

Biography of Dr. Đorđe-Đurica Đorđević, Founder of the Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases in Belgrade

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UDK 616.5:929 Đorđević Đ.

Abstract

Đorđe Đorđević, a Serb from Croatia, was born in Grubišno polje (Croatia) on April 22, 1885. He studied medicine in Vienna and graduated in 1909. Till 1912, he advanced his knowledge working at dermatology clinics with Prof. Finger and Prof. Arning, as well as with Prof. Weichselbaum, professor of pathological anatomy and bacteriology.

From 1912 he worked in Zagreb, at the Dermatology Department of the Brothers of Mercy Hospital, and during World War I as a military doctor at the Dermatology Department and the Zagreb Outpatient Department (Second kolodvor). After the war, in 1918, he moved to Belgrade, where he was the Head of the Polyclinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases, and in 1922 he became an Assistant Professor of Dermatology at the School of Medicine in Belgrade. In the same year, he founded the Department of Dermatovenereology at the School of Medicine in Belgrade and the Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases, of which he was also the Head. In 1923, he became an Associate Professor, and in 1934 a Full Professor. He is given credit for passing legislation on prostitution and banning brothels.

The professional work of Prof. Đorđe Đorđević encompasses all areas of dermatology, including his special interest in experimental studies in the field of venereology.

He organized medical-research trips to study people's health status, and his teams visited the South Serbia (today Macedonia), Sandžak and Montenegro.

In 1927, he founded the Dermatovenereology Section of the Serbian Medical Society (19) and the Association of Dermatovenereologists of Yugoslavia. He was the chairman of the I, II and III Yugoslav Congress of Dermatology in Belgrade, and of the II Congress of the Pan-Slavic Association of Dermatovenereologists with international participation. He was an honorary member of the Bulgarian, Czechoslovakian, Polish and Danish Dermatological Societies, as well as a regular member of the Association of French Speaking Dermatologists, and of French, German and Biology Society. He was the Vice dean of the School of Medicine.

He died suddenly on April 27, 1935, shortly after his 50th birthday, and was mourned by colleagues, friends and students.

On the first anniversary of his death, his family, friends and colleagues established a "Foundation of Dr. Đorđe-Đurica Đorđević" meant for "doctors and health workers". Unfortunately, the foundation was disestablished in the early eighties of the 20th century.

Key words

Biography; Physicians; Dermatology; Venereology; History of Medicine; Serbia; Skin Diseases; Syphilis

Biographies are one of the ways of writing the history of classical (traditional) medical history (1). They give us a way to tie together the parallel currents of history at the level where the events and ideas occur (2), including past and present, history and medicine, and close study of an individual also provides an

insight into the creative process itself (3). However, in the mid-twentieth century, medical biographies have become much rarer, under the influence of academic historians, whose main idea was to study the impact of medicine on the health and development of people (social context: social history of medicine) (4). In this

framework, biographies were not relevant to the new historical science, because the history of medicine is infinitely more than history of great doctors and their books (5). This has decreased the stimulating effects of medical-historical facts, observation, critical and scientific reasoning, thus limiting the development of medical thought.

In the last three decades, these disagreements and mutual antagonism were followed by a return of biography, which became a respected scientific genre once again (1).

The biography of Đ. Đorđević (Figure 1), which covers geographical, existential, professional and socio-cultural aspects, confirms the value of this historiography genre, including the social context, because his life and work are relevant for the development of dermatovenereology in Serbia, but are also features of the era in which he lived.

