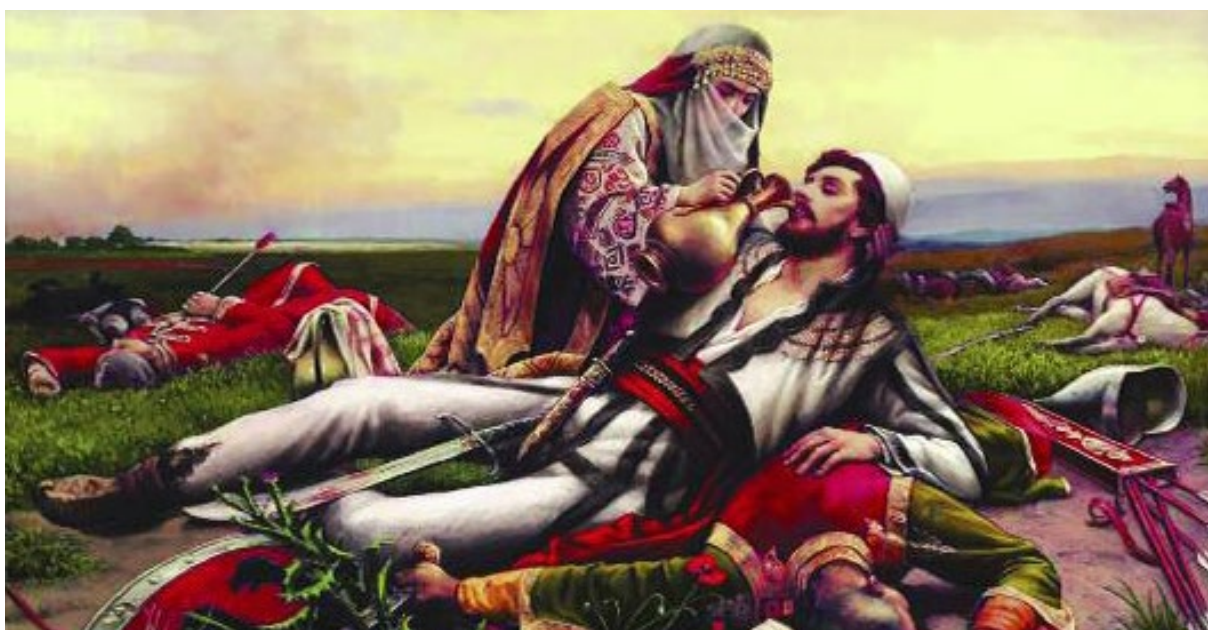


# Helsinki *bulletin*



HELSINKI COMMITTEE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN SERBIA  
address: Kneza Miloša 4,  
Belgrade, Serbia  
tel/fax. +381-11-3349-170; 3349-167;  
e-mail: office@helsinki.org.rs  
http://www.helsinki.org.rs

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A Kosovo girl: Artist's reinterpretation of a traditional painting by Uroš Predić

Illustration: Mića Stajčić, *Kosovka devojka*, 2014.

## THE KOSOVO MYTH

by Ivan Čolović

The historians who studied the historical sources on the Battle of Kosovo, from Ilarion Ruvarac and Ljubomir Kovačević, the founder of critical historiography in Serbia, to Sima Ćirković, who studied the relevant sources during the last decades of the 20th century, concluded that there existed few reliable sources on it. In other words, the critical verification of the reliability of the documents about the Battle of Kosovo has resulted in the fact that we have increasingly less reliable knowledge about it. "Today we know less about this battle than our predecessors", writes Ćirković, "but what we know has been verified and is incomparably more reliable"

(Ćirković 1990: 116). This verified knowledge is confined to several facts: the battle took place on 15 June [Old Style] 1389; it was fought between the Christian army led by the Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović (1329-1389), and the Ottoman army led by Sultan Murad I (1326-1389); those fighting on the Christian side included Lazar's son-in-law Vuk Branković (c. 1345-1397) and one detachment of Bosnian soldiers under the command of Vlatko Vuković, which was sent to Kosovo by the Bosnian King Tvrtko I (1388-1391); both Lazar and Murad lost their lives in the battle.

