

# Monuments and Commemorations of Fallen Soldiers from the First World War in Montenegro, 1918-1941

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary scholarship conventionally divides cultures of memory of the First World War in the interwar period of Europe into two main groups. The “culture of victory” was predominant in those countries that emerged victorious from the war, including France, Great Britain, and Italy. It was also typical of states that owed their independence to the break-up of old multi-national empires and the new Versailles order, such as Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The “culture of defeat,” on the other hand, was characteristic of countries that ended up on the losing side after the war, such as Germany and Hungary. Collective feelings of defeat were only prolonged and excavated by post-war territorial losses, partial limitations of state sovereignty, reparations, and other measures often perceived as unjust and humiliating.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the Kingdom of Montenegro was an independent European state that entered the conflict on the side of allied Serbia and the Entente. In January 1916, the country was occupied by Austria-Hungary, shortly after the empire occupied neighboring Serbia. As an integral part of the new Yugoslav state established in 1918, Montenegro appears to belong to those lands where the memory of the First World War during the interwar period developed under the ruling paradigm of the culture of victory. However, as historian John Paul Newman argues, in Central and Southeastern Europe, “the culture of victory was not an exact fit (...): it masked the far more ambivalent legacies of the war in this region” (Newman 2015: 11). In the nominally “victorious lands” such as Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (the Kingdom of Yugoslavia since 1929), certain victims and their perceived collective contributions to victory and liberation (typically members of the largest, politically dominant, or “state-building” nations) were glorified at the expense of others that tended to be purposefully marginalised or simply overlooked in the official discourse. Even in states that largely owed their existence to the outcome of the First World War and the new Versailles order, not every citizen necessarily felt as a victor: “...Yugoslav veterans, be they Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, or members of the state’s many national minorities, may have served in the Serbian or Montenegrin armies alongside the Allies, or in the Austro-Hungarian army. Underneath the post-1918 triumphalism, various, often competing, notions of the meaning of the war sacrifice coexisted...” concludes Newman (Newman 2015: 11).

The official culture of memory of the interwar Yugoslav monarchy gave a central place to the narrative of the Serbian army’s heroism, sacrifice, and decisive contribution, which (according to the official interpretation) liberated not only the Serbs but also other Yugoslavs at the end of the First World War (Jezernik 2018: 140). The case of the memory of fallen soldiers from the First World War in interwar Montenegro, which represented a peripheral zone of the new Yugoslav state, provides abundant material for observations on marginalization, elimination from collective memory, and poorly developed culture of memory. At the same time, the Montenegrin case, which is closely linked to the wider Serb narrative of the First World War that occupied a central place in the interwar Yugoslav state, reveals, apart from specific features, some wider trends and tendencies that shed light on national politics and the culture of memory at the Yugoslav level. Montenegro, as an independent state with its own army, state administration, and dynasty – and a close military and political ally of Serbia

from the first days of the First World War – had its own, specific experience of the war, its own heroes, fateful battles, its own victories, defeats, and traumas. In the official interwar narrative, the memory of the Montenegrin experience of the conflict and the perceived contribution of the Montenegrin army to the “common cause” (*opšta stvar*) of Serb and Yugoslav unification was systematically marginalised. In line with the ruling centralist and unitarist tendencies, positive references to an independent Montenegrin political history and distinct collective identity were considered unwelcome and potentially subversive, given the internal fragility of the new state. Montenegro’s participation in the First World War was officially treated as an integral part of a wider narrative of Serbian liberation and unification led by Serbia, its army, and its dynasty.

Montenegro did not exist as a separate administrative unit under the centralist Yugoslav monarchy of the Karađorđević dynasty. Territories acquired by the Kingdom of Montenegro in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 were administratively detached and placed under direct Serbian administration soon after unification (Rastoder 2006: 179). At the beginning of the dictatorship of King Aleksandar, who changed the country’s name into Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929, echoing the new official state ideology of integral Yugoslavism, the new administration made the entire territory of present-day Montenegro a part of the new Zeta Banovina (one of the total nine banovinas, mostly named after major rivers), which also encompassed some neighboring territories such as parts of southern Dalmatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, southern and western Serbia, Kosovo and Metohija (Rastoder 2015: 12–5). The Zeta Banovina covered 30,741 square kilometers, or 12,4% of the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and was formed around the former Kingdom of Montenegro, whose historical and cultural heritage was seen as an integral part of the larger Serbian narrative and Serbian “ethnic space.” As such, despite permanent social discontent and a recent history of resistance against centralism, including armed struggle after the First World War and the unconditional union with Serbia, Montenegro was still considered a relatively promising area for the state-sponsored dissemination of Yugoslav patriotism (Babović Raspopović 2002: 66-67).

This contribution aims to analyze and explain the main features of the culture of memory of the First World War in interwar Montenegro by focusing on the most important monuments and commemorations of fallen soldiers erected during this period (1918-1941). It will first focus on the changing political and economic context of building monuments and organizing commemorations for fallen soldiers in

Montenegro. The main focus will be on the largest, but also the last, commemorations held in Montenegro in the final months of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia's existence in 1940 reflecting on two major events: the sinking of the Brindisi ship carrying Montenegrin volunteers, commemorated in Cetinje, and the Battle of Mojkovac, commemorated successively in Cetinje and Mojkovac. In the Montenegrin case, major events and victims of the First World War were properly commemorated for the first time only after the Second World War was already raging throughout much of Europe.

#### STATE POLITICS AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN MONTENEGRO IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

Montenegro was often labelled as a “passive region” in the period's discourse, sometimes even as “Yugoslav Siberia” and “Yugoslav Tasmania,” especially by critically-minded authors who were convinced that the main culprit for Montenegro's peripheral position and marginalization in the unified Yugoslav state was the ruling regime's insufficient care for the region, if not outright political subjugation and economic exploitation of this land by Belgrade. In the 1920s, the state-sponsored infrastructure that stimulated cultural and public life, including the building of monuments and the culture of memory of the First World War, was practically inexistent in Montenegro. In the first decade after unification, there were no funds in the state budget destined for such purposes. Particularly during the turbulent period immediately after the First World War, the state administration focused on security problems and the establishment of law and order (Rastoder 2006: 34). After the introduction of King Aleksandar's royal dictatorship on January 6, 1929, the territory of present-day Montenegro formed the backbone of a new administrative and political unit – the Zeta Banovina or Province (*Zetska banovina*), with Cetinje as its political and administrative capital. After the assassination of King Aleksandar in October 1934, the government of Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović (1935–1939) gradually decreased the previous stress on the concept of integral Yugoslavism characteristic for the period of royal dictatorship in the years 1929–1934. The pragmatic acceptance of different historical experiences of individual Yugoslav nations and regions resulted in a partial decentralization, which began to be reflected in the sphere of cultural and public life, including the culture of memory. In the words of historian Senka Babović-Raspopović: “While in the earlier period, almost all basic questions of

educational and cultural character were dependent on the decisions of the highest political leadership, from now on, they found themselves more or less under the jurisdiction of lower administrative units – the administrations of banovinas. (...) Although the Yugoslav orientation in the work of cultural institutions continued to prevail, at the same time, there were also cultural activities drawing on tradition and cultural specificities of Montenegro and other regions of the Zeta Banovina.” The first attempts by the Banovina administration to institutionalise the care and aid for the affirmation of historical and cultural memory and heritage date back to Stojadinović’s tenure as Prime Minister. The research of historian Senka Babović Raspopović revealed that funds for the publication of books and magazines, work of cultural associations, and similar needs first appear in the budget of the Zeta Banovina in the mid-1930s. The budget for the years 1937–38 included financial help specifically planned for committees for the completion of churches, monuments, and other similar needs (Babović Raspopović 2002: 305–6).

