

MONUMENTS AND THEIR NARRATIVES

FIRST WORLD WAR MONUMENTS IN MONTENEGRO

NEBOJŠA ČAGOROVIĆ AND SAŠA KNEŽEVIĆ

This article brings overview of the First World War monuments in Montenegro. Unlike in other allied nations, there are only a few First World War monuments in Montenegro. Although Montenegro fought with the allies, it lost the peace; Montenegro was stripped of its sovereignty by Serbian troops in 1918. After the First World War, the storyline becomes about the “unification” of Montenegro into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and then its submersion into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Keywords: Montenegro, First World War, monument,

Ta članek vsebuje pregled spomenikov prve svetovne vojne v Črni gori. Za razliko od drugih zaveznških narodov je v Črni gori le malo spomenikov, posvečenih prvi svetovni vojni. Čeprav se je Črna gora borila z zavezniki, je izgubila suverenost, saj jo je leta 1918 zavzela srbska vojska. Po prvi svetovni vojni gre za zgodbo o »združitvi« Črne gore v kraljestvo Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev in nato njeni podreditvi Kraljevini Jugoslaviji.

Ključne besede: Črna Gora, prva svetovna vojna, spomeniki

Public monuments serve nations to commemorate their citizens' sacrifices on behalf of the state. This article examines First World War monuments in Montenegro. Unlike in other allied nations, there are only a few First World War monuments in Montenegro. Although Montenegro fought with the allies, it lost the peace; Montenegro was stripped of its sovereignty by Serbian occupying troops in 1918. When a state disappears, there is no one to look after its legacy or its public monuments. In this case, after the First World War, the storyline becomes about the “unification” of Montenegro into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and then its submersion into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. It is only in the recent past that Montenegro reemerged from Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia as an independent state once again, and that it has turned to its history to connect its monuments to its historical past. In 2016, Montenegro celebrated ten years since its independence referendum and one thousand years of statehood.

The story of monuments begins in the coastal town of Sutomore in 1915, where Montenegrin nationalists seized a bust of Franz Joseph, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary, loaded it into a boat, and dumped it into the sea. The following year, one of perpetrators died in an Austrian prisoner-of-war camp in Herceg Novi while his collaborator celebrated the deed as a heroic Montenegrin stance against its Austrian oppressors. Sixty years later, the bust was caught in fishing nets and deposited in the Museum of Bar's warehouse, where for the last thirty years it has been awaiting restoration (see Figure 1).

In 1920, a family monument was erected in Nikšić, close to the steelworks dedicated to the priest Milovan Popović, his son, and his brothers, who died fighting the Austrians in the First World War. It is written as a traditional rhyming song that glorifies “Serbian unification.” It reads: “Oh traveler stop a while in order that brotherly sorrow may pass at

the place in Lukovo where the priest Milovan with eighty comrades were felled by the most poisonous snake against the Serbs: bloodthirsty Austria. His house gave twenty-two priests for the creed to save the Serbian ideal in order to preserve its people's love, unity, and freedom"¹ (see Figure 2).

A less poetic monument stands in Podgorica, in a park that overlooks the Morača River. It simply reads in a dry and factual tone: "Ljubo Jevtić, a volunteer from Srebrenica, Bosnia, shot by the enemy September 16th, 1916." The small plaque honors only the man and not the politics of the war or its aftermath.



Figure 1: Bust of Franz Joseph in Sutomore.

Immediately after the First World War, the authorities of the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes erected the first monument to the fallen in the intra-ethnic struggle for unification in Cetinje. A second cenotaph was designed in 1938 by Ivan Meštrović to memorialize King Alexander "the Unifier" in Cetinje. However, during the Second World War, history turned sharply, creating conditions for rededications of monuments with the changing political tides and the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Montenegrins were keen to revive their own state and, with the help of Italy, smashed both monuments (see Figures 3a, 3b).

During the fight between the Austrians and Montenegrins in 1915, the chapel on Mount Lovćen dedicated to Prince Njegoš was severely damaged. The Belgrade authorities decided to renovate and rename it. When King Alexander visited Cetinje in 1925, he took the opportunity to pardon a group of rebellious Montenegrins, with a view to closing the rift with Belgrade. The new chapel was dedicated, this time to his family saint (see Figures 4a and 4b).

