

A Professor as a Bond across Time: Classics in Serbia During the Somber Times of the Twentieth Century

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Development of Classics in Serbia

Modern institutions of higher education appeared in Serbia later than in most Western European countries. However, the development of Classics was not significantly different from the broader European pattern of studying classical antiquity. The model for organizing classical education in Serbia was that of the West — more precisely, the German example of the late 18th and early 19th century and the revival of philology by Friedrich August Wolf in his *Darstellung der Altertumswissenschaft* (1807). From that period, Classics extended its scope beyond philology in the narrow sense and became a comprehensive study of antiquity. However, it was not only Wolf's ideas that shaped modern Classics. His close friendship with the Prussian minister of education, Wilhelm von Humboldt, led to the creation of the University of Berlin in 1810. What Humboldt and Wolf had in mind was that a university should produce an ideal citizen — an autonomous and free individual. Most Eastern European universities followed this model, though they found themselves in different political circumstances, which naturally made that process somewhat different.

That a humanistic idea requires political and economic support is something that can be seen in Serbia's development of classical education. In Serbia too there were well-educated officials who understood the importance of classical education and the humanities. In the middle of the 19th century, the playwright and novelist Jovan Sterija Popović, who served as Minister of Education, promoted the idea of secondary education (Gymnasium) founded on the study of classics and the humanities.¹ This idea gradually led to the formation and systematization of instruction in classical languages, even before the establishment of the University of Belgrade (1905). The renewed Serbian state gradually developed a system of higher education that had by then become common in Europe. The process began with the Lyceum (1838–1863), followed by the Great School (1863–1905), and eventually resulted in the establishment of a fully modern university (1905–).

In the first half of the 19th century, all educated people in Serbia who were instructed in classical languages received their education and degrees in the West. During this period, knowledge of antiquity was practically reserved for them, but as individuals they spread ideas to a wider public, which in turn tried to correlate Serbian epic poetry with classical examples, so as to identify itself as part of Western culture. On the one hand, many historical events influenced the adoption and development of Classics; on the other, they slowed it down. An example of the former is the struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, throughout which Serbian society felt the need to draw closer to Western culture — as something that defined Serbia itself — and sought correlation with Latin and Greek antiquity in order to distance itself from the Ottoman East.²

¹Cvjetičanin 2025, p. 7.

²This aspect of the classical tradition was also reflected in the symbolism of the Lyceum and the Great School. The Lyceum had an image of Minerva on its seal, while the building of the Great School was decorated with a statue representing Minerva and Apollo.

Other events that drastically shaped the future of the Department and the study of Classics in Serbia more broadly were the two World Wars and the formation and dissolution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.³ During this period, which is the primary focus of this paper, some political regimes were positively influenced by Classics, while others saw classical education as problematic.

The formation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after World War One, now encompassing other major centres of education — which also had their own traditions of classical education — made Belgrade compete with them and try to focus on what it considered its strong points: ancient Greek and Byzantine studies. The interwar period saw academic success. Although relatively late given the date of its establishment, the University of Belgrade saw two dissertations in Classics successfully defended (1932).⁴

The Second World War, followed by the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, brought even more radical changes. Some members of the Department, such as Miroslav Marcovich, would leave Serbia and pursue an academic career elsewhere. Others faced difficulties because of their engagement with the University during the occupation of Yugoslavia. Finally, the dissolution of Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century shaped the Department as it stands today.⁵

The aim of this paper is to (a) show the history of the Department in the 20th century through its eminent professors and (b) examine the cultural and sociological role of a professor of Classics, using the examples given in (a). The paper is organized into three sections corresponding to three stages of the development of Classics in Serbia. Each stage had some prominent figures, who are discussed below — some briefly, some more thoroughly.⁶

First stage (1875–1914) - laying foundations

At the Lyceum and the Great School, many professors had a high level of knowledge of Latin and Greek. Most of them had received their education in Serbian secondary schools within the Habsburg Monarchy and were taught mostly in Latin. Even after the formal inception of the Department (1875), the study of classical antiquity as a whole was unsystematic. It consisted mainly of language instruction serving utilitarian pedagogical needs. Nevertheless, even this pragmatic approach demonstrated that the main product of classical education was a professor — a figure who started as a Latin instructor but became, in time, someone who not only taught the language but introduced new ideas to society through the subject matter and his knowledge of it.

