

Maja Nikolova

Educational museum, Belgrade, Serbia

DIGITIZED LETTERS – TEACHER LETTERS FROM SERBIA XIX CENTURY

Abstract. We are aware that the interest in history, in the past decade, are increased and because of that the archival materials became the basis in researching historical processes. So, the digitized document, which allows the reconstruction of some events, becomes the indispensable part of every specialist's work who deals with the protection of cultural heritage, scientific research or education of youth. That's why we decided to digitize the documents related to social events in southern Serbia in the eighties of the 19th century. The originals are kept in the Pedagogical Museum in Belgrade in the Fund Djordje S. Kojic. The Fund, among others, also keeps Kojic's letters, written in the eighties of the 19th century. These letters speak about the social events in the newly liberated regions. The analysis of his letters indicates to a gradual transformation of a backward environment which was supported by the educational and political work of the teachers.

1. Digitization of funds in the Educational Museum

Archival material, the primary source for the study of facts about society and culture, is located in a number of archives, libraries, museums, research institutions, and private properties. A large number of documents which indicate the causes and consequences of many events in the social and political history are available to the scientists and experts who investigate the past or the present which reflects what once was accurate and factual. The archival materials, which are related to an individual's life or ordinary people, suggest exciting information about their education, their interests and aspirations, social status, participation in specific historical processes, their habits and daily life. One institution which holds the archival records and relevant information about the history of education is the Educational Museum in Belgrade.

The Educational Museum in Belgrade is one of the oldest institutions of this kind in Serbia. At the initiative of the Teachers' Association, it was founded in 1896 with the aim of collecting and preserving teaching resources and everything else that has pedagogical and historical value for primary schools and teachers. For over a century, it has preserved tens of thousands of textbooks, photographs and documents that testify to the work of Serbian schools from the beginning of the 19th century to the present time. Continuous monitoring of cultural and educational phenomena in history through archival material is the basis for the modern understanding of education and its role and importance in contemporary society.

The digitization of archival material meant to create a digital copy of the originals which formed in a certain period of time. This process enables the protection of material heritage and its ease of use. Regardless of the accompanying difficulties, there is an increasing number of services which base their work on digitized archive material which slowly receives all the characteristics of the original.

In Serbian historiography, there are not enough scientific studies about history of pedagogy. Not fully explored sources lead to significant differences in the perception of the determining factors in domestic and foreign culture. In addition, our society does not

have enough information from the past which are necessary for all problem-solving aspects of contemporary education. To create ongoing projects in the field of education it is necessary to start from the very beginning, from the constitution of the modern civil system of education.



Figure 1. Kojic, 1885.

The undeniable fact is that students of the Belgrade Teachers' School achieved remarkable accomplishments during the eighth decade of the 19th century. By their work in school, the elementary schooling was becoming modern and contemporary, their professional and political engagement influenced social change, and their respectable life elevated the teacher's call to a worthy height. One of them was Djordje S. Kojic who was generally known to the professional and general public as a writer of elementary school textbooks and articles published in professional journals but not as a chronicler of the time in which he lived and worked. This is an opportunity to get to know his earliest observations about living conditions, pedagogical work and political events in the Pirot district, at the eighth decade of the 19th century.

By his efforts in the field of organization and content of work in primary schools, Djordje Kojic supported the idea that the institutional upbringing and education should become part of the daily life and become one of the basics of the new society. Looking from a historical distance and bearing in mind the social circumstances he worked in, we can recognize the value of his work which represents a significant contribution to the Serbian pedagogy. With that in mind, the Educational museum digitized his Fond, and his letters particularly.

The digitization of these archival materials which is made with the purpose of preserving the cultural heritage and its availability for the future generations provides an opportunity to confront the new essential topics in the field of the history of pedagogy.

The special significance in the preservation of cultural heritage is the process of care. The inadequate storage degrades the quality of archival material as well as the possibility of its use in research and educational purposes. *The Law of Cultural Property*, which defines the cultural property as *things and creation of material and spiritual culture of general interest which have special protection*, suggests that the primary task of every institution in the area of culture is to work in the process of protection[1]. The term of protection, besides the conservation and microfilming,

includes the digitization of cultural heritage, which reduces the risk of destruction and increases the possibility of its use. By using metadata, digitization offers the possibility of better organization of available information.

