

Financing Yugoslav First World War Memorials

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Between the two world wars, Yugoslav First World War memorials were financed in several ways. One of them was state funding. The other was voluntary contributions. These contributions took the form of money, material, or volunteer work (although the latter was sometimes *corvée*) (Lajbenšperger 2008: 316–19; Lajbenšperger, Mamula 2014: 212–14; Šarenac 2018: 230–31).

State funding went through several channels. One of them was the budgets of several Yugoslav ministries and lower-ranking authorities—regional (*oblasts* or *banovinas*) or municipal ones. The most important backers were the Ministry of Religion and later the Ministry of Justice, specifically the departments with sections for military cemeteries. In addition to the specially allocated funds, the authorities also provided support through volunteer contributions (most often for the construction of ossuaries). Contributions were also made by the Yugoslav king and members of the royal family.

One of the budget lines, and probably the most important one, was the Fund for the Implementation of the Law on the National Acknowledgement of Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland. To understand its purpose and what it funded, we must first look at state legislation concerning the development of war cemeteries and the national acknowledgment of individuals of merit for the fatherland.

After the end of the First World War, the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Kingdom of SCS) encountered many challenges. In addition to efforts to rebuild the destroyed areas where the battles took place, to provide basic living conditions for impoverished residents, to help numerous families who had been left without breadwinners or individuals who had become orphans, the state also took upon itself the role of caring for war cemeteries. Through legislative solutions passed in 1919, 1922, 1925, 1928, and 1931, the state decided to set aside every year a portion of the funds for the development and maintenance of war graves.

The Kingdom of SCS issued the Decree on the Development and Maintenance of our Military Cemeteries and Graves in the Homeland and Abroad in 1919. Through this document, the state established that the Ministry of Religion should have the ultimate responsibility and control over the development and maintenance of military cemeteries. Taking care of war cemeteries was to be done by church municipalities and priests of the parishes in which they were located. The cemeteries abroad were to be looked after by the respective embassies and consulates, as well as the specially appointed priest-guardians. The costs for developing war graves, along with their regular visitation and maintenance and the erection of ossuaries in the country and abroad, were to be borne by the Ministry of Religion. Furthermore, it was possible to finance all of the above through voluntary contributions. The Decree gave families the option to transfer the remains of their relatives by themselves (Uredba o uređenju i održavanju naših vojničkih groblja i grobova u domovini i na strani, Articles 2, 3, 7, 9 and 14; Lajbenšperger, Mamula 2014: 209; Manojlović Pintar 2014: 202–3; Jezernik 2018: 129–30; Hameršak 2020: 383–84; Živanović 2020: 83–5).

Through the Law on the Development of Our Military Cemeteries and Graves in the Homeland and Abroad, as well as the Graves of Fallen Soldiers and Sailors, Prisoners of War and Internees, Citizens of Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria, Buried in Our State Territory from 1922, the Kingdom of SCS prescribed and elaborated on the development of war graves. In addition to religious institutions, the preservation, maintenance, and development of war graves were also

entrusted to some lower-ranking political authorities. They had to assist the Ministry of Religion financially. It was also stipulated that compensations to persons on whose property the war graves were located, as the salaries and expenses of the priest-guardians abroad, would be financed from the state budget. Reliefs were foreseen for the transfer of remains of the fallen soldiers, but it was not specified exactly which ones (Zakon o uređenju naših vojničkih grobalja i grobova u otadžbini i na strani, kao i grobova izginulih vojnika i mornara, ratnih zarobljenika i interniranih lica, državljana: Nemačke, Austrije, Ugarske i Bugarske, sahranjeni na našoj državnoj teritoriji, Articles 2, 3, 7, 9 and 14; Lajbenšperger, Mamula 2014: 210; Jezernik 2018: 130; Šarenac 2018: 227–28; Hameršak 2020: 384–85; Živanović 2020: 83–8).

