

NEVIDLJIVI NEPRIJATELJ – VARIOLA VERA 1972

PRIKAZ KNJIGE

BOOK REVIEW

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY – VARIOLA VERA 1972

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U Srbiji je, tokom samo jednog prosečnog ljudskog veka, došlo do dramatičnih promena u svim oblastima života, ali je poslednja knjiga vanredne profesorke Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu, Radine Vučetić, razlog da se ovom prilikom ograničimo na bolest i zdravlje. U monografiji „NEVIDLJIVI NEPRIJATELJ – Variola vera 1972“, autorka s naučnom minucioznošću obrađuje pojavu, tok, uticaj na svakodnevni život i socijalno-političke implikacije najveće evropske epidemije velikih boginja posle Drugog svetskog rata, koja je pogodila Jugoslaviju pre pola veka. Za razumevanje značaja teme, važno je sagledati širi kontekst.

BOOK REVIEW

In Serbia, just within the span of an average person's lifetime, dramatic changes have occurred in all segments of life. However, on this occasion, the latest book written by Radina Vučetić, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade, focuses our attention to the segment of illness and health. In her monograph *THE INVISIBLE ENEMY - Variola vera 1972*, the author treats, with scientific precision and attention to detail, the outbreak, course, impact on everyday life, and socio-political implications of the largest European smallpox epidemic after World War II, which befell Yugoslavia half a century ago. In order to understand this issue, it is important to take into consideration the wider context.

Poslednjih godina, sve do pojave kovida 19, obolevanje i, posebno, umiranje od zaraznih bolesti u Srbiji, nisu predstavljali posebno značajan narodnozdravstveni problem. Od nešto više od 100.000 umrlih građana tokom godine, preko 50% činile su žrtve bolesti srca i krvnih sudova, sledili su maligni tumori, sa oko 21%, a zatim drugi poremećaji zdravlja. Zarazne bolesti su se nalazile pri samom dnu liste uzroka smrti, sa ukupno oko 100 umrlih, što je manje od 0,1%. Kada se izuzmu najčešće među njima, grip i sida, rizik da se umre od ostalih zaraza, prema zvaničnim statističkim podacima, bio je otprilike isti kao i da čoveka ubije grom.

Ovakva epidemiološka situacija napadno odudara od strukture obolevanja i umiranja u godinama po okončanju Drugog svetskog rata. Primera radi, procenjuje se da je, samo leta 1946. godine, u zemlji od oko 15 miliona stanovnika, malarična groznica tresla 1,2 miliona građana. Te godine je od pegavog tifusa registrovano preko 900, a od tetanusa skoro 300 smrti.

Usledili su obuhvatni programi suzbijanja tuberkuloze i pegavca, potom iskorenjivanja malarije, i na kraju eliminacije difterije, tetanusa, dečje paralize, i drugih infekcija. To su bile akcije koje su zahtevale ogromna sredstva i masovno angažovanje kadrova, ali su i rezultati bili impresivni. Međutim, ne samo u kolektivnom sećanju, već i po svim objektivnim pokazateljima, posebno po svom intenzitetu, bilo je, i ostalo je bez presedana, suzbijanje epidemije velikih boginja, u proleće 1972. godine.

Profesorka Vučetić prihvatila se izazova da kritički sagleda ovaj kompleksni događaj, pristupajući mu sa više strana i na više nivoa. Njen ugledni hrvatski kolega, Mirko Dražen Grmek, pisao je o tri nivoa istorijske konceptualizacije. Prvi je ono što se stvarno desilo u prošlosti (*res facta*) i to obično pokriva „plava trava zaborava“. Drugi čini pristupačna dokumentacija (*res scripta*) i ona bi trebalo da verno odslikava minule događaje. Treći nivo obuhvata ono što se o događajima misli i što nekada, nezavisno od činjenica, presudno oblikuje odnos prema stvarnosti.