The end of the 19th century was already different from its beginning in terms of Serbian identity questions. Ottoman influence and the threat of cultural domination by the Turks were not as strong as before. Serbia was a state in the process of formation and development — or rather, in the process of statehood restoration. With no cultural threat from the Ottomans, everything except the former medieval or Byzantine tradition was labelled as foreign. Consequently, during this period Classics in Serbia was already operating under unfavourable intellectual and political circumstances. Most notable were the debates over the reform of secondary education. In reality, these were part of a broader political conflict shaped by ideological divisions and the geo-political orientation of the country, and merely found their reflection in educational debates.⁷ Opposition to classical gymnasiums came from those who believed that strengthening classical education in Serbia meant adopting a foreign, Austro-Hungarian educational model. They supported practical

³Ristović 2024, pp. 11–12.

⁴The candidates were Rastislav Marić (*Ancient Cults in Serbian Lands*) and Anica Savić Rebac (*Preplatonic Erotology*). The reason why these defences occurred so late was due to historical circumstances (the Balkan Wars and World War One).

⁵This last factor is not discussed in this paper.

⁶For the complete bibliography on the development of the Department of Classical Studies in Belgrade, see Ristović 2024, pp. 49–50.

⁷Nedeljković 2024, p. 70.

gymnasiums instead. This may represent one of the earliest examples of the divergence of views on classical education that would persist, in essence, throughout the entire development of Classical studies. With certain variations, a similar ambivalence also existed in Western Europe, although it was shaped by different political and economic circumstances.

The man who helped 'defend' Classics in these years marked the beginning of classical education in Serbia. In 1875, Jovan Turoman (1840–1915)⁸ was appointed to the position of Greek and Latin professor on the recommendation of the Minister of Education, who was himself a professor of General History at the Great School (Stojan Bošković). Turoman's appointment marked the beginning of the work and the establishment of a new academic chair — the Chair of Classical Languages and Literature.⁹ Turoman remained the only professor of classical languages at the Great School for eighteen years. He was later joined by Luka Zima, a former Gymnasium teacher of his.¹⁰ Zima's teaching included not only the Greek language itself but also a comparison of Homer's epics with Serbian folk poetry.¹¹ This approach would later develop much further and, as can be seen from this paper, was a characteristic feature of classical education in Serbia from its very beginnings. It was this model that proved most conducive to the popularity of Classics in Serbia.

Turoman thought that the translation and popularisation of classical texts was very important. He was particularly interested in Demosthenes. In 1866, he published a study entitled "Demosthenes as an Orator and Statesman", along with a number of translations. He encouraged the translation of classical authors and began his work at the Great School with his inaugural lecture entitled "The Value of Studying Classical Languages and Literature" — a question that remains relevant today and is raised in both the West and the East. His arguments in defence of the classical gymnasium were that classical authors and their works represent a valuable source of knowledge, and that the moral examples found in classical texts exert a positive influence on students. He also defended Latin and Greek instruction as an ideal basis for learning the structure and logic of language more generally.¹²

His fate and the end of his life were rather tragic. At the beginning of the First World War he was in Austria-Hungary, in what is today Vojvodina (northern Serbia). The Austro-Hungarian police raided his house and Turoman was forced out of his home under threat of execution. He never fully recovered from this traumatic experience and died in 1915.¹³

This first phase began with Jovan Turoman and it was brought to an end and transformed into a second, more scholarly phase by Nikola Vulić, who was appointed as first Chair of Ancient History. Vulić may be regarded as the founder of Classical philology in Serbia, in the modern academic sense.