The state wanted to express special gratitude to certain political and military figures who played an important role in the past, especially during the First World War. To do that, in 1925, the Kingdom of SCS declared the Law on the National Acknowledgement of King Petar the Great Liberator and the Law on the National Acknowledgement of Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland.

The Law on the National Recognition of King Petar the Great Liberator stipulated that King Petar would be acknowledged and gratitude shown to him by erecting an appropriate monument in his honour in Belgrade. That task was delegated to the Committee, which would be formed pursuant to the Law on the National Acknowledgement of the Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland, which had been promulgated. The erection of the monument was to be financed through this Committee (Zakon o narodnom priznanju Kralju Petru Velikom Oslobodiocu, Articles 1–2; Šarenac 2014: 170).

The Law on the National Acknowledgement of Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland declared that a special monument called Temple-Monument to the Liberators (in Serbian: Hram Spomenik Oslobodiocima) would be erected for all those who perished during the Balkan Wars and the First World War. For those who had survived and demonstrated great historical merits for the liberation and unification, an appropriate monetary reward would be provided. Furthermore, the widows and children of Serbian war-time military leaders, *vojvodas*, would receive a monetary reward and a lifetime pension in recognition of *vojvodas'* merits. As for the meritorious soldiers and citizens who had died abroad, the transfer of their remains to the Kingdom of SCS and the erection of a special tombstone at the state's expense was foreseen. As regards the other deceased soldiers, it was foreseen that the transfer of their remains from abroad back to the country would be paid for by the state. It was decided that a special fund named Fund for

the Implementation of the Law on the National Acknowledgement of Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland would be created for financing monetary awards, pensions, the transfer of remains, and the erection of the monuments. It was foreseen that ten million dinars would be allocated every year for the implementation of provisions of the Law on the National Acknowledgement of King Petar the Great Liberator and the Law on the National Acknowledgement of Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland. The financial resources from the Fund were at the disposal of the Ministry of Religion. In order to implement the provisions of these laws, a special committee was formed at the Ministry of Religion. It was named The Committee for the Implementation of the Law on the National Acknowledgement of Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland (Zakon o narodnom priznanju zaslužnima za Otadžbinu, Articles 2–5, 7 and 9; Šarenac 2014: 171)

The Law on the National Acknowledgement of Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland was amended in 1928. The amendment stipulated that the remains of the soldiers deceased abroad should no longer be transferred individually but in larger transports. This was for the state to be able to partially save on those costs. It was also foreseen that the personal and material expenses related to the work of the Committee would be borne by the Fund. Furthermore, the pensions of the members of vojvodas' families were no longer a part of this Fund but were transferred to the state budget allocated for all state pensions (Zakon o izmenama i dopunama u Zakonu o narodnom priznanju zaslužnima za Otadžbinu od 23. avgusta 1925. godine, Article 1–3, 5; Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 252; Lajbenšperger, Mamula 2014: 211).

Amendments to all of the mentioned laws took place in 1931. At that time, it was established that all future funding for the maintenance of war graves would be provided by the Fund. Moreover, all money collected for the monument to King Petar (which was never erected in Belgrade) was transferred to the Fund (Zakona o uređenju naših vojničkih grobalja i grobova u otadžbini i na strani od 22. aprila 1922. godine; Zakona o narodnom priznanju zaslužnima za Otadžbinu od 23. avgusta 1925 godine i Zakona o izmenama i dopunama u Zakonu o narodnom priznanju zaslužnima za Otadžbinu od 31. decembra 1928. godine, Article 3).

As we have seen, the Fund for the Implementation of the Law on the National Acknowledgement of Individuals of Merit for the Fatherland was established to finance the erection of the monument to King Petar, the Temple-Monument to the Liberators, and tombstones for meritorious persons, then for monetary awards, pensions, and transfers of the remains of the deceased soldiers and meritorious citizens.

