

VASA PELAGIĆ – ANATOLY ON THE WEST¹

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SUMMARY

Serbian nation, especially from the time it “opened its orthodox eyes”, had famous people who wrote out its history. One of them, who along with others embed his whole life in prosperity of Serbian people, was Vasa Pelagić.

Born in troubled times of 19th century, he upgraded his high school and seminary knowledge abroad. But, the same as all those before and after him, he came back to Serbian nation, and he shared all of his gained knowledge with his people. In Moscow, where he spent two years, he attended lectures from: Russian literature, history, medicine and political economy. All this he implemented in his (not only) written work.

Educator, humanist, visionary, writer, and with one word – man who *feels the pain of all Serbian wounds*, Vasa Pelagić addressed significant attention also to our profession. With his work and care for proper development of young people (and by that not only physical development), he set the basis for its further growth. As equally useful he recommended both *natural national gymnastics* (work in garden, field), as also *artificial gymnastics* (different kind of physical exercise), and always asserted that *gymnastics* must be first among school subjects.

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His ideas, which we can perceive primarily in *theories of biocentrism and ethnocentrism*, possess a kind of his *theoanthropocentric* signet. By this signet he highlighted the fact that every human is a *personality – one, unique and unrepeatable*.

Key words: physical education, gymnastics, theories of physical education and sports.

INTRODUCTION

History of one nation, as a certain part of world's history, is written out by people with great moral values and patriotism. And that symbiosis of moral and patriotism, which includes a vow – *always as human, never as non human*, can be carried out and raised to heavenly heights only by people who have God in themselves.

Serbian nation, especially from the time it “opened its orthodox eyes”, had people like that who wrote out its history. Each one of them, with their written or oral work, presented motivation and example to others – how to become and remain human being (man) worthy of God and nation. One of them, who along with others embed his whole life in prosperity of Serbian people, was Vasa Pelagić.

Always in conflict with authorities, first with Ottoman, and then with Serbian and Montenegrin, he had to, not only go away from them, but also to imprisonment in their jails. That is how he ended his material (earthly) life, locked up in jail in Požarevac. He passed away certain that his ideas and love towards Serbian people, were not only for (his) present times, but also for the whole future.

He was right. Here we are today, after almost 120 years from his death, remembering his not so long earthly life and his love towards his nation. And this love is revealed in all its greatness through his work, oral and written, and his spirit which was not pleased with injustice, defeatism, and above all with lack of education.

Educator, socialists in the nicest sense of the word (that people unfortunately define as a *utopia*) humanist, visionary, writer and, in a word - man who *feels the pain of all Serbian wounds*, Vasa Pelagić devoted significant attention also to our profession. With his work and care for proper development of young people (and by that not only physical development), he set the basis for its further



growth. As equally useful he recommended both *natural national gymnastics* (work in garden, field), as also *artificial gymnastics* (different kind of physical exercise), and always asserted that *gymnastics* must be first among school subjects.

After Moscow, where he upgraded his education, primarily in Brcko (1860), and after in many other places of Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro, he passed his knowledge and ideas about how to live and work in a right way. One of his books with nice title *National teacher* even today adorns many of our homes. That book, along with Holy Scripture (Bible), was and still is most precious part of even smallest home libraries.

In his every book and written paper reader can feel the care about health and proper development of young people. Where ever he had a chance he implemented gymnastics in school curricula, planed and built spaces adequate for physical exercise, not only in school yards, but also in yards of churches in countryside. He did all this to make physical exercise closer to youngsters, because physical exercise in times when Vasa Pelagić lived, was considered as something unnecessary and redundant.

Today is easy to perceive significance of physical exercise and be sure we will not run into a wall of misunderstanding. But then, at the second part of 19th century, when most of our people lived in rural environment, those were some views beyond their time and space.

Always beyond time and space, Vasa Pelagić was a visionary staring at heavens. Foundation of his vision was love towards his nation. This love shines on us with warmth and is guarded with every mention of his *National teacher*.