Pristupajući istraživanju, doktorka Vučetić je bila svesna da je epidemija varirole, u kolektivnom pamćenju, ostala kao dramatičan događaj, sa većom ili manjom dozom romantične prebojenosti i skoro po pravilu neskrivenim ponosom zbog uspešne pobede nad virusom. Autorka se oslonila na još uvek žive svedoke, bilo da su aktivno učestvovali u suzbijanju bolesti, bilo da su bili nevoljne žrtve nametnutih protivepidemijskih mera. Neki su joj usmeno preneli svoja izbledela sećanja, a neki su na papir stavili sopstvena viđenja borbe sa variolom. Sva ta svedočanstva delovala su

In recent years, until the outbreak of COVID-19, illness, and especially mortality from infectious diseases in Serbia, did not pose a particularly significant public health issue. Of a little over 100,000 deceased persons per year, over 50% were victims of cardiovascular diseases, malignant tumors caused approximately 21% of deaths, followed by other diseases and disorders. Infectious diseases were at the very bottom of the list of causes of death, with a total of 100 deaths, which amounted to less than 0.1%. According to official statistical data, when the most common diseases amongst them, the flu and AIDS, were set aside, the risk of falling victim to an infectious disease was approximately equal to the risk of being struck down by lightning.

Such an epidemiological situation is strikingly different from the morbidity and mortality structure in the years following World War II. For example, it is estimated that, only in 1946, in a country with a population of 15 million, malaria struck 1.2 million people. In that year alone, 900 typhus related deaths were registered, as well as 300 tetanus related fatalities.

Comprehensive programs of suppressing tuberculosis and typhus were then set in motion, followed by the malaria eradication program, and finally programs for eliminating diphtheria, tetanus, polio, and other infections. These were endeavors which required huge funds and mass engagement of staff, but which yielded impressive results. However, not only because it has remained imprinted in collective memory, but also because of objective indicators, especially regarding its intensity, the fight against the smallpox epidemic in 1972, remains unprecedented.

Professor Vučetić took upon herself the challenge of critically assessing this complex event, approaching it from different sides and at different levels. Her distinguished Croatian colleague, Mirko Dražen Grmek, wrote about the three levels of historical conceptualization. The first level relates to what actually happened in the past (*res facta*), which usually sinks into oblivion. The second level comprises available documents (*res scripta*), and it is supposed to accurately reflect the events of the past. The third level relates to what is believed of the events and which, sometimes independently of the facts, has a decisive role in forming the attitude towards reality.

In approaching her research, Professor Vučetić was aware that the variola epidemic remained a dramatic event in collective memory, which was sometimes more and sometimes less romanticized, and which was almost always approached with evident pride stemming from the success in conquering the virus. The author relied on the testimonies of still living witnesses, whether active participants in the fight against the

krajnje autentično, ali su se često znatno razlikovala.

Čak ni stručna literatura posvećena epidemiji – pre svega dva velika simpozijuma o dešavanjima u Beogradu i u celoj Jugoslaviji, uz niz drugih naučno-stručnih i popularno pisanih publikacija i pojedinačnih članaka – nije davala skladnu sliku o dešavanjima u proleće 1972. godine. Autorka je, kao što se od istoričara i očekuje, važan oslonac za rekonstruisanje prošlosti našla u laičkoj štampi i, pre svega, u arhivskoj građi, pohranjenoj u Arhivu Jugoslavije i drugim odgovarajućim fondovima i depozitima.

Rezultat tog savesnog i obuhvatnog rada je svestran i pouzdan prikaz nastanka, toka i gašenja epidemije. Profesorka Vučetić je uspela da uporedi i kritički evaluiira nesvesno pristrasna sećanja, fragmentarne prikaze aktivnosti učesnika i dostupnu arhivsku građu, prelivajući svu prikupljenu dokumentaciju u jednu skladnu sintezu. Ona se nije zadržala na suvoj faktografiji i brojevima, već je bolesnike, građane poslate u karantin i osoblje koje ih je lečilo i opsluživalo, prikazala na način da im je, pesnički rečeno, „udahnila dušu“. Posebnu pažnju posvetila je „običnom“ čoveku u zlom vremenu.

Iz ove pouzdane analize proizlazi da je država bila dobro pripremljena za suočavanje sa variolom ili bilo kojom drugom karantinskom bolešću. Vlastima se odaje priznanje za dobru organizaciju (nije bilo lako za nekoliko nedelja vakcinisati preko 18 miliona ljudi), a zdravstvenim radnicima za pokazanu profesionalnost. Prikazi sprovedenih aktivnosti nevoljno nameću poređenje sa tekućom epidemijom kovida 19, koja je dočekana potpuno nespremno, uz nesnalaženje zdravstvenih vlasti i sa požrtvovanošću zdravstvenog kadra, kao jednom od malo svetlih tačaka.

