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Saint Gerard in the Serbian Textbooks of the 19th Century

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Abstract

Textbooks represent a peculiar and intriguing way of historical reception. They are used for educating children and students, but in the particular setting of the nineteenth-century Austrian-Hungarian Empire, they were printed, translated, and published in a variety of political, ideological, and cultural, circumstances.

The personality of Saint Gerard was reflected in a number of different Serbian textbooks in the nineteenth century. The majority of these textbooks was published in Southern Hungary, i.e. now part of Serbia and the Romanian region of Banat. The aim of this paper is to present what was written on the character, work, and aims of Saint Gerard in the nineteenth-century Serbian textbook. Through author biographies, curriculums, and the textbooks themselves, it is possible to highlight the importance of the Hungarian medieval history in textbooks and the role of Christianity not only in the textbooks themselves, but in the educational system, as well.

Keywords: Saint Gerard; Serbian textbooks; reception; medieval history; history of Christianity.

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Saint Gerard is a personality in Hungarian history. A lot has been written in modern Hungarian historiography on his life and work, but almost nothing in modern Serbian historiography. This is the reason for presenting his figure in Serbian textbooks in the nineteenth century. This study is the result of my continuous research on the history of teaching in Serbian schools and on Serbian textbooks, during the nineteenth century.

The Serbian nation went through a particular type of struggle in the nineteenth century. A part of it was trying to liberate itself and the country from centuries of Ottoman Turkish occupation, whereas the other part was fighting to preserve its own national and cultural identity within the frames of the Habsburg and, later on, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. That struggle led to the opening of the first schools for educating Serbian youth within the Empire. Those schools were the following: The Pedagogical School in Sombor (founded in 1778), The Gymnasium in Sremski Karlovci (founded in 1791), The Orthodox Theological Seminary in Sremski Karlovci (founded in 1794), and finally The Gymnasium in Novi Sad, founded in 1810.¹

During this research, it was necessary to study Serbian textbooks used in teaching different subjects because the majority of subjects taught included historical events and processes. Besides history, these subjects included Biblical history, Science on Christianity, catechesis, and also geography, rhetoric, and Serbian and world literature. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the study of Christianity had a dominant role. Particularly, when teaching history, religious events were stressed as initiators of the historical event in discussion. This is most obvious in the fact that most histories in textbooks begin with the Biblical story of the Creation (Genesis). This kind of practice however stopped after the 1848/49 Revolution and from that point onwards, textbooks did not include any more religious events or characters as the initiators of the history they were telling. From this time onwards, authors only explained at the beginning of their texts how history was written and which were those relevant historical sources which could and should be used in writing and studying history. This does not mean that topics such as religion and Christianity disappeared from history textbooks in the second half of the nineteenth century. The important matter is that those issues were argued in a different manner, organized in a completely different way, in the chapters which discussed culture or the identity of a particular nation. In other words, they received their own place in the textbooks. The first example of such a textbook which completely evaded religious elements is the *World history* written by Aleksandar Sandić.² He insisted on erasing religious influences from history textbooks while being a prominent figure who persisted with his belief that catechesis and science on Christianity should be taught in Theological seminaries, not in Gymnasia, nor in Pedagogical schools.³

In order to find remarks on Saint Gerard in the Serbian textbooks of the nineteenth century, those textbooks which deal with medieval history had to be studied. In most cases, these are general, world histories, but from the year 1867 and the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (Composition) onwards, Hungarian history has become a compulsory subject in schools. Therefore, besides textbooks on world

¹ S. Boškov, "Udžbenici antičke istorije u srpskim školama u 19. veku," [Textbooks of Ancient History in Serbian Schools in the 19th century] In *Antika i savremeni svet*, ed. Ksenija Maricki Gađanski (Beograd: Društvo za antičke studije Srbije, 2007), 21.

² *Zapisnik druge učiteljske skupštine sviju ovostranih srpskih učitelja, koja je u Novom Sadu 15. aprila održana*, [Record from the second Assembly of all Serbian teachers in Hungary held on 15. April 1871], Novi Sad 1871.