SUBJECT AND GOAL

Subject of this paper is Vasa Pelagić, his work in the area of physical culture, upbringing and education of youth.

Goal is to perceive the contribution of Vasa Pelagić to development of general culture of our nation, as also his contribution to development of physical culture in specific, respectively to development of physical education and sports.

METHOD

During writing authors used several research methods. Their choice was conditioned only by the theme and set goals. In this paper authors used historical method, method of theoretical analysis and comparative - logical method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lifecycle

In the turbulent times of the 19th century, when the Ottoman Empire ruled the region, in a small bosnian place of Gornji Žabari in 1838 was born Vasa Pelagic. Bringing joy to his parents at the same time he sparked to his long-suffering Serbian descents. He was educated in various places and schools.

After primary education in his small birth place, he continues his education in the seminary in Belgrade. After this he starts with his teaching experience in Brčko in *Serbian elementary school* (1861).² The desire for additional education took him to Moscow, where he spends two years. At the University of Moscow, amongst others, he took lectures on Russian literature, history, medicine and political economy. This knowledge he used on his new job. In fact, immediately after his return from Moscow, he was appointed director of the *Serbian Orthodox seminary* in Banja Luka, which at that time was the first secondary school in Bosnia (1866). As director of this school he strives to implement all his acquired knowledge into practice. Therefore, he wrote and then published in Belgrade the instruction for educators: *Instructions for Serbo-bosnian, Herzegovinian, ancientserbian and Macedonian teachers*.

His free spirit and non-acceptance of injustice, bothers the Turkish authorities. Already after less than three years (1869) he was interned in Turkey, from which he managed to be saved with the help of Russian friends (1871). Through Serbia he goes to Montenegro, and in Cetinje includes in the work of *United Serbian Youth*. Of course, Montenegrin sovereign Nikola didn't like this, so Vasa had to go away from Montenegro. First he goes in Novi Sad (1872), and the following year he went to Graz, Prague, Trieste and Zurich.

The need to be with his people and the desire to help them encourages him to return to his Krajina. He was with the rebels also in 1875, he writes programs, memoranda, explains and urges. He encourages them to endure, reminds on the struggle of Serbian brothers across the Drina River in the east of Serbia. After

² Since all archives of this school burned down in the war in 1914, the exact start of his employment in Brcko cannot be determined. Indirectly, from other written sources, it can be said that the Vasa Pelagic began its work in *Serbian elementary school* in Brcko in 1860 or 1861. According to: Jelena Dopuđa: *Fizička kultura u školama Bosne i Hercegovine od prvih početaka do 1918. godine*, Komisija za istoriju fizičke kulture Bosne i Hercegovine, knj. 3, Sarajevo, 1974, p. 13; See more in: Jelena Dopuđa: Vaso Pelagić, Prilozi za istoriju fizičke kulture u Bosni i Hercegovini, vol. 2, no. 2, Sarajevo, 1969, pp. 94 – 107.

three years of fighting with the Turks³, and with the shift of occupation forces, when Austria took the dominance over this part of our nation, Vasa Pelagic was more often in Serbia.

In Serbia he continues to talk about more righteous life, teaches, and writes.⁴ There he was also ahead of time in which he lived, encounters misunderstanding and very often has to leave Serbia and again returns back. The authorities were bothered with his libertarian spirit, they condemned and locked him up. In Pozarevac prison, alone and misunderstood, he ended his earthly life. He went to eternity on January 25th 1899, on the eve before Saint Sava Day.