Political changes after the royal dictatorship of King Aleksandar combined with certain liberalisation in cultural politics opened the space for initiatives calling for the building of memorials to two major events associated with Montenegrin participation in the First World War – the tragic death of over four hundred Montenegrin and other South Slavic volunteers in a shipwreck near the Albanian coast and the heroic battle of the Montenegrin army at Mojkovac. Both events occurred almost simultaneously at the beginning of January 1916, when neighboring allied Serbia was already occupied. Montenegro, small, exhausted, and deprived of the help of its faraway allies such as France, Italy, and Russia, was forced to deal with the new reality of looming military defeat and occupation in the wake of the massive Austro-Hungarian offensive on Mount Lovćen on its own. Both commemorations of these events took place in 1940, in the shadow of the increasingly disturbing news of the Second World War engulfing Europe, only several months before the Kingdom of Yugoslavia’s military defeat, occupation, and territorial division in the spring of 1941.

## MONUMENT TO THE VICTIMS OF THE MEDUA TRAGEDY IN CETINJE

In the morning of January 6, 1916, the Italian steamboat Brindisi, carrying several hundred volunteers from Montenegro and neighboring

South Slavic lands, collided with a mine and quickly sank near the North-Albanian coast, which was under the control of the Serbian and Montenegrin armies at the time. The event became known as the Medua Tragedy (*Medovska tragedija*). It was named after the nearest port, known as Medova in South Slavic languages, Shëngjin in Albanian, and San Giovanni di Medua in Italian (Šístek 2018). I use the name Medua in this contribution, an anglicized version of the Italian name close to the South Slavic version Medova that is most often found in Montenegrin sources.



Fig. 1: *Lovčenska vila*, Risto Stijević: The Fairy of Lovćen (1939). Monument to the victims of the Medua Tragedy (1916), unveiled in Cetinje on July 6, 1940 (photo F. Šístek).

After the outbreak of the First World War in the summer of 1914, thousands of Montenegrin citizens, joined by volunteers from South Slavic lands neighboring Montenegro, especially the Bay of Cattaro (*Boka Kotorska*), Montenegrin Littoral (*Crnogorsko Primorje*), and Herzegovina, decided to return to Montenegro for patriotic reasons. Several thousands of them managed to reach the Balkan shores and join the ranks of the Montenegrin army. In December 1915, another group of some 600 volunteers from North America sailed from Canada to southern Italy as part of an organised transport. Most of them continued their voyage across the Adriatic aboard the steamboat Brindisi. Within eyesight of the Balkan shores, the ship collided with a mine and sank in a matter of minutes. According to current scholarship, over 400 passengers lost their lives (389 volunteers and 12 members of the Czech-American Red Cross mission). The lives of 150 volunteers and two members of the Red Cross mission were saved. Given the sheer number of victims, the sinking of the Brindisi steamboat is the largest single loss of human life on sea not just in the history of Montenegro but in the entire history of South Slavic peoples (Špadijer 2016: 63).

The memory of the Medua Tragedy was particularly cultivated among Montenegrin emigrants in North America. Their efforts to preserve the memory of the volunteers who perished aboard the Brindisi often had a very personal note, as they were remembering their own relatives, friends, and countrymen of similar life trajectories. The first call for the erection of a monument in Cetinje to the Medua Tragedy victims was formulated in California. On September 22, 1930, Miloš F. Radunović from Sacramento, whose brother Veliša and cousin Boško died at Medua, published an article in the journal *Američki Srbobran* entitled “The Spirit of Gratitude” (*Duh zahvalnosti*) (Radunović 1939: 6–7). Radunović proposed that a memorial to the “sunken volunteers” (*potopljeni dobrovoljci*) be built in the vicinity of the Cetinje Monastery and their memory personalised by inscribing all of their names on it.

The idea strongly resonated among Montenegrin emigrants. In 1931, The Brotherly Volunteer Association of America and Canada for the Erection of a Monument in Cetinje to the Volunteers Sunken by San Giovanni di Medua in 1915 (*Bratsko dobrovoljačko udruženje širom Amerike i Kanade za podizanje spomenika na Cetinju potopljenim dobrovoljcima pod San Giovanni di Medua 1915*) was founded in Sacramento (the year 1915 referred to the date of the shipwreck according the old Julian calendar). Local committees were formed “all across America and Canada” to stimulate and coordinate fundraising. On

March 22, 1931, the newspaper *Slobodna misao* published in Nikšić, Montenegro, printed a letter from the North American committee whose authors encouraged their “brothers in the homeland” to join their financial efforts (Borović 2016: 127). The committee also wrote to the *Ban* (governor) of the Zeta Banovina Aleksa Stanišić. On March 5, 1933, Stanišić founded the Banovina Committee for the Erection of a Monument to the Volunteers Sunken by Medua (*Banovinski odbor za podizanje spomenika potopljenim dobrovoljcima pod Medovom*) headed by Petar Martinović, former brigadier of the Montenegrin army and retired general of the Yugoslav army. However, according to researcher Gordana Borović, it seemed “that quarrels among the members of the Banovina Committee arose. As a consequence, at the initiative of the new Ban Mujo Sočica and under his official auspices, the Banovina Committee was personally reconstructed at a new official meeting. Respectable personalities from Montenegrin public life, including physicians, bankers, high-ranking officers, and others, joined the Committee. Lieutenant Colonel Risto Stojanović was elected as its new chairman” (Borović 2016: 121).

