

The National-Dynastic Monument in the Kingdom of Serbia The Monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović in Požarevac as a Case Study

Abstract: The monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović unveiled in 1898 embodied the concept of national-dynastic monument in the Kingdom of Serbia at the end of the nineteenth century. The statue in the manner of academic art by Djordje Jovanović, a prominent Serbian sculptor, may be seen as a creative transfer of European practices in designing majestic monuments to rulers. Set up in downtown Požarevac, the monument to Prince Miloš was intended to act as a place of collective remembrance and a means of legitimation of King Alexander Obrenović. Forming part of the process of constructing the cult of Prince Miloš, the monument may be seen as a visual testimony to the attempt of the shaken dynastic regime to define its own ideological model by using the image of its charismatic founder. The unveiling ceremony, pervaded with a military spirit, confirmed the place of the Požarevac visual *topos* on the map of patriotic geography, pointing to the power of the visual work in the system of the representative culture of the state and the nation in the late nineteenth century.

Keywords: Požarevac, Prince Miloš Obrenović, Djordje Jovanović, visual culture, national-dynastic monuments

Monument: between politics and art

The study of the monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović in Požarevac requires a brief typological overview of national-dynastic monuments in a broader, European context.¹ The term “monument” is used here in the narrow sense of a work of art in the form of a human figure that supports the memory of notable events and persons of a community.² The central role of the monument is to signpost the binding values of a given society and thus to verify the timeless sustainability of the message it is meant to convey. The monument is supposed to respond to the requirement of permanence which is to be confirmed by the

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¹ R. Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces. Artefacts of German Memory 1870–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 15–79; W. Telesko, *Das 19. Jahrhundert. Eine epoche und ihre Medien* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2010), 137–156.

² H. E. Mittig, “Denkmal,” in Werner Busch & Peter Schmook, eds., *Kunst. Die Geschichte ihrer Funktionen* (Berlin: Quadriga/Beltz, 1987), 457.

unchallenged acceptance of the historical rationale behind its creation.³ Therefore, all elements of the monument – embodied in clothing, ornament or the inscription on its pedestal – are shaped with the idea of affirming the binding power of the visual work, and of its moral and didactic function.

Even though we tend to perceive nineteenth-century monuments as little short of sacred objects, and even though their creators tended to present them as unquestionable objects enveloped in an aura of sacredness, they were also construed as secular artefacts and as such frequently aroused controversy and harsh criticism from contemporaries.⁴ Finally, the value of public monuments was defined by their political potential, which led to the downplaying of artistic errors and formal inadequacies.⁵ Anatomical inaccuracies and stylistic incongruities in such monuments were downplayed in favour of their universally accepted patriotic content, which protected less satisfactory works from potentially devastating effects of aesthetic criticism.⁶ The presence of a monument in the mass media (newspapers, books, magazines) testified to its propaganda purpose and to its place in the nation's public opinion. A generator of modern societies, public opinion⁷ created a climate that enabled an ideological and ethical framework for the emergence of a public monument. The main social structures (the church, the military and civil elites) determined the form and content of a monument, as well as its place in the community's public memory. The vitality and historical sustainability of the monument depended on contents of current relevance being perpetually read into it. Thus, it was through the agency of the public that some monuments became symbols of collective memory and markers of national identity.⁸ They gained political verification at the moment of ceremonial inauguration, becoming artefacts appealing to *patriotic upbringing* and *national consciousness*.

Monuments can frequently contribute to the understanding of an epoch and its political-historical patterns better than documentary sources.⁹ The question of the artistic quality and aesthetic value of a monument was brushed aside at the moment of unveiling, when the sculpted work assumed the significance of

³ Ibid. 460–461.

⁴ R. Allings, *Monument und Nation: das Bild vom Nationalstaat im Medium Denkmal - zum Verhältnis von Nation und Staat im deutschen Kaiserreich 1871–1918* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996), 598–599.

⁵ Mittig, "Denkmal", 464–465.

⁶ Ibid. 465.

⁷ J. Habermas, *O javnom mnjenju. Istraživanje u oblasti jedne kategorije građanskog društva* (Novi Sad: Mediteran Publishing, 2012).

⁸ N. Makuljević, *Umetnost i nacionalna ideja u XIX veku. Sistem evropske i srpske vizuelne kulture u službi nacije* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2006).

⁹ Allings, *Monument und Nation*, 596.

a first-rate political object (source). Monuments were given their final purpose and required political significance by laudatory patriotic speeches and politically engaged texts.¹⁰ As a consequence, they eventually became engaged media expressions in the service of the dominant ideological currents.

