

RADOSAV VASOVIC (1868-1913) ON THE BELGRADE OBSERVATORY

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Abstract.

In the first half of the XIX century in Serbia the conditions for formation of institutions and development of science arose, whereas in its second half among Serbian intellectuals there was a decisive position to follow the achievements of the European progress, especially in natural sciences. R. Vasovic was one of such intellectuals. His educational and scientific activities took place in areas of geography and climatology. In one of his papers he presented his criticism towards the activity of the Belgrade Astronomical and Meteorological Observatory which had been founded somewhat earlier.

In the second half of the XIX century in Serbia, after the liberation in spite of the state of being undeveloped economically, there were efforts aimed at the founding of scientific and educational institutions following the example of well known institutions of such kind abroad. A rich publishing activity took place, especially that concerning textbooks [1]. For a number of intellectuals of that time a strong tendency existed to follow the progress of the European scientific thought. Radosav Vasovic (Ranc in the region of Novi Pazar, September 9, 1868 - Belgrade, July 18, 1913 - both dates are according to Julian calendar) was among them (Fig. 1). He finished the primary school and the real



Fig. 1. Photograph of R. Vasovic it belongs to the Archives of Serbia (A.S. P.O. 65:64) gymnasium in Uzice and took degree at the Faculty of Philosophy (Division of Natural and Mathematical Sciences) of Grand School in Belgrade in 1893. From the existing data (Archives of Serbia) one can conclude that he was a successful student in spite of his bad material conditions. From 1893 to 1913 he was employed as a teacher at first in Sabac, Nis and Krusevac and later on in Belgrade, in the II and III Belgrade Gymnasiums (Figs. 2, 3).

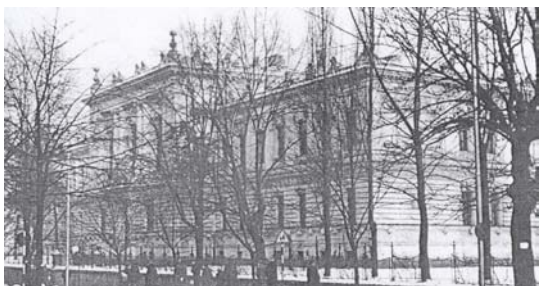


Fig. 2. Building of III Belgrade Gymnasium (photograph is taken of Branko Vujovic's book "Beograd u proslosti i sadasnjosti", Belgrade, 1994)



Fig. 3. R. Vasovic with his colleagues, teachers of III Belgrade Gymnasium from 1909/10 (taken of the book "Pedesetogodisnjica Trece beogradske gimnazije", Belgrade, 1910)

Vasovic wrote textbooks in geography to be used in secondary schools which had several editions. He also wrote some articles concerning the teaching of geography [2]. Among others he published a few scientific contributions in glaciology and climatology. He undertook many scientific travels so that he visited as distant parts of Europe as Scandinavia and Southeast Russia [3]. In 1904 Vasovic's critical position towards the activity of the Belgrade Observatory was published in Belgrade (Fig. 4) [4]. The Observatory had been founded in 1887 due to the endeavour of Milan Nedeljkovic, a teacher in the Grand School. It also belonged to the Grand School. In the period covered by Vasovic's analysis the Observatory was foreseen to comprise not only astronomical, but also meteorological, geomagnetic and seismological activities.

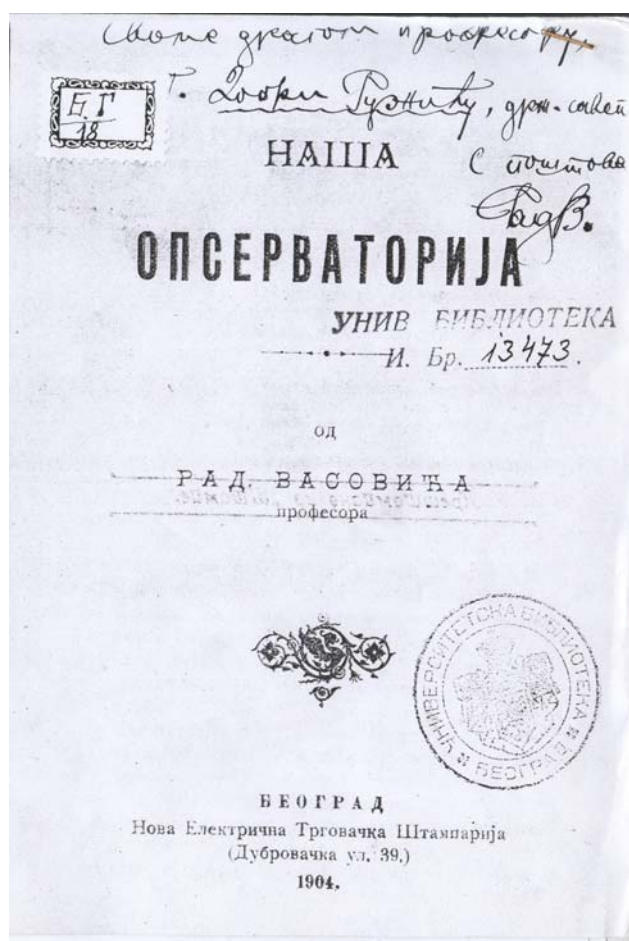


Fig. 4. Head page of Vasovic's critical review on Belgrade Observatory from 1904

With regard that then many necessary instruments were still not available the meteorological activities were, practically, the only ones really performed. The meteorological data were regularly published as monthly reports (Bulletin Mensuel de l'observatoire central de Belgrade, in French). Besides, these data were also published in some papers and journals of that time

(late XIX century and early XX one). Vasovic's criticism mentioned above concerns the correctness of the data communicated there, as well as the control of the work of Meteorological Network activity. In his opinion a vast body of data published by the Observatory was not appropriate and such a meteorological service had to be abolished in order to keep the reputation of other cultural institutions in Serbia.

A characteristic property of newly founded institutions is that they meet many problems concerning their internal organisation. It is necessary to bear in mind that Nedeljkovic missed a qualitative meteorological staff and also one should be aware of numerous difficulties which at that time followed the activity of the Observatory. In spite of all the foundation of an institution like the Observatory was very important for the development of natural sciences in Serbia. The achievements of the scientific organisations having their origins in the Observatory are in favour of this.

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