

CORRESPONDENCE OF VOJISLAV V. MIŠKOVIĆ ABOUT
HIS DOCTORATE WITH MILUTIN MILANKOVIĆ,
MIODRAG IBROVAC AND OTON KUČERA

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Abstract. Many letters from the correspondence of Vojislav V. Mišković with leading scientists such as Milutin Milanković, Miodrag Ibrovac and Oton Kučera from 1916 to 1952 have been preserved. Most often he corresponded with Milutin Milanković who was informed about all phases of his Ph.D, from its writing, to defense, promotion and publication. The title of Mišković's doctoral thesis in mathematical sciences was "Statistical Methods in the Study of the Stars" ("Études de statistique stellaire") and was defended on 12 July 1924 at the University of Montpellier in front of a panel chaired by Professor Pierre Humbert. Mišković also informed Miodrag Ibrovac about the dissertation and asked him to see with the Secretary of Education about funding he needed to print the thesis. Mišković sent the printed thesis to Milanković, Ibrovac and Kučera. They congratulated him and praised his work. Milanković read it and passed it to Professor Anton Bilimović, who was the second Mišković's committee member at the University of Belgrade. Oton Kučera intended to write a review of the Mišković's dissertation in "Nastavni Vjesnik" ("Teacher's Newsletter"), but the printing of the magazine was postponed and was not sent along with the letter, as Kučera planned.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vojislav Mišković (Fužine, 1892–Belgrade, 1976) was the first doctor in astronomy among the Serbs. Doctoral thesis of Mišković in mathematical sciences "Statistical Methods in Studying the Stars" ("Études de statistique stellaire") was defended on 12 July 1924 at the University of Montpellier and the President of the Committee was Pierre Humbert (Paris, 1891–Paris 1953) (Andjelić 1977). The thesis was considered as belonging to mathematical sciences "Le grade de docteur es sciences mathématiques" as written on his printed doctoral paper (Mišković, 1924) since Astronomy was a part of the same department, and the thesis is very theoretical because it studies statistical methods related to the radiance of the variable stars like Algol.

There exists a correspondence wherein Vojislav Mišković wrote, among other topics, about his thesis to Milutin Milanković (Dalj, 1879–Belgrade, 1958), Miodrag Ibrovac (Gornji Milanovac, 1885–Belgrade, 1973) and Oton Kučera (Petrinja, 1857–Zagreb, 1931). In his letters he covered various aspects of his doctorate since the nature of cooperation of Mišković with them was dependent on the interests and expertise of the particular correspondent. His most detailed reports about the progress of his thesis were sent to Milutin Milanković who was his unofficial mentor, then to Miodrag Ibrovac whom he asked for financial contribution for publishing the thesis. To Oton Kučera he sent a printed copy of the thesis.

2. CORRESPONDENCE

The first letter from the collection Vojislav Mišković wrote to Milutin Milanković on 4 January 1924, although it is not known whether it was the really the first piece of correspondence between them. At the beginning of the letter, he congratulated Milanković the New Year 1924 and then commented on his doctorate that he had submitted to the mentor, Professor Humbert. He stated that he did not have any problems with the thesis and that it had been accepted without modifications. The Mentor, Professor Humbert, only asked that it be complemented with the bibliography from all previously printed papers on stellar astronomy and short terminological dictionary in French, English and German.

Observatoire du Mt. Gros, Nice, 4 January 1924

Mr. Professor,

I can tell you that I do not have any difficulties about my thesis: it was accepted without any modifications, but not without additions. Nothing significant, but it postpones the date of my exam. Professor Humbert requires that I add the following:

- 1. Bibliography, as complete as possible, of all already published papers related to stellar astronomy*
- 2. Short terminological vocabulary with simultaneous terms in French, English and German.*

Your source greatly helped me—merci. I thank you also on this occasion for your kindness and your effort. Mr. Professor, please accept the expressions of my personal respect.

