

Emma Burgham

The Eleventh Hour

Dimitrije Mitrinović and his Network. Proceedings of a Symposium at the University of Bradford

Scholars working on the Balkans and more broadly on European intellectual history of the first half of the twentieth century will be interested in an archive and specialised library that opens this autumn. The collection, consisting of books and papers of Dimitrije Mitrinović (1887-1953) is hosted by the University of Bradford, UK. This major new resource thus 'joins' other, more established centres for studying and researching the Balkans in the UK, which include: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL; departments of Russian and Slavonic Studies at several British universities, including Glasgow, Manchester, Nottingham, and Sheffield; more recently established research centres such as Centre for the Study of the Balkans at Goldsmiths College, University of London and a unit on South East Europe at London School of Economics; and projects funded by large external grants, such as The Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor States of the Former Yugoslavia, at the Edinburgh University.

Emma Burgham, the archivist of the Mitrinović Collection, has kindly written a report from a recent symposium to mark the forthcoming opening of the Collection, held at University of Bradford in July this year.

Dr Dejan Djokić

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In July 2015 the Special Collections department at the University of Bradford hosted a symposium as part of a project to catalogue and promote the use of the Mitrinović collection. The event showcased the research potential of the archive and library across a range of subject areas, not least the history of the Balkans.

Dimitrije Mitrinović was a philosopher, social critic and writer born in 1887 in Herzegovina. Largely overlooked today, if he is remembered at all it is for his connection to Gavrilo Princip and involvement in *Mlada Bosna*. However, besides his pan-Yugoslav political activism, Mitrinović was involved in literary, artistic, political and social movements that engaged many of Europe's leading minds from his youth until his death in 1953. He was a leading light behind the *Blutbund* (with Wassily Kandinsky), a columnist with the influential magazine *The New Age*, established the London branch of the International Society for Individual Psychology (Adler Society), the New Europe Group, New Britain Movement, and other organisations.

The Mitrinović collection at Bradford consists of the historical records of, and books collected by, Dimitrije Mitrinović, as well as publications and papers added by his followers and successors. Central to Mitrinović's philosophy was the notion that the works of great thinkers of the past and present should be studied so that their teachings might be applied. His library reflects his interests in philosophy, religion, esoteric and occult ideas, psychology, literature by contemporary writers like John Cowper Powys, politics and society. After Mitrinović's death, the New Atlantis Foundation (now Mitrinović Foundation) was established to continue his work and foster his ideas. One of their first tasks was to oversee the donation of 3,500 publications to the University of Belgrade. In time, Bradford would inherit those works not selected by Belgrade: some 4,500 books and pamphlets, many heavily annotated by Mitrinović.

The archive consists of 31 metres of historical records dating from 1907-2002, including published and unpublished writings by Mitrinović, his letters and notebooks as well as lectures, articles, notes and correspondence created by his circle: the members of the Adler Society, New Europe Group, New Britain Movement, and the New Atlantis Foundation. The current cataloguing project, particularly the creation of in-depth descriptions of the correspondence, has uncovered Mitrinović's extensive networks. For instance, volunteers translating letters written in Serbo-Croatian have revealed the extent to which Mitrinović remained in contact with leading cultural and intellectual figures both within Yugoslavia and in émigré circles in Britain and France. Mitrinović's correspondents included Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, Sveta Vuković, Velizar Godjevac (known as Velizar Godjevatz in the West), Karla Bulovec-Mrak, and Dr Janko Lavrin, amongst others. The letters show how Mitrinović connected British friends such as Alan Porter and Stephen Graham with his contacts in Belgrade. They demonstrate the spread of ideas across Europe, as Mitrinović recommended works on Theosophy to friends in Serbia, discussed Rudolf Steiner or advised correspondents on setting up study groups. This summer's symposium strove to reflect this breadth and depth found in the collection.

