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ENDOWMENTS AND BENEFACTORS OF SMEDEREVO IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Abstract. In the second half of the 19th century, Smederevo underwent significant modernization processes, which were reflected through intensive economic and industrial development and a flourishing of trade and construction. In the middle of the century, the Church of Saint George the Great Martyr was erected in the city centre. So far, between 1883 and 1888, shortly after the proclamation of Serbia as a kingdom, King Milan's Wharf was built on the Danube, along with the Smederevo – Velika Plana railway line, and the District Administration and Court building designed by the royal architect Aleksandar Bugarski. In 1865, on the estate of his ancestors in the vineyards of Smederevo, Prince Mihailo Obrenović commissioned the construction of a summer residence that would, until 1903, serve as a prominent centre of the city's social and cultural life. The economic and cultural life of the city was elevated to a higher level - through steam-powered production and the cultivation of grapevines, as well as the establishment of primary, craft and workers' schools, a gymnasium, women's emancipation associations, music and sports societies. Alongside this dynamic development, the practice of endowment giving flourished, eventually becoming regulated by law. The foundation for this paper consists of the books "Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo" (1927) and "For Those Who Will Come into the World after Us: Endowments and Benefactors in the Archives of Serbia" (2015). An integral part of this work is a critical review of the current condition of endowments and the graves of their founders at the Old Smederevo Cemetery, reflecting a broader issue of collective neglect.

Keywords: Smederevo, endowments, benefactors, testament, Old Cemetery, modernization

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of endowment giving reached its peak during the rapid economic development of Serbia in the second half of the 19th century. This trend was also reflected in Smederevo, which at the time was a city with significant commercial, industrial, craft, and economic potential. Thanks to this, Smederevo gained a number of institutions and buildings that important to this day. At the turn of the 19th century, in line with the main entrance to the medieval Smederevo Fortress and the course of the Petrijevo stream, the Church of Saint George was built and consecrated in 1855, marking the beginning of the formation of the city's triangular main square. Between 1883 and 1888, shortly after Serbia was proclaimed a kingdom, King Milan's Wharf was built on the Danube, the Smederevo - Velika Plana railway was constructed, and the District Administration and Court building was erected according to a project by the royal architect Aleksandar Bugarski. In the 1865, on the estate of his ancestors in the vineyards of Smederevo, Prince Mihailo Obrenović commissioned the construction of a summer residence that would, until 1903, serve as a prominent centre of the city's social and cultural life.

2. Endowments and benefactors

The city's economic and cultural life was elevated through steam-powered production and viticulture, as well as the founding of schools, women's emancipation associations, and music and sports societies. The first Smederevo Credit Bank was also established.[1] With this dynamic urban development, the practice of endowment giving also flourished and was eventually regulated by law. [2]

The first among Smederevo's benefactors was Antonije Protić (1781–1854), one of the most educated citizens of Smederevo (Figure 1). He served as a clerk and participated in both the First and Second Serbian Uprisings, later becoming Minister of Finance.[3] In his time, he was known as "Ćir Anta" (a respectful form of address).[4] In 1826, he donated land in the center of Smederevo to establish the town's first primary school. A plaque was placed on the school with the inscription: "To this school, during the reign of the pious Lord Miloš Obrenović, the benefactor was Antonije Protić, in Smederevo, November 4, 1826."



Figure 1. Arsenije Petrović, Portrait of Antonije Protić, circa 1840,
(From the collection of the Museum in Smederevo)

Ćir Anta also donated a public fountain at the Plavinac Hill, which for years was a beloved gathering place for Smederevo citizens, especially on Đurđevdan (St. George's Day) dawn festivities. [5]

Antonije Protić also authored a memoir titled "A History from the Time of the Serbian Leader Karađorđe Petrović", which permanently inscribed his name into Serbian national history. [6]

Wealthy families from Smederevo, such as the Kuzmanović-Marić family, donated a plot of land in the centre of the city for the construction of the Church of Saint George (1850–1854). The church was largely built through voluntary contributions from wealthy citizens of Smederevo, among whom Dimitrije Đ. Ljotić stood out. In part, the construction was also carried out with the forced labour (Srb: *kuluk*) of peasants from nearby villages. Throughout the construction period, Dimitrije Đ. Ljotić housed and fed the chief master builder Andrej Damjanov and his assistant.

The ancestors of Dimitrije Ljotić had also been benefactors, having contributed to the construction of the wooden narthex of the Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin at the Old Smederevo Cemetery back in 1760.

The archpriest (Srb: *prota*) Milutin Banić (1817–1876), a respected and esteemed cleric from Smederevo, bequeathed 1,000 gold ducats to the municipality of Smederevo in his will, to be used for aiding the poor (Figure 2).