Between the two world wars, the Municipality of Budva erected a plaque at the stone gate to the old city of Budva, which quoted Njegoš: "Future generations will judge the deeds." This monument was dedicated to: "the memory of the arrival of the courageous and victorious Serbian army after their heroic victories in liberating Budva on November 8th,

¹ Text on the monument to the priest Milovan Popović from Dragovoljci: *Oj putniče stani malo nekte bracka mine tuga dje pogibe Pop Milovan na Lukovo s 80 druga od najljuće srpske zmije krvoločne Austrije. 22 sveštenika njegova je kuća dala čuvajući svoju vjeru za spas srpskog ideala da održe svome rodu ljubav, slogu i slobodu. Ovi stub kameniti za uspomen vjekoviti i na njemu dična slika Milovana sveštenika i njegova hrabrog sina Popovića Kostadina. Pop Milovan i Kostad pog. na Lukovo 1918 g. Mirko, Mihailo Miladin na Drinu 1915 g. Podigoše ocu i braći Novo i Boško Popovići 1920 g. Izgradijo Rade Grgurević.*



Figure 2: Monument to the priest Milovan Popović in Nikšić. Photo by N. Čagorović.

1918, Saint Demetrius's Day." However, historians argue that the city had already been liberated by pro-independence guerrillas. After Montenegro regained its independence in 2006, attempts by the city authorities to remove the plaque failed due to pro-Serbian protests. The plaque remains in place.

The struggle by Montenegro to assert its history took a step forward in 1939, with the construction of a monument in Cetinje by sculptor Risto Stijević to commemorate the loss of several hundred Montenegrins at the start of the war in 1914. The men had been recruited from the United States, and their Italian ship hit an Austrian mine in the Albanian port of San Giovanni di Medua (now Shëngjin). In 1974, Montenegro further reclaimed Lovćen and its prince-poet Njegoš with the removal of the King Alexander's chapel from its heights, replaced by a mausoleum designed by Meštrović and dedicated to Njegoš, notwithstanding a strong outcry from Serbian nationalists and the Serbian Orthodox Church.² The fairy of Lovćen was erected to serve as a reminder of Montenegrin patriotism.

This new spirit to erase the symbols of "Serbian unification" was furthered by the occupying Italian governor, Count Serafino Mazzolini, who ordered the removal of symbols from the movement for unification. "Street names that reflected Serbian and Yugoslav symbols were changed. By urgent procedure, King Alexander lost his street and King Nicholas gained one." (Burzanović 2009: 88) A better fate awaited the stone relief of King Peter in Dubrovnik, which ended up in the warehouse of the local museum. It is interesting that the granite pedestal of Juraj Bianchini, a pro-Belgrade politician from Dalmatia, serves as pedestal for Meštrović's sculpture in Meštrović's Split museum.



Figure 3: a) Meštrović's statue of King Alexander in Cetinje; b) Destruction of Meštrović's statue of King Alexander.

² The Serbian Orthodox Church confiscated the property of the abolished Montenegrin Orthodox Church in 1921.



Figure 4: a) Njegoš's chapel destroyed by an Austrian shell; b) Alexander's chapel of Njegoš.

Ironically, the largest monument in Montenegro from the First World War that has not been changed or destroyed is the large relief map of the area of Montenegro that served to support the Austrian military's control over rebellious occupied Montenegro. Although it was created in 1916, in 1948 it was proclaimed a monument. It was restored after the Second World War and now serves as a tourist attraction³.

Under Tito's Yugoslavia, monuments were important for supporting the new ideological construction of federal Yugoslavia. In some cases, older monuments were restored or maintained. For example, Tito was sympathetic toward the historical legacy of the constituent nations of the six republics. According to the Slovenian historian, Jože Pirjevec, Tito opposed the Montenegrin communist leader Milovan Djilas, who had characterized King Nicholas as "an opera character," to which he replied that: "To us, young people, he was a sympathetic character. He was a courageous patriotic Yugoslav." (Pirjevec 2016: 27)

Therefore, in 1989, the transfer of the remains of King Nicholas from exile in San Remo, Italy to Cetinje was not controversial in Yugoslav Titoist discourse, but provoked controversy from the revived Serbian nationalists. In October 1918, two and half years before his death, King Nicholas had appealed to all Yugoslavs and advocated a "confederation" for Yugoslavia—in this way Montenegro would survive as a constituent component. However, in the rapidly changing political tide of 1989, the word *confederation*, which had become an essential condition for Slovenia and Croatia to remain within Yugoslavia, was censored and not mentioned in the speech by Montenegrin President Branko Kostić. The con-federal state that was envisioned by King Nicholas in 1921 was now unthinkable by the Serbian nationalists that had swept into power in Belgrade.