Đorđe Đorđević, a Serb from Croatia, was born in Grubišno polje (Croatia) on April 22, 1885. It was a territory of the Military Frontier (border), which was a strong anti-Ottoman defense line preventing Ottoman expansion in Europe. He attended elementary school in Vukovar, the first four years of high school in Novi Sad, and the higher grades and graduation in Zagreb (6). He studied medicine in Vienna and graduated in 1909. Very early on he showed interest in scientific research and he worked diligently and systematically. During his studies in Vienna, he was an assistant to A. Weichselbaum, professor of pathological anatomy (and histology) and bacteriology (6, 7). In the same period he worked at the *University Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases* with Prof. Finger (8), who belonged to Hebra's school (9) and was known for his works on gonorrhea and syphilis (10). After he graduated, till August 1911, Đ. Đorđević was the first assistant to professor Merck in Innsbruck, and later, till 1912, he worked with E. Arning, professor of dermatology at the University of Hamburg. Then he moved to Zagreb where he had a private practice, but also worked at the *Department of Skin Diseases of the Brothers of Mercy Hospital* (6, 8). The head of the department was Dr. J. Thierry (6), the founder of venereology in Croatia, who worked on prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and health education of common people (11). When the First World War started in 1914, Đ. Đorđević was mobilized as a military doctor and worked at the *Dermatology Department* and the *Zagreb*

Outpatient Department (Second kolodvor) till the end of the war (6, 12). So, until his arrival to Belgrade, he spent almost all his life in areas under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, whereas he was a Serb by his national origin and identity.

Although Serbia was on the winning side after the end of the World War I, the country was devastated by long occupation and outbreaks of infectious disease. At the beginning of war, 30.000 grenades were thrown at Belgrade, so the city was in ruins. Health facilities were severely damaged or destroyed, and the entire hospital inventory, medical supplies, medicines and instruments were taken away, as well as medical records and books from the library. The University building (Captain Miša's Mansion), an architectural beauty of Belgrade, was turned into stables and munitions depot (13). One third of the population was lost during the war, as well as half of the army (14), and 35% of doctors (15), among which there were three dermatologists: Milorad Savićević, Pop-Milutin Jovanović, Milutin Perišić (16), being an irreparable loss to the profession. The development of dermatovenereology service in Serbia, initiated in the nineteenth century by general physicians and surgeons, with special efforts of the first educated dermatovenereologist, Dr. J. Žujović, who was introducing European scientific dermatology, was destroyed.

Đ. Đorđević was among the Serbs who lived scattered in the Habsburg Monarchy, never letting go of the dream to return to their country and help its restoration. Thus, immediately after the war, he fulfilled the ideal of his youth: in 1918 he moved to Belgrade (6), where he lived to the end of his life. His arrival was followed by trains bringing clothing, food, medicines, sanitary materials, beds and bedding for the country which was to be rebuilt from ruins (6, 12).

From the very beginning, he had a clear goal and a plan to achieve it; being a systematic person, in the course of a few years, first he founded institutions necessary for health care, development and education in the field of modern dermatovenereology.

During his short but fruitful life, events were taking place in a continuous and dynamic manner: in 1919 he became the Head of the newly established *Outpatient Service for Skin and Venereal Diseases* (OSSVDs) (17, 18), while the School of Medicine in



Figure 1. Professor Đurica Đorđević

Belgrade was established in 1920 (13). As of 1922, Đ. Đorđević was elected as Assistant Professor and the first teacher of dermatology in Serbia, after which he founded the *Department of Dermatovenereology* at the School of Medicine in Belgrade (13), and the *Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases* (CSVDs), remaining its managing director till his premature death (18). He was elected as Associate Professor in 1923, when he began teaching at the university, and in 1934 he became a Full Professor (8). He founded the Clinical Library, with valuable books and periodicals from the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, and initiated the creation of the Belgrade Dermatovenereology Moulage Collection. After World War II, we learned from our senior colleagues about the newly established Department for Experimental Work with Experimental Animals. In 1927, major institutions were founded under his leadership: the *Dermatovenereology Section* (DVS) of the *Serbian Medical Society* (SMS) (19) and

the *Association of Dermatovenereologists of Yugoslavia* (ADVY), which included all Dermatovenereology Sections of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) of that time (20). He was one of the initiators of the idea of uniting and grouping Slavic dermatologists, while foundation of the ADVY provided inclusion of all dermatovenereology sections of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into the *Pan-Slavic Association of Dermatovenereologists* (PSADVs). In Belgrade, he organized the First (1927), Second (1928) and Third (1929) Yugoslav Dermatovenereology Congresses (18). In 1931, in the second term of PSADV, he was elected as the president of the association, and in the same year, the II PSADV Congress was organized in Belgrade, under his leadership, with international participation and a rich program (21). His young associates were also included in these activities, like the irreplaceable M. Kićevac, later professor and his successor as the Head of the Clinic

