

MEĐUNARODNI NAUČNI SKUP „DANI ARČIBALDA RAJSA“  
TEMATSKI ZBORNIK RADOVA MEĐUNARODNOG ZNAČAJA

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE “ARCHIBALD REISS DAYS”  
THEMATIC CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS OF INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE



MEĐUNARODNI NAUČNI SKUP  
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## DR MARIJA ILIĆ AGAPOVA FIRST FEMALE POLICE OFFICER IN SERBIA

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**Abstract:** Work of dr Marija Ilić Agapova is not quite common among our scientific and professional public, including the fields in which she takes dominant position in her life and professional opus – librarianship and publishing affairs. In said fields, the injustice was partially remedied thanks to the professionals from the Library and the Museum of the City of Belgrade, being the institutions of which she was one of the founders and the first administrator. This versatile educated woman had left the dignifying trace in many other fields as well, including criminology and criminalities.

Marija Ilić was born back in 1895, in the village of Pađene near Knin, on the territory of Military province of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy, as the youngest, thirteenth child in the family of laborers and viticulturists. This exceptional woman was ahead of more than her time in many fields. She had overmastered numerous obstacles in the most demanding field – the intellectual one, and in the areas of “men’s” professions, the hardest ones to master.

She had received her education in Russian Institute for girls in Cetinje (1908 – 1911), followed by the State secondary school in Split (1918), graduating subsequently from the Law School in Zagreb, with the title of so-called Central-European doctorate (1923). In 1926, she had also passed bar exam. She lived and worked in Belgrade.

There are numerous fields where dr Marija Ilić Agapova had given her significant contribution. Apart from previously mentioned achievements in librarianship, establishing and administrating the City Museum, the materials she had collected had constituted the initial fund of present Historical Archive of Belgrade. She wrote novels, monographs on history of Belgrade and Zemun, professional books on public libraries operation; she practiced law and worked on translation, since she was quite familiar with seven languages, so she became the member of Literary translators association of Serbia.

She had built her position in the history of criminology and criminalities by practical work in children’s police department, as well as with wide opus of papers, researching circumstances of crime occurrence, possibility of prevention, educational and social work with children offenders, including specific items of relationship of women to crime [(*Woman and Crime* (1929), *Mistress and Maid* (1929), *Children and Municipal Social Action* (1930)...)]. She was publishing in *Policija* (Police), *Žena i svet* (Woman and World), *Ženski pokret* (Woman’s Movement), *Riječ* (Word), *Savremena opština* (Modern Municipality)... She was an active fighter for woman’s rights and breaking apart patriarchal stereotype in the time before any mechanisms, quotes and laws aiding gender equality were in place – and she had lived that equality.

**Key words:** Marija Ilić Agapova, librarianship, practicing law, translation, the history of Belgrade, the history of criminalities, the history of criminology

## Introductory remarks

The traditional understanding of the security affairs defines them as one of the fields being, almost without exception, the "realm" of men. Such associative relation of this domain to only one gender is, in fact, not surprising. Throughout the long history of various fields and works pertaining to security, also viewed in traditional "key", the men were indeed not only predominant, but usually the only actors in the security affairs.

Without elaborating more or less justified reasons for this status, the women, in this field /as well/, had to take a long journey from total exclusion to the contemporary admittance of their capabilities and competences to participate in numerous aspects of this field. Therefore, the value of remainder of the rare females who were, in spite of cultural conditionals, difficulties and prejudices, the first one to enter the demanding field such as policing – is yet greater.

In our region, the first one among them was dr Marija Ilić Agapova, the woman who had, as in numerous other fields, achieved significant results, partially known to scientific and professional public, but her pioneering role in policing was almost sent to oblivion. According to the obscure available data, she did not spend much time on professional administrative work in police, dedicated predominantly to work with educationally neglected children (Petrović, 2007: 336). That, however, did not prevent her to dedicate in even more intellectually demanding manner, to the issues of crime prevention, predominantly among women and children, by publishing numerous papers in these fields in professional magazines of the time.

## Way forward to higher education

Marija Ilić was born back in 1895, in the village of Pađene near Knin, on the territory of military province of the former Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Her parents Lazar and Marija, maiden name Opačić, had had thirteen children – seven sons and six daughters. Mother was housekeeper, and father worker and vineyard keeper, which were usual occupations for the inhabitants of rocky and not too wealthy area of continental Dalmatia of the time.