The least controversial were numerous monuments erected to revolutionary sailors of the Austrian fleet in the Bay of Kotor. The leaders were tried in front of a military tribunal and executed. In 1952, Tito used this monument to connect the Yugoslav communists and South Slavic nations to the 1917 October revolution. One monument in Djenovići reads:

In front of this shore on February 1st, 1918 an uprising of sailors in the Austro-Hungarian fleet in the Bay of Kotor broke out under the influence of ideas of the Great October Revolution. In the spirit of proletarian solidarity with it and the struggle against social and national subjugation, sailors of various nationalities, but in large number Slavs, formed a revolutionary committee, put red flags of revolution and freedom on their ships, and started the struggle. The uprising was suppressed on February 2nd, 1918, but it forever decapitated the strength of the

³ Anonymous. 2014. Reljefna karta Crne Gore – Cetinje. *Analitika*. Available at: <http://portalanalitika.me/clanak/230440/reljefna-karta-crne-gore-cetinje>

Austro-Hungarian navy. Its beacon will shed light for future descendants as the beginning of great socialist revolutionary actions among the Slav Souths, from which the flame of the people's revolution would start under the leadership of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and Tito.

There are plaques dedicated to revolutionary sailors on the former jail in Kotor, a city building that had served as a military court, as well in the Kotor city cemetery, where a large granite monument stands embossed with a five-pointed star with a hammer and sickle in the middle (see Figure 5).

In 1966, a large monument was built in Mojkovac to commemorate the last battle by Montenegro against Austria in 1915, in which Montenegro defended Serbian troops that had already withdrawn and suffered enormous losses to its army. The battle is controversial for Montenegrin historians because it was seen as unnecessary. The Serbian troops had already withdrawn. The chief of staff of the Montenegrin army was a Serbian officer, Petar Pešić, who gained that position through a military convention that permitted Serbian officers to command Montenegrin armies. It was seen that he deliberately sacrificed the Montenegrin army so that Montenegrin soldiers would not be exiled. The plaque depicts the victimization of Yugoslav unity: It reads: "To the heroes of the Battle of Mojkovac. They died for freedom and brotherhood. This is why they are alive today" .

A similar plaque at Bojna Njiva, close to Mojkovac, was dedicated to the same battle: "We died in order that Serbia and Montenegro would live." In 2015, the Serbian National Council illegally added a cross to the monument with the blessing of the Serbian Orthodox Church⁴.

The commander of the battle, Janko Vukotić, opted for Serbia against Montenegrin independence. In the 1990s, Mojkovac built a monument to Vukotić in the city center. Commander Vukotić had switched loyalties from King Nicholas to King Alexander and, unlike other Montenegrin officers, retained his rank after the war and was included in the new army. He was buried in a prominent place in the Belgrade cemetery with the inscription: "To the ceremonial aide-de-camp of his Majesty the King, Serdar Janko S. Vukotiću, from a grateful fatherland"⁵.

Janko Vukotić's great-grandchild recently erected a plaque with the words of King Alexander: "Serdar Janko Vukotić, commander of the Battle of Mojkovac: If your army stops the onslaught of the Austro-Hungarian enemy and stops the encirclement of our armies in Kosovo, you and your soldiers will pay the debt forever to Serbdom and Slavdom,

⁴ Anonymous. 2015. Srpski nacionalni savjet stavio krst na spomenik. *Radio i Televizija Crne Gore* (September 18th). Available at: <http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/drustvo/104037/srpski-nacionalni-savjet-stavio-krst-na-spomenik.html>.

⁵ Memorial inscription: *Počasnom adjutantu njegovog veličanstva kralja armijskom generalu serdaru, Janku S. Vukotiću zahvalna otažbina.*

Regent Alexander Karađorđević.” The plaque was placed on a house on a main street in Podgorica where Vukotić never lived.

During Tito’s time, “brotherhood and unity” became a motif even for family graves such as one in Spuž. Family gravestones, private in nature, normally escape official approval so long as their narrative does not unnecessarily irk the official approved version, although family narratives often try to accommodate the current official version of history.⁶ The way a family narrative accommodates the official view of history is seen on a private monument in Spuž erected after the Second World War, where it is written: “Perko G. Četković from Crnci, fighting for the unification of nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia, died at a treacherous green evildoer’s hand on June 17th, 1918. This monument was erected by his nephew and nieces . . .”

From this grave, one can see it was made after the Second World War. It is full of contradictions: “nations and nationalities” were only recognized for the first time in Tito’s Yugoslavia, long after Perko’s death; the “unification” with Serbia occurred in October 1918—again, after Perko had died. The gravestone reads that he was killed by the “green evildoer’s hand,” although the division and armed conflicts between the pro-independence greens and pro-unification whites commenced after his death. Finally, to limit objections to the erection of this monument in a public place, the monument refers only to an unnamed green evildoer.