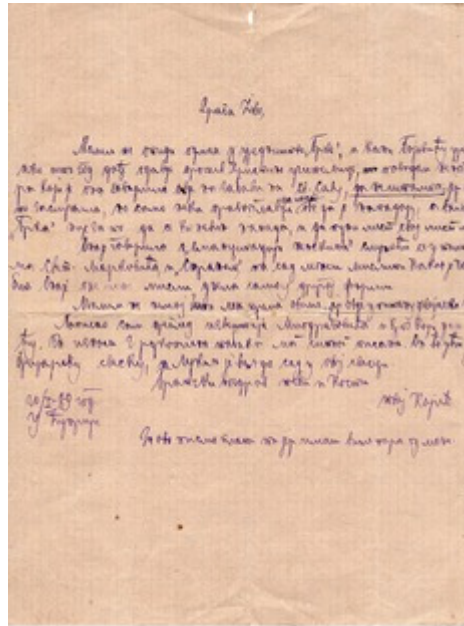


Figure 2. Cuprija,1889

The development of information and communication technologies has transformed the modern society and has contrived the creation of digital culture. So, with the appearance of new media, at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21th century, the professional cooperation among archives, museums and libraries, becomes unchangeable step in the process of scientific research and process of protection, and the virtual existence of cultural goods on the Internet makes the basis for broader communication of these institutions.

The use of modern technology provides not only local but also international cooperation among archives, museums and libraries. Realized digital projects contribute to the expansion of the role of the institutions of protection and promotion of cultural and scientific changes in their environment. The process of digitization of the cultural heritage, in addition makes it available to the entire community. Digitization changes the meaning of the terms of the document which is not only related to handwritten copy, but also to the text or audio file. So, the word document, as a generic term, is used to describe a new concept – the information unit. The location and physical distance of cultural heritage become irrelevant and owing to the new, digital, space - time intervals of the study become shorter. Internet and computer databases support such a project which can be within a single institution or complex when it represents, at the same time, archival material, the museum objects and bibliographies.

The digitization of cultural and scientific heritage makes it possible to form multimedia databases, which contain a picture and a description of the object. By the quotation of many authors, the digitization does not consist only of collecting and storage, but it gives ability, with using of metadata, in the better organization of accessible information. The digital databases require sophisticated software, which helps the user in contrives analyzing, exploring and reproduction.

2. Letters or *About time, about customs!*

The heritage of the Djordje Kojic in the Fund encompasses the following groups of documents:

I Seven Kojic's letters sent to school friends and best friend Jovan D. Jovanovic, teacher in Nis

1. Sent to schoolmates, Mokra, September 9, 1882,
2. Sent to friend Jova, Mokra, February 3, 1883,
3. Sent to friend Joca, Mokra, December 20, 1884,
4. Sent to friend Jova, Bpela Palanka, May 18, 1885,
5. Sent to friend Jova, Bela Palanka, Jun 17, 1885,
6. Sent to friend Jova, Natalinci, October 16, 1885,
7. Sent to friend Jova, Cuprija, December 10, 1888
8. Sent to friend Jova, Cuprija, January 20, 1889 year.

II Three photographs - copies of the seventies of the 20th century: Djordje Kojic, around 1885, Djordje Kojic, with his wife Vidosava 1894 and Djordje Kojic, 1930.

III A short biography written by his son, academician Aleksandar Kojić, based on the article by Sreten Dinić which was published in the journal *Nation Enlightener*

On this occasion, we will present two of his letters. Kojic started his teaching career right after the completion of the Teacher's School in September 1882 in the village of Mokra, Pirot district. At the beginning of the letter, which has seven pages written in ink on bluish paper on September 29, 1882, of the old calendar, Kojic said that it is addressed to all younger schoolmates. For the purpose of more straightforward analysis, the content of this document can be divided into three parts related to his arrival and description of the village, the story of the school, pupils and pedagogical work, as well as his political activity.

In the first part of the letter, teacher Kojic said that he rode on horseback from the village of Zakute on September 1 of that year to Mokra on September 5, after the nights he spent in Kragujevac, Paracin, Aleksinac and Bela Palanka. According to his description, the village of Mokra, located on the slopes of Suva Planina, was surrounded with plenty of sources and mills. The village did not have a church, but there was a monastery with three priests and a monk nearby. The people were mostly rich and uneducated; they lived in chats and used free tools in their work. Their speech was spoiled with Turkish and Greek words. Like adults, children did not know many Serbian words, either. If they would be asked the question "*Do you have a father?*", the pupils would answer: "*I do not*". But, when asked "*Do you have basta (Turkish)?*", they would understand and say, "*I have*"[2].

The estate was large, and the students were predominantly poor; they fed on one roast pepper stuffed with cheese and one piece of bread from unsown barley flour. For a young teacher, the people in the liberated regions looked strange: "*People wear a suit like those who build houses according to plan, and they live in quarters, and women dress strange, they carry some cloth under the knees, and some rich they weave cotton. Socks wear completely white. The braids from hair are down the back to their knees*"[2]. However, Kojic concluded that, even so, civilization has begun penetrating into the distant regions.

In the second part of the letter, Kojic described a school which, according to him, was located in a new building but lack of basic teaching facilities. In the house, there was a large and dry classroom, two rooms for teachers and one large kitchen. The school had a total of 44 pupils from the first and second grades. The children were sincere and obedient, but insufficiently smart and educated, and they still "*read by*

squealing at the syllables and the account works all mechanically and counting on the fingers”[2]. Because of the grape and corn harvesting that involved the children as well, there were only a few working days, so pupils from the second grade only learned to read and write but not count. Analyzing his work at the school, Kojic stated that in such conditions it was difficult to apply demands from contemporary pedagogy.