Second stage (1914–1941): The Great War and a new state

The emphasis on pedagogy began to shift in the first years of the 20th century. During this period, Nikola Vulić played a big role in the growth and transformation of Classical studies. Vulić himself was interested in antiquity as a whole. He later significantly improved the visibility of Classics with his series of public lectures in Belgrade (1922). He also turned his attention to the study of the ancient history of the Serbian lands. This shift towards the study of local antiquity was again shaped by the need to reaffirm Classical studies in Serbia.

⁸Before his appointment at the University of Belgrade, Turoman earned his doctorate in Budapest and taught Latin at the Gymnasium in Novi Sad. More about Turoman in Nedeljković 2024, pp. 67–76.

⁹Cvjetičanin 2025. The Department of Classics in Belgrade celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2025 with an international conference held on 2–5 December in Belgrade, titled "Classical Studies: Traditions, Status, Prospects"; the proceedings of the conference are to be published next year (2027). The programme of the conference can be found here: <https://www.klasicnenaauke.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/PROGRAMME-web.pdf> (last accessed: June, 2026).

¹⁰Zima had begun his studies in Classical Philology in Prague and completed them in Graz. He brought extensive teaching experience, having worked as a professor for more than thirty years.

¹¹Ristović 2024, p. 14.

¹²Nedeljković 2024, p. 70.

¹³Nedeljković 2024, p. 75.

Veselin Čajkanović (1881-1946)

The major figure from the first half of the 20th century was Veselin Čajkanović (1881-1946).¹⁴ He took part in both the Balkan Wars and the First World War and was highly productive even during this difficult period. After the Austro-Hungarian occupation he was among the Serbian soldiers sent to the French naval base in Tunisia. There, he helped disabled soldiers receive training in typography. During this period he translated several works by Plautus.¹⁵ At the end of the First World War, he received a medal for bravery.

His work includes articles on ancient fables and their reception in Serbian folklore and literature. After the First World War, he focused more on comparative religious studies, again with an emphasis on Serbian folk beliefs and epic poetry. With this work, he essentially paved the way for classical reception studies in Serbia.¹⁶ His engagement with ethnography and folklore represented another connection between classical education and modern Serbian culture.

Čajkanović generally tried to keep his distance from politics and ideology, but was appointed Dean of the Faculty during the occupation period (1941-1944) of World War Two.¹⁷ In 1945, he was penalised by the communist authorities, losing his civic rights and suffering financial consequences.¹⁸ Shortly afterwards, Čajkanović died in 1946. His scholarly work remained for a long time overshadowed by political disfavour.

The interwar period

During the interwar period, Classical studies in Serbia improved considerably. The efforts of Vulić and Čajkanović, who led the Chair during this period, contributed greatly to this development. Both served as Deans of the Faculty of Philosophy. The library collection became substantially richer and the scholarly work of Serbian classicists became increasingly recognised and internationally visible. They began publishing their research in respected foreign journals and participated in major scholarly projects.¹⁹ This development brought Classical studies closer to wider society. The connection drawn between classical antiquity and national scholarship helped Classics to be viewed more positively, as something that belongs to Serbian culture. This refers primarily to Čajkanović's comparative studies of Serbian religion and customs and Vulić's public lectures.

In the later part of this period, Classical studies reached their greatest recognition and success in Serbia. Even so, despite significant social and academic achievement, the discipline did not receive much support from the state or its political representatives. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia continued to view it in much the same way as during the time of Jovan Turoman.

During this period another important change for the Department of Classics was introduced. Belgrade classicists understood the importance of Classical scholarship as a foundation for Byzantine studies. Thus, Byzantine Greek and Byzantine studies were incorporated into the classical philology curriculum. A field of particular national significance for Serbia, considering medieval influence of Byzantium on Serbian culture. Also, many classical philologists that were trained in Belgrade received their doctorates in Munich under Professor Karl Krumbacher, the founder of Byzantine studies.

Introduction of Byzantine studies was very important for the debates and discussions about antiquity and classical education in Serbia. It served as a cure for both parties. Byzantine studies were

¹⁴For more information and complete bibliography see Tolić 2024, 77-84.