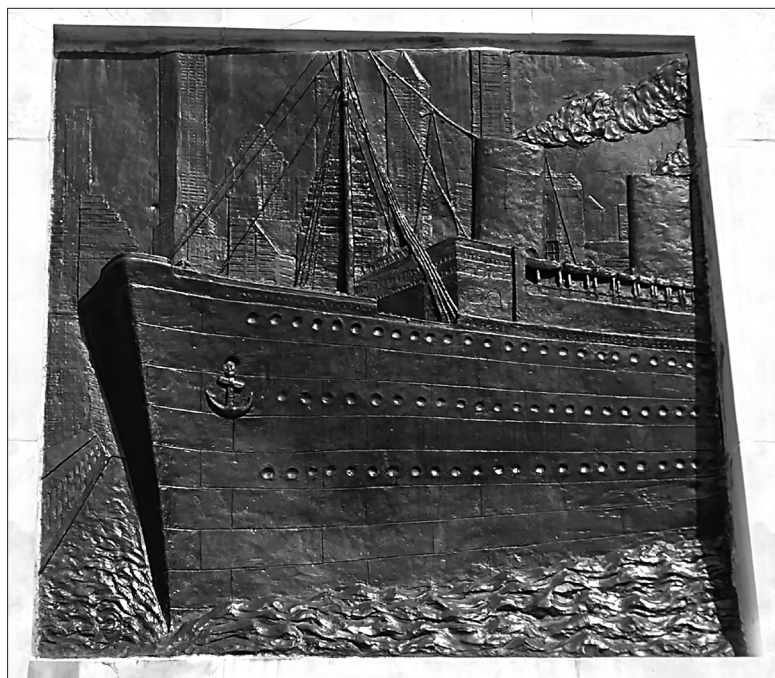


Fig. 2: Risto Stijović: Montenegrin volunteers sailing from America to help their motherland. Relief from the monument to the victims of the Medua Tragedy in Cetinje (photo F.ŠišteK).

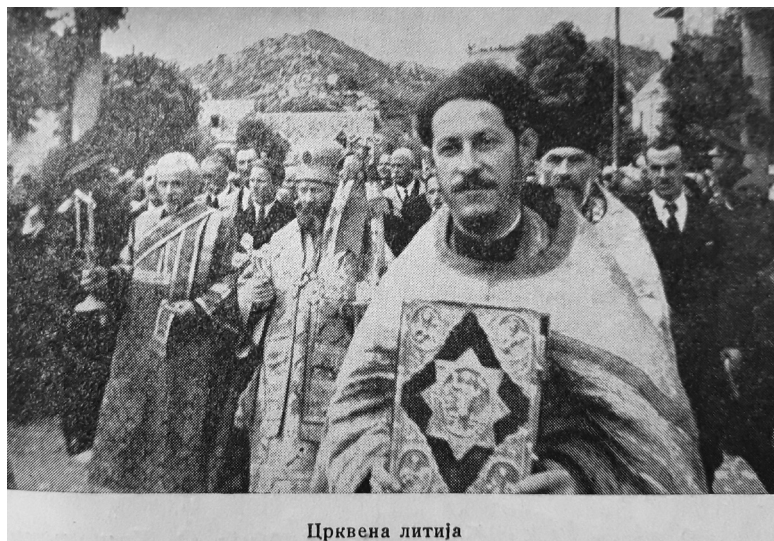


For several years, the official preparations for the erection of the monument dragged on under several successive Bans without tangible results.<sup>1</sup> The first mention signalling that the project was not indeed forgotten appeared in the newspaper *Zetski glasnik* on May 1, 1937: “In accordance with the wishes of our brothers from America, Ban Ivanišević was asked to become the official patron of the Committee for the monument’s erection. The American Committee of our expatriates will decide whether the monument will be executed by Risto Stijović from Belgrade or Marijan Matijević from Cetinje” (Borović 2016: 129–30). Matijević was a Croatian sculptor who taught at a primary school in Cetinje in the years 1934–1937. Stijović was a Montenegrin sculptor who was born in Podgorica and had lived in Serbia since 1912. He had already distinguished himself as an artist and author of several public monuments. On October 3, 1937, the newspaper *Slobodna misao* published the news that “the work of Risto Stijović was selected. The monument represents the Fairy of Lovćen (*lovćenska vila*) which in a gesture of an avenger is holding the yatagan in her right hand and bringing forth a laurel wreath with her left hand.” The names of all the deceased volunteers were to be engraved on the monument in golden letters (Borović 2016: 130). (The idea of personalising the victims in this way was later abandoned. Their names appeared instead in the memorial publication – *Spomenica*.) Stijović visited Cetinje in 1937 to coordinate the preliminary works together with members of the Banovina Committee. A location in the town centre was chosen, not in the vicinity of the Cetinje Monastery as Radunović had proposed in his initial text but in front of the Vlach Church (*Vlaška crkva*). The church dated back to the fifteenth century, making it the oldest in Cetinje, and was encircled by a fence made of “Turkish guns” that came into the possession of the Montenegrins as war booty during the last phase of what they perceived as national liberation wars against the Ottoman empire (1858–1878).

The final preparations for the erection of the monument dragged on again for some time. At the beginning of March 1939, the newspaper *Slobodna misao* announced that the ceremonial unveiling of the monument would take place “by May 1 of this year at the latest” and accompanied the text with a photograph of the monument’s model (*Spomen potopljenim dobrovoljcima pod Medovom 1915. Godine; Zetski glasnik*, March 4, 1939: 4). In mid-May, the same newspaper informed its readers that it was too early to speculate about the

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**1** Ban Aleksa Stanišić (†1934) and the first Chairman of the Committee General Petar Martinović (†1940) did not live to see the unveiling of the monument.



Црквена литија

Fig. 3: *Crkvena litija*, Christian Orthodox Procession before the unveiling of the Fairy of Lovćen monument, Cetinje, July 6, 1940.

exact date of the unveiling because it was still unfinished (Otkrivanje spomenika potopljenim dobrovoljcima kod Medove; *Slobodna misao*, May 13, 1939: 3). Finally, on April 20, 1940, it was announced that the monument will be unveiled on the Day of Ascension (*Spasov dan*)—July 6. That day marked the anniversary of the Battle of Grahovac from 1858, one of the most famous Montenegrin victories in their struggles against the Ottomans. There is no evidence in our sources regarding the reasons for this decision. The exact anniversary, which falls on January 6, was probably less suitable for reasons of weather conditions: Cetinje was known for its severe winters and abundant snowfall. The proclamation released by the Cetinje Committee gives the impression that the organisers wanted to ensure that, apart from high-ranking officials, the “people’s masses” (*narodne mase*) would also be present at the commemoration. They particularly appealed to “participants of the Medua Tragedy who are still alive, the mothers, sons, wives, sisters, and friends of those who had sunk to gather around this monument and pay their last respects to the fallen victims.” The memorial was presented as a symbolical grave: “Since they could not visit the graves of those reposing somewhere in the dark depths of the sea, they are all invited to gather around this common memorial-grave (*zajednički spomen-grob*) in which they can see the shadows of their deceased from now on.” (Otkrivanje spomenika potopljenim kod Medove; *Zetski glasnik*, April 20, 1940: 2).

