the sacred halls of your Alma mater for the first time, and I laugh with you to those astonished and amazed heroes. (...) You, my children, make me happy with your serious dedication... I am proud of you and I pray to God to give you abundant blessings in your endeavors."<sup>63</sup> Zdenka Marković also had strong support from her high school teacher Jagoda Truhelka for continuing her studies abroad: "You need to look around the world, to spread ideas and desires, to search and to find. I am so looking forward to you and your work, your aspirations, successes, and struggles."<sup>64</sup> Truhelka not only encouraged her to go abroad but also clearly emphasized the importance of her stay in Krakow: "We need these kinds of initiatives from abroad, to move forward, to get up and start working... Your stay among the Poles can have great consequences for the women's cause in us. I know you will not fail to work on it: you are young, passionate, don't stop, don't let yourself be swayed by any little things and failures..."<sup>65</sup>

### The Case of Božena Kralj

The barriers Božena Kralj broke through are exceptional in every field, from breaking into the men's world at the Imperial University in Moscow to joining the exclusive male Catholic academic society "Domagoj" in Zagreb, to her academic success. Božena Kralj wrote about her initial isolation in the male-only catholic students' society "Domagoj": "...we will get one more female member of Domagoj... It really makes me happy, because at least this way I will not be 'different than other women' and disappear like a comet without a trace, but I will leave an inheritress."<sup>66</sup> According to the young Velimir Deželić, Božena's future husband, there was skepticism about the appearance of Božena Kralj in the ranks of "Domagoj." After a long discussion, finally, bishop Antun Mahnič himself made a judgment. It was very clear and short, as Deželić reports: "Well, it must be!"<sup>67</sup> She became a part of an important group of the student subculture. Božena Kralj also won a scholarship from the highest scientific institution in the country to continue her education in Slavic studies at Moscow.<sup>68</sup> However, what Božena had to do with this scholarship was even more sensational, considering that she was a woman, a girl of Catholic orientation, going to "anarchist" Russia alone. About the impression that Božena's success left on her surroundings, Deželić wrote in his memoirs that it was "quite a sensation," and everyone doubted "will a

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<sup>63</sup> Jagoda Truhelka's letter to Zdenka Marković, Banja Luka November 15, 1902 [Ana Batinić, "Pisma Jagode Truhelke Zdenki Marković," *Kronika Zavoda za povijest hrvatske književnosti, kazališta i glazbe HAZU VI*, no. 13-14-15 (2004): 122].

<sup>64</sup> Jagoda Truhelka's letter to Zdenka Marković, Sarajevo, December 27, 1910 (Batinić, "Pisma Jagode Truhelke," 144).

<sup>65</sup> Jagoda Truhelka's letter to Zdenka Marković, Sarajevo, April 10, 1912 (Batinić, "Pisma Jagode Truhelke," 149).

<sup>66</sup> Božena Kralj's letter to Velimir Deželić, Zagreb, April 21, 1914 (Državni arhiv Zagreb, Ostavština obitelji Deželić, br. fonda 823, serija 5.7.3. Korespondencija Velimira Deželića ml., sign. 1513, 5; Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!," 142).

<sup>67</sup> Deželić, *Kakvi smo bili?*, 657-58; Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!," 140.

<sup>68</sup> Božena Kralj received a scholarship from the Julije Bubanović Foundation awarded by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts to specialize in Slavic Studies at the University of Moscow in September 1912 in a competition in which she was declared the best among five candidates. Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!," 133-34.

twenty-year-old girl, declared member of 'Domagoj' dare to go to a distant Russia?!<sup>69</sup> However, arriving in Moscow, Božena faced challenges: admission to girls' courses, not to the University, was not an acceptable solution for her, although the level of education was equal. Given the experience in the homeland that some borders can be moved, she decided not to give up: "First female member of Domagoj - why not be the first student at that conservative university?"<sup>70</sup> She was advised not to "look for the impossible," because that Academy would also recognize her High Course from Moscow: "Just out of the politeness they didn't tell me not to be ridiculous in my stubbornness."<sup>71</sup> Thanks to her persistence, in November 1912 she was accepted as an irregular student at the Faculty of History and Philosophy of Moscow University, which she was granted, despite the still unresolved issue of girls' access to the University in Russia.<sup>72</sup> For her admission to Moscow University, Božena Kralj wrote briefly: "My head is so hard that it broke through the wall that fenced the Empire away from women!"<sup>73</sup> She pointed out persistence and stubbornness as the key qualities that brought the girls of her time to the ultimate goal in higher education.

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In conclusion, it can be highlighted that the first female students at the University of Zagreb rose above mainstream stereotypes. Furthermore, their experience during the study, according to the sources, turned out to be different from the usual prejudices of the time: it was presented as a fulfilling and exciting time in their lives. These pioneers in women's higher education pushed the boundaries of their personal and professional lives and opened the door to the thousands of Croatian female students in the following decades. Also, these few fascinating personal examples that shed light on the beginnings of women's studies in Croatia, open the door to a wide field of research into women's higher education from a personal perspective at the turn of the century.

<sup>69</sup> Deželić, *Kakvi smo bili?*, 673. Usp. Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!," 134–35.

<sup>70</sup> Božena Kralj's letter to Velimir Deželić, Moscow, October 8, 1912 (Deželić, *Kakvi smo bili?*, 674; Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!," 136.

<sup>71</sup> Božena Kralj's letter to Velimir Deželić, Moscow, November 1912 (Deželić, *Kakvi smo bili?*, 694; Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!," 137.

<sup>72</sup> Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!," 136.

<sup>73</sup> Božena Kralj's letter to Velimir Deželić, Moscow, November 1912 (Deželić, *Kakvi smo bili?*, 694; usp. Luetić, "Pa, mora i to biti!," 137.

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