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**The specific nature of the activities of choral societies in a multi-ethnic context:
A case study of Serbian choral societies in Banat (Pančevo and Veliki Bečkerek)
in the 19th century**

Abstract

After the extensive migrations of Serbs since the end of the 17th century, the majority of Serbian citizens lived outside their own country. They settled on the territories of the Habsburg Monarchy, north from the Sava and Danube rivers. Their displacement resulted in specific strategies to unify the Serbian people, to establish a national state, national cultural and artistic life, that is, a national identity in itself. Cultural and artistic institutions such as choral societies and reading-rooms had a very significant role in that process. This paper examines the work of those institutions through case studies of choral societies where political, cultural, and artistic activities took place in the multi-ethnic environments of the Habsburg Monarchy, in the towns of Banat (Pančevo and Veliki Bečkerek).

Key words

Habsburg Monarchy, Ottoman Empire, Vojvodina, multi-ethnic environments, Serbian choral societies, German choral societies, Banat – Pančevo, Veliki Bečkerek, national memory, national identity, education, Pančevačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo (Serbian church choral society in Pančevo), Pevačko društvo *Zora* u Beču (Choral society *Zora/Aurora* in Vienna), Groß-Beckereker Wochenblatt, repertory of the choral societies, chorus music, Ujedinjena omladina srpska (United Serbian Youth)

Two empires dominated in 19th-century Europe, of somewhat different political and economic systems and of quite diverse cultural profiles albeit similar in their multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural concepts – the Austrian (later Austro-Hungarian) and the Ottoman Empire. In its very center, sandwiched between the two empires, was a territory settled by Serbian citizens, with the border line passing throughout it. Moreover, the border line was variable, depending on the results of the battles between the Austrian and Ottoman armies. From the end of the 17th century, extensive migrations of Serbs took place, caused by the Ottomans conquering the southern Serbian territories. Retreating from the Ottoman army, Serbian nationals settled in the Habsburg Monarchy territories north from the Sava and Danube rivers.

Accepting Benedict Anderson's suggestion that human memory is the central point in the studies of nationalism,¹ it might be said that Serbian national memory is an “archive of loss”, since the sense of loss and the need for recovery have been

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London. Verso, 1991.

marked by “the long and tragic legacy of emigrants”.² It is the emigrant intellectuals who have given the largest contribution to Serbian national culture, establishing a national language and building a national identity, in spite of the frequent lack of support in their own country. The establishing of a national culture within the diaspora was characteristic not only for the Serbian community, but also for other Slavic people living in the Habsburg Monarchy, due to thinkers such as Dositej Obradović and Vuk Karadžić, Pavel Jozef Šafárik, Ljudevit Gaj, Valentin Vodnik, France Prešern, Jan Kolár, Jernej Kopitar et al.

Considering that the Serbian people were divided between such two very different empires such as the Austrian and Ottoman realms, there was a necessity to devise additional strategies of national networking to surmount the state borders, though there were also different attitudes in regards to national identity itself as well as the struggle for realize this idea. Namely, while the citizens of the Habsburg Monarchy – among them Serbs, especially noblemen and officers in the royal army – regarded the emperor as their ruler and respected him, by and large not considering their loyalty to him an obstacle for encouraging the development of Serbian culture,³ Serbs from Serbia expressed their patriotism as a struggle excluding such compromises. Both forms of patriotism and attitudes toward the national question were reflected in the music life, the profile of music institutions, as well as the repertory of Serbian choral societies. Therefore, it is understandable that Serbian choral societies were initially founded on the territory of Vojvodina (then a part of the Habsburg Monarchy), afterwards forming broad institutional networks by increasing

² The quotation is from the paper dedicated to Irish national memory, migrations, emigrations, as pointed out by James Fintan Lalor, according to: Michael Mays, “A nation once again? The dislocations and displacements of Irish national memory”, *Nineteenth-century contexts*, June 2005/2, p. 122.

³ This statement can be substantiated with many examples. Let’s mention the quoted initiative by the Srpska pravoslavna crkvena opština u Beču (Serbian Orthodox Church Community in Vienna), from May 1908: considering the fact that Emperor Franz Joseph supported the foundation of this community in 1860 and, as its biggest benefactor, contributed 5,000 Kronen from the state sources, 3000 Kronen from the Czernowitz church funds, and 1,000 Kronen from his own private sources (cf.: *Zlatna knjiga Srpske pravoslavne crkveno-školske općine u Beču. Imena prilagača i dobrotvora*, Arhiv Srpske crkvene pravoslavne opštine Sveti Sava u Beču; the amount of the emperor’s contribution is corroborated by the fact that the next benefactor was Serbian king Milan, who contributed 1,000 Kronen, then the Union Bank – 500, field-marshal archduke Albrecht – 300, the Duke of Lichtenstein 300, for instance), and continued to support the Serbian institution, the main topic of the meeting was “The festivity regarding the anniversary of His Excellence the Emperor and King Franz Joseph I”. Nobleman Todor pl. Stefanović Vilovski, the secretary, was in charge of the festivity organization. It was decided to have a solemn liturgy in the emperor’s honor, then a banquet, and to establish a relief fund for the impoverished constituents of the Srpska pravoslavna crkvena opština in Vienna, under the emperor’s name. Cf.: *Izvod iz zapisnika sednice glavnog odbora Srpske pravoslavne crkvene opštine, držane u Beču 16/29. maja 1908*, Arhiv Srpske crkvene pravoslavne opštine Sveti Sava u Beču.