We can distinguish between two major types of representations of the dead volunteers' identity in the interwar public discourse. While some authors felt compelled to stress the volunteers' Yugoslav identity and sacrifices for the "higher" ideals of Serb and Yugoslav unity, others stressed that they came from Montenegro and the neighbouring Dinaric areas. Many believed Montenegrins' contributions and sacrifices in the First World War and the process of Yugoslav unification were unfairly overlooked in the interwar Yugoslav state. In the first years following unification, centralist ideology and politics dominated the public discourse in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and even more so in Montenegro, where the new centralist administration and security forces encountered serious political as well as armed opposition to the unconditional union. In an article from January 22, 1923, the newspaper *Slobodna misao* presented the Medua Tragedy as "part of Serbian sacrifice" (*diosrpske žrtve*) offered on the "altar of unification." As for the volunteers' origin, the article stated that they "came from all regions of our present homeland" (Borović 2016: 126–27). In March 1939, one could still come across the claim that they came "from all regions of our present large homeland" (Spomen potopljenim dobrovoljcima pod Medovom 1915. Godine; *Zetski glasnik*, March 4, 1939: 4.) However, in texts and appeals for financial support, one frequently finds references to the volunteers' Montenegrin origin, the noteworthy Montenegrin contribution to "the liberation and unification," Montenegrin honour, and Montenegrin pride. In the article entitled "Appeal to Montenegrins" (*Jedan apel Crnogorcima*) published in the newspaper *Lovčenski odjek* on May 11, 1934, the author called for "our people to contribute to the erection of the monument to fallen Montenegrins who rushed home to help their fatherland in its hour of need" (Borović 2016: 129). According to *Slobodna misao* of April 27, 1940, instead of volunteers from all Yugoslav regions, the "martyrs" of Medua were identified as "our countrymen from all the regions of Montenegro and present-day Zeta Banovina" (Borović 2016: 133). According to the proclamation of the Banovina Committee for the Erection of the Monument to the Volunteers Sunken by Medua–Cetinje (*Banovinski odbor za podizanje spomenika potopljenim dobrovoljcima pod Medovom – Cetinje*) of May 18, 1940, released almost a decade after the first appeal of Miloš F. Radunović from Sacramento announced the final date of the ceremonial unveiling of the Fairy of Lovćen, the volunteers were described as "three hundred of our kingdom's best-chosen sons from all tribes" (Otkrivanje spomenika potopljenim pod Medovom; *Zetski glasnik*, May 18,

1940: 2). In the proclamation of the same Committee from June 1, 1940, we find “three hundred chosen Yugoslavs, united in spirit and heart, who rushed from faraway America so as to, in the last hour, save their unjustly attacked fatherland” (Proglas odbora za podizanje spomenika; *Zetski glasnik*, June 1, 1940: 2) In a historical overview published several days before the commemoration, the greatest attention was paid to the individual who differed the most, a foreign volunteer from the most faraway place: “The great majority of these volunteers were from Montenegro, and apart from them, they came from various Yugoslav regions, from Czechia, Slovakia, and there was even a young Russian among them who was given the Serbian flag to unfurl it on free Serb land and carry it in front of them from battle to battle, from victory to victory” (Meduanska katastrofa; *Zetski glasnik*, June 1, 1940: 1; Vukmanović 1939: 32–4.) Finally, in the press release about the commemoration of the monument, the origin and identity of the victims of the shipwreck from January 6, 1916, was described as follows: “[A]mong them, there were, apart from Montenegrins, volunteers from the Littoral (*Primorci*), Dalmatia, Herzegovina, Lika, and other Yugoslav regions (...) There was also a Czech medical mission travelling along with them with a large amount of medical material. They rushed from faraway America to help the army of Montenegro and sacrifice their lives for the freedom and unification of the Yugoslavs.” (Svečano otkrivanje spomenika potoplojenim pod Medovom, *Zetski glasnik*, 8. jun 1940: 1.)



Fig. 4: View of the main podium during the commemoration of the volunteers perished at Medua, Cetinje, July 6, 1940.

The unveiling of the Fairy of Lovćen memorial in Cetinje on June 6, 1940, was the largest commemoration in interwar Montenegro since the reburial of the most revered Montenegrin national poet and ruler Prince-Bishop Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813-1851) on Mount Lovćen in September 1925 in the presence of the late King Aleksandar. "The town had a rare festive look. It was decorated with flags and triumphal arches" (Na Cetinju juće osvećen spomenik; *Politika*, June 7, 1940: 12) Apart from remembering the victims of the shipwreck, who were presented as protectors of the fatherland and fighters for Yugoslav unification, the commemoration honored the volunteers in general as a specific group of fallen soldiers. The commemoration was organised by the Banovina administration and was also attended by the army. Although the contribution of emigrants from North America to the monument's construction was periodically mentioned, their representatives were not present. The Nazi Blitzkrieg against France, whose defeat seemed increasingly imminent in the first days of June 1940, had just entered its final phase. Despite the festive atmosphere in the streets of Cetinje, the erection of the monument to volunteers from the First World War was organised in the shadow of the Second World War.

The commemoration began with an Orthodox Christian Liturgy in the Cetinje Monastery presided over by Bishop Joanikije of Budimlje, followed by an assembly of the Sokol Association of Cetinje in the National Theater. A church procession headed by Bishop Joanikije, envoy of the Serbian Orthodox Church Patriarch Gavrilo, marched from the monastery towards the new monument. Joanikije and the clergy then remained seated in front of the veiled monument, surrounded by the honorary guard composed of soldiers of the Cetinje garrison. Representatives of the state and Banovina institutions, including the Yugoslav Minister of Interior Stanoje Milačić, Ban of Zeta Božidar Krstić, personal envoy of King Petar II General Antonije Stošić, and other speakers, stood at the stand, decorated with kilims (ćilim), flags, and flowers. In front of the monument, the Bishop held a memorial service (*parastos*) for the warriors who fell in the battle of Grahovac on June 6, 1858, and for the volunteers sunken by Medua on January 6, 1916. The honor of personally unveiling the monument was granted to General Antonije Stošić, commander of the Zeta Army Division, who "descended from the stand, approached the monument and pulled the silk tricolor. The curtain covering the monument fell, revealing the imposing figure of the Fairy of Lovćen with the hanjar raised high and the wreath she is laying on the blue tomb. A truly successful work of our countryman and recognised artist Mr Risto

Stijović. The cry: Glory to the sunken heroes! /*Slava potopljenim herojima*/, emerging from thousands of throats, while the troops of the Cetinje garrison magnified the occasion with festive shooting” (Svečano otkrivanje spomenika potoplojenim pod Medovom; *Zetski glasnik*, June 8, 1940: 1) The inscription on the monument highlighted the emigrants’ key contribution to the project: “To the volunteers sunken by Medua, erected by the Yugoslavs of America and Canada 1939” (*Potopljenim dobrovoljcima pod Medovom podigoše Jugosloveni iz Amerike i Kanade 1939*) (Vukmanović 1939: 35-42).