(18). With his exceptional gift for communication, he gathered and encouraged them with his creative spirit, inexhaustible ideas and enthusiasm: his ideas were recognized in their work. In the academic year 1933/34 (13), he was elected as the Vice Dean of the School of Medicine in Belgrade, and he held this position till death.

Đ. Đorđević also had a very active professional and teaching career, and his former work with experienced specialists in dermatology centers was of great benefit.

Although the newly established *Outpatient Service for Skin and Venereal Diseases* (OSSVDs) (1919), was situated in an inadequate building with poor conditions, he succeeded in organizing a free of charge modern laboratory service, held classes for medical students and young doctors specializing in dermatovenereology (17, 18).

The professional work of Đ. Đorđević included dermatology in general, but his main interest was venereology. The research that he conducted and encouraged, from the point of view of medicine of that time, demonstrated his professional and scientific competence. He investigated the biological characteristics of *Treponema pallidum* (TP) in rabbits, insisted on the importance of its early detection and serological reactions, studying their relationships. Treatment of syphilis was surely his favorite subject of research. He studied effects of modern treatment, paying special attention to the whole body, as opposed to partial approach. In addition, he believed that the outcome of treatment was not directly influenced by the drug, but by the reaction of the organism, which he stimulated by vaccines and blood transfusions, but he was also a supporter of pyretotherapy in all forms of early and latent syphilis. In gonorrhea, he bacteriologically studied gonococci and "banal diplococci", seeking causes of their variable virulence, trying to explain the relationship with "banal" urethritis, being a major problem for venereologists of that time and long after that (7, 17, 21). Accepted or not by modern medicine, his ideas were progressive for that time; M. Kićevac emphasized the intuition of his mentor, and his ability to get deeply into the essence of the problem (7).

Owing to the obituary written by M. Kićevac (7), we have the bibliography of Đ. Đorđević: he

published 49 papers, of which 31 were in the field of venereology, and 17 were published in German and French journals. This number does not include many case reports presented at meetings of SMS and DVS.

Teaching was among his most important duties. He used to spend a lot of time with his students at lectures and outside the class, and not only with medical students, but with students of the entire University of Belgrade. He was interested in the conditions of their life, financial problems and their other activities (7, 12); he founded the canteen for medical students and was the honorary president of the Association of Medical Students (12). Due to all the above, he was "the favorite teacher" (6).

Social medical work was among the most important areas of his work and he worked on its implementation on a broad scale. He was highly respected as a person spreading social medical measures in fighting venereal diseases and as a founder of free of charge outpatient dermatovenereology service (17, 22). From the beginning of his work in Belgrade, he started fighting against prostitution, which spread throughout Europe after the war. In early 1919, "Temporary rules for fighting against venereal diseases in Belgrade" were brought, and thus control of prostitution was transferred from the police to the Polyclinic where he was the Head, and prostitutes were treated free of charge. He is given credit for passing legislation on prostitution and banning brothels. Following the example of this Polyclinic, on his initiative, the Ministry of Public Health organized a number of similar clinics in other cities in the country (17).

His medical research trips were truly invaluable. In the first years after arriving in Belgrade, Đ. Đorđević began organizing medical research trips with a team of doctors, clinicians of all specialties, with complete laboratory; among them were some professors from the School of Medicine. Destinations were mostly poor and inaccessible areas, distant from health centers, where medical help was most needed, and their objective was to study the general health of the nation, as well as diseases with highest incidence in each area. Thus, the trip to Sandžak was dealing with endemic syphilis, tuberculosis, and liver diseases. Đ. Đorđević believed that this type of work was useful both for physicians on the team, as well as for local

doctors, since various pathology was rarely found in areas closer to health centers. Thanks to his authority, some state institutions supported this work financially (travel expenses, accommodation and organization of team work), and all examinations were free of charge. Team participants were volunteers, working without compensation (23).

