

Medical Biography of Isak Samokovlja: The Famous Bosnian-Herzegovinian Writer

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Abstract

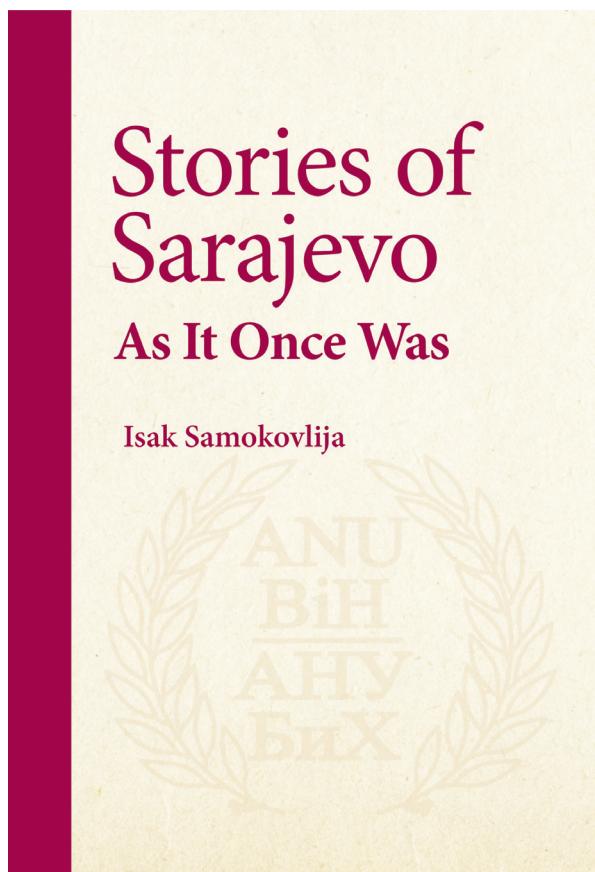
The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the biographical, professional, and health-educational works of Dr. Isak Samakovlja, who was better known as a writer than a doctor in the country where he was born. He was born in 1889 in Goražde, the easternmost province in the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, into a modest Jewish merchant family. He attended high school in Sarajevo and completed his studies in medicine in Vienna in 1917. During the First World War, he served twice in the Austro-Hungarian army. After the end of the First World War in 1918, he completed a medical internship at the National Hospital in Sarajevo. He began his service as a doctor, first in Goražde and then in Fojnica and Sarajevo. After the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia in May 1941, he was dismissed from his duties in the service without the right to pension or support, and without the right to appeal. In the Independent State of Croatia, he was twice mobilized into the Home Guard and was manager of the clinic in the Alipašin Most refugee camp. After World War II, he was the head of the Health Education Department of the Ministry of Public Health of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. Together with a group of enthusiastic doctors, he founded and edited the first Bosnian medical journal *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health). In that journal, Dr. Samakovlja published 29 articles of health and educational content. In 1949, Dr. Samakovlja left the Ministry of Public Health and continued to edit the literature and art journal *Brazda*, but he still had a private practice until the end of his life. He died in Sarajevo on January 15, 1955. He was buried with the highest state honors at the Jewish cemetery in Sarajevo. **Conclusion.** Isak Samakovlja (1889-1955) was one of the first medical doctors born in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He made a significant contribution to the improvement of people's health after the First and Second World Wars in the places where he worked. His special contribution are his articles on health education.

Key Words: Doctors and Writers ■ Isak Samakovlja ■ Sarajevo ■ Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Introduction

Isak Samakovlja was a doctor and writer. Both of these occupations were inextricably linked in his life. His medical work, from which his family and he lived, did not give him enough time for literary work. In 1954, in a conversation with the journalist Siniša Paunović¹, he said: "I mostly worked (wrote) at night. When I finished my medical work, I would throw myself into literature" (1). He published his first short stories in 1926, first in *Jevrejski život* (Jewish life)² (2) and the magazine *Gajret*³ (3), and already in 1927, his short story *Rafina avlja* was published in *Srpski knjiženik*

*glasnik*⁴ (4). Just two years later, his first collection of short stories, "From Spring to Spring," was published by the Sarajevo Writers' Group. From then, with the interruption of the war years, 1941–1945, until the end of his life, Dr. Samakovlja continued to write literary texts with varying intensity, that is, as much as his medical affairs and life circumstances allowed (1). Many writers and literary critics wrote about his literary work and also his literary creativity (5). After the Second World War, alongside his medical work, he continued his literary work, and since 1954, his short stories have been translated into many foreign languages (6-13) (Picture 1). Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić⁵,



Picture 1. The front page of Isak Samokovlija's book in English.

his contemporary, in an introduction to his book, Salamon's Letter, wrote: ... "The deeply human Isak Samokovlija is one of the best writers that Bosnia and Herzegovina has given to our literature" (14), and Meša Selimović⁶, in his memories on Samokovlija, said that Samokovlija, after Andrić and Kočić⁷, was "the best Bosnian storyteller."

However, only as much was written about his medical work as was necessary to indicate the connection between his profession and his writing. He worked as a doctor until the end of his life, and never "escaped" from medicine to literature. Working for many years in various medical jobs, he gained the reputation of a "respected doctor" who, with the same zeal and enthusiasm, treated the people in the hills and mountains of Goražde and Fojnica, in the slums of Sarajevo, and the children, women, and elderly people exiled from eastern Bosnia in

the Alipašin refugee camp. After the Second World War he made a significant contribution to the improvement of people's health, especially in the field of health education. This is best illustrated by his excellent medical texts, which at the time of their creation had a significant role in the eradication of infectious diseases. For him, medical and literary affairs were, together, his primary motivation. Due to its importance and his approach it, medical work had a certain advantage. It cannot be claimed that he thought about literature while working as a doctor, but it is known that certain events from his medical practice were repeatedly an inspiration for his literary creativity, which in its own way strengthened the connection between medicine and literature.

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the biographical details, professional and health-educational work of Dr. Isak Samokovlija.

Samokovlija's Short Biography

Isak Samokovlija was born on September 3, 1889 in Goražde⁸ on the River Drina, a small Bosnian town about seventy kilometers east of Sarajevo, into a merchant family of Sephardic (Spanish) Jews. His father, Moša, was engaged in trade, which enabled him to earn enough to support his large family only modestly. Despite this, he tried to provide his children with the widest possible education. Isak's mother, Rifka, also born in Samokovlija, was a housewife and a caring mother who lived for her children. Among those who knew her, she was remembered as an honorable person, with soft and warm speech and elegant behavior (16). Isaac's ancestors traced their origins to the Baruch family, which at the end of the 15th century was on its way to Turkey with other Jews exiled from Spain to the Ottoman Empire. They found refuge in Samokovo, a small town in the southwestern part of Bulgaria, after which they became known as the Samokovlija (17) in Bosnia, where they settled in 1860.