The first wreath was not conventionally laid down but fell from the sky, the work of Yugoslav military aviation. Two planes, “two guardians of the Yugoslav sky,” took part in this spectacular performance: “Flying over Cetinje, the planes made several circles, always descending lower and lower, until they parted in one moment and continued the free flight on their own. While one plane rose high above, the other approached the monument and threw the laurel wreath, which was greeted with open arms by soldiers from the First World War, Mr Marko Plamenac and Mr Novica Bošković, heads of the Banovina administration. They picked up the wreath, which had fallen close to the monument, and placed it under the pedestal. The brave performance of the victor of the sky (*pobjednik neba*), who flew above the monument once more and veering to the right sent his greeting in respect of the martyrs and heroes commemorated by the monument, was met with long-lasting cheers in honour of our army and our aviation.” (Svečano otkrivanje spomenika potopljenim pod Medovom; *Zetski glasnik*, June 8, 1940: 1)

While the planes were still flying over Cetinje, the obligatory official telegram from the organisers to King Petar II was read aloud. The public speeches that followed provide an interesting glimpse into the official discourse of the period, especially with regard to issues of collective identity and memory of the First World War. On the one hand, there is an evident continuity with the ideology of integral Yugoslavism and the earlier discourse on Yugoslav unification from centralist positions as it had developed since the early 1920s. On the other hand, there was also a notable increase of positive references to Montenegrin historical traditions, sacrifices, and contributions, albeit mostly connected to what was perceived as the wider Serbian and Yugoslav context. In his speech, the Ban of Zeta Božidar Krstić, as official patron of the commemoration, tried to rekindle the flames of alleged Montenegrin superiority within Serbdom. The concept was relatively widespread in the 19th century and best popularly summed up in the saying that the Montenegrins are the best of all the Serbs (rather than

being an equal nation on par with the Serbs, as some Federalists and Communists argued already during the interwar era on the margins of the régime-controlled public space): “Numerous are the virtues that have adorned the Serb nation since its genesis. More than in any other Serb region, these virtues have been vigilantly protected, cared for, and safeguarded right here among these rocks beneath the Lovćen, Kom, and Durmitor mountains” (Ibidem: 3).

The envoy of the Ministry of the Army and Navy, General Miljenko Varjačić, portrayed the victims of the shipwreck as primarily Yugoslav volunteers. Through a creative application of the idea that graves represent the markers of national territory, their tragic death provided him with an opportunity to stress the rights of Yugoslavia to the Adriatic Sea: “These martyrs and knights, whose graveyard is the blue Adriatic, left behind earthly treasures and rushed to help their fatherland, which had found itself in danger. God may have wished that not only the land but also the sea become a graveyard, so that young generations would be reminded that the sea was also ours and would remain ours.” (Ibid.) As a representative of the army, General Varjačić used the occasion to discuss the current political and military situation in Europe and the danger of a new war. He did not hide the fact that the commemoration was taking place “in the most fateful time of the global conflict, at a time when all of us know what is going on around us, in a situation when, at any moment, even we can be dragged into the war against our will.” He then highlighted the importance of unity and readiness to defend the homeland, inspired “by the spirit of our immortal volunteers.” (Ibid.)

The following speaker was the blind Croatian volunteer from the First World War, Lujo Lovrić, a notable individual of the interwar period who provided the régime with a welcome role example of a veteran volunteer, firmly committed to the new unified fatherland and its King (Gulić 2018). Lovrić, chairman of the Association of War Volunteers (*Savez ratnih dobrovoljaca*), saw the monument as “a tomb denied by fate to those who repose in the dark depths of the blue sea.” The volunteers, in his words, “gave up their lives for our nation and our sea.” In his speech at Cetinje, he addressed the audience primarily as Montenegrins: “Montenegrin brothers” (*braćo Crnogorci*), “Montenegrin sisters” (*sestre Crnogorke*), and also referred to the cult of Montenegrin heroism (*junaštvo*): “What else could a Montenegrin be but a knight, what else but a hero just like his ancestors.” (Na Cetinju juče osvećen spomenik, *Politika*, petak 7. jun 1940: 12)

In the speech of Gavro Milošević, head of the Cetinje Sokol Association, we find a characteristic mix of the Serb narrative about

Montenegro's alleged historical mission and calls for unification in the spirit of the slogan "one King, one nation, one Yugoslavia." Milošević presented the Medua Tragedy as a logical consequence of prior Montenegrin history, with phrases that bordered on parody: "[T]he shipwreck is characteristic of the whole time from Kosovo to Grahovo, because Montenegro was nothing but an eternal national shipwreck" (*u brodolomu okarakterisano je sve ono vrijeme od Kosova do Grahova, jer Crna Gora nije ništa drugo bila do vječiti nacionalni brodolom*). Milošević presented a utopic vision of Yugoslavia as a country destined to become the nucleus of a new, far greater state: Slavia. According to his bombastic vision presented to audiences gathered around the monument, Montenegro had safeguarded the idea of a mighty Yugoslavia for centuries. Today, Gavro Milošević argued, it was Yugoslavia's turn to safeguard and promote the creation of Greater Slavia (*Velika Slavija*). The Sokol Association was obviously envisioned as one of the key agents in the creation of the coming Pan-Slavic state, as evident from the slogan "With Sokolism towards Yugoslavism, and with Yugoslavism towards All-Slavism!" (*Sokolstvom u Jugoslovenstvo, a Jugoslovenstvom u Sveslovenstvo!*). In the closing part of his speech, Milošević warned that future battles cannot be excluded: "Glory to our heroes from Kosovo to the present day, and glory to all who have yet to fall for Greater Slavia!" (*Svečano otkrivanje spomenika potopljenim pod Medovom, Zetski glasnik, 8. jun 1940: 4*)



Мајке и сестре потопљених мученика за вријеме парастоса

Fig. 5: *Majke i sestre potopljenih mučenika za vrijeme parastosa*, "Mothers and sisters of the drowned martyrs during the parastos", Cetinje, July 6, 1940.



At the end of the ceremony, Risto Stojanović, the chairman of the Banovina Committee for the Erection of the Monument, officially presented the Fairy of Lovćen to the town of Cetinje. He stressed the decisive contribution of “our brothers in America” who initiated the monument’s construction, which they had envisioned for Cetinje from the very start. Stojanović expressed his satisfaction with the fact that the present generation was erecting monuments not only to great military commanders but also to regular soldiers who have their rightful claim to fame for their bravery and sacrifice. After the Yugoslav anthem was played, the chairman of the Cetinje municipality Tomo Milošević officially accepted the monument in the name of the municipal administration. T. Milošević repeated the idea that the monument served as the “gloomy and wavy tomb of heroes in the blue Adriatic. (...) The souls of these martyrs can now rejoice because their monument is being erected on the day of Montenegrin weapons’ most glorious victory over the enemy.” (Ibid: 4)

The main part of the ceremony, the laying of the wreaths, began after the speeches. The first wreath was laid by the Minister of Interior Affairs Stanoje Mihalčić, who himself was a volunteer in the First World War. According to the Belgrade daily *Politika*, over 70 wreaths were laid under the pedestal that day. The last was brought in the name of the mothers and sisters of the deceased volunteers by an old woman “wearing a black scarf” who “was choking with tears for her sons.” (Na Cetinju juče osvećen spomenik, *Politika*, petak 7. jun 1940: 12) Women dressed in black, mostly the victims’ mothers and sisters, appeared in great numbers at the unveiling of the monument and their presence was documented by photographs. However, apart from laying the final wreath, representatives of those who were most directly and personally affected by the shipwreck did not get an opportunity to speak. They most likely did not even try to get it, as there is no evidence of any discussion regarding the possible participation of survivors or the victims’ relatives on the stand as speakers.