Insufficiently reliable data state that the Ilić family had sent for further education each of their thirteen children, with Marija being the youngest (Durković-Jakšić, 1984: 197; Perić, 2009: 166). The way for such an opportunity to present itself to the family which probably, according to the usual parameters, could not be considered rich, remains unknown<sup>1</sup>. It is assumed that the certain role in her education was taken by widespread legacy education for underprivileged, gifted children in so-called Serbian Dalmatia (Radulović, 2002: 6), which was rather common among the Serbs in Austro-Hungarian empire, directed, however, towards training for various craft and trade works<sup>2</sup>.

She had attended primary school in her village of birth (1902 – 1908), and subsequently, as her sister, attended the Russian Institute of Empress Maria (1908-

<sup>1</sup> According to one of the sources, Lazar Ilić is being mentioned as „one of the wealthiest holder“ in his village, and in other sources, he is „poor worker and vineyard keeper“. (Perić, 2009: 166; Radulović, 2002: 6). Even if he was the wealthiest person in such a small village, it would be difficult for him to educate his numerous children – both boys and girls – without any assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Famous associations with donation funds were: Serbian association of economy „Businessman“, which had during its existence since 1897 to prohibition in 1947 helped education of more than 40,000 children; followed by the Welfare association „Serbian Women“, dedicated to education of girls (Krestić, P. 2009)

1911), established for girls' education within the Montenegrin court in Cetinje<sup>3</sup>. The Institute was a kind of prep school, providing the girls with the opportunity to take high school graduation, which was a prerequisite for access to the university education. Restrictiveness of regulations, and practice to the greater extend, was a great issue for continuation of higher education for girls, especially in Serbia where there was no girls' high school before 1905 (Trgovčević, 2003: 188), so the girls had taken the graduation privately, with the consent by the high school directors, and entry to the university had required consent from rector. Wives, sisters and daughters of Serbs from Austro-Hungarian Empire were in much more favorable position, being for certain the first educated women in Serbia.

In order to study at the university, Marija Ilić had passed the high school graduation in the state high school in Split in 1918, and had entered the Law School in Zagreb in the same year. She had graduated from the Law School in 1923, with the title of so-called Central-European doctorate. Such doctorate was held by some of the most famous intellectuals educated in Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany and Italy at the time, such as our only Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić (in Graz 1924). Having all previous facts in mind, she was among the first highly educated women of her region "and western Serbian population in general" (Marković, 2002: 11).

The first woman who graduated from the Law School in Serbia, Smilja Jovanović, had done so prior to the World War I, in 1914, just nine years before Ilić. Studying law in that age meant conquering "the hardest male profession" (Trgovčević, 2003: 193). No reliable data exist on Marija Ilić education during the World War I, but there is a notice that she had taken "various practical courses in Rijeka and Zagreb" (Durković-Jakšić, 1984: 197), and had anyway dedicated those years to some sort of informal education.

After graduating from the university, she worked as trainee lawyer from 1923 to 1926, passing the bar exam in 1926, thus becoming an independent lawyer in Zagreb<sup>4</sup>. Soon after, she had moved to Belgrade, where she had found the employment and continued her studies. According to the reliable data, she had studied history with Professor Stanojević on the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade in 1931<sup>5</sup>. At the time, she was in the swing of her career, among the others in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, practiced law, translation and her, seemingly, the most accepted profession – librarianship. The will to acquire and apply knowledge was obviously still with her. Example of Marija Ilić, married Agapov, had confirmed one of the basic laws of educational needs proliferation – those needs keep growing, as they are being satisfied.

This versatile educated woman had, besides the formal education, learned foreign languages continuously. As we had noted, she had attended high school in Russian, and she was fluent in German, being an official language in Austro-Hungarian Empire, including the Italian, being the second language beyond the educated world of Dalmatia. She did speak, as expected, French, as all girls educated in Russian, Chekhov's tradition of learning French, piano and knitting. She had also learned Latin in high school, and English and Czech independently. For a resume on the crossing of nineteenth and twentieth century, especially female, such an approach to the intellectual values and life in general is rather outstanding.

<sup>3</sup> According to Durković-Jakšić this education had lasted for three years, but Perić stipulates five years (Durković-Jakšić, 1984:197; Perić, 2009: 166).

<sup>4</sup> *Prva žena policajac u našoj zemlji*, Vreme, 07. 06. 1929, 4.

<sup>5</sup> There is identification with her name of Yugoslavian Academic Club of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, dated August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1931, issued to her as a student of Faculty of Philosophy (Durković-Jakšić, 197).

