

Dragoljub Acković, Samudaripen Roma u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj, „Službeni glasnik“, Beograd 2023, 744.

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Review

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With great sadness, upon completing the writing of this review, we received the bitter and sad news of the death of the great researcher, the distinguished historian of the Roma Community during World War II, Prof. Dragoljub Acković, a courageous spokesman for the Serbian Roma community throughout the world and a wonderful man, a personality amazing in his qualities.

We are obliged with sorrow to dedicate the attached article to the memory of Prof. Acković.

May his memory be blessed.

His contribution to the world of science and to the perpetuation of the Gypsy heritage will remain with us forever.

In history there are always areas that no one has yet explored, unknown areas, and these areas are really begging and desperate for a serious researcher who will devote himself to them and discover their secrets and redeem them from their anonymity. Prof. Acković is just such a historian, who exposed the empty space of the study of the Roma in the Jasenovac camp and other Croatian concentration and extermination camps and devoted his entire life to this important subject. Prof. Acković's latest book, as well as all his other books and many articles, is in a sense a masterpiece. It is hard to believe that a future historian will be found who, after such masterful work, will be

able to innovate something in the field of Roma history in the Jasenovac camp or other camps of its kind. This is truly the magnum opus of Prof. Acković, who in his diligent work did not overlook any document, any photograph, which has the potential to shed light on all sides of the case of the arrest, torture, humiliation and murder of the thousands of Roma in Jasenovac. This and only this is how serious, in-depth and authentic research should look. Prof. Acković is an asset to the Serbian nation, to the Roma community, to the history of the Jasenovac camp and above all - an ambassador of the pure, realistic, reliable and fair truth.

Acković has written around twenty books and several hundred articles on the Roma community. Thus, as a true expert of Romology, Prof. Dr. Acković will be the first one to make a comparative analysis of Auschwitz and Donja Gradina, as part of the notorious Jasenovac brutal murder site, having interviewed child survivors of Jasenovac, and gathering experts on death factories, historians, in order to shape it and have it published in first in Serbian, with ambition to translate into English, German, Hebrew and Russian.

The monumental book was published in 2023 by Službeni Glasnik, and its encyclopedic format seems to be the only one worthy of the Great Martyrs of Jasenovac. On 744 pages, Prof. Dr. Acković depicts the crimes committed in Jasenovac against Serbs, Jews and Roma focusing on Roma and Sinti suffering in detail and with historical factography and archive documents. The size of the book is monumental as it is written in encyclopedic format with a plethora of documents, photographs, personal belongings of victims, excerpts of their testimonies, tools of brutal murders, reconstructions of massgraves and posters of the first Memorial Park for Roma and Sinti in the heart of Germany in its capital. The Permanent Exhibition on Roma and Sinti suffering is a reminder on the seize of massive genocide committed during Nazi regime in WWII throughout the whole Europe.

Shortly after coming to power, the Ustaša authorities passed their version of racial laws that were directed against the Roma. In the summer of 1941, however, a decision was made that all Roma should be registered, ie their personal information should be collected and their life style recorded. The mass and systematic persecution of Roma began after 19 May 1942, when a decision was made to round-up all Roma. From May to the end of July 1942, arrests and deportations had taken place. The final destination of the Roma was the Jasenovac camp.

The suffering of Roma and Sinti in WWII was of such large scale, so that facing historical revisionism, he was compelled to work with forensics and other experts and read many testimonies of survivors which helped him immortalize it through a portrayal of brutal methods of torture and bestial murders especially over Roma and Sinti. This tremendous effort of Prof. Acković to do this monumental monography on suffering of Roma and Sinti in Jasenovac and Independent State of Croatia was a big challenge. In this monumental monography Prof. Acković uses statistical data in explaining the number of brutally murdered Roma and Sinti in Jasenovac death camp and in Ustaša Independent State of Croatia.

Truth be told, there are several articles on this topic in the press, and several scientific studies, which one could count on the fingers of one hand. However, the scholarly community should feel a pressing desire and good will to help in this historical endeavor of Prof. Dr. Acković to correct the injustice made to the matter of the suffering of Roma and Sinti in WWII. The „oblivion“ of suffering of the Roma in the NDH, which was created, both intentionally and unintentionally, by many who have dealt with this topic in the past eightdecades.

Also a chapter of note is the one Acković dedicated to the reconstruction of the size and look of the Jasenovac death camp which was about 240 km², or approximately 150 football stadiums, but also to the number of victims showing the first and only model of Jasenovac camp which was constructed by Architectural Faculty of University of Belgrade. The described results of his research and the parallel drawn with the world-notorious death camp of Auschwitz aim to give unequivocal evidence that Jasenovac was the most brutal and most infamous death camp out of the total of 8 that existed in the Second World War.

Acković points out, that revisionist trends tend to qualify Jasenovac as a mere labour camp, which it was not. Therefore he points out that there were 8 extermination camps in WWII: Auschwitz, Chelmno, Belzec, Maydanek, Sobibor, Treblinka, Maly Trostenets and Jasenovac.

Dragoljub Acković was a writer, academic, activist, and politician in Serbia. He was a prominent member of the Roma community in Serbia and has written extensively on the history and identity of the Roma people. Acković, born in 1952, in the village of Osipaonica, Smederevo, in what was then the People's Republic of Serbia in the Federal People's

Republic of Yugoslavia. He attained university degrees in political science and ethnology, took post-graduate studies at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law, and received a doctorate in Romological studies from the United Nations University for Peace. He joined the Association of Writers of Serbia in 1997 and also has been a member of the Commission for the Study of Roma Life and Customs in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. In 2011, he became deputy president of the International Roma Academy of Arts and Sciences and a member of the National Committee for Intangible Culture Heritage in the Serbian ministry of culture, information, and informational society. Acković became a member of the International Commission for the Truth About Jasenovac in 2007. Three years later, he became president of Milan Bulajić's Genocide Research Fund.



Dragoljub Acković, 1952—2025