Isak grew up in his hometown and began his many years of education. He later referred frequently to that time in his life, remembering it fondly, and wrote about it. In his short autobiography, he

wrote: "I climbed all the hills, screaming together with all the children, Muslim and Christian, and grew up with them. We fought, broke each other's heads, but in everything it was as if we were from one mother and one father. We ate cakes for Pesach, gourabies for Eid, and pretzels for Easter" (18). He finished elementary school in Goražde in 1902, high school in Sarajevo in 1910, and then went to Vienna to study medicine in the same year, as a scholarship holder of the Jewish cultural and educational society *La Benevolencija*⁹. After the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, he was mobilized into the Austro-Hungarian army with other students from the Viennese Medical Faculty and sent to the front. He served as a medic, performing medical services as a medical lieutenant in Galicia on the Russian-Polish border, in the vicinity of Pest, and on the Romanian front. He continued his studies with other mobilized students in 1916 at the Faculty of Medicine, Vienna University, and the following year he successfully completed his studies, when he became a doctor of general medicine. He was then mobilized again and sent to the front in Belgrade, then Niš, and the border with Albania. Having learned, during a short leave in Vienna in 1918, that his father had died, he went to Sarajevo, where he received the order to be transferred from the front to Sarajevo Military Hospital (19). In Vienna in the same year he married Miss Hedda Brunner (20) in a military synagogue. Isak had three children: a son Mišo¹⁰, and two daughters, Mirjam¹¹ and Rikica¹².

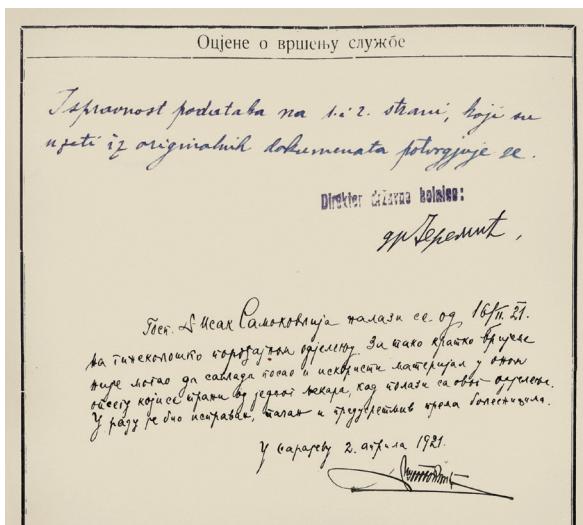
The Peaceful Period between the Two World Wars

Health conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina immediately after the First World War were characterized by the poor general and health education of the people, their poor health and hygiene conditions and habits, especially of the rural population, the frequent occurrence of various infectious diseases that had the characteristics of epidemics, the insufficient number of primary health care institutions, and a shortage of health personnel. However, from the 1920s, there was a significant

improvement in health conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thanks to the implementation of public health policies in the new state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes/Yugoslavia, as a result of the work of Dr. Andrija Šampar¹³, head of the Hygiene Department at the Ministry of Public Health in Belgrade (1919-1930). For the first time, preventive medical institutions in the form of public health centers or hygiene institutes with epidemiological stations, biochemical, bacteriological, and parasitological laboratories, children's, school, anti-tuberculosis, anti-venereal, anti-traumatic and other dispensaries were opened, depending on the current pathology in a certain area, and institutes for the health care of mothers, children, and youth. The opening of new health institutions throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina significantly contributed to the improvement of primary health care, and enabled young doctors and other medical personnel to gain experience more quickly, and to progress in the service through hard and diligent work.

On February 5, 1919, after the end of the First World War, Dr. Isak Samokovlija began his civilian medical service as a secondary physician at the National Hospital in Sarajevo. From February 16, 1921, he worked at the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department of the State Hospital in Sarajevo. Dr. Jovan Bokonjić¹⁴, the head of that department, wrote: "He is correct in his work, punctual and accommodating to patients" (Picture 2). He took the oath of allegiance to King Peter I on February 26, 1919, in Sarajevo (Picture 3).

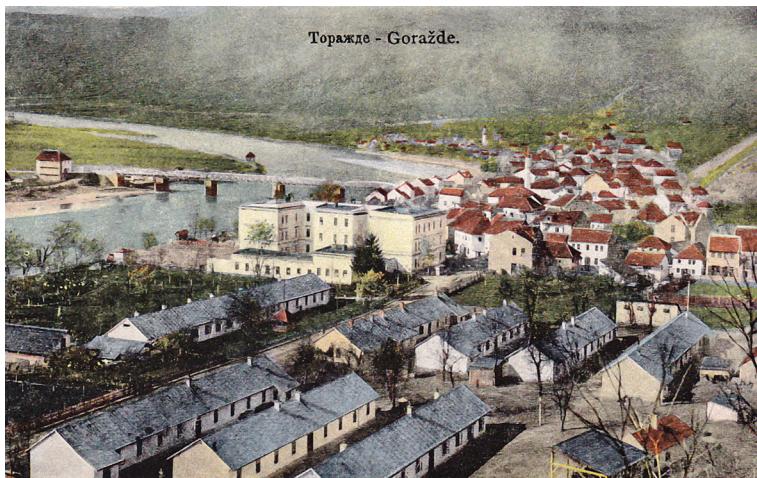
On March 1, 1921, he began working as a district doctor in his native Goražde (Picture 4), where he remained until November of the same year. After the death of King Petar I Karađorđević on July 11, 1921, he took the official Oath of Allegiance to the new ruler, King Aleksandar, in Goražde on September 9, 1921. Official records of his medical work in his native Goražde have not been found. While searching for those documents, I came across a note about Dr. Isak Samokovlija, written by his younger daughter Rikica (21): "My Dad's first job was in his native Goražde. I remember his stories, his desire to give the best he could



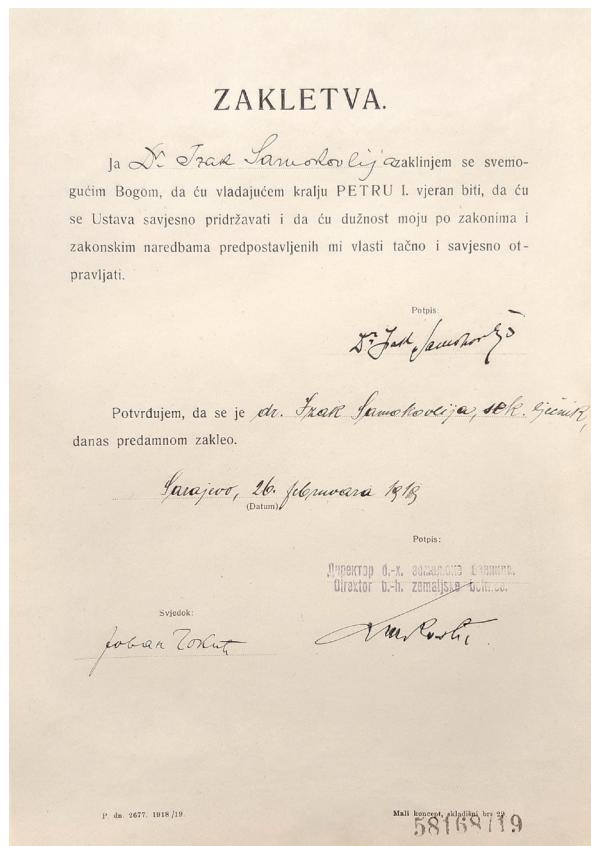
Picture 2. Official evaluation of the work of Dr. Isak Samokovlija at the State Hospital in Sarajevo in 1921 (ABiH, Isak Samokovlija's file).

to his hometown. It was not difficult for him to visit very distant villages carrying his doctor's bag.

