

common ground between all of them was their fearless personalities, which did not conform to the rigid structure of patriarchal society. By being true to their identities and fighting for their freedom, Marija Jurić Zagorka, Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić, Divna Veković, Maria Konopnicka, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Zinaida Gippius, Jelena J. Dimitrijević, and Zofka Kveder created their own space—metaphorically birthing and mapping out new trajectories and ways for new generations of women writers to, hopefully, create in a fairer and more equal world. This collection might be of interest to feminist -activists, literary scholars, writers, and artists who believe that one can always learn from the past. It is recommended to those who need motivation and strength to persist in achieving their goals and artistic ideas.



Jasmina V. Milanović, *Žensko društvo 1875–1942* (The women's society, 1875–1945), Belgrade: Institute for Contemporary History, The Official Gazette, 2020, 638 pp., RSD 2.970, ISBN: 978-86-519-2579-8.

Book review by **Zorana Simić**  
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This extraordinarily extensive study by Jasmina Milanović is the result of many years of diligent research in the area of women's history, and is the first ever completely systematic monograph on the founding and decades-long activity of one of the pioneering and most significant (women's) organizations in Serbia, the *Žensko društvo* (Women's Society, 1875–1942).

For sixty-seven years, starting as an elite association with its primary location in Belgrade and many branches in other parts of the country, the *Žensko društvo* survived, with minor interruptions, both despite and within numerous socioeconomic changes, political turbulences, and (state) reconstitutions in the area of today's Serbia. Thankfully, its history is largely recorded in the pages of its official newsletter, *Domaćica* (Housewife, 1891–1941), which the author also examines diachronically in a meticulous way. The topic and its range, however, placed before the author an extremely demanding task and a great responsibility: to present, through a microhistorical focus on the organization—alongside its periodical—not only its dynamic history but also the ways it interacted with even more dynamic contextual circumstances. It is quite valuable (for other researchers) that she managed to achieve this goal.

First, Milanović refers to the basic principles and courses of women's collective, mostly humanitarian, organizing in Europe, and specifically in Serbia, during the nineteenth century. She points to their (proto)feminist significance and far-reaching influence on the perception of women's roles and agency in public spheres. Within this methodological and macrohistorical framework, she moves on to the main sub-

ject of her research—elaborated through six more chapters—and provides a detailed review of the establishment and development of the Serbian *Žensko društvo* in the corresponding historical, social, political, and educational contexts, marked by deeply patriarchal and nationalist tendencies and obstacles. In addition, she offers bi-bibliographical information about its founders, members, and managers, and corrects along the way the omissions and inaccuracies in previous historical research. Thus, Milanović preserves from oblivion a multitude of women who managed to transgress the *feminine* boundaries of their private lives and cooperate publicly in what is today Serbia despite numerous barriers and hurdles.

Furthermore, the author carefully goes through various historical sources and testimonies on the functioning of the society (official and informal ones), all the while pointing out significant milestones and changes in its history. In this way, with the optimal measure of historiographical objectivity, in her fact-based research Milanović simultaneously tells an exciting story about internal and external conflicts, bigotry, and dis/agreements within the *Žensko društvo*, whose members, sources of (political) support, and positions in the corresponding public spheres significantly fluctuated from period to period.

Not surprisingly, the dynamics of the society were particularly turbulent in the periods of wars, as well as immediately before and after them, both at the local and global levels. The monograph demonstrates how the women members and associates of the *Žensko društvo* coordinated their multiple social positions and roles (philanthropic, humanitarian, as volunteer nurses, etc.) during the Balkan Wars and the First World War, as well as in the interwar period, in the then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (henceforth Kingdom of SCS) (1918–1929) and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1942). In the latter case, by situating the main subject of her research in the context of the increasingly massive and complex organizing of women, the author explores the history of disputes both among different associations and between individual associations and governance regimes. For instance, she considers the curious case of the *Narodni ženski savez* (NŽS, National Women’s Union), the first mass women’s association in the newly formed Kingdom of SCS. Briefly but convincingly, Milanović shows how its history was significantly marked by ethnic and nationalist tensions, competition, and rivalry, but also by differences in imagining optimal collective feminist practice.

Thanks to Jasmina Milanović’s reconstructions, ongoing research into interwar feminism in the Kingdom of SCS and Yugoslavia has also received a new impetus: precisely this kind of historiography—here focused mainly on the *Žensko društvo*—is lacking in the cases of significant women’s/feminist organizations such as the NŽS or *Ženski pokret* (Women’s Movement).

By consistently attending to the nuances in the dialectics of women’s and national or state issues, private and public spheres, emancipatory and conservative tendencies within women’s initiatives and beyond them, social, humanitarian, cultural, and periodical models of engagement, and the dynamics of dis/agreements among (women) individuals and groups in specific forms of civil society during the last decades of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries in Serbia, Jasmina Milanović contributes significantly to research in various disciplines—mainstream national and

women's history, media and periodical studies, and gender studies in particular. Moreover, by enriching the work with numerous appendices, indexes, and reproductions of the society's regulations, papers, acts, and photographs, with carefully provided comments, notes, and biographies and portraits of members of the society, Milanović has done an exemplary job of tracing collective initiatives and organizations, both in Serbia and Yugoslavia, and beyond.

This study, at its core, figures as a fine feminist intervention, a necessary corrective to the official models, masculine norms, and narratives of historiography. At the same time, each of its possible readers—academic as well as nonacademic—is provided with a strong foothold for further research into women's history (in particular in Serbia and Yugoslavia), the history of periodicals, and intellectual history. Finally, while reading this well-conceived and vividly written book, pleasantly immersed in the period of about a century ago, readers are called to follow Milanović's path of responsible scientific work, a challenging but equally enjoyable endeavor.



Valentina Mitkova, *Pol, periodičen pechat i modernizatsia v Bulgaria (ot kraya na XIX do 40-te godini na XX vek)* (Gender, periodicals, and modernization in Bulgaria (from the end of the 19th century to the 1940s)), Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2022, 261 pp., BGN 20, ISBN: 978-954-07-5588-5.

Book review by **Daniela Koleva**  
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This well-researched and well-written book combines two thematic fields in a fruitful way: the history of the book and women's history. Valentina Mitkova has developed an understudied aspect of Bulgarian modernization in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, namely women's periodicals as a form of the modern public sphere. The author draws on feminist studies to highlight the emancipatory and modernizing role of women's periodicals as an "alternative public sphere," or "subaltern counter publics,"<sup>1</sup> which were also an "instrument of civilizational catch-up" (11). Thus, Mitkova succeeds in rethinking the more traditional problematics of women's history through new perspectives that capture the social and cultural conditioning of key categories such as "gender," "woman," and "author," and reveal the intellectual gender hierarchy, its preconditions and mechanisms.

The first chapter sets out the conceptual framework of the study. The author examines the concept of gender tutelage in the androcentric literary tradition, and the resulting gender censorship. She draws on feminist literary criticism to analyze women's writing in Bulgaria and the tension between its civilizing effort and its marginality and subordination ensuing from the authors' gender. She comes to the compelling conclu-