Serbian Orthodox Seminary (theological school)

After a short employment in Brcko and academic education acquired in Moscow, Vasa Pelagic, as a young and educated man, was set as director of the *Serbian Orthodox Seminary* in Banja Luka. This school, founded in 1866 by the decision of the *Metropolitanate of Banjaluka – Bihac*, was the first secondary school in Bosnia. Immediately, the same as in the primary school in Brcko, he introduced gymnastics for young seminarians.⁵

The *Basic rules of the Theological school*, inter alia, stated that the director has to take care also about how young seminarians practice gymnastics, “[...] because as much as this is necessary for their health, it is again important to make it in the way that suits the students of the Theological Academy”.⁶

³ Bosnian - Herzegovinian Uprising (1875 1878) speeded-up the departure of the Turks from this area. At the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Austria uses the new situation and win the mandate to rules these lands for next 30 years. Of course, with justification - to bring peace and provide prosperity in these areas. How this was done - we know. Final act was the annexation in 1908.

⁴ Pelagic's literary work is really impressive. He devoted equal attention to health and education, as well as recommendations on how to live more righteous life. Significant work was devoted to our profession and we are pleased to say that he was the first theoretician of physical education and sport, with ethnocentric and biocentric orientation.

⁵ See more in: Коста Ковачевић, *Српска бањалучка богословија*, Босанска Вила, vol. 11, no. 8, Сарајево, 1909, pp. 122 – 123; Коста Ковачевић, *Српска бањалучка богословија*, Босанска Вила, vol. 11, no. 9, Сарајево, 1909, pp. 130 – 140; Коста Ковачевић, *Српска бањалучка богословија*, Босанска Вила, vol. 11, no. 10, Сарајево, 1909, pp. 155 – 157; Коста Ковачевић, *Српска бањалучка богословија*, Босанска Вила, vol. 11, no. 11, Сарајево, 1909, pp. 171 – 174.

⁶ The *Basic rules of the Theological school*, in paragraph 35, very precisely states: "... this director will determine the subjects in all grades of the Seminary, and for this he must be responsible." And paragraph 36 talks about the duties and obligations of the director. Here are listed the director's duties who has to take care of discipline, learning, and stay of students, about their health and proper development of the control of teachers' work, the aging of the building, and so on. (First schematism of Serbian Orthodox Metropolitanate Banjaluka - Bihać for the year 1901 (1903), Banja Luka, p. 222.)

Following record speaks best about how he did this: "I should mention one more revolutionary - Vasa Pelagić. He opened a seminary in Banja Luka. ... and there he taught them theological sciences, and also gymnastics – with sticks, fencing, **and he taught them in public in front of the school.**"⁷ This public gymnastics of young seminarians shows not only the level of the courage of their young director, which for the time being was at least unusual for the actual social norms, as also all his humanistic attitude towards young people. He knew and with his work testified that care for both body and soul is essential for proper development of young people, and that one doesn't go without the other.

How far he saw and how much he was ahead of his time is best explained by example of attitude towards gymnastics in a Seminary in Sremski Karlovci. One record from 1872 says: "... Here gymnastic exercise is still seen as unnecessary, and is still not performed."⁸

Of course, famous and respected as an educator and reformer, with a little more than 20 years of age⁹, Vasa Pelagic was able to introduce gymnastics as a separate subject. Erudite and humanist in the nicest sense of the word, with his attitude towards physical exercise was actually a forerunner of theanthropocentric views on our profession. He did not precisely define this, but he knew that physical exercise is not only body movement made with a specific purpose, but also of blessed food, primarily for physical part of our being. Therefore he insisted on gymnastics and emphasized the importance of physical exercise.

He loved his seminarians and that is why gymnastics was special and important subject in the Seminary.¹⁰

Theoretical basics of physical education and sports

Philosophical basis on which theories of biocentrism and ethnocentrism are based, in its essence is very simple.

⁷ G., Martić: Zapamćivanje (1829 – 1878). Zagreb, 1906.

⁸ Пехajiћ: Писмо из Карловаца Сријемских (2. април, 1872), Застава, no. 40, 1953.