That was why he also learned to ride a horse, because many villages were inaccessible by other means, especially in winter. He often came home wet, frostbitten but happy, and shouted from the gate, “– Man, he and his mother will be fine!” Once, however, there was no escape, and then he was sad, sullen, silent, he just came in quietly, undressed, muttering, “If only they had called me earlier...” His greatest concern was the people’s lack of education, as they often called herbalists, quacks and



Picture 4. Goražde in the 1920's.



Picture 3. Oath of allegiance to King Petar I Karađorđević, Sarajevo, February 26, 1919 (ABiH, Isak Samokovlija's file).

witch doctors when a doctor was needed. At every opportunity, he explained and convinced people not to believe in witchcraft and not to treat themselves without the advice of a doctor. He was often angry when he heard, “Well, we call you when nothing else helps!”

At the end of October 1923, he was officially transferred as a district doctor to Fojnica (Picture 5) (22), a small Bosnian town, where he stayed until November 1925. Samuel Elazar¹⁵ learned from his wife, Mrs. Hedda, about the days Dr. Isaac Samokovlija spent in Fojnica, during a chance meeting and informal conversation in Zenica in 1941.

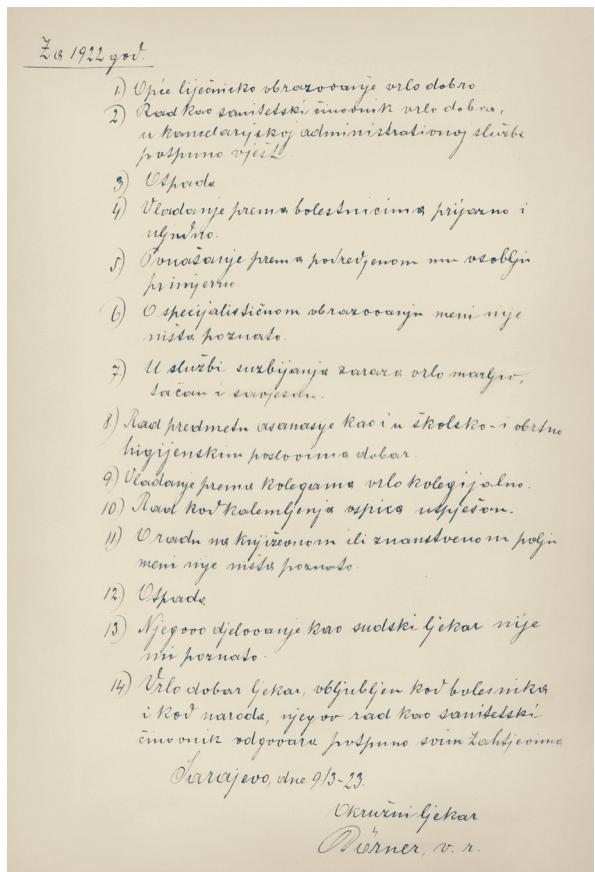
Many years later, he wrote about it: "Isak went to work before seven o'clock and until ten he did administrative work for the county, involving many reports and statistics. After that, he immediately went to the infirmary, where the waiting room was already full. He worked there until 2 p.m. and sometimes until 4 p.m., depending on how many home visits there were, and whether he had to provide first aid at work sites in the forest or at the sawmill. He would come home exhausted. He would hardly eat any lunch, simply longing to lie down and rest. But after a few hours of rest, calls for home visits would follow. The worst was when they took him to the village at night, often in rain and snow, without a horse. He would take his doctor's bag in one hand and a stick in the other and go, as his predecessor, Dr. Isak Israel would say, on "medical tourism" (23).

In the official annual review of Dr. Samokovlija's work in 1922, his superior, district physician Dr. Bürner, wrote, among other things, the following: "A very good doctor, loved by patients and the people, his work as a medical officer fully meets all requirements" (Picture 6) (24).

Despite the fact that he was a favorite doctor among patients and the people, in 1924 he experienced awkwardness as a doctor in Fojnica simply because he did not succumb to the Bosnian market mentality, that is, because he did his medical work professionally, adhering to the code of medical ethics. The unpleasantness must have moved him, considering that he was a conscientious and self-sacrificing doctor, and a man with an uncompromising attitude towards injustice. Marko Marković¹⁶ wrote about this in the daily newspaper *Oslobodenje* (25). A problem arose after a certain Fr. Šumanović filed a complaint with the Fojnica Catholic parish office against Dr. Isak Samokovlija, to be sent to the Archbishop's Vrhbosna Ordinance in Sarajevo because of his alleged "arrogance and intolerance". In the further



Picture 5. Fojnica in the mid 1920's. Courtesy of Nevres Jemendžić, a collector from Fojnica.



Picture 6. Official evaluation of the work of Dr. Isak Samokovlija, Fojnica, 1922 (ABiH. Isak Samokovlija's file).

procedure, the application was forwarded to the Grand Prefect of the Sarajevo Region (health department) for inspection and further procedure, and then it was officially forwarded to the head of the Fojnica section. After a ten-day investigation, Fr. Šumanović's claims were refuted, and Dr. Isak Samokovlija's personality and medical work received a positive evaluation.

At the beginning of November 1925, Dr. Samokovlija was transferred to Sarajevo as a doctor in the Sarajevo district, Sarajevo region, with headquarters in Sarajevo (Picture 7) (26). Later, he worked as a doctor in various professional, administrative and medical posts. By a decision of the Minister of Social Policy and Public Health of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, on February 18, 1930, he was appointed as a regular member of the Banovina Sanitary Council of the Royal Administration of the Drina Banovina in Sarajevo (27). From May 1939, he held the position of senior advisor to the head of Sarajevo County. From July 1939, he served as senior advisor to the head of Brčko County, based in Bosanski Šamac (28). In the Drina Banovina, he was appointed head of the Department's Health Department for social policy and public health (29).

During that period, he also had a private practice. In her memories of his father, his younger daughter, Dr. Rikica Najdanović Samokovlija, wrote about it: "When he returned to Sarajevo, he had a small private practice on the ground floor

of his house where he worked in the afternoons. The prices of the examinations were very moderate, but still too high for the poor. As a result, on Thursdays my father admitted the sick poor without charge. It was free. He received them with the same care and dedication as the others. People knew this and greatly appreciated his charitable work. He later turned many stories about the poor from Bjelave and other Sarajevo mahals into his "stories" (21).