However, following law amendments in 1928, pension entitlements were excluded from the Fund. The change was not directly related to the Fund itself and the pensions of vojvodas' families, but to the pensions of other officers, who were a part of the Serbian or Montenegrin army until the end of the First World War. Namely, the Law on the Organisation of the Army and the Navy from 1923 introduced a significant difference between the pensions of those who retired under the previous Law on the Organisation of the Army and those who retired under the Law on the Organisation of the Army and the Navy. The difference was noticeable—some could live easily, while others had to live hard. To ease the situation of retired war officers, additional changes were introduced to make those pensions uniform. However, as the law amendments were being prepared, it was realised that these changes would constitute too big an expense for the Fund, so it was decided to transfer the pensions for vojvodas' families to other budget lines. The provisions on the transfer of the remains of the deceased were amended to reduce government costs because it was more economical to transport several coffins in train wagons at once than to transfer them separately (Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 252).

Over the years, the Fund was supplemented with financial resources that were gathered within some other funds: Fund of Major Ilić (Ministarstvo Pravde 1931), Fund for Fighters Who Died under Edirne; Fund for Erecting Monuments to Fighters for Their Bravery in Past Wars; Fund of the Gornji Milanovac Branch of the Liberal Party for Erecting a Monument to Fighters Fallen for Liberation and Unification; Fund for Erecting a Monument to Heroes Fallen in the Serbian-Turkish War (Partijalnik 1 1935); and Fund for the Monument in Blaznava (Ministarstvo Pravde 1936).

In addition to income from the budget and voluntary contributions, the Fund also acquired resources from various other sources. The most important was through bank interests. One part of the interest was for the money already in the account, with the Committee also regularly depositing other available funds to increase the yield (Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 242 to F 249). The Fund also included small sums of money resulting from the exchange of coins that were found during the exhumations of warriors whose identity was unknown (Ministarstvo Pravde 1934). Contributions paid by families as a part of the costs for the transfer of their relatives' remains from abroad also passed through the Fund's budget (Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 242 to F 244 and F 249, 1928).

The ten million dinars that were supposed to go into the Fund every year never did. Already in the first budget year (1926/1927), instead of ten million, six million were transferred to the Fund, leaving no money for the rest (Ministarstvo vera 1928). In the next budget

year (1927/1928), the Fund received seven million dinars (Odbor za izvršenje zakona o narodnom priznanju zaslužnih za otadžbinu 1927; Odbor za izvršenje zakona o narodnom priznanju zaslužnih za otadžbinu 1928). Following that, the state's contributions were very small, in tens of thousands of dinars. In some years, the government did not transfer any money from the budget to the Fund. By 1931, the Fund received 11 million dinars in total (Odbor za izvršenje zakona o narodnom priznanju zaslužnih za otadžbinu i zakona o narodnom priznanju Kralju Petru I Velikom oslobodiocu 1931: 11). The amount of money from the budget increased in the late 1930s—in 1938/1939 and 1939/1940 budgets, they totalled around one million dinars per year (Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 242 to F 249).

The Fund started to work on June 16, 1926, with the first sum received from the government (Ministarstvo Pravde 1941). Until the start of the Second World War on Yugoslav soil, the Fund had fulfilled its purpose stipulated by the aforementioned legal provisions. All except building the Monument to King Petar and the Temple-Monument to the Liberators, which was never done. The resources from the Fund were spent on erecting tombstone monuments, ossuaries, memorial chapels and churches, and memorial plaques on churches; the exhumation of the remains of warriors and meritorious persons, their transfer from inland or abroad to new gravesites or ossuaries; compensations to persons on estates where the war graves were located; monetary rewards and pensions of vojvodas' families; state taxes, postal, and other material expenses produced by the work of the Committee, but also compensation for the work of the Committee's staff (Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 242 to F 249).

The amounts disbursed from the Fund differed from one year to the next. However, we may say that the average amount was around 1.8 million dinars. Sometimes it was much lower and sometimes much higher, but it usually varied by several hundred thousand dinars from the mentioned figure. The lowest amount was in 1933, when only 669,919.50 dinars were spent. The highest amount was in 1929 when 3,869,610.60 were spent from the Fund. However, not all of the available funds were spent. It also happened that the majority of funds were not distributed, so only 10% were spent in 1933, or 20% in 1931 (Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 242 to F 249, and 252). We do not know exactly the reasons for this, because we have not found a single document that would provide explanations. Perhaps the funds were saved for the Temple-Monument to the Liberators, or it was simply the sluggishness of state authorities.