Sometimes, discontent with the state and its version of history is expressed through death notices and gravestones. For example, a gravestone in Bare Šumanovića (see Figure 6) witnessed how a guerrilla fighter supporting King Nicholas was killed by the new Serbian authorities in 1924. The inscription reads: “While people’s gatherings last, the memories will not stop. This monument is the eternal house of Milovan Perović and his courageous father. He sent his son to the *comitaji* [guerrilla forces] and gave his life for freedom. Milovan, a people’s teacher, died on January 10th, 1924, his father Milutin was shot in 1918, Petar died in 1922. Erected by Nela Perović.”

During the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the ghost of Franz Joseph was revived in the nightmares of Serbian and Montenegrin nationalists, who saw the demands of Slovenia and Croatia for more autonomy belying secret schemes for the revival of the black and yellow monarchy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It also saw the rise of a quest for Montenegro to reclaim its independence. With this new quest began the fashion of establishing a distinct Montenegrin identity through the construction of public monuments.

In the 2006 referendum campaign, in which Montenegrins voted to regain their independence, the “Yes for Independence” campaign celebrated monuments dedicated to

⁶ An example of private monument revision was the removal of partisan stars by families from many graves in Croatia after 1991, and also former JNA soldiers removing *JNA* tattoos through plastic surgery.



Figure 5: Plaque in Djenovići to revolutionary sailors. Photo by N. Čagorović.



Figure 6: Gravestone in Bare Šumanovića. Photo by N. Čagorović.

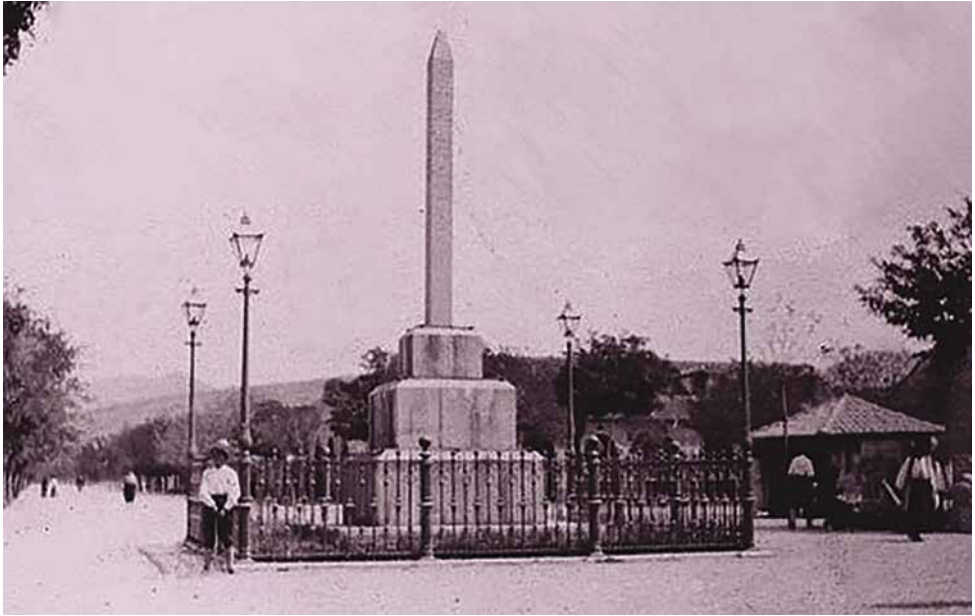


Figure 7: Monument destroyed by unifiers in Podgorica.



Figure 8: King Nicholas Park in Podgorica. *HI* stands for Nicholas I in Cyrillic, and the eight-pointed star is an Azerbaijani symbol.

Montenegrin former statehood and commemorated events that resulted in the loss of its sovereignty in 1918. Two examples revived from history for this purpose were the sinking of a ship full of Montenegrin volunteers off the Albanian coast and the centennial of the Battle of Mojkovac, in which Montenegro lost its army saving the retreating Serbian army.

After Montenegro was dragged into Yugoslavia in 1919, an obelisk in Podgorica dedicated to Prince Mirko, the father of King Nicholas, and fallen soldiers of the war of 1878 was destroyed. Reinstating the narrative on Montenegrin state identity and Serbian occupation, in 2015, after a juried competition, the city of Podgorica commissioned Montenegrin artist Dimitrije Popovic to design and construct a new obelisk for Independence Square (*Trg Nezavisnosti*), the city's main square⁷ (see Figure 7).