Dr. Samokovlija was a member of the Medical Chamber for Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia and Montenegro until 1930, and later the Medical Chamber of Drina Banovina until 1941. As an active and conscientious member, he was often elected to working bodies, and improved their work by his energy and knowledge.

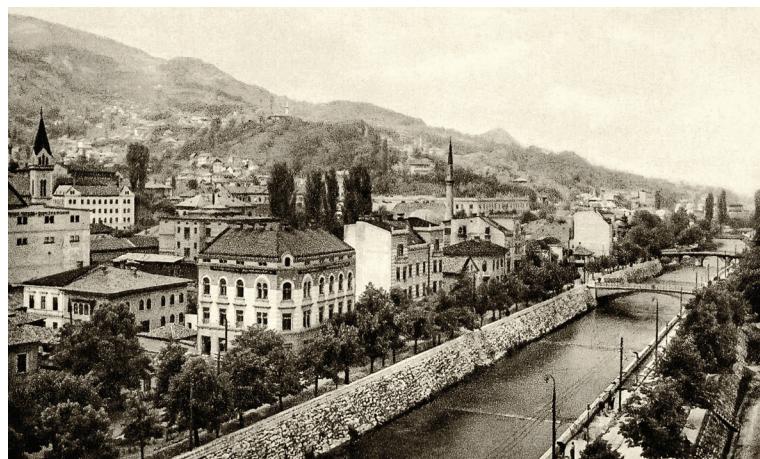
The Period of the Second World War, 1941–1945

The Second World War found Dr. Isak Samokovlija in Sarajevo (Picture 8) in the position of head of the Health Department of the Department for Social Policy and Public Health of the Royal Administration of Drina Banovina in Sarajevo (29).

On May 7, 1941, after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*)¹⁷ and on the basis of the Legislative Decree of April 22, 1941, and according to the authority obtained from the *Poglavnik* (the Chief),

the Chief's Commissioner dismissed him from his duties without the right to pension or support, and without the right to appeal (30). He was forced to wear a yellow ribbon with a Star of David and a round sign designating him as a Jew, in the form of a yellow badge with the letter Ž painted black in the middle, by which the Nazis marked all Jews at that time.

From December 19, 1941 to April 20, 1942, he was mobilized for a home defense exercise in order to "become acquainted with the work



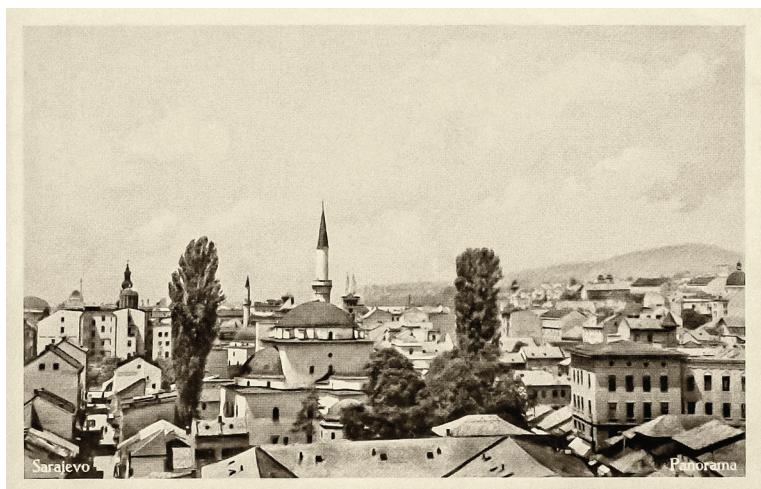
Picture 7. Sarajevo in the mid 1920's.

of doctors in combat units of the home defense". He started military exercises in December 1941, staying for a short time in Ugljevik, where he worked as a doctor for the 6th Infantry Regiment (31).

At the beginning of 1942, he was reassigned as a doctor to the 3rd Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment in Ševarlje¹⁸ near Doboj, where he remained until March 20, 1942, when he returned to Sarajevo (32). There are few written traces of how he endured the military discipline of the ruling regime during home defense exercises in isolated Bosnian towns. He probably told family members and trusted friends about it. The only things that were found in his personal legacy, which is stored in the Museum of the Literature and Performing Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, are texts written on two correspondence cards that Dr. Isak Samokovlija sent to his friend Hamid Dizdar¹⁹. Both were sent from Ševarlje. They were written in ink and in easily legible letters (33, 34). Given that Dr. Isak Samokovlija knew that letters and stationery were censored, it is hard to believe that the accuracy of the written text was preserved.

At the end of March 1942, Dr. Isak Samokovlija returned to Sarajevo. At that time, there were many uncared for refugees in Sarajevo (Picture 9), mostly from eastern Bosnia. At the same time, a massive typhoid and typhoid epidemic broke out (over 3,000 cases), and there were also many people suffering from dysentery (35).

With the aim of stopping the further spread of these diseases, the competent health services considered it necessary urgently to increase the number of professional staff, and take the necessary anti-epidemic and general hygiene measures. The



Picture 8. Postcard of Sarajevo from the Second World War. Courtesy of the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo (Collection of photographs, Fund Radnički pokret, inventory number FRP 2354).



Picture 9. Refugees on the streets of Sarajevo, around 1942. Courtesy of the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo (Collection of photographs, Fund Radnički pokret, inventory number FRP 2184).

health service at the City Polyclinic in Sarajevo was managed by Dr. Asim Musakadić²⁰ and Dr. Ekrem Idrizbegović²¹. They believed that, first of all, they should hire doctors who were out of work in Sarajevo. At their suggestion, the Great Prefect, Dr. Ismet-bey Gavrankapetanović²² rendered a decision by which Dr. Isak Samokovlija was assigned to the Office for Refugees of the Greater Vrhbosna Parish in Sarajevo, where he assisted sick Muslim refugees from eastern Bosnia at the City Health

Department (36). The decision also stated that the amount of the fee for his work would be determined by the Office for Refugees of the Greater Vrhbosna Parish in Sarajevo. The German occupation authorities, fearing the spread of infectious diseases among their army, decided to move refugees suffering from typhus outside the city center (37). For this reason, in April 1942, the construction of a refugee settlement began, that is, a camp for refugees on Alipašin Most²³ (37). The resettlement of refugees from Sarajevo to the refugee camp at Alipašina Most began, under the orders of the German military authorities, on May 20, 1942 (37). The camp accommodated children of both sexes, women and elderly men (38).

From an epidemiological point of view, the resettlement of refugees was carried out with the aim of preventing the spread of these diseases in the metropolitan area of Sarajevo. However, the spread of the typhus epidemic still continued among the refugee population because refugees were sent to the camp regardless of whether they were sick, infected or healthy.

At the beginning of the work in the Alipašin Most Camp, 19 employees were employed. Among them was Dr. Isak Samokovlija (Picture 10). Thanks to his professional and organizational

work, in the following few months the incidence of infectious diseases gradually decreased, and they eventually disappeared. His most significant activity in that period was his active involvement in medical and social work. In cooperation with the representatives of "Merhamet"²⁴ from Sarajevo, he successfully cared for and placed orphaned children staying in the camp in various facilities and Sarajevo families (23).