their number and gradually occupying more territory. Although the list of all the locations where choral societies were established is certainly not conclusive, it confirms the dispersion of this cultural, socio-political, and artistic network.⁴

It seems that the most farsighted in surmounting the geographical division of the Serbian people and in achieving their unifying, were the members of the liberal Serbian youth. Together with Vladimir Jovanović, the leader of the Liberal party, they established “one of the biggest organizations in recent Serbian and Yugoslav history”,⁵ the Ujedinjena omladina srpska (United Serbian Youth), in Novi Sad, Vojvodina, using the slogan: “Srbi svi i svuda” (Serbs all and everywhere). Moreover, annual assemblies were held in multi-ethnic Vojvodina cities (Novi Sad, Kikinda, Vršac), so that the Constitution of the Ujedinjena omladina srpska was published in both the Serbian and Hungarian languages. This organization included sixteen institutions which were the most suitable for conducting an extensive process of networking – these were literary and choral societies, later also collaborating with sokolska (gymnastic) societies. Among these, the most important was the choral society of Serbian students in Vienna, *Zora* (Aurora), in fact the initiator of the United Serbian Youth.⁶ Members of the Viennese choral society promoted the works of Serbian composers, performing them along with works by European composers, with program booklets printed in both Serbian and Hungarian.

⁴ Thus, the following choral societies were established in the subsequent decades – 1820-1830: Novi Sad; 1830-1840: Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Budapest, Vršac, Kotor; 1840-1850: Arad, Temisoara, Jegra, Veliki Bečkerek, Segedin, Zemun, Osijek; 1850-1860: Belgrade, Negotin, Vienna; 1860-1870: Novi Sad, Čakovo, Veliki Bečkerek, Ruma, Ada, Subotica, Sremska Mitrovica, Šabac, Vukovar, Banatsko Novo Selo, Smederevska Palanka, Zaječar, Zemun, Bela Crkva, Kovin, Požarevac, Čurug, Požega; 1870-1880: Trstenik, Kruševac, Bavanište, Sombor, Negotin, Kragujevac, Novi Sad, Senmarton, Dubrovnik, Kikinda, Arad, Zagreb, Niš, Stari Bečej, Zaječar; 1880-1890: Niš, Dalj, Veliko Gradište, Vranje, Užice, Arandelovac, Kragujevac, Veliki Senmikluš, Sremski Karlovci, Smederevo, Vršac, Melenci, Šid, Foča, Pavliš, Jagodina, Leskovac, Vinkovci, Kraljevo, Tuzla, Loznica, Aleksinac, Tomaševac, Prijedor, Pirot, Deliblato, Dolovo, Sarajevo. Cf.: Roksanda Pejović, *Srpsko muzičko izvođaštvo romantičarskog doba*, Beograd, Univerzitet umetnosti, 1991, pp. 21–22.

⁵ Živan Milisavac, ed., *Ujedinjena omladina srpska*, Novi Sad, Beograd, Matica srpska, Istorijski institut, 1968, p. 13.

⁶ The activities and organization of the United Serbian Youth is considered in more details in the following: Tatjana Marković, “Political, cultural, artistic activities of the Ujedinjena omladina srpska as a case of networking”, *Kakanien Revisited*, 2004/8, pp. 1–5.

Ex. 1. The concert program of the Choral society *Zora* (Aurora)