The Fairy of Lovćen survived the Second World War without damage. In the following decades, it became one of the country’s most renowned and recognisable monuments. Commemorative gatherings of the victims’ descendants and survivors of the Brindisi shipwreck from 1916 have been taking place annually to this day. They are regularly attended by the descendants of Montenegrin emigrants from North America (Borović 2016: 150). The monument has been regarded in more general terms as a potent symbol of the Montenegrin diaspora, its sacrifices, and continued links with the homeland.



Fig. 6: *Čuvari našeg neba nadlijeću spomenik*, “Guardians of our skies fly over the monument”. Yugoslav military planes during the commemoration in Cetinje, July 6, 1940.

#### COMMEMORATIONS OF THE BATTLE OF MOJKOVAC IN 1940

The decisive role in the organisation of two successive commemorations of the Battle of Mojkovac from January 1916 (at two different locations: Cetinje on August 31 and Mojkovac on September 1, 1940) was played by the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, or more precisely, the Sokol Association (*Sokolska župa*) of Cetinje. The Sokol gymnastic and nationalist mass movement was founded in Bohemia in 1862. In later decades, Sokol organisations modelled upon the Czech example were established in other Slavic lands as well. In Montenegro, specifically the Bay of Cattaro, the Sokol tradition dates back to 1906. That year, a delegation of Czech Sokols, who publicly performed their gymnastic exercises, visited these South Slavic regions

for the first time. After Kotor and Herceg Novi, a Sokol association was also founded in the Montenegrin royal capital of Cetinje in 1914 (Babović Raspopović 2002: 136). The Sokol movement was revived and reached mass proportions after the war in the new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. During the dictatorship of King Aleksandar (1929-1934), the Sokol of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia played an important role in disseminating and safeguarding the official ideology of integral Yugoslavism. Although the importance of the Sokol and its influence on Yugoslav public and political life somewhat weakened in the second half of the 1930s, this mass organisation contributed to the “identification with the state in its existing form, the ruling order, and Yugoslavism” until the country’s occupation in April 1941 (Babović Raspopović 2002: 136).

At the initiative of the elder (*starješina*) of the Cetinje Sokol Association Gavro Milošević, the Sokol Association of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (*Savez sokola Kraljevine Jugoslavije*) accepted the idea that the upcoming 25th anniversary of the Battle of Mojkovac (January 6–7, 1916) be marked by a public ceremony in 1940. The decision to organise the commemoration in late summer instead at the beginning of January 1941 was again most likely motivated by weather and travel considerations. The memory of the battle and soldiers who fell at Mojkovac was supposed to provide “an exciting example of a heroic patriotic endeavour,” which would serve the purpose of “encouraging the present generations in these great times” (*Devedeset i tri dana borbe od Drine do Mojkovca* 1939: 11). This calls into mind the observation of historian Maria Bucur, who noted that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “politicians and other nationalist enthusiasts used the glorification of past actions in monuments and anniversaries to claim a direct connection with the heroic past and urge the populace to emulate such heroic deeds for the future of the country” (Bucur 2001: 289).

After the defeat and occupation of Serbia by the Central Powers at the end of 1915, Montenegro was unable to hold off the far mightier Austro-Hungarian army on its own for long. The Battle of Mojkovac, which took place on January 6–7, 1916, on the continental Sandžak Front, in which the Montenegrin army under the command of *Serđar* Janko Vukotić defeated the advancing Austro-Hungarian troops, is considered the most memorable Montenegrin military victory in the First World War. However, it was also the last great battle of the Montenegrin army before the collapse of the Montenegrin armed resistance and the country’s occupation by the Dual Monarchy. Simultaneously, a massive Austro-Hungarian offensive against Montenegrin positions

on Mount Lovćen was launched at the beginning of January. After several days, Austria-Hungary managed to overpower the defenders and take over the strategic mountain range. This opened the way for a further advance toward the key cities of Cetinje and Podgorica. At the time of the glorious victory at Mojkovac, Montenegro's fate was already sealed and the heroism of the men and women led by Janko Vukotić could make no difference in this respect (Šístek 2017).



Fig. 7: *Spomenica Mojkovačka bitke*, Cover of the official publication commemorating the battle of Mojkovac from 1916 and its commemoration in 1940.

In the dominant culture of memory of the First World War, the Battle of Mojkovac is depicted as a battle in which the Montenegrins selflessly saved their “Serbian brothers.” Its memory provided an opportunity to connect the specific Montenegrin experience with the wider Serb narrative of the First World War, which included tropes of sacrifice, heroism, and traditional closeness and cooperation between Montenegro and Serbia. The first articles about the Battle of Mojkovac as an example of heroism and cooperation of the Montenegrin and Serbian armies appeared in the press as early as 1939, but there were still no mentions of an upcoming commemoration in this phase. There were also no announcements of a monument building project or fundraising appeals (*Borbe na Mojkovcu* 7. jan. 1916; *Slobodna misao*, January 6, 1939: 7). The first information about the commemoration of the Battle of Mojkovac, to be held in Cetinje on August 31 and Mojkovac on September 1, 1940, and organised by the Sokol Association of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in cooperation with the National Defense (*Narodna obrana*) and the Association of the Natives of Kolašin in Belgrade (*Udruženje Kolašinaca u Beogradu*), was published at the beginning of August 1940. In Mojkovac, “as part of large people's festivities, the foundations of a memorial ossuary” would be sanctified at the occasion (*Proslava Mojkovačke bitke; Zetski glasnik*, August 3, 1940: 3). From the first mentions of the commemoration of the Battle of Mojkovac, the construction of a monument, or more precisely a memorial ossuary (*spomen-kosturnica*), was mentioned alongside festivities as an integral part of this project. Ossuaries had previously been built on other First World War battlefields throughout Europe, including Yugoslavia and especially Serbia. Given the fact that the date was announced less than a month before the planned commemorations, the upcoming festivities were to include only the ceremony of the foundations’ sanctification (*osveštanje temelja*) (Milošević 1940: 7).

In the weeks leading up to the commemoration, the press regularly published texts that provided certain details of the upcoming events. The Battle of Mojkovac was primarily presented as proof of Montenegrin solidarity with Serbia (*Značaj Mojkovačke proslave; Zetski glasnik*, August 31, 1940: 3), as Montenegrin heroism and selfless sacrifice for their Serbian brothers and the “common Serb cause” (*opšta srpska stvar*). In their glorifications of the battle, Montenegrin authors often cited positive assessments and praise coming from authorities beyond the Montenegrin milieu, particularly the Minister of the Army and Navy of the time, Milan Nedić, who expressed the opinion that without the Montenegrin army’s crucial contribution,

which prevented the Austrian manoeuvre aimed at encircling the Montenegrin and Serbian armies, “there would be nothing left of the Serbian army, and the Serb nation would not be what it is today” (Milošević 1940: 7).