At the end of September 1942, the status of Dr. Isak Samokovlija under employment law changed. He became an employee of the Institute for Combating Endemic Syphilis in Banja Luka (the Institute)²⁵, although he never stayed in that city during the Second World War, nor did he work in the field of suppression of syphilis at that time. This title was only formal and legal, since he continued to work as the manager of the infirmary at the Refugee Camp on Alipašin Most.

In fact, the administrative headquarters were in Banja Luka, and consisted of administrative officers and the manager of the Institute, Dr. Stanko Sielski²⁶. The direct work of the doctors employed there took place in the hygiene institutes, public health centers, and other hygiene institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, often in improvised field clinics in remote Bosnian villages where there were no permanent or even occasional doctors. The institute's doctors treated the population not only for syphilis but also for other diseases (39), which was of great importance for the Bosnian people because, immediately before the Second World War, or at its very beginning, a significant number of doctors of Serbian nationality fled from the Ustaša authorities and the war, leaving Bosnia for Serbia. The difficult war period and the dangers to which well-intentioned citizens of Sarajevo who protected the lives of vulnerable citizens, regardless of their national, religious or professional affiliation, could be exposed meant that, among others, Dr. Isak



Picture 10. Dr. Isak Samokovlija, fourth from the left, in the Alipašin Most Refugee Camp with refugees and coworkers, 1943. Courtesy of Dr. Jelice Najdanović Bokonjić.

Samokovlija and his family managed to survive and avoid as much as possible the horrors that Sarajevo's Jews and others experienced during the Second World War. It is certain that his fellow doctors made a significant contribution to this, especially at the beginning of the war, but also in the later war years. This is best seen in the fact that, in critical periods, Dr. Samokovlija was temporarily "sheltered" outside of Sarajevo in small Bosnian towns under the guise of home defense military exercises, or in his later employment at the Institute. The idea of his employment at the Institute was most likely planned by his colleagues in Sarajevo, who, in some sense, "took care of him" from the beginning of the Second World War. Today, one can only guess at their names because it was all done in great secrecy. However, given his employment at the Institute, it may be assumed with high probability that this idea was supported and implemented in Zagreb by Dr. Stanko Sielski and Dr. Ante Vučetić²⁷.

The contract²⁸ signed on September 19, 1942 with the Ministry of Health of the National People's Republic of Croatia on establishing the employment relationship of Dr. Isak Samokovlija with the Institute was made possible by Dr. Isak Samokovlija's acquisition of the status of civil servant, which for him as a Jew and his family meant above all a certain level of safety and material security, but also a number of other "privileges". Dr. Samokovlija was employed for an indefinite period of time as a contract employee to perform work on the suppression of endemic syphilis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and other tasks prescribed by the legal provisions on the establishment of the Institute in the area assigned to him by the Institute, with a monthly salary of HRK 5,600. In addition, he was entitled to a monthly allowance of HRK 300 for his wife and HRK 200 for each child. The monthly reward for work was often increased, so that in January 1945 it amounted to HRK 16,500.²⁹

However, in order to be employed at the Institute and exercise his contractual rights, he had to submit, in addition to proof of professional training, general personal documents, a certificate of impunity and good governance, and a certificate

that he was not under guardianship. In addition, it was necessary to submit to the Home Office a baptismal certificate, a certificate of a sworn oath to the NDH, and a certificate that the marriage that he and his wife Hedda had established back in 1919 in the military synagogue in Vienna had been validated by the Catholic Church.

After Dr. Isak Samokovlija submitted all the required documents to the authorities, on November 13, 1942, he was appointed a contracted employee of the Institute.³⁰ On January 1, 1943, he officially took up the position of contracted physician of the Institute, based in the Institute of Hygiene in Sarajevo, and was assigned to the position of manager of the clinic in the Alipašin Most Camp, where he had been working since its opening in May 1942.³¹

In remembering her father, Dr. Rikica Najdanović, Samokovlija's daughter, wrote that his work in the Alipašin Most Camp during the Second World War brought him face to face not only with numerous illnesses but also with the tragic fate of the exiled population, stating that working with refugees exhausted him, in addition to his own illnesses and personal tragedies. However, he never allowed this to show, and often, according to the refugees' statements, he was the only bright spot in their lives during that difficult wartime (21).

One of his many troubles from the Second World War period, which happened in the Alipašin Most Refugee Camp, was recorded in official documents. A written complaint against him was submitted by a certain Olga Jablačkov, a nurse at the Alipašin Most Refugee Clinic, on June 23, 1944.³² She accused him of working privately in the Refugee Clinic, of using medicines and bandages procured for refugees for private patients, of earning over HRK 10,000 a day, of eating from the hospital kitchen, although he received food like all other employees, of keeping food in his room and freely disposing of it, and paying more attention to private patients than to refugees. At the request of the competent ministry, Dr. Isak Samokovlija wrote a detailed answer. After the warden of the camp gave his opinion,³³ in the final file, T. 997/44

dated August 28, 1944, signed by deputy prefect T. Jurin, it was stated that the administration forbade doctors to receive private patients in the camp infirmary and, following the executive procedure, Dr. Samokovlja was found not guilty.

On March 25, 1945, Dr. Isak Samokovlja was again mobilized into the Home Guard.³⁴ This time he served as a doctor in the Ustaša units, which, together with the German units, retreated in panic towards the north from Hadžić via Zenica, Maglaj and Doboj. After several previous unsuccessful attempts to escape from the Ustaša forces, on April 13, 1945, he managed to escape and hide in Doboj until the liberation of the country. Dr. Samokovlja did not write later in more detail about how he managed to escape, where and how long he hid, who helped him, or how he felt then, and no notes about it have been found. However, it is possible to learn more about it from the notes by Siniša Paunović³⁵ as well as from the short "farewell" letter³⁶ that Samokovlja sent from Doboj to his family in Sarajevo, where it can be seen that those were difficult, uncertain days for him, full of suffering and pain, and that in his mind he was saying goodbye to his family and friends, thinking that he would never see them again.

The Post-War Period, 1945–1955

From April 25 to May 7, 1945, Isak Samokovlja, as a member of the Yugoslav Army, was the manager of Hospital No. 7 in Tuzla (40). Later, he continued working in the Ministry of Public Health of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo. He was the head of the Health Education Department. With pen and written word, in his own way, Dr. Samokovlja worked in various fields, popularizing preventive medicine. He wrote educational medical texts that were comprehensible, interwoven with evidence and adapted to the wider masses, and which he shaped and published in the form of medical articles, popular brochures, leaflets, and slogans.³⁷ At the same time, he organized health-education lectures, with the aim of teaching the people about current health pathologies, which in those years mainly involved epidemics of

various acute infectious diseases, or were a consequence of the people's deep-rooted beliefs in folk medicine for the prevention and treatment of various diseases.