¹⁵*Aulularia*, *Miles Gloriosus*, *Mostellaria*, *Trinummus*, and *Menaechmi*; see Tolić 2024, p. 78.

¹⁶Čajkanović was also the first scholar to study the reception of antiquity in the works of Dositej Obradović, the Serbian Enlightenment thinker of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

¹⁷Tolić 2024, p. 82.

¹⁸Milena Jovanović wrote about his tragic final years; see Jovanović 2013.

¹⁹For a detailed overview, see Ristović 2024, p. 21.

both Classical (textual aspect, transmission and the language) and national (cultural and religious impact).

Milan Budimir (1891-1975)

Milan Budimir joined the Department in 1921.²⁰ He introduced comparative and historical linguistics into the study of Greek and Latin, and was also one of the co-founders of the Institute for Balkan Studies at the Serbian Royal Academy in 1934. Like other professors discussed in this paper, he was deeply interested in the ethnographic, cultural, folkloric, and linguistic dimensions of Serbian and other Balkan peoples.

He grew up in Sarajevo and was arrested by Austro-Hungarian authorities several times as a member of the Young Bosnia movement. Time spent in prison as a young man left traces on his health, leading to later blindness. The difficulties Budimir faced in life due to his blindness, as well as his remarkable achievements in spite of it, are discussed by Miroslava Majher.²¹ He later lost nearly all of his sight, yet he managed to turn this limitation into an advantage. His best students would read sources and scholarly literature aloud to him and transcribe his observations. His academic output during this period was shaped through collaboration with students, to the mutual benefit of both. He, like Vulić, frequently delivered public lectures.²² During the Second World War, Budimir was accused by the occupying authorities of being 'nationally unreliable'.²³ After the war, he became head of the Department. However, he later fell out of favour with the communist regime when he published "The Serbian Rhapsody of Filip Višnjić," which the authorities — during the student protests and political crisis of that period — condemned as Greater Serbian nationalism.

Budimir largely helped the development of Byzantine studies in Belgrade after the formation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918. Because of the strong Latin centers like Zagreb and Ljubljana, classicists like Budimir felt that Belgrade should adopt a more distinctive focus on Greek (and Byzantine) studies.

Third stage: World War 2 and its aftermath

The academic and wider rise of Classical studies came to an abrupt halt with the German occupation. First, the Faculty of Philosophy stopped working for a short period. By the end of 1941, however, operations resumed, but with many personnel changes and various difficulties.²⁴ Budimir was temporarily removed from his position during the occupation but was reinstated after the end of the war. The post-war decades were marked by great academic productivity, but also by major losses. By 1945 Budimir was practically completely blind. Čajkanović died, Anica Savić Rebac took her own life, and Miroslav Marcovich left Yugoslavia because of political oppression.²⁵

Another organizational change that affected the future of Classical studies in Belgrade was the Formation of the Faculty of Philology in 1960. It was formed from language departments which were

²⁰More about him in Majher 2025, pp. 85–90.

²¹Majher 2024, p. 85.

²²Majher 2024, p. 87.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Ristović 2024, p. 33.

²⁵A year after Savić Rebac's death, Miroslav Marcovich left Yugoslavia. During his tenure in the Department from 1946 to 1954, he demonstrated considerable scholarly potential and a wide range of intellectual interests. However, his career was marked by persistent criticism and opposition from the communist authorities, as well as from sections of the Yugoslav classical scholarship community and the wider Belgrade intellectual circles. Because of this oppressive atmosphere, and for family reasons, he moved out. He later taught Classics in Venezuela (1955–1962), Bonn (1962) and Cambridge (1963–1968), until he finally settled at the University of Illinois in 1969. Cf. Cvjetičanin 2025, p. 11. He is best known for his edition of Heraclitus. He devoted the later part of his career to critical editions, mainly of Christian authors.

previously part of the Faculty of Philosophy. Thanks to the intervention of Budimir and Đurić, the study of classical philology remained within the Faculty of Philosophy and its name was changed to Department of Classics (as is today). Without the broad popularity that Đurić enjoyed, the outcome would certainly not have been the same. In order to save the broader cultural and historical study of antiquity, Belgrade classicists believed that it was easier to have interdisciplinary cooperation within one Faculty (Faculty of Philosophy), and not be separated and confined only to language and literature study.