⁹ "... 1861 – 1862 famous Vasa Pelagic came. We have to admit that Pelagic worked a lot on transformation of our school... he introducet gymnastic as a subject." According to: Jelena Dopuđa: *Fizička kultura u školama Bosne i Hercegovine od prvih početaka do 1918. godine*, Komisija za istoriju fizičke kulture Bosne i Hercegovine, knj. 3, Sarajevo, 1974, p. 13.

¹⁰ In the seminaries of our time, and there is enough of them, gymnastics, respectively physical education as a subject, does not exist. Unfortunately for all those young people who need to pass the faith to new generations, but also for ourselves, we have to point out and underline this fact.

Biocentrism identifies man as part of nature and refers him to return to it. Humanists led by Jean Jacques Rousseau, after they got acquainted with the history and philosophy of ancient Greece, after the medieval social period, advocated the return to nature and recommended the natural form of physical exercise. That was the ancient concept of physical exercise of New Age.

Ethnocentrism, unlike biocentrism, has ethnos as the center of attention. And any form of physical exercise from the point of ethnocentrism as an objective had (and still has) the strengthening of a nation. Thus, the collectivity is in the foreground. Such a defined objective was due to social conditions that have prevailed in Europe during the 19th century. Apparently, today is not much better.¹¹

Although Sokolism, as an important part of ethnocentric approach to physical exercise of young people, was in the very beginning at the territory of Slavic nations, Vasa Pelagic when working with his students showed how physical exercise of young people can be organized.¹² And this was a combination of biocentric and ethnocentric approach to physical exercise.¹³

Along with educational work that was constantly under surveillance of the authorities and people, because he was “out of the standard social frames”, with many lectures and articles he published as separate publications, he spoke about school reform and the need for continual improvement of teaching. His “... contemporaries, friends and acquaintances ... teachers of Serbian schools in Bosnia (and in Serbia), by spending time with him, listening to his lectures on the school reform, and especially about the importance of general physical culture, were his followers, so they were introducing this subject, gymnastics, although it has not yet been implemented in the curriculum, by practicing with children

¹¹ Ненад Живановић, Верољуб Станковић, Небојша Ранђеловић и Петар Павловић: Теорија физичке културе, Факултет спорта и физичког васпитања у Нишу и Паноптикум Ниш, Ниш, 2010.

¹² Petar D. Pavlović, Kristina M. Pantelić Babić, Danilo P. Pavlović and Danica Piršl: Establishment of the Serbian Sokol parish in the United States and its functioning till the end of 1911, *Physical Education and Sport through the centuries*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2014, pp. 19 – 33; and Petar D. Pavlović, Nenad Živanović, Kristina M. Pantelić Babić and Danilo P. Pavlović: Serbian Sokol in Chicago (Illinois), *Physical Education and Sport through the centuries*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2015, pp. 5 – 23.

¹³ Petar D. Pavlović, Nenad Živanović and Kristina Pantelić Babić: *Vaso Pelagić, the first theoretician of physical culture in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 4th International Scientific Conference “Anthropological aspects of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation, Banja Luka, November 2012, Proceedings Book, Editors: Slobodan Simović and Veroljub Stanković, Banja Luka, 2013, pp. 65 – 71.

‘national gymnastics’ as Pelagic called it, i.e. folk games, running, rock-throwing, jumping, etc.”¹⁴

And these schools, as Vasa Pelagic used to say, should be built in specially chosen places. Therefore, in his book *Attempt for national and personal improvement*, printed in Belgrade in 1871, in the sixth chapter dedicated to municipalities of all Serbs, he advises: “Both with free and enslaved Serbs schools are built everywhere, but unfortunately without any kind of regularity for school fitting. Therefore, it is the concern of municipalities to ensure that schools are being built on a clean and healthy places far away from ponds and humid places; ... to always make one large room next to the school, where gatherings, feasts for St. Sava day and other public lectures can be held, in **which the children can be taught gymnastics during winter**. For the health of our beloved little children, future Serbs, it is necessary to plant a variety of fruits and trees in school yards and **arrange all devices for gymnastic exercise** so the students at a certain time can practice their glorious bodies, and improve their bad health.”¹⁵