The political communication of monuments in public space involves the conversion of a historical content into form which derives its rhetorical power and influence from the clarity and readability of its message.¹¹ It is important to emphasize the contribution of the method of political iconography to the interpretation of the monument as an active political performer in political space.¹² Political iconography seeks to situate the performance of a monument between the intentions of its creators and the expectations of the public and thus to convert its aesthetic effect to a charismatic effect.¹³ The method corresponds with various disciplines such as cultural history, the history of ideas and social history, endeavouring to explore the effects of political staging in the field of visual culture. It is not focused exclusively on high art; it also explores other phenomena (media) such as urban planning, print media and ephemeral spectacles,¹⁴ *studying the modes of creating, appropriating and protecting the political significance, intentions, influences and functioning of visual strategies.*¹⁵

The ruling structures of society in most European countries of the late nineteenth century rested on national, military and monarchical elites whose relationships defined the basic social norms. Army and monarchy, as pillars of the national state, defined the framework of modern states. They were perceived as permanent structures of society, protectors of peace and welfare and guarantors of the survival of the state and national unity. Their supporter and generator was the conservative-national section of the urban elites which, in line with market mechanisms and the overall militarization of society, sought to convince the nation of the immutability of the existing state of affairs. At the end of the nineteenth century, nations began to disregard state borders and to campaign for tribal (ethnic) unity. The process of national mobilization would find expression in the culture of monuments and its need to accommodate the aspirations to join various ethnic groups into a unified body.

¹⁰ Ibid. 598.

¹¹ Mittag, "Denkmal", 460–461.

¹² Martin Warnke, *Politischen Ikonographie. Bildindex zur Politischen Ikonographie* (Hamburg 2001).

¹³ Ibid. 2–3.

¹⁴ T. Haunfels, *Visualisierung von Herrschaftsanspruch. Die Habsburger und Habsburg-Lothringer in Bildern* (Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 2005), 101.

¹⁵ Ibid. 102.

The basis of national-dynastic monuments

National monuments are an expression of the endeavour to shape national identity with the use of the visual language. Thomas Nipperdey, in his seminal article, points out that the intention of nineteenth-century national monuments was to promote the concept of the nation (national idea) by means of lasting symbols and thereby to set an example for future generations.¹⁶

A strict typology of national monuments is difficult to develop, but a few types may be distinguished nonetheless. One of the basic types is the national-dynastic monument.¹⁷ This type of monument was inaugurated throughout late nineteenth-century Europe amidst the tension between the pursuit of absolute monarchical power, constitutional limits to it and class turbulences. These monuments were statements of the current course of society, which depended on where the preponderance of power lay, and they sought to materialize the ruler's immortal image into the ideal of the seamless unity of nation and monarchy.

The end of the eighteenth century saw the birth of the cult of genius. The right of hereditary succession, as a precondition for glorifying the ruler, is on retreat before the concept of personal merit. Now the ruler has to earn respect and honours and to prove his worth by personal example and virtue. The moralizing tone of a monument is substantiated by the character of the depicted ruler. The apotheosis of the great individual and his untainted character is meant to serve the common good, which leads to the design of dynastic-national monuments being imbued with a stronger patriotic charge. The depicted ruler not only represents the monarchy but also co-acts with the dominant national idea.¹⁸ The monument encapsulates all ideals of the nation, and thus explicitly defines the desires of the community. The hero (monarch) in monumental form becomes an extraordinary individual and the leader of the community¹⁹ which ritually gathers and self-defines in front of his stone statue.

In line with the basic principles of the culture of monuments, the topic of national-dynastic monuments in Serbia was placed on the agenda in the mid-nineteenth century (1857) with the proposal to set up a monument to Karadjordje in Belgrade.²⁰ The first monumental national-dynastic monument in the Kingdom of Serbia was erected in honour of Prince Michael Obrenović in downtown Belgrade in 1882, as a visual statement of the link between the dy-

¹⁶ T. Nipperdey, "Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert", *Historische Zeitschrift* 3 (1968), 532.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 534–535.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 537.

¹⁹ A. D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁰ Makuljević, *Umetnost i nacionalna ideja u XIX veku*, 293.

nastic history of the Obrenovićs and the national idea.²¹ Despite its distinctly dynastic vocabulary, the monument to Prince Michael was the product of a compromise between the supporters of constitutional monarchy and the promoters of the ideal of dynastic patriotism. Conforming to the prescribed guidelines, the monument was comprehensively imbued with the Serbian national idea, which was made manifest in accompanying emblems (e.g. the figure of a *gusle* player as an epitome of Serbian ethnic identity).