Constructing obelisks has become a key milestone of Montenegrin identity in various municipalities to commemorate historical battles. For example, the Municipality of Bar erected an obelisk to commemorate a battle in 1042 at Tudjemili, the Municipality of Danilovgrad built an obelisk to mark the Battle of Martinići in 1796, and the Municipality of Cetinje erected an obelisk to mark a battle at Grahovac in 1858 as well as another one in Bajice to mark the Christmas uprising against Serbian occupation.

As part of the Montenegrin identity-building effort, the government has erected numerous monuments dedicated to King Nicholas, the last reigning sovereign. A favorite among them are newly minted equestrian sculptures of King Nicholas; one replaced a fountain with two swimming nudes in front of the Montenegrin parliament in Podgorica, and another stands in Freedom Square (*Trg Slobode*), the main square in Nikšić.

The international community has now “discovered” Montenegro on the geopolitical map and has joined this narrative. Azerbaijan paid to renovate the central park in Podgorica and dedicated it to King Nicholas together with an Azerbaijani poet (see Figure 8).

In collaboration with the Municipality of Bar, in 2015 the French commemorated one hundred years since the sinking of the French military ship *Dague*, which was transporting food to the Montenegrin army. Using EU discourse on the First World War, the French ambassador to Montenegro said:

The tragedy of the ship resonated greatly in France, England, and US, and that sad event stressed the role of Montenegro in those difficult times from 1915 when the allies' solidarity was a key factor for the revival of our nations

⁷ The name of the main square changed many times, which is reflected in current political discourse. It started as Unification Square after the First World War, and after Second World War it became Ivan Milutinović Square, named after Montenegro's leader in the war. Then, after the collapse of communist Yugoslavia, it became Republic Square, and in 2016 Independence Square.

The friendship of our people is focused towards the future and Europe, which Montenegro is invited to join. In that Europe, former enemies are now allies, and this is the reason why I am especially glad that we are in the company of the ambassador of Austria I thank you for having come in such number to express the strength of French-Montenegrin friendship.

With Montenegro's independence, the government has worked to resurrect and construct its historical monuments. By doing this, Montenegro is reclaiming its past and continuing to forge a distinct identity from Serbia. This, however, is an ongoing struggle, given the ever-growing strength of the Serbian Orthodox Church to perpetuate its view of Montenegro as simply part of the larger Serbian people, which denies Montenegrins their distinct history and character.

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SPOMENIKI IN NJIHOVE PRIPOVEDI. SPOMENIKI PRVE SVETOVNE VOJNE V ČRNI GORI

Priprava o spomenikih se začne v obalnem mestu Sutomore leta 1915, kjer so črnogorski nacionalisti doprsni kip Franca Jožefa, avstrijskega cesarja in madžarskega kralja, naložili v čoln in ga odnesli v morje. Leta 1920 je bil v Nikšiću postavljen družinski spomenik duhovniku Milovanu Popoviću, ki je v prvi svetovni vojni umrl v boju proti Avstrijcem.

Takoj po prvi svetovni vojni so oblasti novo ustanovljene Kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev postavile prvi spomenik padlim v medetničnem boju za združitev na Cetinju. Črnogorci so želeli oživiti svojo državo in so s pomočjo Italije razbili oba spomenika.

Vsekakor je ironično, da ni bil spremenjen ali uničen največji pomnik v Črni gori iz prve svetovne vojne; gre za velik relief območja Črne gore, ki je služil avstrijskemu vojaškemu nadzoru nad uporniško Črno goro. Leta 1966 so v Mojkovcu zgradili spomenik, ki je spominjal na zadnjo bitko Črnogorcev proti Avstriji leta 1915, ko so branili srbske enote, ki so se umikale na jug. Podobna plošča na Bojni Njivi blizu Mojkovca je bila posvečena isti bitki: »Umrli smo, da bi živeli Srbija in Črna gora.« Srbski nacionalni svet je leta 2015 nezakonito dodal križ spomeniku s blagoslovom srbske pravoslavne cerkve.

Pomemben segment referendumske kampanje »Da za neodvisnost« leta 2006, v kateri so Črnogorci glasovali za ponovno pridobitev svoje neodvisnosti, so bili tudi spomeniki, posvečeni nekdanji državni Črni gori, in dogodkom, ki so povzročili izgubo suverenosti leta 1918. Vlada je kot del prizadevanj za graditev identitete Črne gore postavila številne spomenike, posvečene kralju Nikolaju, zadnjem vladajočemu vladarju. Z neodvisnostjo Črne gore si je vlada prizadevala za obnovo in gradnjo zgodovinskih spomenikov.

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