Compared to the critical interpretations of the Montenegrin army’s role, especially prevalent in the 1920s, and the marginalisation of its contributions in the overall narrative about the formation of the unified Yugoslav homeland, in the last months of the existence of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia the heroism of the Montenegrin army received complete and unambiguous rehabilitation in the public discourse surrounding the commemorations of the Battle of Mojkovac. Montenegrinhood (*crnogorstvo*) was still situated within a wider narrative of Serbdom, Yugoslavism, unification, and unity. In the ethnic sense, the Montenegrin army was depicted as “the Serb army of the Kingdom of Montenegro” (*Štampa o Mojковаčkoj bitci; Zetski glasnik*, August 31, 1940: 3) and Montenegro, traditionally, as one of the two brotherly states of one and the same Serb nation. Whenever Montenegrinhood was mentioned, it was usually safely anchored in wider Serb and Yugoslav concentric circles of identity. According to the text entitled “On the Chivalrous Spirit of the Montenegrins” (*O viteškom duhu Crnogoraca*), written by the general of the Yugoslav Army and commander of the Zeta Division Mirko Varjačić at the occasion of the 25th anniversary since the battle, “Montenegrins are racially pure Serbs, exactly the same as they were when they arrived from Bojka, their blood uncorrupted by other nations, nor foreign life and spirit. It is evident the fact that the first Serb state formed right here, in Zeta, was not accidental” (Varjačić 1940: 3–4). At the beginning of August, a committee presided by Gavro Milošević was formed in Cetinje to organise the official celebration of the birthday of King Petar II (September 6) and the anniversary of the Battle of Mojkovac (*Proslava 6. setembra i Mojковаčka bitka; Zetski glasnik*, August 10, 1940: 3). A few days prior to the commemoration, numerous delegations from the Montenegrin hinterland began arriving in Cetinje. At Mojkovac, the surviving warriors, commanders, and their descendants were gathering spontaneously. Commemorations of the “last heroic endeavour of the still free army of Montenegro” (*Mojkovačkim herojima odati je dostojno priznanje; Zetski glasnik*, September 6, 1940: 2) were, as already noted, the last major public commemorations organised in Montenegro before the defeat, occupation, and territorial dismemberment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The speeches, proclamations, articles, and other texts related to these events provide a valuable and insufficiently researched testimony about the last phase of the discourse on the First

World War, collective identity, and narratives of recent history in interwar Montenegro and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The commemoration in Cetinje started on August 31, 1940, at around four in the afternoon in front of the Cetinje Sokol Hall (*Sokolana*). Here, alongside the orchestra of the Yugoslav Royal Navy from Tivat, members of the Sokol gathered together with representatives of various state institutions and several important guests, including Major Vukašin Vukotić and Vasilija Vrbica, the son and daughter of the late *Serdar* Janko Vukotić, an active participant in the battle. After a march from the Sokolana to the Monastery of Cetinje, Bishop Joanikije of Budimlje greeted the participants at the gates. On the way to the National Theatre, where a festive academy was taking place, the marchers stopped in front of the house where the late King Aleksandar was born for a moment of silence. At the festive academy, the elder (*starješina*) of the Cetinje Sokol Association Gavro Milošević spoke in favor of a greater homogenisation of the Yugoslavs: “We are aware that the events and circumstances in the world demand that we stand united in firm falangas and, inspired by the ethics of Kosovo heroes and heroes of the battle of Mojkovac, safeguard our spiritual values and purity from all outside influences ...” (Mojkovačkim herojima odato je dostojno priznanje; *Zetski glasnik*, September 6, 1940: 2) The Academy concluded with the performance of the patriotic songs *Onamo, 'namo!* (There, o'er there!) and *Hej, Sloveni* (Hey, Slavs). The lyrics of the former song were written by the last Montenegrin King Nikola. Signs that the Second World War was dangerously close to spilling over in Yugoslavia were mostly indirect. However, the general public, informed by the press, radio, and other sources, was well aware of many details of the general situation in Europe, which was becoming increasingly worrying. August 31, 1940, the date when the Cetinje commemoration of the Battle of Mojkovac from 1916 took place, was also the most difficult day of the entire Battle for Britain, which lasted for three months and three weeks. As a result of a massive German air offensive on that day, the Royal Air Force lost a record number of planes—39 (Eight Important Dates in the Battle of Britain 2018).

The mass public festivities in Mojkovac on September 1, 1940, exactly one year after the outbreak of the Second World War, took place near the Vojna njiva (Military Meadow), Razvršje, and other locations associated with important moments of the battle from January 1916. Weather conditions were not ideal for a public gathering for which “villagers not only have to travel on foot or horseback for hours but even for several whole days” (Mojkovačkim herojima odato je dostojno priznanje; *Zetski glasnik*, September 6, 1940: 3). It was a

cold and cloudy Sunday, with occasional rain. Despite the weather, “several thousand souls” gathered in Mojkovac. Compared with the first commemoration held on the previous day in the administrative capital of the Zeta Banovina, when the press mentioned mostly representatives of the state and army, various organisations, and organised delegations “from the hinterland,” the ceremony at Mojkovac left an impression of greater spontaneity and genuine popularity among the wider masses. Given the fact that the core of the former Kingdom of Montenegro’s Sandžak army was composed of soldiers from the vicinity, the gathering managed to attract a large number of veterans, their relatives, and descendants: “The surviving participants of the battle, broken down by bullets, exhausted by poverty and misfortunes, by visiting the places where they once confronted the far mightier enemy, remembered their countless brothers, relatives, and friends whom they had left behind on the battlefield, satisfied that, finally, the time had come when their role and the historical importance of this battle would be recognised” (Svečanost u Mojkovcu; *Slobodna misao*, September 8, 1940: 5). However, it was not just a nostalgic gathering celebrating the past: “A large number of officers from the former Montenegrin army who commanded different units on the day of the battle were now wearing the uniforms of the Yugoslav army because almost all of them were either in active service or in the reserve corps,” wrote the *Zetski glasnik* (Mojkovačkim herojima odati je dostojno priznanje; *Zetski glasnik*, September 6, 1940: 3). In texts and photographs from the commemoration, the veterans of Mojkovac were depicted as men ready to go into another war at any time if the fatherland found itself threatened once more.

The main part of the commemoration took place in a large meadow near the town: “In the upper part, a ceremonial stand was built, decorated with flags and greenery. In front of the stand, there was a large wooden cross at which the memorial liturgy was held.” The wooden cross was erected in the absence of a permanent monument. During the commemoration, wreaths were laid at the foot of the cross. The surviving flags from the Mojkovac battle were also brought to the ceremony.

Apart from these flags, numerous state flags fluttered in the hands of the young men (...) The women were mostly all dressed in black. Many mothers, sisters, and wives were crying, even today, for their loved ones. Many of them brought with them the coats of arms, medals, and other memorabilia of those fallen at Mojkovac, sewn onto small pillows. One old woman, who remained all alone because she had lost two sons at Mojkovac, recounted: “In the morning I visited



the places where my sons fell. I did not forget to light a wax candle on the grave of the Austrian officer who committed suicide after his army was defeated at Mojkovac” (Ibidem).