The end of the nineteenth century saw a strong reassertion of the absolutist concept of power entertained by the last Obrenović rulers. The struggle with the parliamentary opposition led to the frequent change of government. In October 1897 King Alexander Obrenović dismissed the Radical government and installed a *neutral* cabinet of Progressives and Liberals led by Vladan Djordjević.²² Even though the new government's legitimacy was soon confirmed by the Liberals' convincing victory at the election of 4 June 1898,²³ its *neutrality* sanctioned the political dominance of the crown over both the parliament and the government. The Djordjević cabinet remained in office until 1900. In a bid to consolidate his shaky position, the ruler resorted to yet another political move. The construction of the cult of Prince Miloš Obrenović was supposed to reaffirm the dynasty and renew its vitality.²⁴ The glorification of the founder of the dynasty involved adding the epithet "the Great" to Prince Miloš's name in 1896, one of the propaganda devices used to shape the dynastic mythology of the Obrenovićs.²⁵ The establishment of the Order of Miloš the Great in 1898 was also in the service of countless ephemeral spectacles in honour of the founder of the dynasty. The historical image²⁶ of the mythologized ruler was accommodated to current ideological contents and thus the young King Alexander *acquired* the right to a political life of his own through the old monarch. Prince Miloš was also used as a suitable image to evoke a golden age.²⁷ The founder of state and dynasty, the mythical father of the nation, became an instrument of

²¹ M. Timotijević, "Mit o nacionalnom heroju spasitelju i podizanje spomenika Mihailu M. Obrenoviću III", *Nasledje III* (2002), 45–78.

²² S. Rajić, *Aleksandar Obrenović: Vladar na prelazu vekova, sukobljeni svetovi* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 2011), 229.

²³ *Ibid.* 223.

²⁴ I. Borozan, *Reprezentativna kultura i politička propaganda. Spomenik knezu Milošu u Negotinu* (Belgrade: Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2006), 145–148.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 146–148.

²⁶ K. Mitrović, "Dvor kneza Miloša Obrenovića", in *Privatni život kod Srba u devetnaestom veku*, eds. A. Stolić & N. Makuljević (Belgrade: Clio, 2006), 261–301.

²⁷ M. Timotijević, *Takovski ustanak – srpske Cveti. O javnom zajedničkom sećanju i zaboravljanju u simboličnoj politici zvanične reprezentativne kulture* (Belgrade: Istorijski muzej Srbije & Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2012), 321.

legitimation of the last Obrenović king. An imaginary past became a guarantee for the present and for the survival of the last Obrenović.

The implied unity of the national idea and monarchy embodied in the figure of Miloš Obrenović was bolstered by the action of visual-verbal culture. The purpose of countless panegyrics in the print media was to help construct the hagiography of the mythical ruler. Intended in substantiation of the chosenness of the father of the nation were also numerous sculptures, painted portraits, photographs, picture postcards and other media of mass communication. Eventually, Prince Miloš was moved out of historical time²⁸ into a timeless, mythical space attuned to the current strategies of political elites.

Požarevac as an ideological topos and the shaping of the Monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović

As part of the unprecedented elevation of the cult of Prince Miloš, a monument to the charismatic Obrenović ruler was unveiled in the centre of Požarevac in 1898. The monument was intended as a reminder of the glorious liberation of the town in 1815 by the Serbian insurgent army led by Prince Miloš himself.

After liberation, the town of Požarevac began to develop at a fast pace.²⁹ It was given its urban reference points by the Prince himself who had a church built in 1819 and his residence a few years later, in 1825. By building the church and the residence Prince Miloš clearly staked his claim to the town, making its symbolic urban pattern dependent on the ideological basis of the Obrenović dynasty and its founder.³⁰ During the nineteenth century the town remained a stronghold of the dynasty and a place of the collective memory of its liberator. As part of constructing Požarevac as a powerful state and national *topos*, several military institutions were set up there, notably the Military Academy (1837), which established the town's military spirit.³¹ Požarevac was assigned an important military role which was built throughout the century in parallel with the modernization of the army and the state. The town was also the seat of the county military command garrisoned with two regiments: the 8th and the 9th (named Prince Nikola I), which is a clear indicator of the strengthening of the military structure in the town in the course of the nineteenth century.

²⁸ R. Ljušić, *Kneževina Srbija 1830–1838* (Belgrade: Zavoda za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 2004).

²⁹ M. Manojlović, *Požarevac od turske kasabe do srpske varoši 1804–1858* (Požarevac: Narodni muzej Požarevac, 2005).

³⁰ M. Lazić, "Crkva i dvor u Požarevcu kao ideološki centri vladarske reprezentacije kneza Miloša," *Viminacium* 16 (2011), 135–168.

³¹ M. Manojlović, *Požarevac, okružna varoš 1858–1918* (Požarevac: Istorijski arhiv Požarevca, 2011), 86–95.