Together with a group of enthusiastic doctors, Dr. Samokovlja founded and edited the first Bosnian medical journal, *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health)³⁸ (Picture 11), and became its first editor. The journal had two editorial boards. The wider committee included: Dr. Mića Branisljević³⁹, Dr. Vladimir Čavka⁴⁰, Dr. Ante Čićeć⁴¹, Dr. Blagoje Kovačević⁴², Dr. Alija Karahasanović⁴³, Dr. Luka Šimović⁴⁴, Dr. Asaf Šarac⁴⁵, Dr. Mara Živanović⁴⁶; and more narrowly: Dr. Miroslav Feldman⁴⁷, Dr. Teodor Ilic⁴⁸ and Bogdan Zimonjić⁴⁹.

The members of the Editorial Board also published their articles in the journal *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health) and thus significantly contributed to its quality and regular publication. The publisher of the journal was the State Publishing



Picture 11. Cover of the first issue of the journal *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health).

Company *Svetlost*, Sarajevo, and it was printed at the Sarajevo State Printing House.⁵⁰

As editor, Dr. Isak Samokovlija designed the contents of the journal with texts on current health issues. He took care of the regularity of the publication of the journal, and invited his colleagues to write articles on given topics, and famous Bosnian painters⁵¹ to illustrate the journal with their drawings. In addition to the usual medical texts written by prominent Bosnian doctors, Dr. Samokovlija also published his own articles on health and education in the journal. In total, he wrote twenty-nine texts with health and educational content. He did this in a planned and methodical manner, choosing topics to write about based on current pathologies. Almost all his health education texts were written in a literary and artistic style, which was quite unusual in medical circles at the time. However, the language in which the texts were written was simple, interesting and popular, making them easy to read and understand, even for the lay population. Today, when we read them, Dr. Samokovlija's health education texts not only reflect the state of health in Bosnia and Herzegovina of that time, but also provide the reader with an opportunity to learn about the life and customs of the population at the time of their creation.

Already in 1949, Dr. Isak Samokovlija left the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of BH (the Ministry). That year also marked the end of his involvement with the journal *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health). Later, he continued to edit the literature and art journal *Brazda*, a job he had been working on since 1948. He was the editor of this Journal until 1951, and later was an editor at the publishing company *Svetlost*. Leaving the



Picture 12. Funeral procession and coffin with the body of Isak Samokovlija, Sarajevo, January 17, 1955. Courtesy of Dr. Jelice Najdanović Bokonjić.

Ministry did not mean leaving medicine because he had a private practice until the end of his life, remaining faithful to both medicine and literature.

He died in Sarajevo on January 15, 1955 and was buried with the highest state honors at the Jewish cemetery in the Sarajevo settlement Kovačići, on the southeastern slopes of Mount Trebević (Picture 12). On behalf of the Society of Physicians of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dr. Mića Branisljević said farewell to Dr. Isak Samokovlija. The only obituary written about him as a doctor was published in the journal *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health).⁵²

Concluding Remarks

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, his native country, he was known more as a writer than as a doctor, most likely because his literary work overshadowed his professional medical work, or simply because there is insufficient interest in the history of medicine amongst the medical public of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In both fields, this is best illustrated by the fact that only one short obituary was written after his death. It seems that the “historians of medicine” in Bosnia and Herzegovina considered him more of a writer than a doctor. What was written about his medical work was only what was needed to show the connection between his profession and his writing, although he worked as a doctor for the rest of his life and never “escaped” from medicine to literature. Through his work, he made a significant contribution to the improvement of people’s health after the First and Second World Wars wherever he worked, and working with children, women, and the elderly in the Alipašin Most Refugee Camp during the Second World War. His special contributions are the articles on public health published in the first Bosnian medical journal, *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health).

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ Siniša Paunović (Čačak, Aug 25, 1903-Belgrade, Apr 9, 1995). Journalist, writer and collector.

² *Jevrejski život* (Jewish life), a weekly newspaper for cultural, political and economic issues; owner and publisher Albert D. Kajon, managing editor Albert Cohen. The paper was published from 1924 to 1928.

³ Gajret was the newsletter of the society of the same name for supporting the education of Bosniak students. The magazine was published in Sarajevo from 1907 to 1941, with interruptions from 1914 to 1921 and 1923. It was edited by Edhem Mulabdić, Mustaj-beg Halibašić, Osman Đikić, Murat Sarić, Avdo Sumbul, Šukrija Kurtović, Abdurezak Hifzi Bjelevac, Hamza Humo and Hamid Kukić. The magazine cherished the traditional spiritual values of Bosniaks, but was also open to the positive cultural influences of Christian civilization. In the period from 1921 to 1941 it openly supported the political idea of the national identification of Bosniaks as Serbs. [cited 2022 September

4]. Available from: <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=21015>.

⁴ *Srpski književni glasnik* is one of the most important Serbian literary magazines. It was published from February 1901 to July 1914 and, renewed, from September 1920 to April 1941. It was launched by Bogdan Popović, who was also the first editor. Later editors were Pavle Popović (1905–06) and Jovan Skerlić (1905–1914), and it was restored in 1920 by Bogdan Popović and Slobodan Jovanović, and then had several editors. [cited 2022 March 9]. Available from: <https://pretraziva.rs/pregled/srpski-knjizevni-glasnik>.

⁵ Ivo Andrić (Travnik, Oct 9, 1892-Belgrade, Mar 13, 1975). Writer of novels and short stories in the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian languages, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961.

⁶ Meša Selimović (Tuzla, Apr 26, 1910-Beograd, Jul 11, 1982). A novelist, storyteller, literary historian, memoirist, and critic.

⁷ Petar Kočić (Stričići near Banja Luka, Jun 29, 1877-Belgrade, Aug 27, 1916) [cited 2022 March 9]. Available from: <https://www.biografija.org/knjizevnost/petar-kocic/>

⁸ Goražde was at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

⁹ The Jewish cultural-educational and humanitarian society “*La Benevolentija*” was founded in January 1892 with the aim of providing scholarships to talented Sephardic students who were studying trades or attending higher schools throughout the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The society ceased to be a scholarship society for solely Sephardic young men in 1908 and became the Jewish Society for Education and Culture, which removed the distinction between Sephardi and Ashkenazim. La Benevolencia. Wikipedia [cited 2022 Jan 9]. Available from: https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Benevolencija.

¹⁰ Mišo Samokovlija (Goražde, Mar 30, 1920-Sarajevo, Feb 22, 1974). He finished elementary school and high school in Sarajevo in the 1940/41 school year, enrolled in medical studies, which he interrupted due to the start of the Second World War, and joined the Partisans. After liberation, he worked as a salesman in Sarajevo and Banja Luka.

¹¹ Mirjam Samokovlija Vujošević (Goražde, Jun 27, 1921-Sarajevo, Jan 23, 2003). She finished elementary school and the Trade Academy in Sarajevo. She worked as the head of the foreign exchange department of the National Bank in Sarajevo.

