



Who is Teodor Margo?

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Teodor Margo (Pest, 1816 - Pustasentlerinc, 1896) was a distinguished Hungarian scientist; he introduced histology and Darwinian theory in that country. He was a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences - a corresponding, regular and an honorary member, respectively. As a son of a Serbian, Orthodox priest, he spent his childhood and youth in Serbian surroundings, but after 1853 he completely parted from the people he belonged to by his birth and education, and even changed his religion.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Hungarian science highly appreciates the contribution of Teodor Margo (Budapest, 1816 - Pustasentlerinc, 1896) to the advancement of biological research. The scientific community of his time called him a Hungarian Darwin. Teodor Margo was a corresponding, then a regular and later an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He was also a member of scientific societies of other countries. As a Dean and a Rector of the University of Budapest, he introduced histology as a scientific discipline, and Darwinism as the prevalent methodology in zoological researching. He had contacts with Darwin himself through letters and a visit to his home.

Teodor Margo was a son of a Serbian Orthodox priest Georgije, who was a prominent member of Matica Srpska (Matica Srpska is the Serbian institution for preservation of cultural heritage), and also a devoted subscriber to Serbian books. Like his father, Teodor also became close to Matica. He volunteered as a doctor in Tekelium, at the Serbian students' dormitory in Budapest. In 1853, Margo applied for the position of the professor of natural sciences at the Belgrade Grand School, but Josif Pancic was elected instead of him. Since that moment, he completely separated from Serbian people, keeping only the family relations. He was buried according to the canons of Catholic church. Although he did not have any connections with Serbian science his indirect influence can be found in the work of Jovan Petrovic who was the first propagator of Darwin's theories among the Serbian scientists and the author of a popular zoological handbook.

WHO IS TEODOR MARGO?

Hungarian Biographical Lexicon (1) gives following data about Teodor Margo: MARGO, Tivadar (Budapest, 5th March 1816 - Pustasentlerinc, 5th September 1896), a zoologist, a university professor, a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (corresponding by 1860, regular by 1870, honorary by 1891), one of the first Hungarian Darwinists, and a well known biologist of his time. He studied for a doctor, but also attended the lectures in philosophy and natural sciences at the Universities of Budapest and Vienna. He got his first Ph.D. in philosophy in 1838, in Budapest, and in 1840 his second Ph.D. in the field of medicine. He also received the titles of a surgeon and an obstetrician, in 1841 in Vienna. After spending few years in the Central Hospital in Vienna he was elected for the position of an assistant of Zsigmond Shordan at the Department of Anatomy, University of Budapest. During the war of liberation (1848/49) he was a military doctor. In 1851, he was appointed to the rank of a professor of histology. As a part-time professor, he also gave introductory lectures on natural sciences to medical students. In 1858, he studied the physiology of muscle tissues, in Vienna. For a short period of time he lectured at the Institute for injuries in Kolozvar, but since 1862 and until his death, he was a regular professor of zoology and comparative anatomy at the University of Budapest. His basic researches were within the field of histology. He introduced Darwinism into university lecturing and improved the microscopic methods of investigation. In 1876, he replaced digestive method of work in his zoological researches with a progressive one. He edited the translation of Darwin's *The Origin of a Man*, for which he had written an extensive introduction.

Although the Lexicon gives bibliographic data, including even a picture of Teodor Margo, it does not mention the peak of his university career: he was a Dean of Faculty of Philosophy in 1865/6

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and a Rector in 1880/1, elected on the 100th anniversary of the University.

As a Rector, he had drawn a tremendous attention of the Austrian court, having conferred an honorary doctorate on the archduke Rudolf and having held a remarkable and brilliant speech in Latin in Hradcani, where the residence of the heir to the throne was.

His work was not only praised in scientific literature. Magazines and journals of other contents also published articles about Teodor Margo. One of the most popular and widely read magazines of that time - *Vasárnap Ujság* (Sunday Paper) - printed articles about Margo twice on its front pages (2). The articles also had pictures of Teodor Margo: first time it was a reproduction of drawing by the famous painter Zsigmond Pollák, while the second time it was a photograph taken by Edö Elinger. Both articles highly recognized his work and mentioned that, although still an assistant, Margo had been quoted in a famous book *The Basics of Physiology* written by the Holland physiologist Cornelius Donders. The same information was stated in an article from 1885, published in another magazine and signed by doctor Károly Szigeti (3). When Teodor Margo passed away, the Sunday Paper printed the obituary with biographical sketch and Margo's picture on its cover page (4).

The scientific literature of his time recognized the importance of his work and his contributions to the development of scientific investigation. In the book titled *Emlekezes három hírneves Budapesti egyetemi tanarrol (The Memory of Three Famous Budapest Professors)*, the epithet "Hungarian Darwin" was put next to the title of the chapter dedicated to Margo (5). Worth mentioning is also the publication on Teodor Margo written by Geza Entz, a regular member of Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and read at the plenary meeting of the Academy on 28th March 1898 (6). This paper gives many details about Margo's scientific results, especially those concerning his merits for introducing histology, Darwinian theory and zoology in the university lectures. It also refers to Margo's visit to Istra where he spent several months, studying the fauna of the Adriatic Sea.