## THE MEMORIES OF THE BATTLE OF KOSOVO BEFORE THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONALISM

In contrast to Ruvarac – who argued that a serious historian should exclude every unreliable historical source from his field of interest, so that when one writes about Kosovo he should not pay attention to “folk and popular narration...poems and stories, and narratives based on them” – contemporary researchers of the Battle of Kosovo know that part of their job is also to get acquainted with the poems and stories dedicated to this battle. “What people were thinking, believing and speaking”, Sima Ćirković warned his colleagues, “was part of their social reality and we must not discard it even when we know from our perspective that it does not correspond to the data from the sources” (Ćirković 1990: 113). In fact, even before these Ćirković’s words, the memories of Kosovo, as a group of folklore, literary, church and other documents about the Battle of Kosovo, were the object of scientific research, which was not confined to the search for something that unquestionably belongs to the historical truth. Stojan Novaković asked that attention should be devoted to stories and legends about the Battle of Kosovo and that they should be considered and interpreted in the context of the time in which they were created (Novaković 1906: 8). Following this line of reasoning, some researchers have found the traces of archaic, that is, pagan beliefs and myths in folklore and other documents preserving the memory of the Battle of Kosovo and its heroes. In that sense, Natko Nodilo, Veselin Čajkanović, Vojin Matić, Aleksandar Loma, Miodrag Popović and others also wrote about the Kosovo myth. In his book *Vidovdan i časni krst* (St Vitus Day and the Honourable Cross), Popović interpreted the conflict between Lazar’s sons-in-law Miloš Obilić and Vuk Branković, described in the folk poem “Kneževa večera” (The Prince’s Supper), as the conflict between the ancient pagan religion and Christianity.

Accordingly, he interpreted the question “who is the faithful one, and who unfaithful” – which is understood in the text of the poem as a dilemma who of Lazar’s two sons-in-law will betray the Serbs at Kosovo – as the question which religion was the true one – Pagan religion, personified by Obilić, or Christianity, symbolised by Lazar and Vuk Branković (Popović 2007: 127).

Miodrag Popović also expressed the opinion that in the second half of the 19th century there appeared folklore, literary and other documents in which the memory of Kosovo was separated from the authentic Kosovo myth and turned into the “St Vitus Day myth”, the myth in the service of conquest and hatred. He writes that in the authentic Kosovo myth “St Vitus Day was the day of heroic competition, victory and triumph over evil. In the new cult emerging under the pressure of the political and economic imperatives of the Serbian citizenry, southward penetration and conquest of Kosovo, St Vitus Day was, above all else, the symbol of a bloody, merciless revenge over everything that was Turkish or Muslim in general”. According to Popović, this is a pseudo-myth, an “aesthetic and humanistic degradation of the Kosovo myth” (Ibid: 167-168). However, other contemporary researchers on the narrative about the Battle of Kosovo, relying on the new insights into the nature of the political imaginary and symbolic resources of political power, gained by some researchers (such as Benedict Anderson, Jacques Lacan, Cornelius Castoriadis, Anthony Smith or Alaida Assmann) hold that the departure from pagan beliefs is not a good reason to deny some Kosovo narratives the status and name of myth.

My research on the history of the memory of the Battle of Kosovo (Ćolović 2016) also led me to the conclusion that in the early 19th century there emerged the documents testifying about the gradual formation of a new mythical narrative about this battle and its heroes, in the centre of which there was the cult of the people

– the ceremonial narrative of their struggle for national freedom and their nation state. The novelty did not consist in the fact that the memory of Kosovo was put in the service of legalising political aims and affirming an ideology, since that memory had political and ideological functions since the very beginning, that is, the emergence of the first documents about it. There is no doubt that such a function was also assigned to the cult writings about Prince Lazar, which appeared in the first years after the Battle of Kosovo, when Princess Milica won over Patriarch Danilo III for the idea that her husband, Prince Lazar, who was killed in that battle, should be canonised, which she needed in order to strengthen her position in the influential Serbian Church and in relation to other ambitious regional lords who, like Milica herself, were ready to rule as Ottoman vassals over the territory governed by Lazar before the Battle of Kosovo. Danilo's *Slovo pohvalno knezu Lazaru* (Eulogy for Prince Lazar) and other similar writings created under his control in the 1390s, were simultaneously building the image of Lazar as a martyr saint and the image of his brave widow who, with God's help, succeeded in defeating all her enemies, establishing peace and restoring "the earlier beauty" of her country (Pavlović, D. and Marinković, R.: 51). Here the memory of the Battle of Kosovo contributed to Lazar's elevation to the rank of saint but, what was probably more important, to emphasizing the ruling capabilities and merits of the saint's wife, Regent Milica.