In the course of the nineteenth century Požarevac became a symbol of modernization and emancipation of the Serbian state, and an urban *topos* of great importance.³² The importance attached to it was formalized in 1839 when it became the seat of the eponymous county with the status of a county town. Between 1878, when the territorially enlarged Principality of Serbia achieved independence, and the First World War, Požarevac was one of the five largest towns in Serbia. In line with the general political course of the country, local elections in Požarevac held on 23 May 1898 were marked by a remarkable success of the Progressives and the Liberals.³³

In 1897, in accordance with the character of the town and the legitimation of King Alexander, the project of setting up a monument to Prince Miloš in downtown Požarevac was initiated by Mihailo Kovačević, Požarevac County governor.³⁴ The usual public competition was bypassed and the design of the monument was entrusted to the sculptor Djordje Jovanović.³⁵ On behalf of the Committee on the Erection of the Monument, Kovačević asked the sculptor to prepare a drawing of the future monument. Kovačević, being a prominent supporter of the dynasty, also initiated the erection of a monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović in Negotin (1901) during his subsequent service in that part of Serbia.³⁶ Djordje Jovanović,³⁷ a leading Serbian sculptor trained at art schools and academies in Vienna, Munich and Paris, was a natural choice as author of the monument in his hometown.³⁸ His artistic reputation based on the authorship of the monuments to Hajduk Veljko in Negotin (1892)³⁹ and to Josif Pančić in Belgrade (1891)⁴⁰ must have been seen as a good enough recommendation for this commission.

³² Manojlović, *Požarevac, okružna varoš*, 272–366.

³³ M. Manojlović, “Političke stranke i izborne borbe u Požarevcu u drugoj polovini XIX i početkom XX veka”, *Viminacium* 16 (2011), 306.

³⁴ V. Tomić, “Požarevljani u spomen knezu Milošu Obrenoviću”, *Viminacium* 16 (2011), 211–219.

³⁵ “Autobiografija Djordja Jovanovića”, in M. Jovanović, *Djoka Jovanović 1861–1953* (Novi Sad: Galerija Matice srpske, 2005), 111.

³⁶ Borozan, *Reprezentativna kultura i politička propaganda*, 165–177.

³⁷ M. Jovanović, *Djoka Jovanović 1861–1953* (Novi Sad: Galerija Matice srpske, 2005); M. Jovanović, *Vajar Djoka Jovanović (1861–1953)* (Belgrade: SANU, 2008).

³⁸ Borozan, *Reprezentativna kultura i politička propaganda*, 85–236.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 156–157. Veljko Petrović, popularly known as Hajduk Veljko, was a commander of insurgent forces in the First Serbian Uprising (1804–1813) against Ottoman rule.

⁴⁰ M. Timotijević, “Naučnik kao nacionalni heroj i podizanje spomenika Josifu Pančiću”, *Godišnjak grada Beograda* XLIX-I (2002–2003), 211–243. Josif Pančić (1814–1888) was a physician, but most famously a botanist, discoverer of the species *Picea omorika* (*Pančić*) *Purk.* He was the first president of the Royal Serbian Academy.

Jovanović took on the obligation to complete the statue by St John the Baptist's feast day 1898 for a fee of 12,000 francs. The unveiling of the monument was planned for the day the town had been liberated from the Ottomans. The sculptor completed the statue at his Paris studio. Given the size of the square in Požarevac where the monument was to be erected, Jovanović increased the originally planned height of the statue of 2.5 meters by half a metre. A plaster cast of it exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1898 was quite a success.⁴¹ It won the praises of French art critics. Worthy of particular mention is the text of Armand Silvestre in the exhibition catalogue which included a photograph of the statue of Prince Miloš and described it as one of the most successful of the exhibited works.⁴² Besides art critics, the monument also won appreciation from the French military. Officers of the Paris Military School expressed the wish to have a collotype print of the statue. As a result of the effort to overcome the trauma caused to the nation by the defeat in the war with Germany in 1871, France was strewn with monuments glorifying the spirit of the French soldier and national identity.⁴³ That was the kind of the spirit that the French army officers recognized in the statue of Prince Miloš and his commanding posture. We can learn from their request for the collotype of the statue that there was an original photograph taken for reproduction purposes in the mass media.⁴⁴ This image was supposed to adorn the walls of government institutions, army barracks, schools and private spaces like some sort of a modern patriotic icon and, functioning as a visual booster, to raise the spirits and morally uplift the whole nation. The photograph of the statue of Prince Miloš Obrenović by the French photographer Michel Berthaud and its transposition to the medium of the collotype print eventually gained a canonical status (fig. 1). The image was included in the memorial album published in honour of the election of Djordje Jovanović as member of the Royal Serbian Academy.

As far as the visual record of the monument at the time it was displayed at the Paris Salon is concerned, a photograph showing the sculptor and his artwork should be mentioned (fig. 2). The image of Djordje Jovanović standing proudly in front of the statue of the Serbian ruler clearly reveals the artist's self-assured identity and social status. The author and his work legitimize one other, creating a representative visual image which indirectly confirms the identity of a Serbian sculptor in the French capital at the end of nineteenth century.