Miloš N. Đurić (1892-1967)

Miloš N. Đurić was a professor who managed to extend his influence into broader society and culture. He was the son of a village schoolteacher. His literary and translatorial gifts were probably inherited from his father, a writer who composed fifteen original dramas on national themes, taught himself ancient Greek, and even translated two of Euripides' tragedies.²⁶ Miloš N. Đurić spent more than a decade as a gymnasium teacher, instructing students in logic, psychology, Latin, and Serbian. He received his doctorate from the University of Zagreb in 1929, with a dissertation entitled "Problems of the Philosophy of Culture", and joined the Department of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade shortly after. His scholarly work before 1946 was primarily concerned with philosophy.²⁷ However, following his transfer to the Department of Classics, his research focus shifted toward Greek literature. Among his major contributions are his *History of Greek Literature* and *History of Greek Ethics*. He was also a prolific translator of Greek literary works, and his translations of Homer, Greek tragedy, and Plato remain widely used today.

I argue that it was these translations, accompanied by his critical studies, that made him widely known to the public and popularised Classics far more than anyone in Serbia before him. By translating and commenting on passages he did what all of his predecessors had tried to do. Through the personal and pedagogical charisma he possessed, he linked Greek ethics, morality, literature, and myth to Serbian national poetry and folklore, showing both their differences and similarities. He was known to conduct 'peripatetic' lectures on the slopes of Avala, the small mountain near Belgrade.²⁸ Most importantly, he lived according to his own ethical teaching, which led him to be recognised as a true example of a devoted professor. Already in his early school years, Đurić had translated Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocles' *Antigone*, having acquired the language through his father.²⁹ After his death in 1967, the most distinguished achievements in translation have been recognised with the "Miloš N. Đurić" award. As a classical philologist, philosopher, translator, and educator — much like Nikola Vulić with his public lectures during the interwar period — Đurić enjoyed a remarkable degree of popularity in society at large. He was regarded as an embodiment of ancient wisdom and ethical virtue.³⁰

The Second World War and its aftermath brought Đurić to Classics; he would otherwise probably have remained a professor of philosophy. During the Nazi occupation and the collaborationist government in Belgrade he was removed from the Faculty (1942). He refused to sign the anti-communist Appeal to the Serbian People — the same appeal for which Čajkanović was put on trial, even though it could easily have been verified that he had not signed it either.³¹ In November 1941, Miloš N. Đurić was arrested along with other prominent public figures and taken to the Banjica concentration camp in Belgrade. Upon his release from the camp several months later, he continued his scholarly work — despite being prematurely retired — and published translations of Plutarch, Sophocles, and Seneca. His refusal to sign the Appeal became one of the most celebrated anecdotes about the professor of

²⁶Todorović 2024, p. 92.

²⁷After the Second World War he remained at the Department of Classics until his formal retirement in 1962.

²⁸Cf. Todorović 2024, p. 91.

²⁹For an overview of the most important and most influential translations, see Todorović 2024, pp. 95–96.

³⁰Božidar Kovačević called him "*the greatest Hellene among the Serbs*." Cf. Todorović 2024, p. 91.

³¹See Todorović 2024, p. 92, as well as Tolić 2024, p. 83.

ethics and his personal integrity. He stated that he could not sign the Appeal against the Partisans when more than half of his students were among their ranks, as he would not have been able to face them afterwards. Later, when a composer and music teacher, Miloje Milojević, warned him of the possible consequences and asked why he continued to refuse to sign, the professor replied: “It’s easy for you. You play bagpipes, while I teach ethics.”