Mišković

At the same day, on January 4, 1924, Mišković also wrote to Miodrag Ibrovac, literature historian, romanist, Professor of the University in Belgrade and became an academician. The two of them also communicated during the First World War. On this occasion, Mišković sent his best wishes to him and his wife for the New Year, but he also contacted him for financial help.

4 January 1924

Dear Mr. Ibrovac,

I certainly never received anything from anywhere, vous pensez bien si on se f(aut??). . . un peu pardone des clients comme moi. That is why I withdrew my application. These days you were ill and could not go out. To wait, I could not. And to leave it, I thought, a quoi bon!?. Today I can tell you how colossal it could be for me

if I could get something. If it is agreeable to you and if you think it might succeed, I would be thankful to you if you could influence that some assistance be given to me. I could send you another application, if you had lost the first one, since it is missing in the Ministry.

....

*Yours,
Mišković*

It is not known what Ibrovac answered, but the letter that Mišković sent to him was preserved,

Observatoire du Mr. Gros, Nice, 12 March 1924

Dear Mr. Ibrovac,

... Excuse me, I will not keep you long.

I just want to inform you that the printing of my thesis will start on the 15th of this month. I got bon a sির. I am only waiting for the printer to tell me exact conditions and time when he could send me the first epreuves.

100–110 printed pages with 8", with 12 printing plates will cost me around 2500–3000 fr.. Out of that I secured 750 fr. that local Universities gave me. And the rest I must provide myself. If it only were to take care about it, I would do it, but it has to be found and paid. It would take me 10 months to collect that from my salary.

Mr. Ibrovac, can I have any hopes from our Ministry? Have they told you anything positive? Please inform me as soon as possible. If there is nothing to hope for (which would not surprise me very much), I could look on some other possibility. I have to try, at least, although the outlook is not very promising.

I again kindly ask you to pardon me if I disturbed you with my letter and plea.

Please convey my regards to Mrs. Ibrovac and you, dear Mr. Ibrovac, please accept my cordial greetings from your

Mišković

In his letter of 28 September 1924 from Bourg-St.Maurice (Savoie) Mišković informs Milanković that as a member of state mission of France participates in the defining of the geographic coordinates of southeastern French Alps. He also informs him that the promotion of his doctorate was held on 12 July 1924 and that he sent him one copy of the dissertation. It was obvious that Mišković seriously intended to return to Belgrade and be engaged at the University and Milanković wholeheartedly helped him with that.

Bourg-St. Maurice (Savoie), 28 September 1924

Mr. Professor,

...

It is probably known to you that my promotion was held on 12 July since I immediately after the exam sent you one copy of my thesis and I presume that my parcel had arrived.

V. Mišković

Milanković replied him very soon, on 4 October from Belgrade and congratulated Mišković on his passed exam, defense of his doctoral thesis, with the promise to very gladly read it. He wrote to him that there was no need for him to come that year to Belgrade, possibly only when "his post had been accepted at the University". Milanković advised him not to leave his present post in Nica, but to patiently wait to

be invited to the Department of Philosophy, and that the two of them should discuss the conditions of the return of Mišković that would secure him future existence and work conditions.

4 October 1924

Dear Mr. Mišković,

I left Belgrade already at the beginning of May and returned recently after spending the last months in Austria. In a large pile of letters and various parcels waiting for me on the table I found your thesis and today I received your dear letter.

I wholeheartedly congratulate you on passing the exam, and I will recommend your thesis with the outmost interest. When I do that, I will write you in more detail.

Yours truly,

Milanković

The letter of Milanković of 17 December 1924 (written on eight pages) was very significant for Mišković. Mišković mentioned it in his eulogy speech that he held at the grave of Milanković on 17 December 1958. In that letter Milanković wrote about the doctoral thesis, about the proposal that he should get a post of invited Associate Professor, about the foundation of Astronomical Observatory in Belgrade and about the cooperation with Alfred Wegener (Berlin, 1880–Greenland, 1930).

He started his letter informing Mišković that he had read his thesis (Figure 1.).