Autorka ukazuje i na uočene nedostatke, stavljajući naglasak na neblagovremeno informisanje. Tačno je da je vest o pojavi varirole na Kosovu i Metohiji kasnila dva dana, a da je javnost zvanično saznala za postojanje bolesti u Beogradu sa zakašnjenjem od nekoliko dana. Međutim, kako ističe, uz te izuzetke, informacije slate građanstvu bile su celishodne i pravovremene.

Ona posebno ističe zađevice prisutne među federalnim jedinicama, dovodeći ih u vezu za labavljenjem federalnih vlasti i uočavajući, u nastalim nesuglasicama, klicu daljeg rastakanja države.

Za čitaoca obuzetog formalnostima, napomenimo da je izdavač „Službeni glasnik“, da knjiga ima oko 240 strana i da je podeljena u šest poglavlja: Virus, Država, Struka, Vakcinacija, Život za vreme varirole i Umesto zaključka: Nevidljivi neprijatelj vreba.

Zaključak recenzenta: Profesorka Radina Vučetić napisala je vrednu, korisnu i potrebnu knjigu, kojom

disease or involuntary victims of the imposed anti-epidemic measures. Some of these witnesses shared their faded memories with the author in person, while others wrote down their own accounts of the fight against variola. All of these testimonies seemed authentic yet were often quite different from one another.

Even professional literature on the epidemic – primarily two large symposia on the events in Belgrade and the whole territory of Yugoslavia, along with a series of other scientific, professional and popular publications and individual articles – did not paint a unified picture of the events of the spring of 1972. In reconstructing the past, as expected of a historian, the author relied significantly on popular newspapers, magazines and literature, and, primarily on archives preserved at the Archives of Yugoslavia and within other related archival fonds and deposits.

The result of this dedicated and comprehensive effort is a multiperspective and reliable account of the outbreak, course, and termination of the epidemic. Professor Vučetić succeeded in comparing and critically evaluating unconsciously biased memories, fragmented accounts of participant activities, as well as available archive material, and amalgamating all the collected documents and accounts into a coherent whole. She did not adhere merely to dry facts and numbers, rather, to put it poetically, she gave the patients, quarantined citizens, and health personnel who treated and cared for them, life. She placed special focus on the 'ordinary' person in times of trouble.

This reliable analysis shows that the government was well prepared to face variola or any other quarantine disease. The book acknowledges the government's good organization (it certainly was not easy to vaccinate 18 million people in a matter of weeks) and commends the health workers for the professional conduct that they exhibited. The description of the executed activities involuntarily elicits a comparison with the outbreak of the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic, which was met with complete unpreparedness and which health authorities were incapable of managing, but which the health workers met with dedication and selflessness, this being one of the few bright sides in the situation.

The author, however, also points out some observed failings, with an emphasis on an initial delay in notification. It is a fact that the news on the outbreak of variola in Kosovo and Metohija was two days late, and that the public was officially informed of the incidence of the disease in Belgrade with a few days delay. However, as emphasized in the book, with these exceptions, announcements made to the public were meaningful and timely.

The author particularly stresses the bickering amongst the federal entities and connects them to the

je zaokružen pogled na najskuplju, najdramatičniju, najobuhvatniju i najambiciozniju akciju zdravstvene službe u posleratnoj Jugoslaviji.

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weakening of federal government, perceiving in these disagreements the impending dissolution of the state.

For the reader focused on formal points, the following information may be important. The publisher of this book is The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, the book has around 240 pages, and is divided into six chapters – The Virus, The State, The Profession, Vaccination, Life during Variola, In Lieu of a Conclusion: The Invisible Enemy Lies in Wait.

The reviewer's conclusion: Professor Radina Vučetić has written a valuable, useful, and necessary book, which provides a rounded view of the costliest, most dramatic, most comprehensive, and most ambitious endeavor of the healthcare services in post-war Yugoslavia.

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