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## Fields of professional engagement

Rich life and professional engagement of dr Marija Ilić Agapova offers plentitude of material, which may be interesting for researchers of the same subject from various perspectives. Change of optics, of course, provides a significantly different picture of this persona, but with the same key value dedication and properties. Everything known about her is a testimony of capable, persistent, meticulous, hard-working, intelligent, versatile educated, probably self-assured and non-conventional woman.

Dr Marija Ilić Agapova is predominantly known to our intellectual public as one of the founders and first administrator of the Library of the City of Belgrade. Fields of her interest, which she had visited rather thoroughly than sporadically, were much more diverse. She had had a significant role in establishing the Museum of the City of Belgrade, Historical archive of Belgrade, translated from German, Russian and Italian, being an active member of Women's movement, author of novels and historical publications, lawyer, lecturer of foreign languages in schools for adults and, interesting for the topic of this paper – the first female police officer in our country (Vreme, 7.6.1929).

Data on her are not unknown within the individual fields, but linking them to the same person was often missing. It is possible that the reason for it is indeed extraordinarily wide scope of her interest, where some fields inevitably push out the others, or perhaps identification difficulty for women changing their last names upon marriage. Whichever the reason, papers presenting Marija Ilić Agapova and her various other roles do not mention that it is the same Dr Marija Ilić, the first female police officer, and vice versa.

Identity of dr Marija Ilić Agapova testifies of numerous interlaced elements. That allows us to fit her in more than one category and classify her in various ways. By the efforts of employees of the Library of the City of Belgrade and the Administrator, literary professional Jovan Radulović, she is the best known to the public by her work on establishing that library and the city museum and managing them. Seventy years after library establishing, they had prevented for her legacy to fall into oblivion. A rich selection of her papers had been collected and republished in "Selected Papers" (Ilić Agapova, 2002), including republishing of books "Illustrated History of Belgrade" (Ilić Agapova, 2002a), novel "Son of the Defender of Belgrade" (Ilić Agapova, 2003), professional book "Public Libraries" (Ilić Agapova, 2003a), and the prize "Dr Marija Ilić Agapova" for the best librarian of the City had been established.

The Library of the City of Belgrade and the Museum of the City of Belgrade still exist as separate institutions of culture, established as a single institution by the resolution of Municipal Court of the City of Belgrade in 1931. Marija Ilić Agapova had instantly worked in the library as an officer, and had become the administrator in 1932, while she started administering the City Museum in 1941 (Marković, 2002: 11). She had dedicated most of her career to upgrading and developing library and establishing the first children department of the library countrywide. She was assisted by numerous public workers of the time to develop and upgrade the operation, build awareness on importance of libraries and museums as the institutions of culture, including Branislav Nušić and poet Sima Pandurović. She had published numerous professional papers in the field of librarianship, organized library according to the relatively new decimal system and wrote classical book "Public Libraries" (1934), which is still being recommended as

a professional literature for the librarians. Thus, it is more difficult to comprehend that no library in Belgrade had had her name by 2002 (Radulović, 2002: 6). Nowadays, one branch of the City Library in New Belgrade is named after her.

Volume of material data on Belgrade and Zemun, which she had been collected for the City Museum and Library for years, being the base for 1933 popular, yet accurate historical synthesis of the Capital history, was the seeding for the Historical Archive of the City of Belgrade (Marković, 2002: 11). Currently, this archive does not contain personal volume of Marija Ilić Agapova, in the form available for other significant personas.

As previously noted, she had obtained doctorate of law and had practiced law for many years. That was the main reference for her to join the Ministry of Internal Affairs, since it was noted that “she is among the most significant female lawyers in our country”<sup>6</sup>. She had published a series of articles on preemptive measures to protect women and children, necessity to adjust and modernize Penalty system of Serbia, according to the European and international codes for women and children protection, rights of children born outside marriage and other issues, considered ahead of her time.

Her vast theoretical knowledge and willingness to act in practice, Marija Ilić Agapova had given a significant contribution to sensitizing public on necessity to establish fair view of law makers, society and individuals of women. She is almost unanimously considered to be advocate for woman’s rights, even a precursor of feminism here (Radulović, 2002: 8). She had been translating papers by the most famous female authors, kept correspondence with highly educated women and men of her time on issues of gender equality, writing and lecturing on those subjects. Current, extended view of security for the reason includes specific issues of gender equality, societal security, which may be gender-determined, including individual security. Throughout her entire influence, Marija Ilić Agapova was on the path of modern standpoints, according to which “the term of security, in its social aspect, becomes even the real alternative for the term and existence of freedom” (Cvetković, 2010: 57). She had considered equality of males and females normal, she wrote about that in the manner free of aggression, she had promoted female qualities and celebrated female contribution to human society development.<sup>7</sup> Herself, she was emancipated and free from interiorized prejudices and limitations, woman living a life of a dynamic intellectual, for which there was no “glass ceiling” to limit vertical success for women. Keeping her maiden name after marriage, studying law, practicing law, entering police force, typical male bastion, accepting managing positions – all of those were properties of the woman ahead of her time back then.