„ZORA.“	„З О Р А“
PROGRAMM :	ПРОГРАМ :
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mozart: Ouverture zu Figaro's Hochzeit unter persönlicher Leitung des Capellmeisters Ziehler. 2. Jenko: Dunte vetri, gesungen von den Mitgliedern des akademischen Lesevereines „Spolek“ und der „Osнова.“ 3. Beriot: Walzer. Antoinette Baronesse Dienersberg. 4. a) Rubinstein: Tarantelle. b) Serbische Fantasie. Frä. Marie v. Baich. 5. Oberthur: Notturmo. Frä. Therese Zamara, v. Gunz, Brioschi und Rosenegger. 6. Duett aus Trovatore. A. Baronesse Dienersberg. Herr Nawiaski. 7. Raff: Duo aus dem „Fliegenden Holländer“ für Piano und Violine. Frä. Marie und Theresine Seydel. 8. Declamation: Frä. Marie v. Jelenska. 9. Fürchtgott: (Tovačovski) Serbischer Liederkranz, gesungen von den Mitgliedern des akademischen Lesevereines „Spolek“ und der „Osнова.“ 10. Ouverture zur Apotheose des Fürsten Michael von Serbien, — von Carl Reich unter persönlicher Leitung des Capellmeisters Ziehler. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Мозарт: Увертира к опери „Figaro's Hochzeit“ управла капелник Цирер. 2. Јенко: Моја лађа, певају чланови: „Академичког читаоничког друштва“ и „Основа.“ 3. Бериот: Valse. Нена гђица Антоанета баронеса Динерсбергова. 4. а) Рубинштајн: „Tarantelle.“ б) српска фантазија свира на гласовиру гђица Марија пл. Бајићева. 5. Обертур: Notturmo: свирају на харфама гђе: Терезија Замарова, пл. Гуичева, Бриосхијева и Розенегерова. 6. Двојел из „Троваторе“ гђица баронеса Динерсбергова и госи. Навијаски. 7. Раф: Дуо из опере „Fliegender Holländer“ за гласовиру и виолину свирају гђе: Марија и Терезија Сејдлове. 8. Декламације: гђица Марија пл. Јеленскова. 9. Товачовски: Венац српских песама, певају чланови „Академичког читаоничког друштва“ и „Основа.“ 10. Увертира к апофеози кнеза српског Михаила, од Драгутина Раша управла капелник Цирер.

The entire activity of the United Serbian Youth was aimed to enlighten and politically educate the Serbian people, so that the struggle for national unity would be widely accepted and a national identity established, built and preserved in the multi-ethnic societies such as those existing in Vojvodina or, more broadly speaking, in the Habsburg Monarchy.

As mentioned, certain political circumstances, such as a lack of state unity, were reflected in the cultural, that is the music life, and thus there is a great similarity with the political-cultural strategy of the German students several decades earlier: “In the War of Liberation of 1813, the German nation rose to preserve its pride and ancient traditions, to squelch the advance of Napoleon and to avenge its earlier defeats at Jena and Auerstädt in 1806. From 1806 to 1813 the spirit of Germany had started to rebuild. Johann Fichte found the answer to German problems in national education, using Pestalozzi’s ideas of a culture of the intellect, practicality, and patriotism. The famous ‘Turnvater’ Jahn organized students from German universities into a patriotic national force through his work in gymnastics. The fiery poet, Ernst

Arndt, placed the greatest value of a nation in its common language and common descent. (...) From 1806 onwards, the social and national growth of the German nation occurred simultaneously with the growth of male choirs”.⁷ In other words, “the German male choir became both the symbol of a united Germany through the bond of German songs, and an agent of social and political change”, something that can also be said about Serbian male choirs.⁸ Not only the same aims but also the awareness of the similarity of Prussian and Serbian strategies in the struggle for national unification was represented by envoys engaged both in the United Serbian Youth work and the work of Serbian choral societies. Namely, in June 9-10, 1869, the festivity of the consecration of the Vršačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo (Serbian church choral society from Vršac) flag was held, with the participation of several Serbian choral societies from Belgrade, Novi Sad, Pančevo, Timisoara, and Vršac. Beside the festive, concert part of the manifestation, there was also a meeting held regarding fellowships for music students, as well as “the needs of Serbian musical art”.⁹ This meeting was attended by the elected assembly president, politician Vladimir Jovanović, the vice president, conductor of the Vršac society, Vojtěch Hlaváč, the author Aleksandar Sandić, and others. Comparing Serbian choral societies with the ones from Prussia, Milan Jovanović from Belgrade said that choral societies “were coming closer and

⁷ James M. Brinkman, “The German male chorus of the early nineteenth century”, *Journal of research in music education*, Spring 1970/1, 17. Obviously, the author was wrong in claiming that “the growth and development of German male singing in the early nineteenth century represents a unique historical phenomenon”, bearing in mind the tradition of Serbian (male) choral singing. *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

⁹ The program of the festivity: “The schedule for the festivity of the consecration of the Vršačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo’s flag, on the Pentecost, 9 June 1869”.

I Day One

1. At 8 o’clock in the morning, the procession starts with the flag from the music school through the market, Royal Street, to the cathedral, where the flag will be consecrated after the liturgy. Afterwards:

- a) the president’s speech
- b) striking the pins
- c) the godmother’s speech during the bestowing of the flag to the president
- d) the speech of the flag-bearer during the receiving of the flag from the president
- e) all the choral societies sing *Ne dajmo se* (Let’s not give up) .

2. Banquet scheduled for two o’clock in the afternoon.

3. Scheduled for 8 o’clock in the evening: ‘Oration’.

II Day Two

1. The singers will assemble at 7 o’clock in the morning, discussing the following topics:

- a) The ways of establishing fellowships for music students; and
- b) the needs of Serbian music art and the ways of meeting the same.

2. At 8.30 in the evening: *San na javi* (A dream in reality) by J. Subotić i *Lek od punica*, a theater play in the honor of the celebrants.

Everyone who would like to attend the festivity can, if in possession of our choral society’s ID, travel by boat or train in both directions for half the price of the ticket.