³ S. Boškov, "Antička tradicija u obrazovanju srpskih učitelja u Somboru u 19. veku," [The Ancient Tradition in the education of Serbian Teachers in Sombor in the 19th century] In *Evropske ideje, antička civilizacija i srpska kultura*, ed. Ksenija Maricki Gađanski (Beograd: Društvo za antičke studije Srbije, 2008), 33; Aleksandar Sandić, *Svetska istorija. Stari vek, knj. 1* [World History. Ancient History book 1] (Novi Sad: štamparija Ignjata Fuksa, 1869), 272; Aleksandar Sandić, *Svetska istorija. Srednji vek, knj. 2* [World History. Medieval History book 2] (Novi Sad: štamparija Ignjata Fuksa, 1868), 112; Aleksandar Sandić, *Svetska istorija. Novi vek, knj. 3* [World History. Modern History book 3] (Novi Sad: štamparija Ignjata Fuksa, 1871), 76.

history, it was necessary to thoroughly study the textbooks dealing with Hungarian history in order to find the place of Saint Gerard of Cenad within them.

Most of the Serbian textbooks which treat medieval history as their main subject were based on German textbooks, namely the *Grundriss der Geographie und Geschichte. Der Staaten des Alterthums für die obere Klassen eines Gymnasiums* by the German gymnasium professor Wilhelm Pütz.⁴ He wrote this textbook in 1833. I do not have information when he has written the textbook in medieval history, but its English translation appeared in 1854, under the title *Survey of the Geography and History of the Middle Ages A.D. 476-1492*.⁵ Based on the text of Pütz, the teacher Aleksandar Sandić from the Novi Sad Gymnasium wrote his *History of the Middle Ages* in Serbian language.⁶ The only difference between these textbooks is that Sandić added some parts from Serbian medieval history. However, he was not the only author who wrote a textbook based on the work of Wilhelm Pütz. A French textbook written by Victor Dury was also translated into Serbian, under the same title, *History of the Middle Ages*.⁷ There is also a valuable testimony of different influences in Serbian textbooks, particularly in a textbook written by the Hungarian historian Otton Varga.⁸ Professor Milan A. Jovanović translated this textbook.

Nevertheless, none of these textbooks mention Saint Gerard. This is understandable because they only give a general impression of the medieval world. Wilhelm Pütz's textbook includes only one brief lesson on Hungarian medieval history,⁹ while Dury does not mention Hungary at all. Varga, naturally, elaborates on Hungarian medieval history, but he does not give any information on Gerard either.

Because of this peculiar situation, the attention had to be turned to the specialized textbooks on the history of Hungary. However, here too, we came across a problem. After the year 1867, it became obligatory to learn Hungarian and a new subject called *History of Hungary* was introduced. Therefore, there was no need to translate Hungarian textbooks into Serbian, because every student had to understand Hungarian. Only at the very end of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century, some Hungarian textbooks were finally translated into Serbian. The above-mentioned high school teacher Milan A. Jovanović translated two Hungarian textbooks.

The first textbook was that of the prominent nineteenth-century Hungarian teacher, historian (mainly of the ancient history), geographer Ferenc Ribáry, the author of the first grammar of the Basque language in Hungarian.¹⁰ His textbook was published in Serbian in 1879. In this textbook, one encounters the first mention of Saint Gerard. He is briefly mentioned in about the history of the persecution of the Christians during the uprising of Vata in 1046. During this riot, one of the persecuted was Saint Gerard, who was, alongside his associates, thrown from the cliff in Buda into the Danube River, that cliff bearing his name now.

⁴ Wilhelm Pütz, *Grundriss der Geographie und Geschichte. Der Staaten des Alterthums für die obere Klassen eines Gymnasiums* (Köln: Verlag von Renard und Düben, 1833), 120.

⁵ Wilhelm Pütz, *Survey of the Geography and history of the Middle Ages A.D. 476-1492* (London: Varty and Owen 1854), 334.

⁶ Aleksandar Sandić, *Svetska istorija. Srednji vek, knj. 2* [World History. Medieval History book 2] (Novi Sad: štamparija Ignjata Fuksa, 1868), 112.

⁷ Viktor Diri, *Istorija srednjeg veka* [Medieval History] (Beograd: Knjižara Velimira Valožića, 1894), 151.

⁸ Otton Varga, *Istorija sveta. Stari vek. Knj. 1* [World History. Ancient History. book 1] (Novi Sad: Braća M. Popović, 1898), 201; Otton Varga, *Istorija sveta. Srednji vek. Knj. 2* [World History. Medieval History. book 2] (Novi Sad: Braća M. Popović, 1898), 198; Otton Varga, *Istorija sveta. Novi vek. Knj. 3* [World History. Modern History. book 3] (Novi Sad: Braća M. Popović, 1898), 256.