There are additional fields of work, creating the landscape through which this versatile educated woman had travelled. She wrote several novels and popular history books on history of Belgrade and Zemun, connecting thus her two loves – love for history and love for Belgrade. The most familiar ones are “Illustrated History of Belgrade” (1933) and “Son of the Defender of Belgrade” (1940). Historians consider accuracy and documentation of volumes she wrote about positive, with the same consideration of lightness and style by the writers. Culture Association of Serbia had granted her status of artist in 1962, for contribution in that field (Durković-Jakšić, 1984: 199)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> *Prva žena policajac u našoj zemlji*, Vreme, 07. 06. 1929, 4.

<sup>7</sup> In 1930, she had held lecture via Radio Belgrade on Mary Wollstonecraft (Ilić-Agapova, 2002: 374), senior, considered to be pioneer of female movement with the book *Defense of Woman Rights* from 1792. Her daughter Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, known as Mary Shelley, is the author of the famous *Frankenstein*.

<sup>8</sup> Not even love for Belgrade seems to be reciprocated to her. Only a street in Padinska Skela was named after her few years ago.



Fluency in seven foreign languages was undoubtedly the base for her work on translation and lecturing. Apart from being an author and creator herself, she often did numerous translations, predominantly from Italian and Russian, although translations of professional articles from German and French can also be found. Opus and quality of those translations is indicated by recognition obtained from the professionals in that field, who had proposed and accepted her in the Association of Literal Translators of Serbia (Perić, 1984: 166). Being a true polyglot, she had been translating various contents, in general related to history, social work, female issue, literature and other topics within her vocation. As for known literary books, she had translated "Roman Woman" by Alberto Moravia, "One True Love" by Dino Bucatti, "Maria" by Grigorije Medinski... After retiring, she worked as a part time lector for Russian and Italian with High Journalistic-Diplomatic School, and taught those foreign languages on courses for adults and archive workers.

One cannot guess the reasons for un/intentional oblivion, which had almost enveloped her work. One of the possible explanations, based on similar experiences, is that the reason holds ideological stamp. There is information that, after the World War II, she was reprehended for continuing to work and manage city cultural institutions during the occupation. After the war, she got fired in 1945, and retired in 1947 (Perić, 2009: 166). Political branding of people would not be spread randomly to other dimensions of their work in this case only. All of the regiments had achieved desired outcome for shorter or longer time by doing so, but with harming own cultural and spiritual background.

### First female police officer

The least known data from rich professional biography of dr Marija Ilić Agapova is covering in fact her work in police. The reasons may be various, from lack of research of policing past issues, her short stay in the force, to different comprehension of policing of her time against current organization of forces. Historical literature does not even mention that aspect of her work – Serbian Dictionary of Biographies, Prefaces of her republished books, *In Memoriam* text published in 1984 Annual Booklet of the City of Belgrade – fail to note this fact.

Sources and literature in the field of security sciences note that dr Marija Ilić was the first woman appointed "to work in children police as a notary" (Petrović, 2007: 336). Date of this appointment was June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1929, and not July 7<sup>th</sup> as noted by Petrović, since „*Vreme*“ newspaper dated June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1929 had published "The Resolution by the Minister of Internal Affairs, General Živković, appoints dr Marija Ilić as a police trainee in the Directorate of the City of Belgrade, ninth group first category and degree, as of yesterday. Miss Ilić is the first female joining the police forces in our country"<sup>9</sup>. Text with the same heading and date in June was published by professional-popular magazine of the time „*Policija*“(Police)<sup>10</sup>.

Position of notary was, at the time, significant professional officer's appointment in the field of public administration (Petrović, 2007: 336), far from current understanding of that term. Terms such as "female police" and "children police" were attempts to differentiate against traditional, existing organization of police in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, employing exclusively males. That had firstly noted that the scope of work of this new department, established pursuant

<sup>9</sup> *Prva žena policajac u našoj zemlji*, *Vreme*, 07. 06. 1929, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Nikićević, M, (1929) *Prva žena policajac u našoj zemlji*, Beograd, *Policija*, br. 11-12, 527-532.

to the amendments of Penalty Law and consequential organizational changes, are different, specific issues of women and children, as well as that those special children police department, according to the foreign experiences, should be staffed with females.