⁴¹ Jovanović, *Djoka Jovanović*, 38.

⁴² A. Silvestre, *La sculpture au Salon (1898)* (Paris 1898).

⁴³ J. Hagrove, "Qui vive! France! War Monuments from the Defense to the Revanche", in *Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870–1914*, eds. J. Hagrove & N. McWilliam (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 55–82.

⁴⁴ Jovanović, *Djoka Jovanović*, 38.



Fig. 1 Djordje Jovanović, Monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović, 1898, collotype print (Historical Museum of Serbia)



Fig. 2 Djordje Jovanović in Paris with the statue of Prince Miloš Obrenović, 1898, photograph (private collection)

The formal analysis of the monument clearly leads towards reading the figure of Prince Miloš within the narrative of the Knight of Takovo. The sabre in his left hand and the energetic gesture of his outstretched right arm are associated with the militant pathos of the first Obrenović. The rhetoric of visual language was placed in the service of raising the historical Prince Miloš to the level of an abstract idea. In the context of the glorification of the Second Serbian Uprising, which had started at Takovo in 1815, and of the constitution of the Takovo myth,⁴⁵ the famous ruler was depicted as a valiant defender of the homeland and a fighter for national justice⁴⁶ in line with the Obrenović dynasty's concept of "folkness". In the spirit of the militarization of the state and the nation the Prince's figure reflected the current ideological and ethical framework of society. Prince Miloš was not depicted fighting in the Battle of Požarevac, which would have confirmed the trustworthiness of historical narrative, but as an encapsulation of the idea of the power of the dynasty and the nation. The ruler was a visual symbol of the unity of state and nation, a proof of the rising power

⁴⁵ Timotijević, *Takovski ustanak – srpske Cveti*, 320–330.

⁴⁶ Borozan, *Reprezentativna kultura i politička propaganda*, 344–345.

of military structures in the society of the late nineteenth century.⁴⁷ The mythical dimension overshadowed historical authenticity, and the Prince's image was typologically equated with iconic images. Even though the Prince's image was based on his authentic portraits, it was transformed into a timeless and supra-personal mask of authority and institutional state power.

Despite the prominent timeless dimension of the monument, Jovanović built the image of Prince Miloš on hard historical facts in keeping with the tenets of academic art. The Prince's attila and helmet with plume are exact replicas of the elements of his historical attire that Jovanović borrowed from the National Museum for this particular occasion.⁴⁸ The consecrated jacket that visually evokes the dignity and historicity of the Prince's image confirms the respect for the rules of decorum characteristic of idealistic realism. At the core of the concept of idealistic realism is the idealized and selective representation of nature aimed at making corrections and embellishments to the observable world.⁴⁹

*The unveiling ceremony of the Monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović
in Požarevac on 24 June 1898*

The project of erecting the Požarevac monument had media coverage from day one. The *Večernje Novosti* reported that the proposal of the county governor Mihailo Kovačević met with an affirmative response in the District of Ram. The citizens of Ram proved their loyalty to the dynasty by donating 1,000 dinars for the future monument to Prince Miloš in April 1897.⁵⁰ The same month, as we can read in the *Večernje Novosti*, the citizens of Požarevac donated 15,000 dinars.⁵¹ Periodical reports on the donations made were part of the standard process of national mobilization and patriotic homogenization aimed at keeping the local population on the ball since only the residents of the Požarevac County were allowed to donate money.⁵² Thus, in spite of a broader significance of the whole project, it was regional identity that defined the question of local heritage and of the place of the county residents in the system of dynastic patriotism.

⁴⁷ M. Milićević, *Reforma vojske 1897–1900* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 2002).

⁴⁸ Jovanović, *Djoka Jovanović*, 40.

⁴⁹ Borozan, *Reprezentativna kultura i politička propaganda*, 258–271.

⁵⁰ "Patriotski odziv", *Večernje novosti* no. 114, 26 May 1897.

⁵¹ "Spomenik knezu Milošu", *Večernje novosti* no. 115, 27 May 1897.

⁵² The minimum donation was set at five dinars. People were encouraged to donate by the announcement that their names would be included in a commemorative book which was to be released on the unveiling day, cf. "Domaće vesti", *Male novine* no. 89, 30 March 1898.

In May 1898, the foundation stone of the monument was consecrated and the project entered its final phase of realization.⁵³ The public was informed of the planned festivities by the media, including a detailed programme of the unveiling ceremony. The purpose of such invitingly offered information was to achieve the highest possible attendance at the big event.