In 1924, he organized a small expedition to investigate the incidence of syphilis in the area of Požarevac. The interest of the population was huge (22), so in 1925 he organized another medical trip to South Serbia (today Macedonia), where 10.000 people were examined in the course of one month (22, 23). The next expedition was to Sandžak in 1929 (23). His last expedition was in 1933, and in addition to many professors, it was attended by the rector, V. Petković, and the vice rector, M. Ilić. According to incomplete data, its destination was Montenegro (22).

Unfortunately, data on these events are missing. After World War II, Prof. S. Ilić, director of the CSVDs, claimed that some of the gathered materials were processed, but he could not obtain any reports, so in his monograph on the treatment of endemic syphilis, he provided only oral statements of participants, general and sporadic, on one of the expeditions (24). However, it is known that during World War II, the CSVDs was occupied by the enemy (13, 25) and that in that period the complete Clinic Archive disappeared (25), probably together with these reports.

Prof. Đ. Đorđević was a man of great humanity. During World War I, as a military doctor in Zagreb, he organized the rescue of a large number of nationally oriented Serbs and Croats, who were considered to be politically incorrect, and as recruits of the Austrian army, they were systematically sent to the most dangerous parts of the Austrian front, where they would certainly end up dead (6). Among them, there were further editors of the "Literary South" (literary magazine of Yugoslav nationally oriented writers, which was published in Zagreb in 1918 and 1919) (26): Niko Bartulović, a writer; Ivo Andrić, later a Nobel Prize winner in literature and Vladimir Ćorović, one of the most significant Serbian historians (12).

After the war, he also provided financial support to people who came from internment or prison, as well as numerous children from Bosnia and Herzegovina who have lost their parents (6). He put some of them

through school (12).

Đ. Đorđević was an ethical and highly professional person, fully dedicated to the Hippocratic Oath. Those who worked with him knew how passionate he was about his job, also conscientious, consistent and accurate in carrying out his duties, a great organizer. On the other hand, socially, he was a bright and witty man, fond of people, arts and artists, a bohemian. J. Nedeljković, an internist-pulmonologist, later a professor at the School of Medicine in Belgrade, one of the participants of his health expeditions, wrote about his youthful memories in the obituary: "He made people feel cheerful and good, and he spread serenity and goodness which came from perfect inner harmony in his most intimate being he was an exceptional and truly generous man"; he boosted his associates with self-confidence and wish to work independently, so they could develop their skills. He loved people and they felt it, so he made lasting friendships, both with the common people from areas he visited on his expeditions (22), and with learned scholars. With his wife Krista, born Šumanović, he was a patron of modern art, and his home in Belgrade was one of the most popular meeting places for the intellectual and artistic elite. Among his friends were sculptors Sreten Stojanović and Toma Rosandić, painters Milo Milunović and Ignjat Job, composers Petar Konjović, Kosta Manojlović, Miloje Milojević, writers Miloš Crnjanski, Tin Ujević (12), Branislav Nušić (22) and others. He was their moral support, and to some he provided financial assistance. Thus, he supported specializations abroad for the sculptor Sreten Stojanović, and Radivoje Pavlović, later a distinguished professor of pharmacology (12).

He was an honorary member of the Bulgarian, Czechoslovakian, Polish and Danish dermatological societies, as well as a regular member of the Association of French-Speaking Dermatologists, and of the French, German and Biological Society (8). The Clinic of Dermatology and Venereology of the School of Medicine in Belgrade was named after him.