17 December 1924

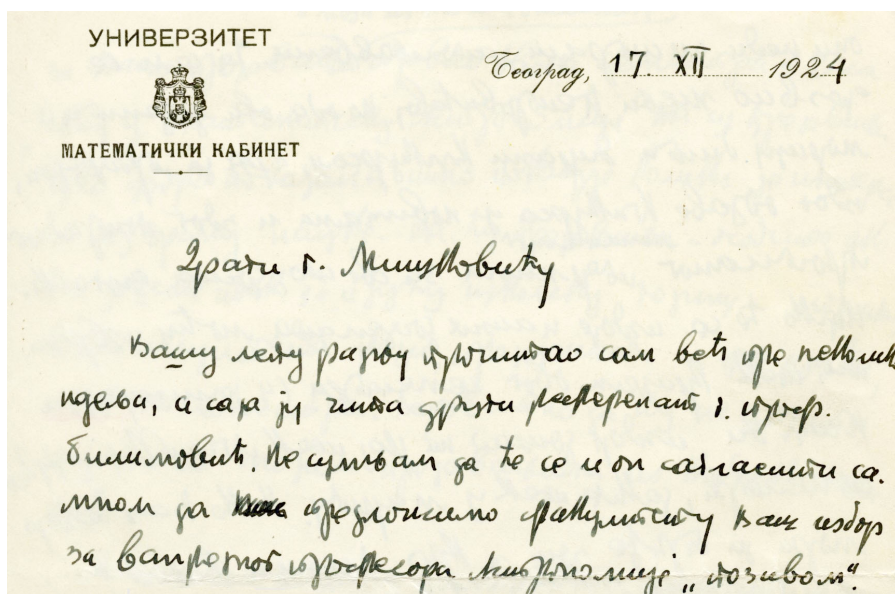


Figure 1: Facsimile of the beginning of the Milutin Milanković's letter were informing Vojislav V. Mišković that he had read his thesis written 17. December 1924.

Dear Mr. Mišković,

I had read your nice paper several weeks ago and now your colleague, Mr. Professor Bilimović is reading it. I do not doubt that he will agree with me to propose to the Faculty to elect you as Associate Professor of Astronomy by "invitation".

*Faithfully yours,
Milanković*

The other responsible Professor for the choice for the University was Anton Bilimović (Žitimir, 1879–Belgrade, 1970). He came from Russia and was Professor at the University of Belgrade from 1920 to 1955, and a Member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts from 1925.

In his letter of 31 December 1924 Mišković asked Milanković whether he thought it necessary and appropriate to send, before his election for the Professor of the Faculty, several copies of his thesis to professors who do not deal with Mathematics. He mentioned that he had already sent them to Professors of Mathematics and Technical Sciences whom he had known, or at least had known their names..

Nice, 31 December 1924

Mr. Professor,

Before even starting to answer your dear letter of the 17th of this month, I would like to express to you my friendliness and obligation for your kindness to me and for the interest that you had in our future cooperation.

....

It would suffice (at least I hope), for example, that we, at the very beginning, present at a minimal cost, to our scientists and wider circles, two or three results of obvious practical value. And that is not difficult, I assure you. Our world does not know Serbian astronomers, it does not believe that they exist. They should be shown, if not the astronomers themselves, but their work and they will be acknowledged.

Do you think it necessary and appropriate that before being elected, I send several copies of my thesis to Professors of non-mathematical faculties? I have sent it so far only to Faculties of Mathematic and Engineering that I knew, even only by name. In general, I would be very grateful if you could be willing to give me your advice and instructions on what should be done before the time of the election.

Yours truly, Mišković

Milanković replied to that on 23 January 1925 that there was no need to send by post the copies of his thesis, but to personally give them upon coming to Belgrade from France.

University, Mathematical Office, Belgrade, 23 January 1925

Dear Colleague,

Congratulations to you!

At the last night session, the Philosophical Faculty elected you based on my proposal (also signed by Mr. Petrović) as invited Assistant Professor of Practical Astronomy.

...

Sending of the copies of thesis is not necessary now. Soon you will be able to hand them personally.

...