Djordje Jovanović sent the bronze statue from Paris by the arranged date. In his recollections of the whole affair, the sculptor says indignantly that he was not paid the entire agreed fee, and that the local authorities even failed to inform him of the monument's safe arrival in Požarevac.⁵⁴

It was not until his intervention that the Committee on the Erection of the Monument found it fit to pay what was due to him but not even then all of it. The Committee justified its failure to fulfil contractual obligations by the large costs of preparations for the upcoming celebration, which clearly indicates the precedence of the grand unveiling ceremony over the work of art.⁵⁵ Through their rhetoric and their propaganda character, the celebrations surrounding the unveiling of the monument, as para-religious moments in the life of the nation, became a value in themselves, dwarfing the aesthetic value of the work of art.

The monument to Prince Miloš was set up in the centre of Town Park (fig. 3).⁵⁶ Its setting up on the most prominent urban location indicates a political reading of public space (square).⁵⁷ The monument defined the town's symbolic topography and asserted ideological ties between Požarevac and the Obrenović



Fig. 3 Unveiling of the Monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović, 1898, picture postcard (Historical Museum of Serbia)

⁵³“Osvećenje temelja”, *Male novine* no. 126, 20 May 1898.

⁵⁴“Autobiografija Djordja Jovanovića”, 112.

⁵⁵ Jovanović was belatedly informed that he was awarded the Order of St. Sava 4th Class by Prime Minister Vladan Djordjević for his work of art. Jovanović did not attend the unveiling ceremony in Požarevac.

⁵⁶ Manojlović, *Požarevac, okružna varoš*, 176–177.

⁵⁷ Makuljević, *Umetnost i nacionalna ideja u XIX veku*, 255–259.

dynasty. Moreover, it was placed in front of a monumental public building,⁵⁸ the County Hall,⁵⁹ forming with it a whole in townscape and ideological terms.⁶⁰ In the vault of its ceremonial hall is a medallion painted with a representation of the Takovo Uprising (fig. 4).⁶¹ This work of an unknown painter of the late nineteenth century followed the standard iconographic pattern to give a visual form to the gathering at which the decision was taken to raise the Second Serbian Uprising. Thus, the painted medallion with the status of a patriotic iconic image⁶² and the monument to Prince Miloš complemented one another, creating a conceptual and symbolic framework for the glorification of the nation's statehood and the vitality of the reigning dynasty. King Square (*Kraljev trg*) was defined as the stage for a display of power and a visualization of the state and the ruling dynasty in conformity with the required national policy but also with the local memory of Prince Miloš.

Upon its arrival in Serbia, the statue of Prince Miloš was raised on an already prepared pedestal. The real and symbolic base of every public monument, the pedestal helped verbalize the figural representation, and in that way round out the emblematic nature of the visual representation. As a symbolic signifier of the sculpted image, the pedestal bears several inscriptions. Its left-hand side is inscribed with the date of the liberation of the town, 24 June 1815, and the date of the unveiling of the monument, 24 June 1898. The right-hand side is carved with two key dates in the life of Prince Miloš: his birth, 7 March 1780, and death, 14 September 1860. The most important inscription is placed on the front of the pedestal – the words that, according to Vuk St. Karadžić, Prince Miloš said during the Battle of Požarevac: *Delibasha, Sultan's soldier, You have other options and ways to follow, And I have no other way but this, So, may it be life or death.*⁶³

On 24 June 1898 Požarevac became the main symbolic *topos* on the patriotic geography map and the focal point of national self-understanding.⁶⁴ That was the intended spirit of the great celebration occasioned by the unveiling of

⁵⁸ The County Hall was the largest public building in Serbia at the time of its completion in late 1889. It was designed in the style of academism by Friedrich Gizel.

⁵⁹ A. Kadrijević, "Arhitektura i urbanizam u Srbiji od 1854. do 1904. godine", in *Nauka i tehnika u Srbiji druge polovine XIX veka 1854–1904*, ed. T. I. Podgorac (Kragujevac: University of Kragujevac), 276.

⁶⁰ Makuljević, *Umetnost i nacionalna ideja u XIX veku*, 261.

⁶¹ Timotijević, *Takovski ustanak – srpske Cveti*, 355.

⁶² *Ibid.* 400–406.

⁶³ V. Stefanović Karadžić, *Prvi i drugi srpski ustanak* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1947), 366.

⁶⁴ V. Djordjević, *Kraj jedne dinastije. Prilozi za istoriju Srbije od 11. oktobra 1897. do 8. jula 1900*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: Štamparija D. Dimitrijevića, 1905).