That episode left a lasting impression. Đurić created an image of himself as the finest embodiment of what he taught — namely, civic and human virtue — something that classical education and the idea of a free university should provide. His statement became a symbol of personal integrity in Serbian society and remains significant to this day.³²

After the war, for ideological reasons, he was not permitted to rejoin the Department of Philosophy.³³ He was then appointed to the Department of Classics. In Đurić, as in many other notable professors discussed in this paper, one can clearly see a love of Serbian folk poetry and the ethos of freedom. His literary work began in the atmosphere of the struggle for national liberation during the Balkan Wars and the First World War. He was a sympathiser of the Young Bosnia movement and devoted much of his research to the libertarian ideals embedded in Serbian folk poetry.³⁴ In Zagreb in 1914 he founded the journal *Vihor* (“Whirlwind”), which was banned and confiscated in the aftermath of the Sarajevo assassination.³⁵

For Đurić, the Second World War ended with a profound personal tragedy – the loss of his only son, the twenty-year-old Rastko. He was killed on the Srem Front while fighting against the Nazi occupying forces. Đurić’s scholarly studies, university handbooks, and above all his translations of classical works of Greek literature continue to be read today.

Communist regime

The ideological pressure of Marxist theory during the Communist regime inevitably left its mark on the writing of Belgrade classicists. However, compared to some other humanistic disciplines, its effect on scholarly objectivity was neither lasting nor consequential.³⁶

During the socio-political upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s — student protests, the absence of Savić Rebac, Marcovich, and Đurić, and Budimir’s fall from favour as discussed earlier³⁷ — the Department faced increased scrutiny from the communist authorities, who portrayed Classical studies as outdated, and characteristically *bourgeois* and *reactionary*. This challenging period was further marked by the deaths of Đurić and Budimir, two central figures of the Belgrade Classics community. The combination of political pressures and the loss of influential scholars contributed to a decline in international academic cooperation.

Communism sought to be modern, but through a total break with the past. That was its key factor of antagonism with Classics in Serbia. This Communist idea of breaking with the past did not take hold, however, especially in a discipline such as Classics. Textbooks on classical literature and history during this period would simply emphasise social struggle and inequality in antiquity. In academic circles this was mostly regarded as a necessary concession to avoid confronting the regime.

In Serbia, especially under the Communist regime, the unpopularity of Classics was always rooted in utilitarian concerns. Knowledge of Greek and Latin was (and is today, to an extent) seen as useless for practical life. Communist education preferred a pragmatic approach. The review of

³²It has been cited many times publicly, most recently during the student protests in Belgrade in 2025. On this, see further in the conclusion.

³³Cvjetičanin 2025, p. 10; Ristović 2024, p. 33.

³⁴Todorović 2024, p. 93.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Ristović 2024, p. 34.

³⁷For more information about this see: Jovanović 2011.

key figures who led the Department of Classics during the 20th century shows that pressures of this kind are something that will always follow Classics — and that they need to be answered correctly. I am not saying that every critique of classical education is wrong; I am simply saying that there is another side to such views, one that has ‘saved’ Classics many times. And it was saved mainly by prominent individuals, highly knowledgeable in the study of antiquity, who could see the broader picture of how Classics matter to a culture.

Conclusion

Here I would like to summarise the points I have tried to make in my historical overview. My first point (a) is that public lectures and a closer connection with broader society are very important for visibility. This approach has consistently shown good results for Classics as a discipline, both academically and culturally. Ignorance of the wider public about antiquity makes them dismissive toward Classics, nothing more. My second point (b) is that the Serbian example shows that the connection of Classics with vernacular tradition is very important. This was evident in the work of Vulić, Čajkanović, Budimir, and Đurić. Every defence of Classics that drew on this approach yielded positive results. It even gave rise to Byzantine studies in Serbia. My third conclusion (c) is that wars and politics inevitably influence Classics. The difficulties are not always immediately apparent, but professors are usually the first to notice and address them. Universities and higher education more broadly came into being through dialogue between professors and ministers of education or other state representatives. Educational reforms can be positive or negative depending on the personal involvement of professors. As with politics, Classics requires debate. Lastly, (d) the Serbian ethos of freedom and national romanticism was always present in every major figure of the Department of Classics. The idea of personal integrity, pride, and connection with ancient civilisation is something that defines Serbian classical education. From its very beginnings it showed a consistent inclination in this direction. Turoman defended classical education in general; Vulić began researching the ancient history of Serbian lands; Čajkanović focused on ancient fables and their reception in Serbian folklore and epic poetry. Budimir and Đurić followed that example.