¹² Rikica Samokovlija Najdanović (Fojnica, Mar 19, 1923-Belgrade, Aug 29, 2014). She finished elementary school and high school in Sarajevo. She graduated in medical studies in Zagreb in 1952. She passed the specialist exam in paediatrics in 1958. She defended her doctoral dissertation in 1974. She began her university career in 1959 being selected as an assistant, and was finally a full professor at the Faculty of Medicine in Sarajevo.

¹³ Andrija Štampar (Brodska Drenovac near Pleternica, Sep 1, 1888-Zagreb, Jun 26, 1958). Croatian encyclopedia, online

edition. Miroslav Krleža Lexicographic Institute, 2021 [cited 2022 Jul 9]. Available from: <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=59892>.

¹⁴ Jovan Bokonjić (Kostajnica, Dec 19, 1883-Sarajevo, Aug 20, 1970). He graduated on March 24, 1911 from the Faculty of Medicine of the German University in Prague. After returning to Bosnia, he was employed as a secondary physician at the National Hospital in Sarajevo on June 1, 1911. He worked in the gynecology, surgery, and psychiatry departments. At the beginning of the First World War, he was interned in a concentration camp in Arad (Romania). After liberation, he continued to work at the National Hospital. From July 1919, he worked independently as head of the Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics until his retirement.

¹⁵ Samuel Elazar (Gračanica, Dec 17, 1902-Sarajevo, Nov 23, 1989), close friend of Isak Samokovlija, and a famous Sarajevo pharmacist, historian of Bosnian pharmacy and medicine, and a cultural and public worker.

¹⁶ Marko Marković (Zvornik, Feb 27, 1896-Pale, Aug 12, 1961) was a Bosnian writer, cultural worker, and close friend of Isak Samokovlija.

¹⁷ Commonly referred to as the NDH.

¹⁸ A populated area on the railway line leading from Dobojska Kosa to central Bosnia.

¹⁹ Hamid Dizdar (Stolac, Feb 22, 1907-Sarajevo, Jul 17, 1967), a close friend of Isak Samokovlija, Bosnian poet, storyteller, bibliophile, journalist, publicist, ethnologist, cultural and public worker.

²⁰ Dr. Asim Musakadić (Sarajevo, Jan 15, 1894-Sarajevo, Aug 1, 1979). He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Zagreb in the 1926/1927 academic year. He worked as a doctor in Sarajevo. During the Second World War, he was the head of the City Polyclinic in Sarajevo. He collaborated illegally with the National Liberation Movement (commonly referred to as the NOP) in 1941–1945. After the liberation, he worked until his retirement in 1963 at the City Polyclinic in Sarajevo.

²¹ Dr. Ekrem Idrizbegović (Bugojno, Oct 21, 1903-Sarajevo, Feb 3, 1996). He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade in 1930. He was a doctor in Prozor, Foča and Sarajevo. During the Second World War, he worked as a physician at the City Polyclinic in Sarajevo. From 1941 to 1945, he illegally collaborated with the NOP. From April 16, 1945, until the end of the war, he was a member of the NOP. From after the liberation until his retirement in 1964, he worked as the head of the Children's Department of the Military Hospital in Sarajevo.

²² Dr. Ismet-bey Gavrankapetanović (Počitelj, Jan 1, 1877-Sarajevo, Oct 29, 1959), Grand Prefect of the Greater Vrhbosna Parish in Sarajevo (Sep ?, 1941-Oct 1, 1944).

²³ A Sarajevo settlement that today belongs to the municipality of Novi Grad.

²⁴ The Muslim charity “Merhamet” was founded in Sarajevo in 1913 with the aim of helping the poor. The activities of

“Merhamet” depended on the goodwill and solidarity of wealthier individuals, mostly Bosniak merchants, artisans, landowners, scholars, and social activists. By a decision of the authorities, “Merhamet” ceased to operate in 1946. Work was resumed on February 2, 1991. During the Second World War, it played a significant role in caring for exiled and orphaned children from eastern Bosnia.

²⁵ The Institute for Combating Endemic Syphilis in Banja Luka was established by the NDH in 1941 with the aim of finally eradicating this disease from Bosnian villages as quickly as possible. This served as the conceptual foundation for the Institute's legal provisions. However, the main goal of the originator of the idea of founding the Institute was that the Jewish doctors in the NDH who had already been, or were about to be, deported to labor camps or death camps, should be taken as soon as possible to a health facility in Bosnia that would in some way protect them from being killed or deported to concentration camps, without any hope of return.

²⁶ Dr. Stanko Sielski (Gračanica, Jun 18, 1891-Zagreb, Oct 31, 1958). From July 19, 1941 to Aug 25, 1944 he was director of the Institute for Combating Endemic Syphilis in Banja Luka, and then from July 19, 1941 to Aug 25, 1944 he was Dean of Sarajevo's Faculty of Medicine, and from Aug 1, 1944 to May 13, 1945 director of Tuzla's Sanitary and Epidemiological Station (later the Institute of Hygiene) from Feb 1, 1946 to Oct 31, 1958. At the end of 2014, he was posthumously declared Righteous Among the Nations. Although he was proposed as a righteous man from Bosnia and Herzegovina, he was, by a mistake made at Yad Vashem, ranked among the Righteous from the State of Croatia.

²⁷ Dr. Ante Vučetić (Sarajevo, Oct 2, 1899-Zagreb, May 14, 1977). He was one of the initiators of rescuing Jewish doctors from death and the idea of founding the Institute for the Suppression of Endemic Syphilis in Banja Luka in 1941. During the Second World War, he was the director of the Croatian Institute of Hygiene and an associate of the Ministry of Health of the NDH in Zagreb. He received the Israeli award, Righteous Among the Nations.

²⁸ ARS. Isak Samokovlija's file. The service contract was concluded between NDH, represented by the Minister of Health, Dr. Iva Petrić and Dr. Isak Samokovlija on October 28, 1942.

²⁹ ARS. Isak Samokovlija's file. Accounts Court of the Independent State of Croatia Zagreb, January 4, 1945. Number: 6381-P-1944. Subject: Dr. Isak Samokovlija's salary increase.

³⁰ ARS. Isak Samokovlija's file. Document number: 72128-0-1942. Zagreb, November 13, 1942. Appointment of Dr. Isak Samokovlija from Goražde as a contract officer to perform work on the suppression of endemic syphilis at the Institute for Combating Endemic Syphilis in Banja Luka, signed by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr. Nikšić.

³¹ ARS. Isak Samokovlija's file. A written statement by Dr. Isaka Samokovlija was sent on January 1, 1943 to the Institute about taking up the duties of contracted doctor.

³² Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Application against Dr. Isaac Samokovlija. Number 5332. NDH Fund. Box 22.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Archives of Yugoslavia. Ministry of Social Policy and Public Health Collection (Fasc. No. 159). Personal and professional information about Samokovlija (Moše) dr. Isaac. Sarajevo, June 15, 1946.

³⁵ *Pisci izbliza* (Writers up close). Belgrade: Prosvjeta.

³⁶ Museum of Literature and Perform Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Zbirka Isaka Samokovlije 1- 1027; pp 266; 945.