Prof. Đ. Đorđević died shortly after his 50th birthday. He worked till the last day of his life. Although he already had symptoms of the disease that would result in death, as the vice dean, he hosted Professor Debré from France: he gave a welcome speech, the next day he attended his lecture, and held a reception

for more than 100 people at his home. During the following days, shortly before his death, he visited the playwright Branislav Nušić and gave him advice on taking his medications; for the next day he scheduled a game of cards at home, where B. Nušić read his new play "Ujež". A few days later, he went to Arandelovac, full of optimism and good spirits. That evening he played his last piquet card game with his friends. Prof. J. Nedeljković wrote: "He lay down in good earnest and fell asleep forever" (22). He died at dawn of April 27, 1935. It was during the Easter holidays, and it was announced over radio and newspapers; people expressed grief in many parts of our country (6). He was buried at the New Cemetery in Belgrade; his grave has a white marble headstone with a symbolic relief full of emotions: a kneeling girl with arms outstretched towards the leaving ship; candelabra with caryatids, described by the art historian J. Sekulić, and the work of his protégé and friend, sculptor Sreten Stojanović (27) is unfortunately missing.

After his death, his family, professors, assistant professors, teaching assistants of the School of Medicine, and staff of the CSVDs, OSSVDs, as well as doctors of other institutions established the "Foundation of Professor Đorđe-Đurica Đorđević" meant for rewards "of doctors and medics" on his death anniversary. The director of CSVDs was the Head of the Foundation and the President of the jury; it was to be a permanent foundation. Unfortunately, due to poor management, the Foundation was disestablished in the early eighties (28).

This paper will end with the words taken from the obituary written by Prof. Kićevac "After his sudden death, his associates, assistants and staff are filled with deep sorrow at the early loss of their superior, but also with great affection for the kind and cordial man Prof. Đorđe Đorđević was."

His early death was a great loss for Serbian dermatovenereology, as well as for the society. But, like every man with a vision, he left behind a group of exceptional Serbian dermatologists who followed his path: Prof. Milan Kićevac, Assist. Prof. Sava Bugarski, Assoc. Prof. Nemanja Barjaktarević, and Prof. Sima Ilić.

Abbreviations

OSSVDs - Outpatient Service for Skin and Venereal Diseases
CSVDs - Clinic for Skin and Venereal Diseases
DVS - Dermatovenereology Section
SMS - Serbian Medical Society
ADVY - Association of Dermatovenereologists of Yugoslavia
PSADVs - Pan-Slavic Association of Dermatovenereologists
TP - *Treponema pallidum*

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Biografija dr Đorđa - Đurice Đorđevića, osnivača Klinike za dermatovenerologiju i venerologiju u Beogradu

Sažetak

Uvod. Biografija profesora dr Đorđa Đorđevića ukazuje na važnost ovog istoriografskog roda, jer su njegov život i rad značajni za razvoj dermatovenerologije u Srbiji, ali i kao obeležje epohe u kojoj je živio.

Biografski podaci. Đorđe Đorđević, Srbin iz Hrvatske, rodio se u Grubišnom Polju (Hrvatska) 22. aprila 1885. godine. Osnovnu školu pohađao je u Vukovaru, a gimnaziju u Novom Sadu i Zagrebu. Medicinu je studirao u Beču i diplomirao je 1909. godine. Do 1912. godine usavršavao se na dermatološkim klinikama kod prof. Fingera i prof. Arninga, kao i kod Vajhzelbauma,

profesora patološke anatomije i bakteriologije, gde je stekao široko dermatovenerološko obrazovanje.

Stručna aktivnost. Od 1912. godine radio je u Zagrebu, at the Department of Skin Diseases of the "Hospital of Brothers of Mercy", a u toku I svetskog rata kao vojni lekar na Kožnom odeljenju i Ambulanti Drugog zagrebačkog kolodvora. Posle završetka rata, 1918. godine prešao je u Beograd sa ciljem da pomogne u obnovi svoje zemlje razorene ratom. Odmah je postavljen za rukovodioca Poliklinike za kožne i venerične bolesti u Beogradu. Godine 1922.