The conference keynote speaker Dr Dejan Djokić of Goldsmiths, University of London, focussed on Dimitrije Mitrinović's youth and his background as a Serb in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Placing Mitrinović into his political, cultural and intellectual context, Dr Djokić discussed the figures who constituted the major influences on the young Yugoslav activist. Mitrinović's own role was outlined as author of the manifesto of Young Bosnia, with a drive and energy that earned him the nickname "Mita Dinamika" (from Ivo Andrić, a fellow Young Bosnian and future winner of the Nobel Prize in literature). Djokić noted how from a young age Mitrinović had a gift for securing funding from various backers for his different groups and ventures. This skill would serve him throughout his life, as he always found supporters for his unusual activities and lifestyle.

Mitrinović's focus at this time was the promotion of Yugoslavism, and Dr Djokić demonstrated the influence of the artist Ivan Meštrović on him in this respect. Mitrinović saw Serbs and Croats as a single people, and Meštrović's work as embodying that Yugoslav identity. Djokić discussed wider currents of thought amongst the Balkan intelligentsia and wider society, suggesting that the notion of a Southern Slav identity had a wider appeal than is often claimed. He highlighted Mitrinović's work for the Serbian Legation in London, arguing that the Serbian government's support for Mitrinović suggests that they were not solely focussed on Serbia's interests, but had a wider Yugoslav perspective.

Continuing to explore Mitrinović's earlier career, Professor Mike Hughes of the University of Lancaster examined his relationship with the then well-known journalist and travel writer Stephen Graham. Approaching Mitrinović first as a sort of guru, Graham would ultimately become Mitrinović's brother-in-law, marrying his sister Vera after many years together. This relationship caused tension between the two men, but Hughes strongly argued that an intellectual gulf had already opened up between them. Hughes succinctly discussed the influence of Vladimir Solovyov who inspired Mitrinović and Graham, showing how their shared intellectual background brought them together. Where the two men came to differ was in the degree to which they should be focused on inward, spiritual change versus practical, outward change. As Mitrinović devoted his energies increasingly towards establishing the London branch of the Adler Society, Graham felt that spiritual development was sidelined. This tension between public and private initiatives, spiritual and practical change in the world, would run through

Mitrinović's other ventures and relationships, and was one factor in the collapse of the New Britain Movement.

Returning to the theme of federalism, Dr Gábor Bátonyi of the University of Bradford drew on his previous research on R.W. Seton-Watson and the federalists around the *New Europe Review*, dubbed the "New Europe School" for clarity. Bátonyi examined the archive for evidence of connections between the School, Dimitrije Mitrinović and the New Europe Group Mitrinović established in 1931. Bátonyi's study revealed a multitude of connections, less with Seton-Watson himself than with Henry Wickham Steed (editor of *The Times*), Harold Nicholson and others. Dr Bátonyi also showed how both groups were heavily influenced by, and in contact with, the Czechoslovakian politicians Masaryk and Beneš, particularly after the Munich crisis. Bátonyi's work placed the New Europe Group into the wider context of pre-war federalism in Britain and Europe.

Turning to the collection itself, Emma Burgham, Mitrinović Project Archivist at Bradford, outlined the history of the Mitrinović Library and Archive, noting the New Atlantis Foundation trustees' deep regard for the value of provenance and role in ensuring the survival of the records and books. The paper highlighted the research potential of the collection, listing significant contacts of the group around Mitrinović and some of the numerous subject areas the collection covers. The latter range from intentional communities to the history of psychology, Modernist art to social credit, and embrace diverse figures such as Nobel prize-winning chemist Frederick Soddy, painter Gabriella Münter and political theorist S.G. Hobson. Artists, politicians, writers, philosophers, etc. from across Europe became part of Mitrinović's networks. The paper dwelt on the relationship between complexity and the richness of the collection. Cataloguing a multi-lingual collection where much of the archive cross-refers to, or results from the study of, other parts of the collection is challenging, but this complexity results from and creates the breadth and depth that have become apparent in the course of Bradford's current project.