⁹ Wilhelm Pütz, *Survey of the Geography and history of the Middle Ages A.D. 476-1492* (London: Varty and Owen 1854), 297-302.

¹⁰ Ferenc Ribari, *Istorija Ugarske* [History of Hungary] (Novi Sad: Srpska narodna zadužna štamparija, 1879), 41-42.

The second translated textbook was compiled by two prominent Hungarian historians. One is most significant for his studies in the history of the Banat Region: Lajos Baróti. The other one is well-known to any historian of Medieval Hungary: Dezső Csánki. The title of this textbook, which was published in 1904, was *The History of Hungary for the third grade, part one*. This book contains an entire chapter dedicated to Saint Gerard, and it is significant to stress that up to these days this is the most extensive biography of Saint Gerard of Cenad in Serbian language, not only in the textbooks, but also in historiography. It is apparent that the *Legenda maior* was the main source for this chapter, as the legend describes Gerard's life. The authors write that the saint was born in a pious Venetian family and that his parents prepared him for priesthood in a Benedictine monastery. He had a desire to go to pilgrimage to the Holy Land but destiny brought him to Hungary. For a while, he stayed at the bishop of Pécs, Mauricius. Because he was well-educated man and a learned man in rhetoric, King Stephen I entrusted him with the education and upbringing of his son Emericus. After finishing his duty with the prince's education, Gerard went to the Bakony woods for seven years. Afterwards, King Stephen summoned him and Gerard was named the bishop of Marosvar, later on known as Canad/Cenad. His duties included baptizing people and he was given ten monks to assist him. Because of his many merits, the king and queen offered him many gifts, while he was, in return, founding churches, convents, and a school for educating priests. The death of King Stephen brought turbulent times to Hungary and his heirs to the throne did not prove as worthy of ruling the country. Peter was deposed only three years after he started to rule, and Aba Samuel was then enthroned. Hungarian noblemen were not fond of the close cooperation between Aba Samuel and the German Emperor Henry III so they conspired to replace him with Prince Andrew. When Aba Samuel found out about these intentions, he summoned his nobles in Cenad for a meeting, where he executed fifty of the most prominent ones. That infuriated Gerard who predicted to Aba on the Easter service that he would be killed. The prediction came true after the Battle of Győr in 1044, when Henry III killed Aba Samuel. After that, Peter returned to the throne, but he was overthrown two years after, as he has pledged fidelity to Emperor Henry III, and the Hungarian nobility insisted on independence. At another meeting held in Cenad, the nobles deposed Peter and brought Andrew I to the throne of Hungary. Andrew was in Russia at the time, and he accepted this call, but on his way to Hungary, a riot under Vata broke out. It was a pagan riot which then became anti-Christian oriented. King Andrew himself did not know whether only a part of the people or their majority wanted to return to ancient paganism. Saint Gerard fell as a victim of these persecutions. He was on his way to Pest to greet the new king, but he was attacked and stoned by Vata's supporters. He did not resist; quite the opposite, he prayed for them, which made attackers even angrier, eventually dragging him up the hill and throwing him off the cliff. Hearing this, King Andrew ordered that Gerard's body be found and buried in a church in Pest, from where his relics were transferred to Cenad. 37 years after these events, Prince Emeric canonized Gerard. This is also the end of Gerard's biography in the textbook.¹¹

As already stated, not even the twentieth and the twenty first centuries have an extensive biography of Saint Gerard in Serbian. Even the capital work titled *History of Hungarians* which was published in 2002 in Belgrade and written by four prominent Novi Sad professors, only briefly mentions Gerard, mostly in connection to his work on spreading Christianity and his death.¹² Some scarce notes are given on him in articles and books that elaborate on the history of Banat, church history of the region, and so on. As far as textbooks are concerned, the aforementioned two textbooks are the only ones in Serbian historiography to ever mention Gerard. However, this is not peculiar since his ties with the area of nowadays Serbia are not strong and are connected only with parts of what is today known as

¹¹ Lajoš Baróti, Deže Čanki, *Istorija Ugarske* [History of Hungary] (Novi Sad: Štamparija braće M. Popovića, 1904), 23-26.