Years before this appointment, numerous public and professional workers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, had been indicating necessity for some of the works regarding “criminal activities prevention” within some police competences, to be performed by women, although they had been aware that this was considered “bold or even naïve” at the time in Serbia (Todorović, 1925: 19). The first attempt to “authorize a police notary to care for children” dates back to 1921, but had lasted for mere month. Advocates of such approach claim that the positive effects of existence of “special officer for minors” had been noticeable, even for such short period (Nikićević, 1929: 528), therefore the lack of funding for such purposes is inadmissible justification. Relation of society towards children was not different from relation to the adults, and was based on repressive actions, with children being incarcerated with the others. There was a noticeable need to establish shelters for children of streets, beggars, advisory activities, prevention of premature or “immoral” children labor, even establishing public baths and taking in alcoholics and mentally ill. Different approach was required for interrogating children, performing body search for women and similar activities. Separate problem was prostitution which was in some countries, such as England, dealt by so-called moral police, which was armed and authorized to use force. Yet again, in spite of its existence, there was a newly established female police with different methods of acting, unarmed, trained predominantly for care giving role, similar to present social works, with the task to “build the thought for return to honorable life” (Janković, 1926: 621).

Certain skepticism with advocates of female employment in police can be found in the article greeting and praising appointment of the first female police officer: “Together with Miss Ilić, one experienced and professional male police officer should have been appointed, for children affairs only. Our society is different from the ones in Germany, America or England, for a female police officer to count on the success as there. It is necessary to start with a man” (Nikićević, 1929: 531). It seems that skepticism in this field is a phase which is slow to disappear. Emphasis of this remark should have been on the word “one”, since back then there were experiences that such duties were delegated to teams, and special Children departments had been established, not even looking like police departments (Sretenović, 1929: 6).

The main official duties of the first female police officer were, as she noted, founded on wide base, but within the boundaries of preventive work. Only in the extremely difficult cases, such as child seduction, persuasion to do prostitution and similar, the repressive measures would be used. The task of children police was nearest to the present comprehension of social care. It included monitoring and supervision, predominantly of educationally neglected children on places they resided, housing them in institutions, health care, collecting data on social circumstances of children’s life and coordination of work with parents or institutions for child care; advisory works directed towards parents, including advocacy and advising courts and tutorial boards “in all punitive and civic matters” pertaining to children; down to giving comments in all cases of children education neglect and aiding teaching institutions in decreasing low attendance (Sretenović, 1929: 6). Members of children police would locate such children, house them and cooperate with other institutions, including juvenile homes.

Ilić herself had been promoting the standpoint that females in children police achieve greater success than males, since they win child's confidence easier, understand child's emotions and needs better and face less resistance in contact with parents, especially mothers. That had, however, perhaps understandable for the time, pulled her into the trap of cultural prejudices on nature of genders, only this time – in favor of females.

Apart from practical engagement in children police, she wrote theoretic papers and translated texts on the issues of women and children protection, presenting problems and solutions in that field in many countries worldwide to the domestic public, predominantly from England, Germany, Russia and Netherlands. She had also been publishing papers quoting literary works on abandoned or neglected children, such as works of Ilja Erenburg or Nadezda Krupskaja on "children of the street" in Russia. She was writing for journals and magazines such as

*Policija, Žena i svet, Ženski pokret, Vreme, Savremena opština, Opštinske novine* and other on topics of female equality, specific properties of females and children as offenders and child protection. Her work in children police and papers such as *Woman and Crime* (1929), *Mistress and Maid* (1929), *Children and Municipal Social Action* (1930) and other had given her place in history of, among the others, criminalities and criminology.

After her short work in police, there had been other attempts to appoint females in police, but without any significant steps forward, due to the lack of systematic solutions. A. Dimitrijević had also attended course for female police offices in Germany, but did not work in police, and as late as 1937, Josipa Šagovac was appointed as police officer in Zagreb (Petrović, 2007: 336).

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Dr Marija Ilić Agapova had earned for her name to be mentioned in history of crime research. She was working both theoretically and practically in that field. She was the first female police officer in our country and the woman writing numerous popular, professional and scientific works in the field of children and women protection. Although she did not work in the police for long, she did give her contribution, as circumstances allowed, to affirmation of this vocation and for women in it. If her contribution in this field was not greater, judging by plentitude of her biography, that was certainly not her fault. In all professional fields she was dedicated to, which were unusually numerous, she had taken dignifying position. Each of those stories depicts her in the same manner – or is it one and the same story?

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