In 1867, he accompanied Prince Mihailo Obrenović on his journey to Constantinople for the ceremonial handover the keys of Serbian cities from the Turkish Sultan.[7] [(Figure 3)



Figure 2. Portrait of Prota Milutin Banić, Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo



Figure 3. P. Sebah, Serbian Delegation in Constantinople, 1867, Historical Museum of Serbia

The wealthy merchant Dina Mančić (Smederevo, 1827–1882) bequeathed his entire estate to the municipality of Smederevo for educational and charitable purposes (Figure 4). The goal was that, through the Dina and Ljubica Mančić Fund (Figure 5), a gymnasium would be built, as well as public fountains at the Small and Large Markets.



Figure 4. Portrait of Merchant Dina Mančić,
Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality
of Smederevo



Figure 5. Portrait of Ljubica Mančić,
Testaments of the Benefactors of the
Municipality of Smederevo

Dimitrije (known as Dina) Mančić started his career in the craft of shoemaking, then moved on to tailoring, and eventually opened a general store. He quickly became a prominent merchant at the Smederevo Market. From 1853, he was married to Ljubica, and together they increased their wealth. Since they had no children, they chose to leave their fortune to the city of Smederevo.

Above his grave at the Old Smederevo Cemetery, a chapel was erected, designed by Aleksandar Bugarski, one of the most famous architects of the time. A fountain named after Dina Mančić existed in Smederevo until Second World War. (Figure 6) Also, the Gymnasium built with their funds (Figure 7), played a significant role in the city's educational development.



Figure 6. Figure 6: Dina Mančić - Fountain in Smederevo
(From the collection of the Museum in Smederevo)



Figure 7. Gymnasium in Smederevo, the building before 1904
(From the collection of the Museum in Smederevo)

Another merchant, Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin (1828–1888), bequeathed all of his property - described on his tombstone as “earned through honest work” - to the municipality of Smederevo. (Figure 8)



Figure 8. Portrait of Merchant Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin,
Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo

In Smederevo, he owned a large two-story building known as the “Endowment”. The 17th October Street and Dimitrije Davidović Street (Figure 9). He also owned a smaller two-story building with one shop on the corner of Dimitrije Davidović and Stevan Kuzmanović Streets.[8]



Figure 9. Endowment of Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin (unknown year)



Figure 10. Endowment of Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin, May 2025

He donated all this property to the city with the aim of funding the education of promising students, helping the poor during major religious holidays like Christmas and Easter, and supporting poor girls when getting married. His will also include aid for the Church of Saint George, the local reading room, a choir, and the fire brigade.[9] His multi-story endowment building still stands at the corner of today's Dimitrije Davidović and 16th October Streets, facing the Church of Saint George and the main city square. After the World War II, the building's façade - originally constructed in the style of eclecticism - underwent architectural changes in line with the then-prevailing socialist realism style (Figure 10). At that time, the inscription on the attic, "Endowment of Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin," was replaced with a five-pointed star.

The spirit of philanthropy was also supported by people from rural backgrounds. One such benefactor was Petar Spasojević (1838–1882), a farmer, vineyard owner, and merchant, who established a Charitable Fund in his name (Figure 11). The fund was intended to support the education of poor students and to aid impoverished citizens.[10]

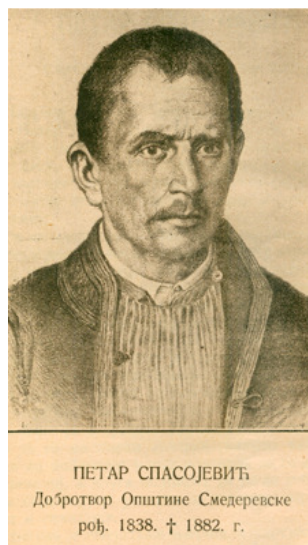


Figure 11. Petar Spasojević, Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo

Thanks to the dedicated work of Stevana Đorđević-Bižo (1846–1915), a long-time president of the Women's Society in Smederevo, a Workers' School was established in the city. (Figure 12) Many girls received education there. [11] With the funds she had in the Smederevo Credit Bank, she founded the Jova Rašić and Gaja Čupić Fund, aimed at supporting students of commercial academies and vocational schools. [12]

Jova Rašić (1836–1902), a merchant and member of parliament (Figure 13), was Stevana's brother, while Gaja Čupić (1841–1883), president of the Smederevo municipality and also a member of parliament, was her second husband (Figure 14).