In Vršac. The Committee”.

closer to fulfilling their mission, since they were starting to accept genuine Serbian ideas. The same was occurring in Germany: shorter songs were united in one long one that became a freedom song. We need a freedom song too and, in order to achieve that, it is necessary to call the people to support the already existing choral societies as well as to establish new ones”.¹⁰

Consequently, as a key way of gathering citizens, choral and reading societies became very numerous and significant in the process of national networking, especially in multi-ethnic environments such as those which existed in the Habsburg Monarchy. This is corroborated by the case of Serbian choral societies from towns in Bosnia and Vojvodina, and especially from the area of Banat (Pančevo, Zrenjanin).

When the war between the Austrian and Ottoman armies (1683–1699) was concluded by the Peace Treaty in Karlovci, Banat remained within the Ottoman borders, but two decades later, in 1716, two years before invading Belgrade, this area was conquered by the Austrian army. Then it was called Temišvarski Banat (Timisoara Banat) and became one of the royal domains. As the Emperor Leopold’s Privilegium gave Serbian nationals the right to establish their local government, many Serbs, led by the duke designated for this area, emigrated during the following years from Timisoara to Pančevo in Banat, so that the demographics were altered.

From 1794 Pančevo (Germ. Pantschowa, Hung. Pancsova) was a “military border community, the headquarters of the German-Banat regiment”.¹¹ It was in Pančevo that one of the oldest choral societies was established, Pančevačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo (Serbian church choral society from Pančevo, officially founded in 1838). Undoubtedly with intention, this society was clearly determined by its name in the national (Serbian) as well as religious (Orthodox) sense. The facts indicate several issues, the key starting positions of this paper: the associating of members of the same nationality in the multi-ethnic context of Pančevo (like in other towns in Banat, the population consisted of Serbs, Germans, Hungarians, and other nationalities) had a more significant political, social, cultural than artistic role. Afterwards, there was a strong connection with the Orthodox church, where the Society sang at the service, but the main activity took place outside the church, at the *besede - orations* (a term for 19th century concerts with combined programs, including

¹⁰ *Pančevac, nedeljni list za prosvetne i materijalne interese*, 22 June 1869, vol. I, no.11.

¹¹ “Inner description”, archival document no. 547/1851, according to: Srećko Mileker, *Istorija gradova i gradskog razvića u Banatu*, Pančevo, Istorijski arhiv u Pančevu, 2004, p. 63.

not only music numbers, but also reciting poetry, gymnastic exercises, lectures) both in Pančevo and other places. Another activity was developed early on in this society: a theatrical company was founded, and it had its guest performances in the Belgrade theater *Kod Jelena*, performing plays with very popular songs such as *Ustaj, ustaj Srbine* by Nikola Đurković and Josif Šlezinger, called the “Serbian *Marseillaise*”; also, the conductor Nikola Đurković himself performed arias from Italian operas, and a music school section was established as well.¹²

In the context defined by the mentioned strategic position of Pančevo, as well as a specific demographic picture, the activity of a Serbian choral society in the town had, understandably, an emphatic political character. According to data from 1851, almost 11,000 citizens lived in Pančevo, of different faiths:

- 7,573 Orthodox,
- 3,114 Catholics,
- 238 Protestants,
- 12 of the Jewish faith,

of different nationalities:

- 6,897 Slavs,
- 3,097 Germans,
- 819 Romanians,
- 112 Hungarians,
- 12 Jews,

and of different professions:

- 723 assistants of craftsmen and merchants,
- 643 day laborers,
- 568 farmers,
- 467 artists and craftsmen,
- 197 merchants,
- 77 restaurant owners,
- 59 lackeys,
- 3 factory owners.¹³

¹² One of the largest Festschriften is dedicated to the work of the Pančevo society, cf.: Mihovil Tomandl, *Spomenica Pančevačkog srpskog crkvenog pevačkog društva 1838–1938*, Pančevo, Napredak, 1938.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

It is interesting to compare this data with that published twenty years later, when 14,523 resident citizens of different origins lived in Pančevo:

- males from Pančevo 6,443,
- females from Pančevo 6,965,
- foreign males from the surrounding areas 867,
 - from other countries in the Monarchy 1,011,
 - from foreign countries 122,
- foreign females from the surrounding areas 666,
 - from other countries in the Monarchy 681,
 - from foreign countries 43,

as well as of different religions:

- 9,678 Orthodox,
- 42 Armenian Orthodox,
- 5,528 Catholic,
- 11 Greek Catholic,
- 1,212 Lutherans,
- 220 Reformists,
- 4 Unitarians,
- 193 Jews.¹⁴

The census from the end of the 18th century shows a similar multi-ethnic picture in the central place of Banat, that is, Torontal county, in Veliki Bečkerek (Groß-Betschkerek, Nagy Beeskerek), since Serbs, Hungarians, Germans, Slovaks, Jewish and others resided there, from which

- 10,542 Orthodox,
- app. 5,000 Catholics,
- app. 800 Evangelists,
- nearly 450 Jews.