izabran je za docenta za Dermatovenerologiju na Medicinskom fakultetu u Beogradu. Iste godine bio je jedan od glavnih osnivača Klinike za dermatologiju i venerologiju i Katedre za dermatovenerologiju. Za vanrednog profesora izabran je 1923. godine, kada je počeo sa nastavom, a redovni profesor postao je 1934. godine. I pored nepovoljnih smeštajnih uslova, na Klinici je organizovao stručni i naučno-istraživački rad, kao i nastavu za studente i lekare na specijalizaciji. Njegova je zasluga donošenje zakonskih odredbi o regulisanju prostitucije, na osnovu kojih je kontrola prostitucije prešla iz policije u Polikliniku za kožne i venerične bolesti, gde je lečenje bilo besplatno i ukinuo je javne kuće. Svojim stručnim radom obuhvatao je kompletnu dermatovenerologiju, s posebnim interesovanjem i eksperimentalnim studijama u oblasti venerologije. Objavio je 49 radova – 31 rad je iz venerologije; 17 radova je objavljeno u nemačkim i francuskim časopisima. Podsticao je stručni i naučni rad svojih saradnika.

Kao nastavnik bio je vrlo cenjen. Pored predavanja, učestvovao je i u drugim studentskim aktivnostima i problemima; osnovao je menzu za studente medicine, bio je počasni predsednik Udruženja studenata medicine i jedan od najomiljenijih nastavnika.

Značajan je bio njegov socijalno-medicinski rad. Organizovao je zdravstveno-naučne ekskurzije radi proučavanja zdravstvenog stanja naroda i sa svojim ekipama obišao je Južnu Srbiju (danas Makedonija), Sandžak i Crnu Goru.

Već 1927. godine bio je jedan od glavnih osnivača Dermatovenerološke sekcije Srpskog lekaraskog društva i Jugoslovenskog dermatovenerološkog društva koje je objedinilo sve dermatovenerološke sekcije u tadašnjoj Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca. Jedan je od pokretača ideje zbližavanja

slovenskih dermatovenerologa; njegovom inicijativom Jugoslovensko dermatovenerološko društvo uključeno je u Sveslovenski dermatološki savez. U drugom mandatu izabran je za predsednika ovog saveza. Pod njegovim rukovodstvom održan je u Beogradu I, II i III jugoslovenski dermatovenerološki kongres i II kongres Sveslovenskog dermatološkog saveza sa internacionalnim učešćem.

Bio je počasni član Bugarskog, Čehoslovačkog, Poljskog i Danskog dermatološkog društva, kao i redovni član Društva dermatologa francuskog jezika, Francuskog, Nemačkog i Biološkog društva. Bio je prodekan Medicinskog fakulteta.

Društvena aktivnost. Humanost Đ. Đorđevića bila je neiscrpna. U toku I svetskog rata, kao lekar u Zagrebu pomagao je nacionalno orijentisanim Srbima i Hrvatima da izbegnu mobilizaciju kao austrijski vojni obveznici i mnogima je tako spasao život. Materijalno je pomagao naše ljude koji su se posle završetka rata vraćali iz internacije i zatvora, kao i mnogobrojnu decu koja su u ratu ostala bez roditelja. Neke od njih je i školovao.

Kao čovek je predstavljao izuzetnu ličnost: odan svome pozivu, na poslu je bio neumoran i strog, dobar učitelj i odličan organizator. S druge strane bio je širokogruđi, veseo i duhovit čovek, voleo je društvo, umetnost i umetnike. Bio je zaštitnik moderne umetnosti i njegov dom je bio sastajalište intelektualne i umetničke elite u Beogradu.

Premинуo je iznenada, 27. aprila 1935. godine, neposredno posle svog 50. rođendana, ožaljen od kolega, prijatelja i studenata.

Njegova porodica, kolege i prijatelji osnovali su „Fond dr Đorđa-Đurice Đorđevića“ za nagrađivanje „lekara i medicinar“ o godišnjici njegove smrti. Lošim rukovanjem, fond je ugašen početkom osamdesetih godina XX veka.

Ključne reči

Biografija; Lekari; Dermatologija; Venerologija; Istorija medicine; Srbija; Kožne bolesti; Sifilis