Cordial greetings by your Milanković

Mišković sent his doctoral thesis to Oton Kučera, physicist and promoter of natural sciences (Internet 1 2016). He was one of the founders of Astronomical Observatory in Zagreb and its Director in the period from 1920 to 1926 and also the editor of the calendar “Bošković” for the years 1924, 1925 and 1926 (Internet 2 2017).

Letter from Oton Kučera to Mišković written in July 1925 (Figure 2):

Zagreb, 15 July 1925

My dear colleague and friend!

As events turned out, you are only now getting the reply to your dear letter of 23 October 1924. My intention was to thank you for it after printing report on your dissertation in “Nastavni Vjesnik” and to also send you several copies of it. But, printing took an unusually long time and difficulties arose that prevented my reply. When I was able to do that and send you at the same time a copy of “Bošković” for 1925, I was told that you were elected as Professor of Astronomy in Belgrade, that you are on your way to Belgrade and that there was hope that you would come to Zagreb where I intended to meet you and hand you both things. And the time passed in waiting.

Now I hear that you returned to Nice to stay there for another year, so I am sending you this letter with the kind request to forgive my not answering because of the above.

I first want to most cordially thank you for detailed information on recent events in your life and let me add the expression of my exceptional joy to have you as chosen expert to pave the way of scientific astronomy in our homeland. In it, I did but a little for arousing wide interest for it - more as an amateur and, thus, it would certainly

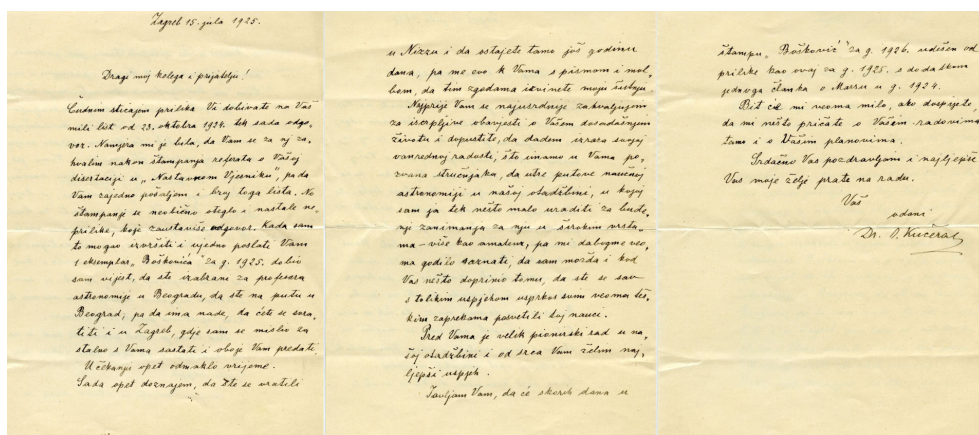


Figure 2: Facsimile of the letter from Oton Kučera to Vojislav V. Mišković written in 15 July 1925.

feel good to know that I might have influenced you, too, in that direction, so that you very successfully devoted yourself to that science despite all the obstacles.

Great pioneering work is awaiting you in our homeland and I wish you great success from the bottom of my heart.

I inform you that very soon “Bošković” will go in print for the year 1926, compiled similarly to the one for the year 1925 with the addition of one article on Mars in the year 1924.

I would be very glad if you could talk to me about your papers there and about your plans.

I cordially greet you and may my best wishes follow you in your work.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. O. Kučera

Review of the PhD dissertation of Vojislav V. Mišković by Oton Kučera was published in the magazine “Nastavni vjesnik” in the column “Literary notifications” (Kučera, 1924).

3. CONCLUSION

At the University of Montpellier Vojislav Mišković defended in 1924 the state doctoral dissertation with the topic “Statistical Studies of the Stars”. In the period from the final phase of the doctorate until its defense and publishing he kept correspondence with Milutin Milanković, Miodrag Ibrovac and Oton Kučera. Milutin Milanković was mostly informed about it. After defending the dissertation Mišković sent each of them a copy of his dissertation. All of them praised it and supported his work.

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