

SRPSKA KNJIŽEVNA ZADRUGA  
(The Serbian Literary Cooperative)

A brief historical overview

*Srpska književna zadruga* or the Serbian Literary Cooperative is the oldest publishing house and one of the few cultural establishments of the Serbs continuously operating since the 19th century despite all difficulties and trials. At the time of its founding, the *Zadruga* was the first and truly modern publishing house among the Serbs. Today, far from being just a token name of Serbian culture and literature, it remains a publisher with a special place and mission in the cultural area of its people.

*Srpska književna zadruga* was founded on 29 April 1892 on the premises of the Royal Serbian Academy, 15 Brankova Street, in Belgrade. All of its sixteen founding members were prominent figures in the cultural, scientific and political life of late 19th-century Serbia. Elected as its first president was Stojan Novaković, a historian, philologist and diplomat, and as its vice-president, Jovan Jovanović Zmaj, a physician, one of the greatest lyric poets of Serbian Romanticism, and designer of the recognizable SKZ logo featured on all *Zadruga's* editions ever since. Subsequently, too, the *Zadruga* has been run and overseen by some of the foremost among Serbian authors and scholars.

On the very same day, the founders signed the *General Rules* of the *Zadruga*, its founding document. Its twenty-five articles laid down the basis for the *Zadruga's* existence and operation, and defined its membership, i.e. the founders, investors and benefactors, as well as subscription collectors and local supporters. It also provided for a body responsible for managing the affairs of the *Zadruga*. 'The main organ of the *Zadruga*,' according to the *Rules*, was its Assembly, 'which is to meet every year on St. George's Day'. 'The meetings of the Assembly are attended and decisions are made by the members, benefactors and founders.'

The *Rules* state, among other things, that the *Zadruga* is founded 'with the intention to help foster a more appropriate appreciation of select belles-lettres and generally instructive works, and thus create a library for all ranks of people.'

Article 2 of the *Rules* states that the *Zadruga* will seek: 'to prepare critical editions of old and more recent Serbian writers, to publish select belles-lettres and generally useful works, to lead the way in translating and borrowing from

Slavic, foreign and classical literatures, and, on the whole, to help the advancement of domestic literature by facilitating the publication and spread of books by all means at its disposal.' In pursuing these goals, the *Zadruga* will annually publish, 'according to its means', a book series, *Kolo*, which 'cannot consist of fewer than six volumes and less than six signatures' per volume.

The first meeting of the Assembly was held on 22 May 1893, and the first *Kolo* series of seven volumes—the most important series of the *Zadruga* and the most important single series in modern Serbian culture and literature at large—appeared as early as the autumn of 1892 with a print run of 5,000 sets of copies, only to be reprinted the following year, with a 4,000-copy run. The same year, 1893, saw the publication of the second series, with a print run of 7,000 book sets. Over time, the print run increased with the increasing number of subscribers and members not only in Serbia but in all Serb-inhabited areas, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Dalmatia, Montenegro, Vojvodina... The *Zadruga* has carefully maintained this spirit of community, providing, through the book, a living link between the Serb diaspora and the nation's core area.

The *Kolo* series has had a distinctive profile from the outset. Every yearly set of books (excluding the jubilee ones) includes critical editions of both domestic and foreign authors, contemporary works and classics, works of literature and scholarship. It encompasses all genres: novel, short story, poetry, drama, essay, scholarly study (historical, historiographical, ethnological, art-historical...).

Until this year, 2013, the *Zadruga* has released 105 annual editions of the *Kolo* series with over 700 titles in the unchanged book format and design. The difference between the years of its anniversary and the number of yearly book sets is due to irregular publication during and immediately after the First and Second World wars. In continuous publication for 123 years now, the *Kolo* series is one of the oldest, if not the only, living book series in the world.

In 1898 the *Zadruga* launched yet another series—*Zabavnik* (Distraction), which included, and still does, world-famous prose writers. Between the two world wars two more series were started—*Poučnik* (Instructor) in 1925, and *Savremenik* (Contemporary) in 1931, the former including popular treatments of scientific and cultural subject matter, the latter being reserved for younger domestic authors.

When the *Zadruga* resumed its activity after the Second World War, a number of new series was started, the most important of which being *Serbian Literature in One Hundred Volumes*, prepared and published in concert with the Novi Sad-based *Matica srpska*. At this moment, more than ten book series are active.

Over the past decades, with the changing socio-political setting and business conditions, the *Rules* have been modified and amended, but the ownership status, organizational structure and mission of the *Zadruga* have remained the same as established by the founding act of 1892.

The *Zadruga* is run by its members, directly—through its regular annual, and triennial electoral, Assembly meetings, and indirectly—through their elected representatives in the Board of Directors and the Supervisory Board and their executive bodies. The Board of Directors has two branches, Literary and Economic, and a few special committees—for the *Kolo* series, for the membership and for the rules. Most of the *Zadruga's* book series have their own editorial boards assembling highly competent experts on particular literary periods and genres, or on particular areas of scholarship and culture, in order to ensure a rigorous multilevel review process.

Since 1992 the *Zadruga* presents the *Srpska književna zadruga Award for Life's Work*, while an award for a historical novel or a major historical study is presented under the *Dušan Baranin Fund* instituted with the *Zadruga*.

In recognition of its achievement, the *Zadruga* was presented with the Order of St Sava, 1st-Class, the Order of Vuk Karadžić, 1st-Class, the Vuk Award and the Golden Chain-link.

As a publishing house and cultural institution of outstanding national significance, the *Zadruga* was made the subject of a separate law, the *Srpska književna zadruga Act*, passed by the National Assembly of Serbia in May 1997. Under the Act, the legal status of the *Zadruga* is defined, and its cultural activity and significance in today's society acknowledged. In that way, the *Zadruga* joined the few Serbian institutions of culture, such as *Matica srpska*, or the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which are governed under their separate laws.

The mission pursued by the *Zadruga* is to publish the most important works of earlier, popular and contemporary Serbian literature and scholarship, to

acquaint the Serbian readership with important works of world's literature of all periods and, through its broad membership, to play a role in fostering the sense of community and shared values among the Serbs through the cultural and literary merit of the works it is acquainting them with. Its mission, therefore, is as much literary and cultural as it is national and social. Throughout its existence, the *Zadruga* has been a reliable guide to the value, wealth and diversity both of Serbian and world's culture, scholarship, literature and art.