He finished the letter with the observation of his political action. A few days after his arrival to Mokra Kojic and his friend teacher Kosta Glisic from Bela Palanka went to Pirot. There, with a few other friends, he joined the Radical Party. After that, together, they were walking through the village, where the chief of Pirot paid attention to them. Apparently, teachers in those years were a major threat to the political system, so the principals wanted to scare young radicals. Because of his political education, he expected his friends to send him the pages of the Radical Party - *Self-government and Thought*.¹

Although the village was small and out-of-the-way, the social life in it was quite dynamic. Kojic said that he mostly met with teachers from the surrounding villages, and even with one women teacher - Niketic. Also, he spent time with his best friend Acosta, where he had lunch and spent the night until he bought bedding. At the end, he wrote one note “*not to write anything provocative because here every letter gets opened*”[2].

The second letter, that attracted our attention, was written on June 14, 1884, according to the old calendar, in the village Okra. At the end of the school year, June 6, his primary school was visited by an auditor “*some Cuturilo*”. He wrote: “*He is a really old auditor, a faithful copy of Pecic or Sretenovic*”[3]. According to his description, Cuturilo was a grumpy man who did not tolerate any justification.

During the exam pupils did not give satisfactory answers. Kojic was angry and had a quarrel with Cuturilo. Apparently, the meeting between Kojic and Cuturilo was not pleasant. Cuturilo concluded that the pupils did not know grammar rules sufficiently, and he also suspected that Kojic was using physical punishments as one student’s hands were shaking when he was solving a mathematical task. Obviously, the meeting between Kojic and Cuturilo was not pleasant. Cuturilo concluded that the teacher “did not achieve any success”, with explanation that Kojic was in love or that he had some “other passion”. Kojic was silent and thought that Cuturilo hated him and that he was too strict to evaluate him.

In the second part of the letter, Kojic mentioned school friends, including Ljuba Sretenovic from Jagodina who was punished because he spoke “*some dangerous words during the rebellion*”[3]. The political situation in the country was not stable, so young teachers, especially members of the Radical Party, were exposed to constant threats. However, the penalties were different, so Kojic’s friend Ljuba was only jailed but not chained. Although he was in jail, he wore his suit and paid for his own food. He ends the letter with facts from personal life - providing material support to friends, friendship during school breaks, and overcoming quarrel with teacher Niketic.

3. Summary

With the tendency to literate and educate the population in the newly formed regions, educational authorities, in the eighteenth years of the 19th century, began the work in

1 *Self-government - political, economic and literary list* - the organ of the People's Radical Party was published in Belgrade between 1881 and 1941. A part of the circulation, due to frequent prohibitions and censorship, came out in 1882 with the same text entitled *Freedom and Brotherhood*.

the field of education, which was concretized through the establishment of primary schools and the setting up of a young teaching staff.

In contact with a backward environment, where illiteracy and ornate lifestyle dominated, young teachers are faced with basic problems - with spoiled language full of Turkishism and bad accent, with mechanical learning of mathematics, lack of basic teaching tools and irregular attendance of school. And regardless of the fact that their professional work was full of obstacles the role of the teacher was multiple - practical work in school, education through reading professional literature and active political life. The ruling party, in fear of their political influence, controlled their movement - with distrust they looked at their gatherings, and the teacher's letters were passed to compulsory censorship. Actually, this was not without reason. The political influence of teachers, especially those in the countryside, was great. In village gatherings, by fiery speeches, they discussed about social issues, called for active participation in political life, explaining the social happenings in Serbia and advocating for a better position of teachers in society and the state. The work of women teachers, in this area, was noticed - they fought, among others, for a better position of women in society.

The private life of teachers was not ordinary. Often, they organized many events together with the villagers and, in such a way, they tied them to themselves and their political ideas. Due to a poor material position, they shared accommodation or travel costs, but they were always ready to help the friends or their families. In spite of the dynamic life, they were sometimes lonely. They often faced with dilemma with whom to marry – with a peasant or a teacher.

By attaining vocational education in the teaching school as well as political ideas related to social events, they, through some practical work, a theoretical critique of the curriculum and textbooks, and discussion at the teaching assemblies created a new educational policy. Because of this they were often criticized, falsely accused and moved.

Finally, we can conclude that Djordje Kojic with his efforts in the field of organization and content of primary school has helped bring institutional education into everyday life and become one of the basic needs of the new society. Looking from the historical distance and bearing in mind all the social circumstances in which he was created, we can see the value of his work which represents a significant contribution to Serbian pedagogy.

Literature

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ngomusektar@hotmail.com