He always preferred exercise in the open air, and as gymnastics intended for health and happiness he included: running, jumping, rock-throwing, bowling, dancing, swimming, walking, wrestling, boating and exercise on gymnastic equipment. He particularly warned of the need for the proper performance of physical exercises. “When jumping and in all gymnastics should always be remembered that one should never jump and fall on his heels, because it's all dangerous ...”¹⁶

He always thought and with his actions showed that the “gymnastics is a creator of strong muscles and strong guardian of health and morals. Without gymnastics education and life is worthless. Because nation needs to have healthy and sane people and not some weaklings.”¹⁷

This was necessary in the 19th century, century of Vasa Pelagic. This is necessary for all of us today, in our 21st century.

¹⁴ Jelena Dopuđa: *Fizička kultura u školama Bosne i Hercegovine od prvih početaka do 1918. godine*, Komisija za istoriju fizičke kulture Bosne i Hercegovine, knj. 3, Sarajevo, 1974, p. 13.

¹⁵ Тихомир Тодоровић and Боривоје Богојевић: Васа Пелагић о значају гимнастике и физичког васпитања, Зборник за историју физичке културе, по. 4-5, Београд, 1968, р. 89.

¹⁶ Васа Пелагић. Стварни народни учитељ, поглавље: О гимнастици у опште и о гимнастици у води при купању и пливању; Cited in: Тихомир Тодоровић и Боривоје Богојевић: Васа Пелагић о значају гимнастике и физичког васпитања, Зборник за историју физичке културе, бр. 4-5, Београд, 1968, р. 90.

¹⁷ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

In the turbulent times of the 19th century, when Turkey and Austria, two great empires, both rotten inside but spry and still strong enough to bring misfortune to others, deciding on the life of Serbian people in this region, Vasa Pelagic was the spark that awakened hope in better tomorrow. Always with his people, even when the authorities of that nation expelled him from his and our country and imprisoned, he did not cease to radiate *hope, faith and love* to his people.

Those were hard times, when good and not very educated people lived their lives and heated with the New Testament (Bible) endured all the tyranny of the powerful ones. Educated by folk poetic literature he built his life by honesty and hard work. His faith and traditions, which are passed down from generation to generation, helped him to survive these hard times. And in these times Vasa Pelagic was together with his descents, and with all his knowledge and love was trying to enlighten them.

Erudite, educator, writer, (Theo) humanist, socialist, but above all a man who loved his nation, Vasa Pelagic did not only told how to do something, but he showed how this can be done. Very courage for the time in which he lived, he spoke and wrote about health, the necessity of education and the importance of physical activity. By traveling around the world he saw a lot of useful things and all of them, with great personal effort, he conveyed to our nation.

His books are useful material for many questions that still need answers. And when it comes to health, proper physical development, better and more righteous life for all people, it is good to remind ourselves what Vasa Pelagic wrote about this. His *National teacher*, full of useful advices, is valuable book in any home, especially now when we are poisoned with various products and toxins, as they say, for our own good.

In our profession, as one of our most important theoreticians, deserves all our attention. He wrote and spoke about the importance of physical activity for the proper development of people, and when the opportunities allowed him, he introduced gymnastics in schools as one of the most important school subjects. Inspired with ancient Greeks, he wanted to provide a special place for physical exercise in the education system. This was accepted with disbelief and bewilderment, but his faith in the correctness of his views is our present guidance - how and which way to go.

For him equally important were both *natural national gymnastics* (gardening, field work), and *artificial gymnastics* (various forms of physical exercise). Both useful and applicable in certain conditions, they equally benefit humans. He knew and said that physical exercise is beneficial not only for young

people and that without it there is no healthy life. Methodically correctly, he advised on how to and how much to exercise, always giving priority to exercising outdoors.