¹² Petar Rokai, Zoltan Đere, Tibor Pal, Aleksandar Kasaš, *Istorija Mađara* [History of Hungary] (Beograd: CLIO, 2002) 22-41.

Serbian Banat. It is important to stress that in Serbian historiography and textbooks, there are no complete biographies of other relevant Hungarian personalities, who had stronger ties with Serbs, such as Sigismund of Luxembourg or Matthias Corvinus, so the case of Saint Gerard is not particular. As far as this topic is concerned, it is important to stress that a nineteenth-century textbook bears the most extensive and complete biography of Saint Gerard. Although the authors were Hungarians, they gave the largest contribution in presenting the figure of Saint Gerard of Cenad to Serbs.

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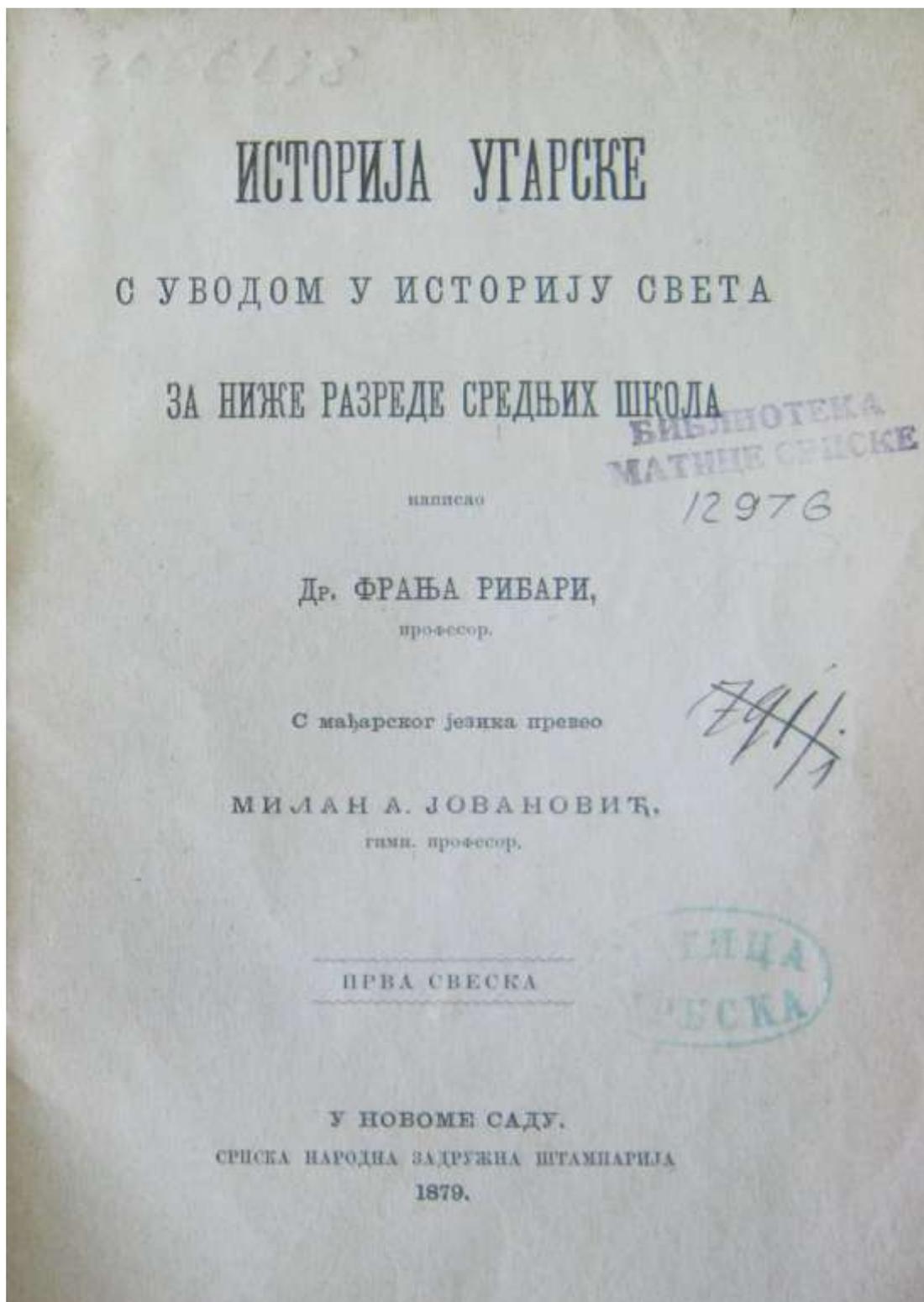