In the segment of the erection of monuments to meritorious persons, the Fund did finance the exhumation, transportation, new

burials, and erection of special memorial tombstones for several military leaders and significant persons who died during the First World War, that is, for individuals of merit for the fatherland. They were all believed to have played a prominent role in the war or in efforts for the unification of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Almost all of them were Serbs from pre-war Serbia. Only one was from pre-war Montenegro—Serdar Janko Vukotić. The most important figure was Serbian military commander Vojvoda Radomir Putnik. He was granted a special tomb in the form of a chapel, in a specific place at the New Cemetery in Belgrade, the capital of the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia. Others were given a special kind of tombstone, made of marble. These monuments were tall, with the representation of a cross in the upper portion and special bronze emblems in the middle. Their appearance conveys dignity and monumentality (Obrenović 2013b: 182–83). These monuments were erected for the following military commanders of the Serbian army: General Vukman Aračić, General Ilija Gojković, and Colonel Milan Nedić; and one military commander of the Montenegrin army: Serdar Janko Vukotić. The politicians who were granted these monuments were: Andra Nikolić, Stojan Novaković, Bogdan Janković, Pavle Bulić, Đorđe Kurtović, David Simić, Milan Mostić, Čeda Urošević, Dimitrije Mihailović, Dimitrije Sredojević, Đura Prokić, and Milan Đurić who was also a priest. These works were performed during 1929 and 1930 (Odbor za izvršenje zakona o narodnom priznanju zaslužnih za otadžbinu i zakona o narodnom priznanju Kralju Petru I Velikom oslobodiocu 1931: 2–5). Later on, in 1938, the erection of a tombstone for Serbian writer Petar Kočić was also financed through the Fund (Ministarstvo pravde 1938). He was considered meritorious to the fatherland because of his patriotic literature and work.

During the period from 1927 to 1931, money for the Fund was spent on activities regarding mentioned tombstones for individuals of merit for the fatherland, and for developing a Serbian military cemetery on Zeitenlik in Thessaloniki, Greece, with an ossuary within it (Figure 1). Works in Thessaloniki were massive and lasted almost a decade – from 1928 to 1937. The only exception in financing from the Fund during this period was a small contribution to the erection of the Monument to King Petar the Liberator in Gnjilane, given in 1928 (Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 242 to F 244 and F 249, 1928).

In the decade following the legislation change in 1931, until the commencement of the Second World War, several capital projects for building ossuaries were financed through the Fund, and help was also provided for erecting a larger number of other memorial objects in the



Fig. 1: Ossuary at the Serbian military cemetery on Zeitenlik in Thessaloniki, Greece (Documentation of the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Monuments of Serbia, photo by P. Marjanovic, 5. 9. 2014).

country and abroad. Considerable resources were provided for the ossuary on the Greek island of Vido. Further on, large sums were contributed for the construction of a church with an ossuary in Cetinje, Montenegro,¹ a church with an ossuary in Lazarevac, Serbia, and an ossuary in Ljubljana, Slovenia (Figure 2). Various sums were contributed to help in raising ossuaries, churches, or chapels with ossuaries, monuments, memorial plaques, etc. These sums ranged from several thousand to several tens of thousands of dinars and were provided yearly. The majority of such contributions were around ten thousand dinars. Most of the funded objects were located in parts of the country that belonged to the Kingdom of Serbia before the First World War. Even when funds were directed to other parts of the country, they were mostly for objects related to Serbian soldiers or persons. This is not to say that the soldiers from other regions, i.e., the Austro-Hungarian army, were completely neglected. In addition to the aforementioned ossuary in Ljubljana (Figure 3), the development of military cemeteries in Osijek, Croatia, and Ptuj, Slovenia, was supported by the Fund. Moreover, funding was provided for the development of cemeteries

1 This church supposed to be a cathedral. It was planned that the ossuary beneath the church receive over a thousand mortal remains of martyred fighters. Although certain activities were carried out to raise it, it was never built (Partijanik 2 1935; Žunjić 2019: 527–31).

abroad—Czechoslovakia, France, Albania, Holland, etc., where soldiers who died as members of Serbian, Montenegrin, and Austro-Hungarian armies (of Yugoslav origin) were buried (Arhiv Jugoslavije, F 245 to F 249; Dobrovšak 2022: 405–8).