In his theoretical principles of proper physical exercise, we recognize the combination of biocentric and ethnocentric approach. With extreme precision he represented both of these theoretical views, which are still very actual. Of course, this was all decorated with rudiments of theory of Theoantropocentrism. Because the Love he had in himself, which he showed in all his work, could not bypass our profession. For him, every man was *personality- one, unique and unrepeatable*.

That personality he cherished so much, this human being and all people he had in his heart, he illuminated with light of *Anatoly*. And that light replaced the darkness, love replaced hatred, and goodness replaced malice. With this light of *Anatoly*, poetically speaking, he was helping to all our souls to “tremble by longing for eternity”. (I. Negrisorac)

That is why we can say that Vasa Pelagic is our *Anatoly* on the West.

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ВАСА ПЕЛАГИЋ – ИСТОЧНИК НА ЗАПАДУ

САЖЕТАК

Српски род је, нарочито од времена када је православно прогледао, имао знамените људе који су исписивали његову паметарницу. Један од њих који је, као и други, сав свој живот уградио у бољитак српскога народа, био је Васа Пелагић.

Рођен у немирним временима 19. века, своје гимназијско и богословско образовање надоградио је у иностранству. И као сви пре њега, али и после њега, вратио се Српском роду, и своје стечено знање подели са својим народом. У Москви, где је провео две године, слушао је предавања и стицао знање из: руске књижевности, историје, медицине и политичке економије. И све је то уградио у своје (не само) писано дело.

Просветар, хуманиста, визионар, писац и, једном речју – човек кога *све ране српског рода боле*, Васа Пелагић је и нашој струци посветио велику пажњу. Својим радом и бригом за правилан, не само телесни, развој младих људи постављао је темеље за даљи њен развој. Препоручивао је као подједнако корисне *привредну народну гимнастику* (рад у башти, пољу), као и *вештачку гимнастику* (разне форме физичког вежбања). И стално истицао да *гимнастика мора да буде прва међу школским предметима*.

Идеје за које се залагао, а које сагледавамо, пре свега, у *теоријама биоцентризма и етноцентризма*, имају и својеврстан, његов, *теоантропоцентристички* печат. Тим печатом је истакао да је човек *личност – једна, јединствена и непоновљива*.

Кључне речи: физичко васпитање, гимнастика, теорије физичког васпитања и спорта

ВАСА ПЕЛАГИЧ – АНАТОЛИЙ НА ЗАПАДЕ

АННОТАЦИЯ

К числу известных людей Сербской народа, особенно с тех времен, когда он «открыл свои православные глаза», относятся и те, кто писал ее историю. Один из них, кто вместе с другими положил свою жизнь на дело процветания и благополучия сербов, был Васа Пелагич.

Он родился в трудные времена 19 столетия, получил образование в высшей школе и усовершенствовал свои знания за границей. Также как, жившие и творившие до него и после него, он вернулся в Сербию, чтобы поделиться своими знаниями с сербами. В Москве, где он прожил два года, он посещал лекции по русской литературе, истории, медицине, политической экономии. Все эти знания он воплотил в своих (не только) письменных трудах.

Педагог, гуманист, идеолог, писатель, одним словом, – человек, который чувствовал душевную боль всей Сербии, Васа Пелагич уделял особое внимание и нашей профессии. Своей деятельностью и заботой о развитии молодых людей (и не только в области физического воспитания) он заложил основу дальнейшего развития этого направления. Он рекомендовал использовать в равной степени и природную национальную гимнастику (работа в саду, в поле), и искусственную гимнастику (различные физические упражнения), и всегда утверждал, что гимнастика должна быть самой первой среди школьных предметов.

Его идеям, которые можно считать основополагающими, преимущественно в теории биоцентризма и этноцентризма, присущ своего рода дух теоантропоцентризма, посредством которого он подчеркивал, что человек – личность единственная, уникальная и неповторимая.

Ключевые слова: физическое воспитание, гимнастика, теории физического образования и спорта.

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