Dr Tom Steele, Honorary Research Fellow of the University of Glasgow, discussed A.R. Orage (editor of the radical journal *The New Age*) and the Leeds Arts Club, showing the pioneering role the Club played in popularising Nietzscheism and the avant garde. Steele showed how Leeds became a centre for Modernism across the arts, particularly through the influence of Orage, Michael Sadler and Tom Heron. This portrait of the city illustrated why Leeds was an obvious location for Mitrinović's first public lecture in Britain, a talk on the sculptor Ivan Meštrović and the Temple of Kosovo, delivered at the University of Leeds in 1915. Steele showed that the intellectual currents that had seized hold of Orage were the same as those driving Mitrinović. Orage hired Mitrinović as a columnist for *The New Age*, giving Mitrinović a platform for his ideas and Mitrinović in turn acted as Orage's spiritual teacher.

Author and University of Bradford Special Collections Assistant Martin Levy examined Mitrinović's relationship with the German philosopher Erich Gutkind. Levy described how the two met in 1914 after Mitrinović read and was inspired by Gutkind's *Sidereal Birth*. He would later state that if Gutkind had not written the book, he himself would have been compelled to do so himself, so central was it to his own philosophy. Together with Kandinsky they conceived a project to form an intellectual and artistic elite, the Blutbund, which would lead a change in the world. They planned to produce a yearbook as a follow-up to the *Blaue Reiter Almanac*. The First World War intervened and Mitrinović fled to England, taking Gutkind's ideas with him. They would be core reading for all those who studied with him for the rest of his life. Levy spoke about the hardship Gutkind faced when he fled Nazi Germany for America in 1933. He struggled

financially and his ideas never enjoyed the wider currency he might have aspired to, despite a small devoted following amongst New York intellectuals. This lack of popularity led to a discussion about the complexity of Gutkind and Mitrinović's writing, its roots in poetic Russian philosophy, and the possible intentions behind it.

The final speakers of the day were perhaps the most intriguing. John MacDermot and Margaret Shillan are trustees of the Mitrinović Foundation who were raised in the community Mitrinović and his circle established at Richmond, Surrey. MacDermot's talk focused on Mitrinović and the group as collectors of art, discussing their patronage of such well-known figures as Miro, Picasso, Magritte and Roy de Maistre. He outlined how artworks were shared amongst the group. Never bought as an investment, but always chosen for their aesthetic value and meaning, paintings, sculptures, antiquities and craft pieces were given as gifts and in many senses formed a collection belonging to the whole community.

Margaret Shillan's lecture explored Norfolk Lodge: the large house in Richmond which the group acquired in the 1940s and where Mitrinović lived out his days amongst his close friends. After his death, various members of the New Atlantis Foundation continued to live in the house until it was eventually sold. Shillan described how the public rooms functioned, setting the art collection in context and illustrating the sorts of activities in which the Foundation was engaged. MacDermot and Shillan conveyed a sense of the community that formed around Mitrinović, bound to each other through what they termed a "Personal Alliance". Their fascinating accounts of Mitrinović and Norfolk Lodge represented uniquely personal contributions not often seen at an academic event.

The programme of the Eleventh Hour symposium succeeded in reflecting something of the breadth of Mitrinović's life and interests, whilst also drawing out some of the coherence and continuity in this diversity. Themes emerged across the day: the influence of Nietzsche and Russian philosophy, Mitrinović's skill as an operator – building networks and obtaining funding for his ventures, the tensions between personal development and public action for societal change, federalism and devolution, all emerged in various lectures. The range of Mitrinović's interests and activities means that there is much to research in the archive and library, and indeed several speakers are already planning further work.

Bradford's current project is generously funded by the Mitrinović Foundation. The new archive catalogue will be available online from the end of 2015. Researchers are encouraged to contact Special Collections for further information.

Further reading

Palavestra, Predrag (2003, first publ. 1977): *Dogma i utopija Dimitrija Mitrinovića. Počeci srpske književne avangarde* [Dogma and Utopia of Dimitrije Mitrinović. The Beginnings of the Serbian Literary Avant-Garde]. 2. Ed. Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva.

Rigby, Andrew (2006): *Dimitrije Mitrinović. A Biography*. York: Sessions of York.

The Mitrinović Bradford University collection blog: <https://eleventhhourarchive.wordpress.com>

The Mitrinović Foundation website: <http://www.mitrinovic-foundation.org.uk/books>