Individual ethnic groups undoubtedly defined their own national political and cultural foundations, primarily by gathering in cultural-artistic societies, as well as within periodicals and academic institutions. Every one of these spaces modeled by imagination, that is groups, were clearly marked by language. Along with using Latin for bureaucracy (for official court documents), i.e. the official German language, the

¹⁴ Cf.: *Pančevac, nedeljni list za prosvetne i materijalne interese*, 3 May 1870, vol. II, no. 38.

cultural life of the individual ethnic communities took place in the national languages as key signifiers of the entire national culture. “In multi-ethnic and multi-lingual communities confronted with the task of state-building in a multi-national environment, the way inter-communal differences such as language are interpreted or constructed becomes very important for the undergoing processes and its consequences for the state and population. The interplay between the role awarded to language and identity...attains special importance from a historical and political, anthropological and sociological viewpoint. The issue of language and its relationship to nationhood and identity is present in all spheres of life, but is particularly salient in the educational context”.¹⁵ This is obvious especially in those multi-ethnic places settled by Serbs, inasmuch as in the programs of the Biedermeier institutions, such as choral societies, the task of enlightening and educating Serbs was accentuated. Enlightenment ideas were included in the defining of the aims and rules of all national institutions, primarily choral societies and reading rooms. Consequently, the mentioned attitude regarding the significance of the national language and its special connection with education was presented in numerous programs of Serbian institutions, primarily youth programs. One such example is a letter from Serbian youth to Hungarian youth, published in two Hungarian magazines, as well as in the Pančevo weekly newspapers *Pančevac*, protesting against the process of Hungarization:

“Hungarian Brothers!

(...)We are used to reading in numerous Hungarian periodicals about the decline in the numbers of our people living in this area, as well as being unjustifiably accused for animosity towards our mutual fatherland. Recently, those attacks have been occurring more and more often. (...)

... our people see that in these areas their survival and ethnical development is not guaranteed by state law, and they perceive how their ethnicity remains unrecognized and is under more and more pressure.

(...)When Serbs wish to establish only one Serbian theater, where their nationality, elsewhere impeded, could always find refuge, then the Hungarian government lays various obstacles in order to prevent this, so that they cannot have this single institution, where their language and nationality could be

¹⁵ Nadežda Kinsky, “Language and education in the multi-ethnic context. Group conflict and nation building”, *Kakanien revisited*, 2005/3, p. 1.

developed and evolve further. When it happens that in a town where Serbs hold the absolute majority compared with other nationalities and which is the center of our literary and educational work, there is more effort and work invested in education, immediately suspicion ensues of a hidden political agenda against the state, and commissioners are sent...”¹⁶

There were different kinds of schools in Pančevo (primary schools, grammar schools for boys and girls, gymnasiums, trade schools, girls craft schools, evening trade schools). According to data from a later date, from 1920–1921 there were seven primary schools, four conducted in Serbian, two in German, and one Hungarian, lasting from four (Serbian), and five (German), to six years (Hungarian). The language the pupils from Hungarian and German schools learnt (at that time official in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) was Serbian (i.e. Serbo-Croatian), beginning from the third year of primary school. The majority of teachers were of Serbian nationality, as well as the majority of pupils (1,018 Serbian, 990 German, 225 Hungarian, 86 Jewish, 26 Romanian, 21 Slovakian), and they used textbooks published in Belgrade or in towns in Vojvodina. Similarly, in the second half of the 19th century, eight schools were established in Veliki Bečkerek – three Serbian, two German ones, and one Slovakian, Hungarian, and Jewish respectively;¹⁷ and some were founded by churches.

It should be said that there were three Serbian reading-rooms, cultural-political institutions such as choral societies:¹⁸ Srpska čitaonica (the Serbian reading-room, 1895), Ratarska čitaonica (the Farmers’ reading-room, 1892), Zanatlijska čitaonica (the Craftsmen’ reading-room, 1919). There was also a German reading-room, Deutscher Leseverein, founded in 1903.

A protest similar to the one mentioned, also regarding the language issue, occurred in Pančevo when German teachers organized the Grenziehrertag (Border Day) in the Real School, including Serbian representatives in the organization. However, one of the selected representatives, Konstantin Pejčić, a representative of

¹⁶ *Pančevac, nedeljni list za prosvetne i materijalne interese*, 4 January 1870, vol. II, no.2.

¹⁷ Milan Tutorov, *Banatska rapsodija: Istorija Zrenjanina i Banata*, Novi Sad, Aurora, 2001, pp. 406–407.

¹⁸ “The same said about the importance of Serbian reading-rooms in Pančevo can also be said for the choral societies in Pančevo. The choral societies were the centers for fostering and spreading Serbian national thought and national resistance”. Cf.: Nikola Milutinović, *Naše varoši. Pančevo* (reprint), Pančevo, Istorijski arhiv, Knjižara Prota Vasa, 2004, pp. 85– 86.