Margo was also interested in the philosophy of natural phenomena. He was Darwin's correspondent, as well as his personal acquaintance; he had spent some time at his home as a visitor in 1875. He mentioned this visit in the speech he held in Hungarian Academy and later published in a booklet (7). He was a member of Vienna zoological and botanical society, French zoological society, and Society for improvement of science from Edinburgh. He participated in a scientific journey across the North Sea together with famous biologists like Thomas Henry Huxley and Wyrille Thomson. He was the founder of the Institute for zoology

and comparative anatomy. His works were mostly published in the editions printed by the Academies in Vienna and Budapest. About half of his papers were written in German, the rest in Hungarian and some in Latin as well. He was known as one of the best lecturers of the University of Budapest and gave lectures in Hungarian, but also in Latin and German. Apart from the above-mentioned languages, he also spoke Greek, English, French, Italian, Spanish and his mother tongue, Serbian.

Contrary to other articles, the official publication issued by the Hungarian Academy of Science did not omit to mention that Teodor was a son of a Serbian Orthodox priest Georgije Margo and Katarina Saranda, who originated from an old family from Novi Sad. After many years of voluntary work, Georgije Margo was elected as an honorary member of Matica Srpska in 1839. He was the follower of Sava Tekelija, who asked him to become the supervisor of Tekelianum at the end of 1839. Georgije Margo was closely attached to Matica Srpska and attended its meeting until August 1857. He was a great book admirer; according to the register of Matica Srpska he was subscribed to seventy-four Serbian books until 1816 (8). He was also buying books for his children Teodor, Jovan, Sofia and Julijan; they continued later with this habit. This shows that Teodor Margo was growing in the Serbian surroundings. As a student in 1833, Teodor subscribed to three books, two by Jevstatije Mihajlovic and one by Isidor Stojanović. As a doctor of medicine in 1846, he subscribed to "The King of Dečani", the epic poem by Jovan Subotić, and the next year to the book about the history of Orthodox services by Aleksandar Stojacković. Teodor Margo associated with Serbs. In 1845, he was a doctor in the Tekelian students' dormitory, and it seems that he volunteered without pay until 1853. He dedicated his first book, a dissertation written in Latin on the latent diseases at the clinic in Budapest, which was printed in 1840, to his father's friend Sava Tekelija (9).

According to the Margo's obituary printed in the newspaper *Defender (Branik)* published in Novi Sad (10) he repudiated his Serbian ancestry after not being elected for the position of the professor at the department for natural sciences in Belgrade Grand School. Josif Pančić was appointed instead of him. Margo was embittered so much and gave up from all contacts with Serbs; he became a Hungarian scientist. However, this information cannot be taken as granted. According to the collection of the documents of the Grand School published by Radoš Ljušić (11), there is a record of the application submitted by Pančić to the "newly founded department of the natural history" but no records of Margo's applying for the same position. The original application of Josif Pančić was not preserved but it is mentioned in the

letter of the Chief inspector of the Ministry of Education, Platon Simeonović. Does it mean that Margo presented his application only in words to Mr. Simeonović or Minister Rajko Lesjanin, or that the written application was lost, will probably stay unsolved. The year of Pančić's election, 1853, was the year when Teodor Margo was lost for Serbian culture, but fortunately not the world's science. Pančić and Margo most probably knew each other because they studied medicine at the same time, although Pancic was two years older.

Margo, a successful scientist, a great orator, a polyglot, was a fan of the books of fiction. He was reading the world's classics with enormous admiration. He also liked music. He was a good singer with the voice of a baritone; as a young boy he probably sang in his father's church choir. He played the cello, and later also the guitar and the piano. Ten days before he died, he lost his consciousness and fainted by the side of his piano. He got married quite late, in 1860, with the widow of Lajosz Tognio (Vienna, 1798 - Budapest, 1854) a doctor and professor of balenology. Her name was Anna Albert Montedegoi. They lived in a harmonious marriage. They had no children, but they adopted a daughter of Anna's brother, Maria. We do not know what language was spoken in their house, German or Hungarian. The letters about Margo's journey to Madrid are the only published documents not related to his scientific work. They were written in German (12). Having a catholic wife and a stepdaughter Margo also changed his religion. All Margo's obituaries published in both Hungarian and German newspapers clearly show his shift to Roman Catholicism (13). The obituary given by his widow Maria Anna Albert Montedegoi, her brother Nandor and his daughter Maria was printed in the newspaper *Nemzet* (7th September 1896, p. 3b). Đorđe Radišić, his nephew, and his daughter Jelena, and all the other relatives gave also a death notice. From both obituaries it is obvious that Teodor Margo was buried according to the canons of Catholic Church and consecrated in the chapel at the Kerepesh cemetery, in Budapest. Among others, the funeral was attended by the Minister of education Gyula Wlassics, the Rectors of both of Budapest Universities and many other prominent and respectable people. The Reverend Karoly Kerner said the low mass, and the professor Géza Mihalkovics held a speech. A day after that, a requiem mass was held at the University church. The first rows were covered in black and they were reserved for the family members and friends. Dr. Ivan Purt delivered the service. Margo kept the relationship with the Serbian members of his family. Đorđe Radišić was a son of Teodor's sister Sofia and Vasilije Radisic, a merchant from Budapest. They named their son Georgije (Đorđe) after the priest Georgije. Evidently, none of