Dr Milutin Niketić (1827–1924) graduated from the Medical Faculty in Vienna as a scholarship recipient of the Ministry of War. (Figure 15) Starting in 1921, he served as the municipal doctor in Smederevo. His endowment, the Dr. Milutin Niketić Fund, was intended to provide financial aid and improve hygienic conditions to poor and sick students in Smederevo's schools. [13]



Figure 12. Stevan Đorđević Bižo, Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo



Figure 13. Jova Rašić, Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo



Figure 14. Gaja Čupić, Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo



Figure 15. Milutin Niketić, Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo

The merchant and founder of the first modern brickworks in Smederevo, Branko Ž. Jefremović (1844–1911), was a benefactor to numerous local institutions, including the Fund for Poor Students, the Fire Brigade, the Agricultural Society, the United Youth, and the Saint Sava Society. [14]

The spirit of endowment giving extended into rural areas as well. In the village of Skobalj, within the municipality of Smederevo, a Reading Room was established according to the will of Staniša Adamović, a local farmer. His testament dates back to 1888. [15]

In the 20th century, the number of benefactors decreased. Milan Jovanović Stojimirović (1898–1966) was one of the last major endowers from Smederevo. In his Will from 1966, he donated a legacy of 34 artworks to the Museum in Smederevo, and thousands of books to the Public Library in Smederevo. He also bequeathed his rich collection of manuscripts to Matica Srpska in Novi Sad. [16]

At the Old Cemetery in Smederevo lie many of the city's great benefactors: Antonije Protić, Dina Mančić, Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin, Archpriest Milutin Banić, Stevana Đorđević Bižo, and Branko Ž. Jefremović.

Today, Dina Mančić still has a street named after him in Smederevo. However, after the World War II, the street formerly named after Archpriest Milutin Banić was renamed to Omladinska Street, and the street named after Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin was renamed to Radoslav Grujić Street.

On the other hand, Antonije Protić has two streets bearing his name: Ćir Antina Street in the Plavinac neighborhood, near his former estate and fountain, and Ante Protića Street in the centre of present-day Smederevo. Antonije Protić's endowment was destroyed in the Smederevo ammunition explosion on June 5, 1941. [17]

It cannot be said that the graves of these benefactors are maintained as they deserve to be - with the exception of Dina Mančić's chapel, which was recently restored.¹ At the Smederevo Gymnasium (Figure 16), a memorial plaque (Figure 17) honours its benefactor Dina Mančić,² but on the building once belonging to Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin, there is no visible marker noting its historical importance.



Figure 16. Gymnasium in Smederevo, May 2025



Figure 17. The memorial plaque dedicated to Dina and Ljubica Mančić at the entrance of the Gymnasium

In the permanent exhibition of the Museum in Smederevo, titled “Grapes, Iron, and Urban Vibrations”, a special section is dedicated to Smederevo's benefactors.³ More information can also be accessed by downloading the museum's virtual guide application.⁴ The sources for this paper were primarily drawn from the 1927 book

¹Conservation and restoration works on the chapel of Dina Mančić at the Old Cemetery in Smederevo were led by the Regional Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Smederevo in two phases, during 2018 and 2020.

²A commemorative plaque was installed in 2020 as part of the reconstruction of the school building.

³The exhibition “Grapes, Iron and Urban Vibrations” was opened to visitors in 2020. The authors were the curators of the Museum in Smederevo: Snežana Cvetković (art historian), Gordana Miletić (ethnologist), and Miroslav Lazić (historian).

⁴Endowments of Smederevo Benefactors (Museum in Smederevo), part of the project Digitization of the Cultural Heritage of the Smederevo Region, organized by the Museum in Smederevo and the Mathematical Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU).

“Testaments of the Benefactors of the Municipality of Smederevo”, whose facsimile edition was published in 2007 by the Historical Archive of Smederevo. [18] Additionally, the comprehensive volume “For Those Who Will Come after Us: Endowments and Benefactors in the Archives of Serbia” (Vol. I) included valuable material on Smederevo’s endowers, which was of great help in writing this study. [19]

3. Conclusion

The benefactors of Smederevo, their endowments and names, are unfortunately often targets of vandalism and destruction, despite the existence of heritage protection services responsible for their care. For example, the restored fountain of Ante Protić in Plavinac was desecrated shortly after its renovation, while the metal cover was removed from the chapel of Dina Mančić at the Old Smederevo Cemetery soon after its restoration.

In addition to acts of vandalism, the neglect of the graves of benefactors such as Milutin Banić, Ante Protić, Stevana Đorđević Bižo, and Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin is deeply concerning. These graves, located in the immediate vicinity of the 15th-century Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin - near the resting place of a prominent figure in our history, Dimitrije Davidović - are left to decay under the weight of time and indifference.

Furthermore, the facade of the Endowment of Stevan Kuzmanović Kršljanin suffered unacceptable architectural alterations after World War II, and a commemorative plaque honouring its benefactor has never been installed.

This text also serves as an appeal to the citizens of Smederevo, city authorities, and protection services to dedicate due attention to this issue - in the name of memory, dignity, and gratitude to those who gave selflessly, asking only for their legacy to endure.

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