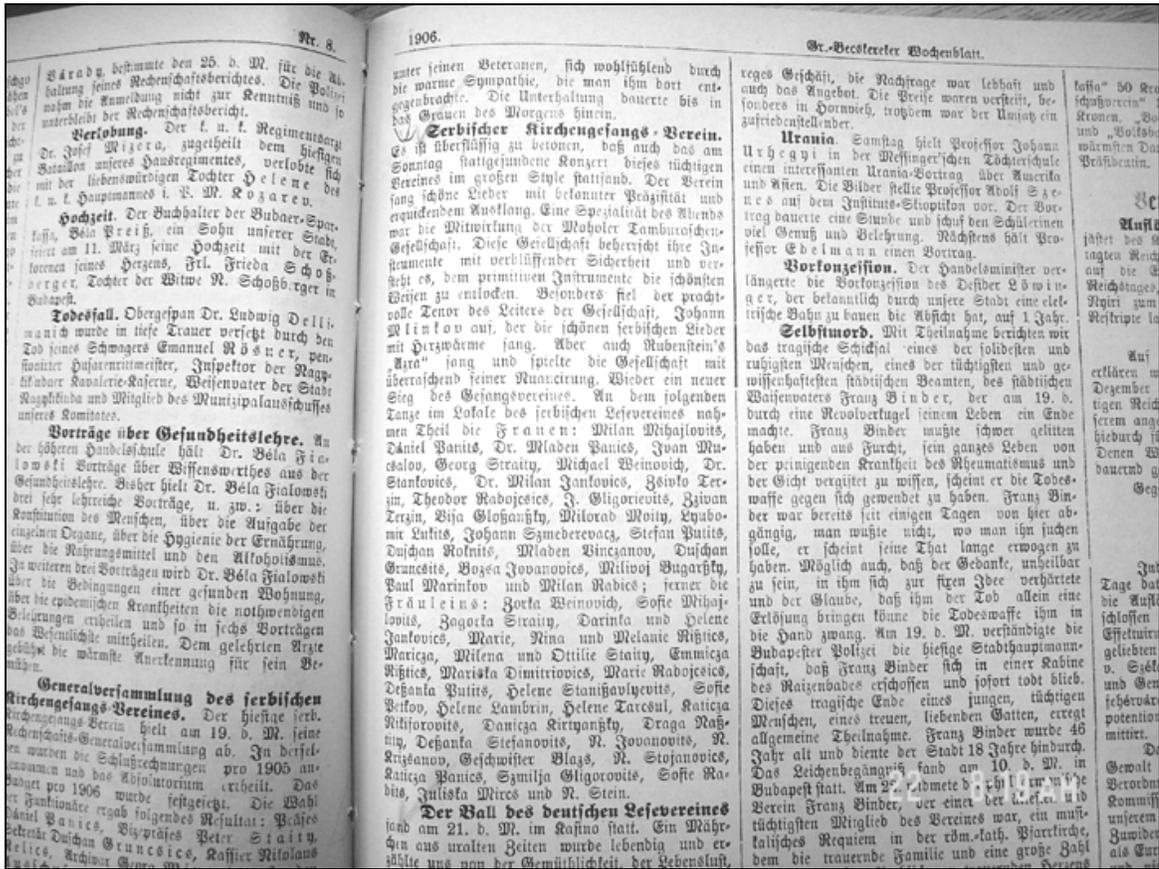
the Pančevačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo, pointed out the discontent of Serbs due to the threat of introducing German instead of Serbian as the official language in schools, “which goes against not only our honor, but also in opposition to the development of our language. Here, at the German school there are German teachers who have been teaching Serbian youth for years and who live in Pančevo, and yet don’t speak Serbian at all”.¹⁹

The language was also cultivated in the local periodicals and it was common for several national journals to exist in the multiethnic cities, representing individual ethnic groups. Thus, in Veliki Bečkerek, the first to be established was the German *Groß-Beckereker Wochenblatt* (1851), then the Hungarian *Torontál* (1872), and the Serbian *Glas* (1887), while in Pančevo there were *Pancsovaer Wochenblatt* (1868), *Pančevac* (1869), *Neues Pancsovaer Wochenblatt* (1870), *Banater Post* (1872). These journals were not significant just from the aspect of fostering national languages, but were invaluable also as the only source of cultural and artistic events. Thus, the *Wochenblatt* from Veliki Bečkerek listed concerts of German as well as Serbian and Hungarian choral societies, then the theatrical companies’ plays, and significant soloists, like the violin player Dragomir Krančević – who attained European renown.²⁰ Moreover, it seems the German journal provided more reliable information about Serbian choral societies than Serbian periodicals. An example of this are reviews of a typical *oration*, called a “musical concert in great style”, with the tamburitza or bagpipe orchestra, including even the names of all performers,

¹⁹ *Pančevac, nedeljni list za prosvetne i materijalne interese*, 15 August 1871, vol. III, no. 66.