Fig. 4 *Takovo Uprising* by an anonymous painter, County Hall, Požarevac, late 19th century (photo by the author)



Fig. 5 Unveiling of the Monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović in Požarevac, 1898, photograph (Historical Museum of Serbia)

the monument (fig. 5).⁶⁵ On the day of the anniversary of the liberation of the town, in the presence of eight thousand people, a complex national spectacle was performed at the centre of which was the monumental image of the founder of the Obrenović dynasty. The town was crowded with people from all of Serbia and all of *Serbdom* who had come, as national pilgrims, to visit the new destination in the visual system of patriotic tourism. Representatives of patriotic cultural associations, such as the Choral Society “Dušan the Mighty” and the Belgrade Singing Society, greatly added to the festal tone of the spectacle. As far as the military spirit of the celebration is concerned, what is observable is an active role played by the representatives of the local garrison and the presence of an equestrian association, the Circle of Riders “Prince Michael”. The arrival of King Alexander and the ex-King Milan in Požarevac was described by reporters as a manifestation of strength and fighting spirit.⁶⁶ The two rulers riding on horseback, saluted by a salvo of artillery and rifle fire and escorted by the National Guard, set a tone of masculinity for the entire celebration.

The ceremony, disturbed by spells of heavy rain, reached its culmination when the reigning monarch Alexander Obrenović pulled the white cloth from the monument. Announcing this ceremonial act, Prime Minister Vladan Djordjević addressed the assembled people: *The son of the first Serbian king after Kosovo. The son of the descendant of Miloš who staked the victorious flag atop the walls of the ancient and proud city of Niš and shouted to the Serbian nation: the Serbian flag is flying in the middle of Niš but our forlorn Kosovo hasn't been avenged yet. People pray and wish for this image to be presented to them by the worthy descendant and successor of Miloš, the one who made the memorable words known to all: Nothing is more important to me than Serbia.*⁶⁷ The speech was supposed to evoke the notion of the Prince's spirit being incarnated in the figure of the reigning monarch or, in other words, the sanctified ancestor was invoked to sustain the legitimacy of his weak descendant. The speech of the newly-appointed county governor, Kosta Jezdić, struck a similar chord: *This Great Serb, this greatest son of his people and his times, Miloš the vojvoda of Rudnik, the knight of Takovo [...] this hero giant who like Theseus flew down into the abyss and crushed the darkness and brought thence the imprisoned Serbs into the light of day.*⁶⁸ It is evident that

⁶⁵ The complex celebration surrounding the unveiling of the monument has already been an object of scholarly analysis, and our attention will therefore be focused primarily on the monument in the light of the narrative of the Takovo knight: Tomić, “Požarevljani u spomen knezu Milošu Obrenoviću”, 215–219.

⁶⁶ “Narodna slava”, *Male novine* no. 172, 26 June 1898.

⁶⁷ Djordjević, *Kraj jedne dinastije*, 532.

⁶⁸ “Govor predsednika Odbora za podizanje spomenika Knjazu Milošu, okružnog načelnika K. Jezdića, prilikom svečanog otkrivanja spomenika Velikome Milošu na dan 24. juna 1898. u Požarevcu”, *Male novine* no. 180, 4 June 1898.

Jezdić's intention was to emphasize the knightly spirit of the first Obrenović and, thus, the masculinity and strength of contemporary Serbian society and its crown. His classically composed speech situates the Prince's figure in the field of the mythical struggle between good and evil in a bid to transfer history to the level of cosmology. Later in his speech, the county governor likened the Prince to Napoleon and Hannibal, pointing to his soldierly character and statesmanlike wisdom. The ancient concept of the hero as the community's moral role model was placed in the context of a political reading of the history of the Serbian people, and so Prince Miloš became an embodiment of national patriotism and a paragon of national endeavour. In this speech the ruler was also defined by the region of his birth: *The lush and magical Šumadija gave birth to Serbian Miloš, she was his mother. Serbian genius was his father.*⁶⁹ Nineteenth-century national ideals involved the notion of the unity of soil and people, which meant that the first Obrenović was necessarily predetermined to be born exactly there where he was born, on Šumadija's soil. Geographic determinants in the life of a nation implied that its identity depended on the characteristics of local soil and climate, from which Prince Miloš also sprang.

The celebration was supposed to include a theatrical performance, "Dušan the Mighty", but it was cancelled due to rain. The purpose of the evocation of the most famous medieval Serbian ruler was to revive the age perceived as the optimum historical age of the Serbian people in an attempt to revive its past glory in the present historical moment. The unification of the dispersed Serbian people and the aspiration for the liberation of the *enslaved brothers* were the driving force behind this kind of popular celebrations aimed at mobilizing the national spirit. During the celebration in Požarevac, the Belgrade Choral Society performed the song composed to the poem of Dragomir Brzak, "In front of the Monument to Prince Miloš". Its patriotic verses were undoubtedly a testimony to glorifying the Serbian arms and warrior character embodied in the figure of Prince Miloš: *Here come I. Here comes war. Those were your words that rumbled like thunder across all of Serbia. And the guns roared, And the yataghans swished, After a dark, terrible night, Bright days dawned.*⁷⁰ The pathos marking the event reflected the current political situation in Serbia. The pursuit of national homogenization, the integrative idea of the Kosovo legacy and the revival of the Takovo myth, all of it was in the service of the preservation of the dynasty and its place in the European-wide process of militarization. In the context of the masculine pathos of the celebration in Požarevac, veterans of the War of Independence were awarded the Takovo Cross. Prince Miloš's insurgents Sima Mišić from Aleksandrovac and Dimitrije Jovanović, a rebel army drummer, were deco-