Fig. 2: Ossuary in Lazarevac, Serbia (Documentation of the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Monuments of Serbia, photo by N. Lajbenšperger, 3.8.2006).

We must not forget that Serbian and Austro-Hungarian soldiers were buried alongside in many ossuaries built on the battlefields or in the background – like in Lazarevac in Serbia, or Jindřichovice in Czechoslovakia (Figure 4) (Vukosavljević 1975: 238; Sokolović 1991: 142–43; Pavlović 1995: 115–30; 2014: 15, 24–35; Lajbenšperger 2008: 326–27; 2014: 14–6; 2015: 509–10; Lajbenšperger, Džamić,



Fig. 3: Ossuary of the First World War Victims, Žale Central Cemetery, Ljubljana, Slovenia. (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c8/Kostnica_na_%C5%BDalah.jpg; author: AwesomeSauceLtd, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons)

Radovanac Živanov 2015: 258–70, 273–82; Obrenović 2013a: 81, 132–33, 135, 137–38, 281–82, 288, 238–41, 340, 549–50; Dobuševa, Krymova 2013: 61–4; Skoupý 2016: 84–5; Borovnjak 2017: 267–87; Bogdanović 2018: 342–46, 459–74, 485, 489–92; Šarenac 2018: 226, 230–34). Although Serbian symbols were highlighted on the monuments, proper attention was also given to the enemy soldiers. In this way, lasting peace was made possible for soldiers from once opposing sides.

We could not find any archival material that would tell us how the funding decisions for the construction of memorial ossuaries were made. From that documentation, it might be possible to see whether there were any rivalries towards former enemy soldiers or some special interest to finance only memorials to Serbian soldiers. We did not discover any rejected applications for the allocation of funds. However, we believe we can rightly make two assumptions. The first is that the Fund was intended for individuals of merit for the fatherland who died during the war. These were soldiers of the Army of the Kingdom of Serbia who won the war, liberated the country, and created conditions for unification. Because of those merits, cemeteries for those soldiers have been developed. The second is that most of the battles took place in the territory of the pre-war Kingdom of Serbia, and later in the territory of Greece. Far smaller battles were fought on Austria-Hungarian soil. The



Fig. 4: Ossuary in Jindřichovice, Czech Republic (Documentation of the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Monuments of Serbia, photo by V. Džamic, 11. 11. 2014).

layout of the soldiers' graves, which were created as a result of those battles, dictated where the appropriate memorial ossuary would be erected (Manojlović Pintar 2014: 212).

As we have seen, the financing of the development and maintenance of military cemeteries was supposed to be funded by the state, with the possibility of voluntary contributions. However, the situation in the field was quite different. Many of the cemeteries were not cared for properly and many of them perished during the period of the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia (Manojlović Pintar 2014: 204–5, 210; Hameršak 2020: 385; Živanović 2020: 89–93). On the other side, the construction of ossuaries was sometimes funded using amounts obtained from voluntary contributions, which were larger than the funds provided by the state. Many of the planned ossuaries were never built or were left unfinished because funding was insufficient and the Second World War broke out and halted all the works.

The state did manage to erect several monuments to persons of merit, as well as a large number of ossuaries and other memorial objects for deceased soldiers, but it did not manage to build a respectful monument to King Petar I and the Temple-Monument to the Liberators. The state had bigger issues to solve in terms of its economy, so it lacked the resources to provide proper burial places for all soldiers who perished in the war.

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