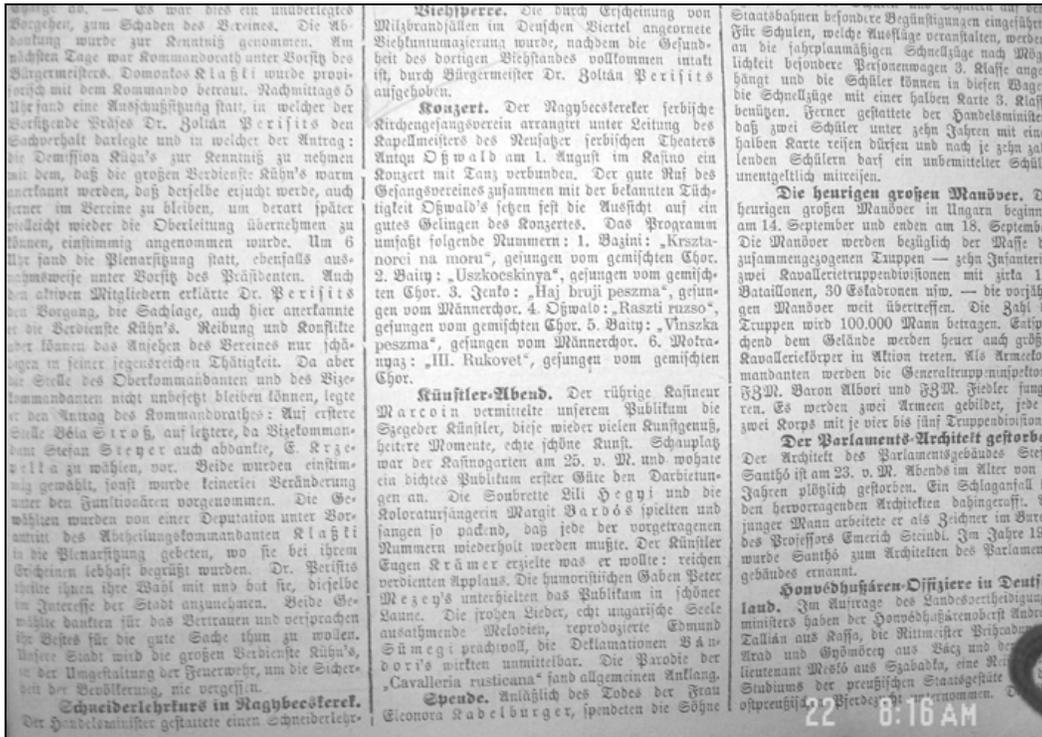
²⁰ Dragomir Krančević (according to some sources, Kranjčević) had his first concert in Pančevo in 1861, and later he was the Konzertmeister in the Budapest Royal Opera orchestra, during the tenure of Gustav Mahler as conductor. As a student of famous violin player Joseph Helmesberger in Vienna, his concerts were reviewed in Viennese periodicals. Some other members of the Krančević family contributed to the music life of Pančevo, such as music teacher Sofija Krančević, and composer Petar Krančević.

Example 2. *Gross-Becskereker Wochenblatt*, 2 January 1906, a review of the concert of the Srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo (Serbian Choral Society)



as well as the news about the society's concert, listing all the program events. A program specified in such detail is certainly very valuable for researching choral societies' work and repertoires.

Example 3. *Gross-Beckereker Wochenblatt*, 1 August 1908, a note about the concert of the Srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo



Among the choral societies of Pančevo, undoubtedly the most significant and active was the Pančevačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo, while there were two more Serbian choral societies (*Venac/Wreath* and *Zanatlijsko pevačko društvo/The Craftsmen' Choral Society*), as well as three German choral societies: *Deutscher Männergesangsverein* (1863), *Deutscher Kirchengesangsverein* (1883), *Evangelischer Kirchengesangsverein* (1883). In Veliki Bečkerek there were (from time to time) fourteen Serbian, German, and Hungarian choral societies, among which the oldest one was the *Srpsko pevačko društvo* (Serbian Choral Society), established in the 1840s. *Groß-Beckereker Männergesangs-Verein* (1879) and the Hungarian choral society *Dalarda* (1882) were also significant and, as expected, along with the majority of members of German or Hungarian nationality, included singers of the Catholic faith so that these societies were German-Hungarian. In spite of certain attempts – for instance, the rules of the *Srpsko zanatsko pevačko društvo* stipulated that any craftsmen could join as members, regardless of religion or nationality – there was no similar tolerance in Serbian choral societies. Thus, in the Serbian journal *Glas* dissent was expressed due to the mentioned rule, as the mentioned stipulation would

result in the society ceasing to be Serbian and no “decent craftsman” would be willing to join such a society.

Choral societies were political, social, educational, cultural institutions, with the aim to gather Serbian citizens. They were often officially established in Orthodox churches (thus the license for such gatherings, something usually not endorsed in the Habsburg Monarchy), as one of the prerequisites for the existing of a choral society was an administrative procedure, implying defined written and fixed rules, including the aims and plans of all the society’s activities.²¹ Furthermore, choral societies had their own recognizable insignia such as a flag, a stamp, and an anthem.