Put more broadly, what does the Serbian example show? One can see a constant debate between universal classical culture and national identity. In reality this is a broader social and cultural question present in modern Serbian society. On the one hand, classical literature was used by Serbian authors to express aspirations towards European identity and modernity; on the other, there was a pushback against universal classical culture in favour of national identity. Today, modern pan-European, Western, rational cosmopolitanism — exemplified primarily by Dositej Obradović — is confronted with traditionalism and national romanticism, whose roots lie in Serbian medieval history. The representatives of the latter are Vuk Karadžić and Đorđe Petrović (Karadorđe), a Serbian revolutionary leader who led the struggle against the Ottoman Empire during the First Serbian Uprising. But the examples given in this paper show that these two views can go very well together. Furthermore, even Karadorđe himself, who was illiterate, understood that he needed Dositej Obradović to form a new state — national pride was not enough. Similarly, classicists in Serbia today feel that Serbian society lacks classical education. Classical studies were most successful when these two elements were not in contradiction, as during the interwar period. These two perspectives enrich the core of Serbian culture and should not be marginalised.

Daniel Markovich, in his talk at the Belgrade 150th anniversary conference titled “*Classical Studies as a Subculture*”,³⁸ argues that Classics (both in the West and in Eastern Europe) consists of a combination of elements from both sides. This became especially evident after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the differences between Eastern and Western Europe grew smaller. Serbia lies somewhere between these two sides. The Serbian 20th-century example may serve as a useful case for thinking

³⁸This paper was greatly inspired by Markovich’s talk, and I am very grateful to him for it.

about the broader future of Classics, because these questions remain vitally important. Even today, classical education is viewed largely as a privilege of elites, with the knowledge of classical languages seen merely as a symbol of prestige — something more about social status than anything else.

Lastly, I wish to underline the importance of the professor as a figure and connect the examples of virtue and personal integrity given in this paper to today's Serbia — specifically, the student protests of 2025 and this year. The student protests began as a social movement demanding justice for the victims who tragically perished in the collapse of the station canopy in Novi Sad, but gradually assumed a political character. Through the idea of solidarity, they succeeded in mobilising a substantial number of people — and that solidarity was not merely rhetorical. Among the various segments of society, it was the university professors who distinguished themselves by making a concrete sacrifice: they were left with practically no salaries for supporting their students. Most other social groups did not follow their example. This raises the question of why professors took such a step when others did not — particularly given that they joined the protests with no personal interest at stake, neither demanding higher wages nor improved working conditions. The answer bears resemblance to the remark attributed to Miloš N. Đurić: “*I teach ethics*” — and therefore cannot act otherwise. In the same spirit, scholars in the humanities found themselves without an alternative course of action.³⁹

To conclude, Solon's definition of democracy⁴⁰ holds that one must engage in civic life precisely when others are suffering, even when one's own circumstances are comfortable. Such a sacrifice for the sake of a better society is one that only a person of a certain formation is prepared to make — someone educated in a way that cultivates awareness of broader social problems and the capacity to perceive the larger picture. Strictly pragmatic education does not furnish this disposition. The humanities, on the other hand, embodied in the classical disciplines, provide precisely that.

³⁹The well-known Đurić anecdote from the Second World War was cited before a large audience (more than 100,000 people) in 2025 by Professor Milo Lompar (Faculty of Philology). It is also worth noting that the Faculty of Philosophy demonstrated remarkable perseverance throughout the protests — its faculty members were the last to lift the blockade of the Faculty and resume regular instruction.

⁴⁰As portrayed in Plut. *Sol.* 18.5.

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