The day before, a number of official representatives of Mojkovac also visited the Cetinje commemoration. Guests of the September 1 commemoration again included the Ban of Zeta Banovina Božidar Krstić, Bishop Joanikije as a special envoy of Patriarch Gavrilo, General Pešić as an envoy of King Petar II (*Svečanost u Mojkovcu; Slobodna misao*, September 8. 1940: 5), Vasilija Vrbica and Vukašin Vukotić, daughter and son of the late commander-in-chief Janko Vukotić, the widow of the late general and commander of the Sandžak army Petar Martinović Valerija, and other prominent guests. A direct participant of the battle from the ranks of the Montenegrin officers, Brigadier Miloš Medenica, commander of the Kolašin brigade at Mojkovac in 1916, was supposed to address the audience in the name of the veterans, “but due to old age and obvious overexcitement, Mr. Medenica was unable to read his speech” (Mojkovačkim herojima odati je dostojno priznanje; *Zetski glasnik*, september 6, 1940: 4) His son Vaso had to read it for him. General Varjačić then read a speech written by the Minister of the Army and Navy, General Milan Nedić. Unlike certain other top Serbian officers, including Petar Pešić, whose negative assessment of the Montenegrin army’s role in the First World War generated controversial reactions in one part of the Montenegrin and Yugoslav public during the interwar period, General Nedić positively appraised its role. His speech at the Mojkovac commemoration was another proof of his respect for Montenegrin contributions and sacrifices in the First World War:<sup>2</sup>

The words of the minister, Mr. Nedić, full of praise and recognition of the Montenegrins, their patriotism and heroism, deeply moved the audience. And they were openly expressing this, because they applauded after every paragraph, and sometimes even after every sentence, and voiced their approval and gratitude for such a competent recognition of their heroism and virtues. (Mojkovačkim herojima odati je dostojno priznanje; *Zetski glasnik*, September 6, 1940: 4)

After the speeches, the Yugoslav government’s special envoy Sava Mikić “laid upon the cross a beautiful wreath in the name of the

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**2** As officer of the Serbian army retreating through northern Albania, Milan Nedić was actually an eyewitness of the Medua Tragedy on January 6, 1916. The first reports informing the highest Serbian command about the shipwreck and its circumstances were sent by him.

Prime Minister.” Despite unfavourable weather, the success of the mass commemoration allowed for raising the question of a permanent monument honouring the victory at Mojkovac. It was announced that donations for the memorial ossuary’s erection had already been received from several people and organisations: Minister Čubrilović donated 10,000 dinars, Ban of Zeta Krstić 20,000 dinars, Sokol Association 10,000 dinars, and the Montenegrin associations of Belgrade 3000 dinars. After the customary military march and dinner, official guests began to leave Mojkovac. The people’s masses remained, singing and dancing the national dance of *kolo* until nightfall (Ibidem).

At the beginning of February 1941, the newspaper *Zetski glasnik* recalled the successful commemorations from the previous year’s turn of August and September. It brought the news about the status of the effort to build a permanent monument in the form of a memorial ossuary in Mojkovac, as well as information on financial donations. According to the article, the commemorations had left a lasting imprint “in the hearts of all participants (...), in the hearts of patriots from all regions,” but “the warmest response came from our chivalrous army, especially the Zeta Division.” The paper then cited a letter from General Varjačić, commander of the Zeta Division, addressed to the chairman of the Committee for the Erection of the Monument at Mojkovac Gavro Milošević:

The Zeta Division, all of its officers, underofficers, corporals, and soldiers, accepted your request of support for your noble idea of erecting a monument to heroes fallen at the battle of Mojkovac with great joy and gratitude. In short: so that the deeds of the best sons of the Fatherland may inspire even the coming generations, as long as there is the sun and the moon. For this aim, the Zeta Division will donate 9,729 dinars for the monument. (Odjek Mojkovačke proslave; *Zetski glasnik*, February 1, 1941: 3)

This was also the last mention of the fundraising activities to erect a monument in Mojkovac. The April invasion of Yugoslavia by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and their regional allies Hungary and Bulgaria, which quickly brought the interwar Yugoslav kingdom to defeat, occupation, and territorial dismemberment, put an end to this project.

In his monograph on the Battle of Mojkovac from 1995, historian Aleksandar Drašković claims the following: “On all eighty Christmas holidays that have passed since the battle, the chivalrous deaths of the Montenegrins led by Janko Vukotić were commemorated in a way they deserve only on one occasion. That was in 1940, in the organisation of the Sokol Association. Before and after this, not a single word was said about these events, let alone a commemoration,

albeit a symbolical one, out of due respect to the Montenegrin warriors who had fallen in the battle at Mojkovac” (Drašković 1995: 16–7). It is indeed surprising that Drašković failed to mention the large commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Mojkovac organised by the Socialist Republic of Montenegro in 1966. As part of this state-backed memory project, a central monument commemorating the battle was finally built. It is a modest but elegant structure standing on a small hill by the main road before entering the town which is impossible to miss. The commemoration in 1966 was attended, among others, by Đuro Pucar as official envoy of the President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito, representatives of the highest institutions of the Socialist Republic of Montenegro, and a relatively large number of surviving veterans. The most notable among them was Vasilija Vrbica, daughter of the Commander-in-Chief Janko Vukotić. She also attended the Cetinje and Mojkovac commemorations of 1940 (Rakočević 2013: 187–96). The monument from 1966 represents the central place of memory of the Battle of Mojkovac. It was restored before the centenary of the battle, celebrated at the highest state level in January 2016. The last commemoration attended by direct participants of the First World War was organised by the Republic of Montenegro in Mojkovac in January 1996 on the occasion of the 80th anniversary. Four veterans of the Battle of Mojkovac were present on the occasion, despite their advanced age.

## CONCLUSION

According to sociologist Todor Kuljić, “the conventional political memorials use the past to justify the present through an explicit lesson and message. The ruling circles that erect them strive to keep the past permanently in the present and safeguard it for the future. As an undemocratic institution, conventional memorials are the means available to the powerful to impose their own values and ideology” (Kuljić 2015: 339). The intentions of the government, which felt the urgent need to homogenise the masses and increase patriotic feelings among citizens in the face of the looming Second World War, created a new space for the belated appreciation and glorification of the specifically Montenegrin contributions and sacrifices. Paradoxically, the interwar culture of memory of the First World War in Montenegro reached its greatest intensity at a time when the Second World War was already consuming large parts of Europe and rapidly approaching Yugoslavia: the largest

commemorations took place in the summer of 1940. This makes the Montenegrin case rather unique in the European context of the time.

\* I would like to thank my colleague and friend Professor Boban Batrićević, a historian from the Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature in Cetinje, for his valuable help, exchange of ideas, and assistance with the research of interwar periodicals.

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