It was the usual practice in bigger cities for several choral societies to exist at the same time. The societies consisted of members of different social classes: the bourgeois *Pevačko društvo Stražilovo* (Choral Society Stražilovo), the *Ratarsko pevačko društvo* (the Farmers’ Choral Society), a youth society, and a Croatian choral society – all of whom worked in Sremska Mitrovica. In other places, along with Serbian choral societies, there were societies of other nationalities (often a part of the cultural context of the multi-national towns in the Habsburg Monarchy or Ottoman Empire) and in Veliki Bečkerek there were Serbian, Hungarian, and German societies. Each one of those societies had its own national ideology, so that, in such a context, the cultural and political mission of the choral societies was obvious.

The mentioned mission was embodied in the repertoire concept of these societies. True to form, choral societies fostered the so-called international part-songs, as was mentioned in the program of the society *Zora*. This was more characteristic for Serbian choral societies in the Habsburg Monarchy, that is, in multi-ethnic contexts, than for Serbian choral societies from Serbia proper, and went without saying for German, and partly for Hungarian societies. Furthermore, the national repertoire/s consisted of both arrangements of folk melodies as well as fostering choral music of the national composers. Actually, “national” composers in this sense implied – especially in multi-ethnic towns – musicians who composed part-songs according to the poems in a given national language. Bearing in mind the fact that Czech musicians

²¹ A choral society couldn’t officially work without permission. In spite of that, many choral societies were active, although illegal gathering and the performing of *orations* could cause certain police restrictions. The practice of working without a license can be corroborated, for instance, by the fact that the *Srpska crkvena pevačka zadruga iz Zemuna* (Serbian church choral society from Zemun), was established “ca. 1855, no precise date”, and its activity was officially confirmed on September 15, 1866. Cf.: *Pristupnica Srpske crkvene pevačke zadruga iz Zemuna Savezu srpskih pevačkih društava*, 11 April, 1911, Fond 42, Istorijiski arhiv Sombora, 42.33.

worked in the Habsburg Monarchy mainly as conductors of choral societies, that is, were conductors and composers, spoke Serbian and accepted the Orthodox faith (which was necessary to apply for Serbian citizenship), they are also included among national composers. On special, rare opportunities, before all due to certain political circumstances, a closer collaboration between the societies of different nationalities was possible, although the repertoire of individual vocal ensembles remained inside the national frame in those cases as well. However, there were exceptions even regarding this rule: thus, there is only one case in the entire performing practice in Veliki Bečkerek, at least only one known at the moment: the composition *Jezerce* (A little lake) by Mita Topalović, the conductor of the Pančevačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo for several decades, was sung in 1900 by the German-Hungarian choral society, Groß-Beckereker bürgerlicher Gesangverein.

Therefore, communication networks, characteristic for the activities of the choral societies, were undoubtedly signified by the general, multi-ethnic context, but also reflected individual political (liberal), patriotic, social (bourgeois), and national cultural ideas. In that way, extensive historical migrations, such as the emigrating of Serbian nationals to the Austrian Empire and Hungary, constituted one of the “myths of the origin” of a certain people,²² which also marked the establishing of the Serbian nation and state. Hence, Serbian choral societies had a very significant role in this process.

Translated by the author

Summary

After the extensive migrations of Serbs since the end of the 17th century, the majority of Serbian citizens lived outside their own country. They settled on the territories of the Habsburg Monarchy, north from the Sava and Danube rivers. Their displacement resulted in specific strategies to unify the Serbian people, to establish a national state, national cultural and artistic life, that is, a national identity in itself. The strategies were based, above all, on Serbian citizens' gatherings and founding national institutions. Political and cultural-artistic institutions, such as Ujedinjena omladina srpska (United Serbian Youth), choral societies, and reading-rooms, had a very significant role in that process. This paper considers the work of those institutions through case studies about choral societies whose activities took place in the Habsburg Monarchy's multi-ethnic environments, in towns in the Banat area, Pančevo and Veliki Bečkerek. The oldest known Serbian choral society was established in Pančevo itself (Pančevačko srpsko crkveno pevačko društvo/Serbian church choral society of Pančevo,

²² For more details about the immigration issue, cf.: Gérard Noiriel, “Immigration: amnesia and memory”, *French historical studies*, Autumn 1995/2, p. 368.

1838). In these towns, different national communities formed their own cultural space: they founded their church, schools, periodicals, reading-rooms, as well as choral societies, fostering the national ideology in their national languages. For instance, one of the main sources on the cultural and artistic life in Veliki Bečkerek, including the work of the Serbian choral society, was the German weekly journal *Groß-Becskereker Wochenblatt*. Thus, the artistic work of Serbian choral societies in the multi-ethnic towns of the Habsburg Monarchy was, in point of fact, of a secondary importance compared with their cultural and political activities. The repertoires of different national communities' choral societies also reflected the national ideology, so that they were based on the arrangements of folk melodies of a given nation or the part-songs of national composers.