Fig. 1. Title page *History of Hungary* by Ferenc Ribari

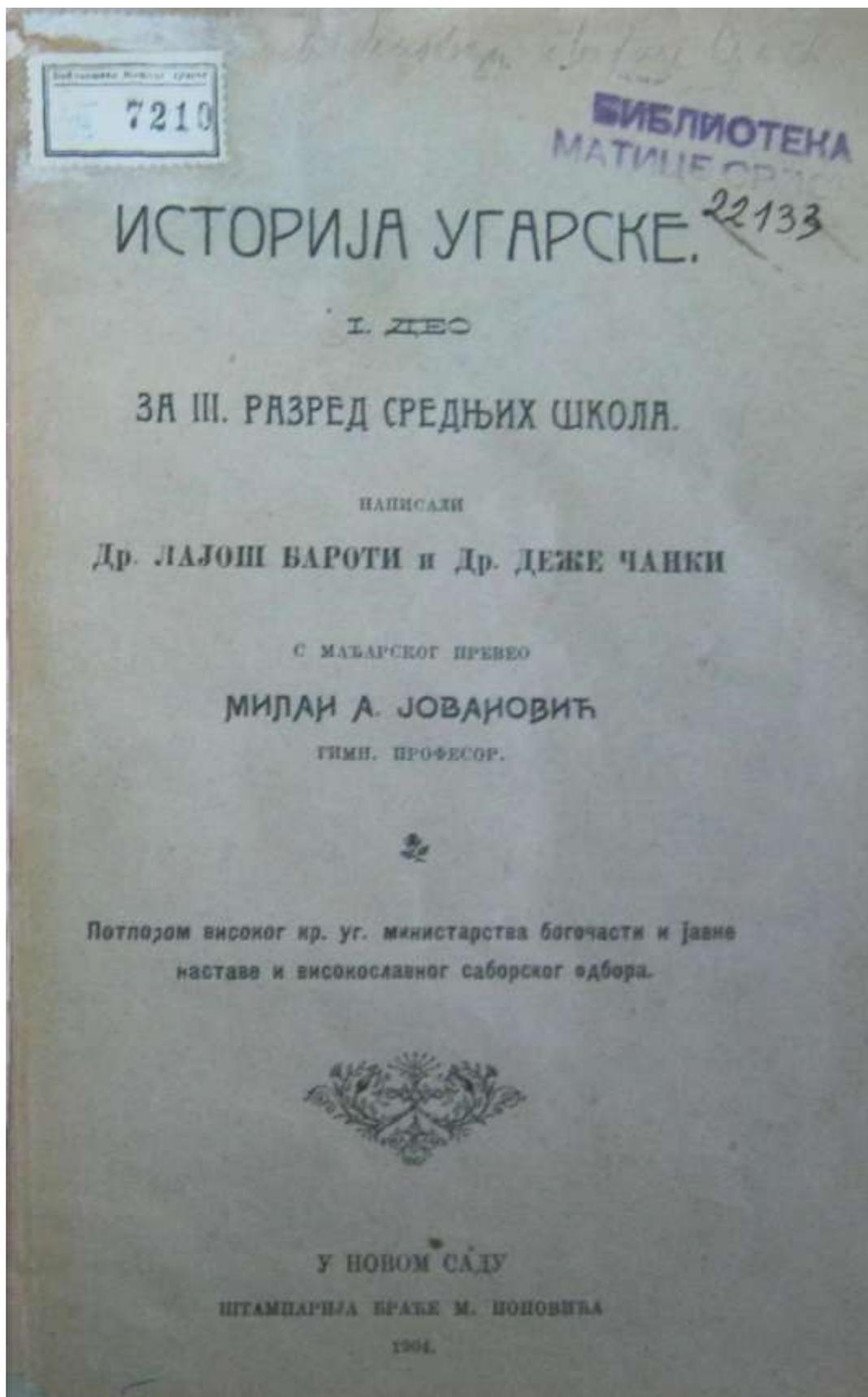


Fig. 2. Title page *History of Hungary* by Lajoš Baroti and Deže Čanki