³⁷ The publishing house "Life and Health" of the Ministry of Public Health of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina published the magazine of the same name, as well as brochures and leaflets with health and educational content. The brochures were written by experienced and respected Bosnian doctors of the time, and depending on the title and current pathologies, were printed with a circulation of 2,000 to 10,000 copies..

³⁸ *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health) was the first medical journal in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It began to be published in April 1946 with a circulation of 6,000 copies. Its content was of a popular-health-educational nature. The journal was edited by the Editorial Board of the Ministry of Public Health of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was published regularly four times a year.

³⁹ Mića Branislavljević (Višegrad, Feb 21, 1891 - Sarajevo, Mar 3, 1978). He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Prague on March 8, 1920. He worked as a doctor in Jajce for more than 20 years. Later, in Sarajevo, he performed highly positioned administrative duties. Among other things, he was the head of the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the manager of the Koševo Clinical Hospital.

⁴⁰ Vladimir Čavka (Orašje, Oct 31, 1900 - Belgrade, July 3, 1984). He completed his medical studies in Vienna in 1924. He was a university professor in Zagreb, Belgrade, and Sarajevo. He was the founder of the journal *Medicinski arhiv* and its first editor-in-chief. He was the first president of the Scientific Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) and a member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of BH. His activity in the organization of the ophthalmology service and the eradication of trachoma in BH was significant.

⁴¹ Anto Čičić (Krešev, Apr 1, 1893–Sarajevo, Dec 24, 1958). He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Lviv (Ukraine) in 1925. He was the first director of the High School of Dentistry in Sarajevo, which was founded in 1946.

⁴² Blagoje Kovačević (Grahovo, Montenegro, Mar 25, 1900-Zagreb, Dec 1, 1959). He was buried at the Lav cemetery in Sarajevo. He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade in 1926. He specialized in surgery in Paris and Berlin. Before World War II, he was the head of the Surgical Department of the State Hospital in Sarajevo. From the end of 1944 to the middle of 1945, he was the manager of

the hospital of the 5th Corps of the NOB in Jajce. After the Second World War, he was the head of the Surgical Department of the General State Hospital in Sarajevo. He was one of the founders of the Faculty of Medicine in Sarajevo. He was Dean of the same faculty, president of the Society of Physicians of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a long-time president of the Red Cross of Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was elected a regular member of the Scientific Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1952..

⁴³ Alija Karahasanović (Foča, Sep 27, 1902-Sarajevo, Oct 8, 1978). He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Belgrade in 1931. He specialized in surgery at the Surgical Clinic in Belgrade from 1933 to 1937. During World War II, he was a prisoner of war in Germany. After the liberation, he worked as a surgeon in the General State Hospitals in Sarajevo (1945–1952), Banja Luka (1952–1953), and Tuzla (1954–1961), where he was head of the Surgical Department and manager of the General Hospital. From 1962 until his retirement, he worked at the Health Center in Sarajevo.

⁴⁴ Luka Šimović (Zvirovići, Čapljina municipality, Oct 17, 1895-Sarajevo, Mar 28, 1979). He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Vienna in 1924. Before the beginning of the Second World War, he was appointed manager of the National Health Center in Tuzla, and he held that position until October 1943. After the liberation, in 1945, he was appointed director of the then Hygiene Institute in Sarajevo, and he held that position until the end of 1951. He retired in 1960.

⁴⁵ Asaf Šarac (Sarajevo, Sep 30, 1896-Sarajevo, Dec 15, 1968). He graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Vienna in 1924. From 1937 until the establishment of the NDH, he was the manager of the State Hospital in Sarajevo. During the Second World War, he worked as the head of the Infectious Diseases Department of the Military Hospital in Sarajevo, then as a specialist doctor and head of the Infectious Diseases Department of the General State Hospital in Sarajevo. After the liberation in 1945, he was the head of the Infectious Diseases Department of the General State Hospital in Sarajevo, and after the opening of the Faculty of Medicine in Sarajevo in 1946, he was also the first head of the Clinic for Infectious Diseases.

⁴⁶ Maša Živanović (Delnice, Croatia, Dec 14, 1890-Belgrade, Aug 12, 1960). She graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Vienna in 1916. From 1919 she worked as a children's doctor at the City Infirmary in Sarajevo, and from 1924 to 1941 in the Children's Dispensary, that is, at the Institute for Health for Mothers, Children and Youth in Sarajevo, where she was doctor and director of the institution. During World War II, she lived in Belgrade, where she had a private practice. After liberation in June 1945, she returned to Sarajevo and continued working at the Institute for Health for Mothers, Children and Youth. At the same time, she worked for the Ministry of Public Health of Bosnia and Herzegovina. She was the president of the Women's Movement in Sarajevo from 1924 to 1934.

- ⁴⁷ Miroslav Feldman (Virovitica, Dec 28, 1899–Zagreb, May 30, 1976). A Yugoslav writer, doctor, poet, and participant in the National Liberation War. He began his medical studies in Zagreb in 1919, and in 1921 he continued to study at the Faculty of Medicine in Vienna, from where he graduated in 1924. After the Second World War, from 1945 to 1947, he was head of the health service in the Ministry of Public Health of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- ⁴⁸ Teodor Ilić (Batuša, Bosanski Šamac, Feb 28, 1893-Dubrovnik, Dec 20, 1974). In his high school days, before the First World War, he was a member of “Young Bosnia” and one of its leaders in the Tuzla region. He finished high school in Tuzla in 1914 and medical school in Prague. Between the two wars, he served as a county doctor in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. From 1945 to 1949, he was the assistant minister of health and social policy in the Government of the People’s Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and from 1949 to 1957, when he retired, he was the director of the Institute for Health Education and the head of the Health Education Department of the Central Institute of Hygiene in Sarajevo. After the departure of Dr. Isaka Samokovlija from the Ministry of Public Health, he was the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health).
- ⁴⁹ Bogdan Zimonjić (Sarajevo Feb 2, 1899-Sarajevo Jan 8, 1966). He studied medicine in Vienna. He specialized in internal medicine and radiology in Vienna and Prague. In the period between the two world wars and after the liberation until 1947, he was the head of the Internal Diseases Department of the State Hospital in Sarajevo. During the Second World War, he worked with the NOP. He hid and treated the wounded and sick. He was one of the founders and professors of the Faculty of Medicine and head of the First Internal Diseases Clinic in Sarajevo. He published a significant number of medical articles in the country and abroad. According to the wishes of Dr. Zimonjić, his sister Ljubica Zimonjić, a former Sarajevo teacher, founded the “Dr. Bogdan Zimonjić” Foundation fund. The foundation stopped working in 1992.
- ⁵⁰ *Život i Zdravlje* (Life and Health) - journal for health education. 1946; 1(1). Imprint.
- ⁵¹ Roman Petrović (Donji Vakuf, Oct 1, 1896-Sarajevo, May 25, 1947); Ismet Mujezinović (Tuzla, Dec 2, 1907-Tuzla, Jan 7, 1984).
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