priest's children had son to inherit the family name. Sofia and Vasilije Radišić were also faithful subscribers to Serbian books. Perhaps, a few things should be said about the direct influence of Teodor Margo to the Serbian science. Jovan Petrović, (Kovilj, 1841 - Kuvezdin, 1867) the professor of natural sciences at the grammar schools in Sremski Karlovci and Novi Sad, held the first public lecture on Darwin to the Serbian audience in 1863. The lecture was held at Tekelianum, where Teodor Margo was the institutional doctor, although it had been ten years before the time when Jovan Petrovic became the member of this dormitory. However, during his studies of medicine in Budapest Petrović probably attended some of the lectures of Teodor Margo, a regular professor of zoology since 1862. Jovan Petrović published his essay titled "The Horse with the Serbs", in the *Preodnica*, the almanac of Serbian youth in Budapest and the journal of the society with same name. The essay, which was previously read at the meeting of the society, is an unusual and romantic combination of zoological facts and our ethnography, mythology and national tradition. The lecture on Darwin and this essay present a turning point for Petrović. Up to that moment he was inclined towards the literature. He wrote two dramas, one under the title *Jota* was lost, while the other, *Milan Toplica*, was printed in 1862. In 1867, he published a popular handbook *The Science about the Animals*. The cover of this book says that it was done "according to Dr. Alois the Obedient", though it might be quite possible that Petrovic found the scientist in the lecture of Teodor Margo, who published his zoological textbooks a year after Petrović (14). In Hungarian government Secenji's library (No. 61.607) there are Margo's Állattani jegyzetek (*Zoological notes*) but they are undated. They might be his lectures, which Jovan Petrović could have been familiar with. However, this is still a subject to be investigated by an expert, together with the introduction of Darwinism in Serbian science. Spiridon Spiro Brusina (Zadar, 1845 - Zagreb, 1908) and Živko Vukasović are being mentioned among the first Darwinists in Croatian science. According to the existing indications, they were Serbs.

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ENDNOTES

1. Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon II. Budapest; 1969, p. 142-3.
2. Vasárnapi Ujság 1879, No 36. dd. 7th September, p. 569-70 and 1885, No 49. dd. 6th December, p. 781-2.
3. Figyelő (Policeman) 1886, issue XX.

4. Vasárnapi Ujság 1896;37: 605-6.
5. Ládai Győző. Emlékezés három hírneves budapesti egyetemi tanárról (The Memory of Three Famous Budapest Professors), Dr. Margo Tivadar (A Magyar Darwin) Marosrasarhely; 1909. p. 15-27.
6. Entz Géza. Emlékeszéd Margo Tivadart tagról (The Speech of the Memory of the Honorary Member Teodor Margo) Budapest, 1898, p.31. A very similar text, Entz had also published in a renowned magazine Természettudományi Közölny (Messenger for the Natural Sciences), XVII, 1898.
7. It was actually a speech, which he held in the Hungarian Academy about the outside member Charles Darwin on 24th March, 1884, printed in a special booklet of the Series of the Formal Speeches of the Academy, as well as the prologue to the Hungarian translation of the Darwin's book about The Origin of a Man.
8. The data about the subscriptions to the books, I have received from the valuable, enormous card file of the subscribers, which was put in order in Matica Srpska thanks to Vladimir Otavic.
9. Today, this copy is being kept in the Library of Matica Srpska.
10. Branik (Defender) No 101. dd. 27th August / 8th September 1896. The necrology was also written in Nase doba (Our Age) No 66. dd. 28th August / 9th September 1896, but not in Zastava (The Flag).
11. Licej 1838-1863. (Lyceum 1838-1863) Collection of documents, Belgrade, 1988, p. 439. After Acting Director, Mr. Ljuba Popovic was asked to review the register of the fund of the Grand School in the Archive of Serbia, he notified me that there is no trace of Teodor Margo. I would like to thank him most cordially for his efforts.
12. Reiseskizzen. Mitgestelt von Dr Theodor Margot, Professor an der K.K. Universitat Budapest. Budapest Post, 203,204, dd. 7th and 8th September 1853.
13. The necrologies in the following papers were read: Abendblatt des Budapest Lloyd, No 205. dd. 7th September 1896; Nemzet, No 5042. dd. 5th September 1896, the evening edition. I also used three texts in the Nemzet magazine about the death and the funeral of T. Margo: in the issues dd. 7th September (the evening edition), 8th September (the morning edition) and 9th September (the evening edition).
14. Általános állattan (The General Science about the Animals), Budapest, 1868; and A tudományos állattan Kézikönyve (A Booklet of Scientific Zoology), Budapest, 1868.