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ D. Brzak, "Pred spomenikom kneza Miloša", *Vitez* no. 9–10, 24 June 1898, p. 2.

rated in token of remembrance of the “Serbian Palm Sunday”⁷¹ and the glorious rebellion against the Ottomans.⁷²

The unity of the people and the Prince’s image and their integration into a single national body was vividly evoked by the ceremony in Požarevac. The issue of the magazine *Vitez* (Knight) devoted to the Požarevac monument highlighted the dynastic-national character of this work of art.⁷³ The author of the text called the Prince a new Achilles in front of whom the people should be united under the lucky star of the native Obrenović dynasty, thus offering their sacrifice on the altar of the nation and the throne. The editorial board, in accordance with their understanding of the nationalization of the monument, placed the canonical photograph of the model of the statue on the front page and, to highlight the national idea, framed it with the Serbian tricolour (fig. 6).⁷⁴

The monument began its life in the collective memory of the nation at the moment of its unveiling. The idea was that patriotic pilgrims would visit the Prince’s cult image every year on Liberation Day, offering flowers and wreaths to the liberator of the town.⁷⁵ The regular annual commemorations would keep up dynastic patriotism, raising patriotic consciousness of the population. This practice continued until the overthrow of the Obrenović dynasty in a coup in 1903. With the ascension of a king of another dynasty, Peter I Karadjordjević after 1903, the practice of paying homage to the former dynasty was abandoned. However, the performative power of the Požarevac monument in public space before the coup should not be taken for granted. Namely, in 1900 the daily *Večernje Novosti* reported on the local community’s neglect of the monument to its liberator since inscription letters had fallen off the pedestal.⁷⁶ The actual power of the dynastic-national monument lay in the space between high ideals and daily practice.

In 1900, shortly after the campaign for erecting the monument in Požarevac was brought to a successful end, Simeon Roksanđić completed a monument to the founder of the Obrenović dynasty for the hall of the Kragujevac *Gymnasium*,⁷⁷ and in 1901 Djordje Jovanović created another monument to Prince Miloš, in Negotin.⁷⁸ This monumental triad suggests the sustainability

⁷¹ Decision on starting the Second Serbian Uprising was reached on Palm Sunday 1815 at Takovo.

⁷² Tomić, “Požarevljani u spomen knezu Milošu Obrenoviću”, 216.

⁷³ Brzak, “Pred spomenikom kneza Miloša”, 2.

⁷⁴ *Vitez*, no. 9–10, 24 June 1898.

⁷⁵ Tomić, “Požarevljani u spomen knezu Milošu Obrenoviću”, 218–219.

⁷⁶ “Fotografija iz Požarevca”, *Večernje novosti* no. 37, 6 January 1900.

⁷⁷ “Otkriće spomenika kneza Miloša Velikog u Kragujevcu”, *Nova iskra* 1 (1901), 26–27.

⁷⁸ Borozan, *Reprezentativna kultura i politička propaganda*, 237–288.



Fig. 6 Djordje Jovanović, Monument to Prince Miloš Obrenović, *Vitez*, illustrated magazine, 1898 (National Library of Serbia)

of national-dynastic monuments before the demise of the Obrenović dynasty. Erected as part of the process of the nationalization of society, supported by civil and military structures, these monuments heralded a continuity of the process of the failed militarization of society under King Peter.⁷⁹ The military elite whose power became obvious at the time of the fall of the Obrenović dynasty would prove to be a basic social structure. The conceptual and formal similarity of the abovementioned monuments and their rhetorical power obviously had a limited significance. The 1903 coup and the assassination of King Alexander

⁷⁹ D. T. Bataković, "Storm over Serbia: Rivalry between Civilian and Military Authorities (1911–1914)", *Balkanica* XLIV (2013), 319–330.

Obrenović⁸⁰ laid bare the discrepancy between representative culture and the pulse of the times. At the turn of the century, the use of imposing propagandistic memorials as a means to save the regime of the last Obrenović monarch proved to be unsustainable and the monument in Požarevac sank into collective oblivion.

UDC 73.041.2:929.731 Miloš Obrenović
94(497.11):316.658.2"18"

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⁸⁰ Rajić, *Aleksandar Obrenović*, 512–528.

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