Until the early 19th century, in the documents containing the memory of Kosovo – in the writings of Greek and Ottoman chroniclers, and Western travellers, as well as in the recorded folk poems about the Battle of Kosovo and 18th century writings, such as *Priča o boju kosovskom* (Story About the Battle of Kosovo) and *Tronoški rodoslov* (Tronoša Genealogy), it can be observed that the acts of the participants in the Battle of Kosovo were assessed according to more or less identical value criteria, the criteria of feudal

society, where loyalty and allegiance to the ruler, piety, honour and glory were especially appreciated as the class virtues, that is, the virtues adorning a lord, a noble and a knight. Therefore, in these writings, the two parties fighting at Kosovo understand each other excellently and their heroes enjoyed the reputation depending on their adherence to the knight's code of conduct and ethos. Their ethical and religious differences were less obvious here.

For example, one motive that appears in many of these writings is the conversation between the mortally wounded Sultan Murad and Prince Lazar and Miloš Obilić, taken prisoner and brought before the Sultan who had to decide on how they would be executed and buried, has the same ideological point – the affirmation of the feudal system and hierarchy. Although Murad will die of the wound inflicted by Obilić, he praises the latter's courage and loyalty to Lazar, and says that – if his life were not coming to an end – he would be glad to have him in his service, and accepts his plea – as being justified and in accordance with a knight's funeral protocol – that he is buried below Lazar's legs and not beside Murad, as it was ordered at first by the Sultan. This discussion about the feudal nobles' funeral protocol worthy of three Kosovo heroes, appeared for the first time in the early 15th century in the writing of an anonymous Florentine, bearing the title *Cronica volgare* (Chronicle in the Vulgar Tongue), then in *Janičareve uspomene* (Memoirs of a Janissary) by Konstantin Mihailović of Ostrovica, printed in Poland in the late 15th century, in the bugarštica "*Kad je poginuo knez Lazar i Miloš Obilić na Kosovu*" (When Prince Lazar and Miloš Obilić Died in Kosovo), which Andrija Kačić Miošić included in his *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskog* (Pleasant Conversation of Slavic People), written in 1756, from which it was taken by the anonymous compiler of *Priča o Boju kosovskom* (The Narrative of the Battle of Kosovo), which appeared in the second half of the 18th century.

Murad accepts Miloš's explanation that the Sultan and Lazar should be buried beside each other and that he should be buried below their legs, just like in "Lazarica", a decasyllabic poem found in Vuk's legacy collection. In this poem, apart from the consent given by the Sultan and his enemies about a politically correct burial, there appears the consent on the policy to be pursued by the Turks after the deaths of two rulers or, more precisely, some kind of joint legacy of Lazar and Murad where it is demanded that the people should be governed like before the Battle of Kosovo, that the poor should not be converted into Islam, that the churches should not be demolished, that the people should not be resettled, but should be left alone and should only pay *arač* (tribute money). This testament was formulated by Murad: "The Prince leaves a legacy to me and I leave it to you from now on till forever". Murad also left the same legacy to his successors in Višnjić's poem "Početak bune protiv dahija" (The Beginning of the Revolt Against the Dahis).

The scene in which Murad, Lazar and Miloš discuss the funeral protocol appears for the last time in Matija Ban's drama *Car Lazar ili propast na Kosovu* (Tsar Lazar or the Defeat at Kosovo) (the first edition was printed in 1858 and the second in 1866). In the drama, these three men excellently understand each other because they belong to the same world and respect the same values. Thus, Murad can say to his killer without irony: "I admire you!" and the latter replies: "Believe me I regret that such a csar is dying". However, apart from continuity with the feudal, knightly ethos, in this Ban's drama, as well as in other dramas based on the same theme and published in the first half of the 19th century by Jovan Sterija Popović (Miloš Obilić, 1828), Isidor Nikolić (*Car Lazar ili Padenie serbskog carstva / Tsar Lazar or the Fall of the Serbian Tsardom*, 1835) and Ban's contemporary Jovan Subotić (Miloš Obilić, 1858), there appeared two new factors.

The authors of these dramas live and were educated in Austria, where they adopted the political ideas combining Enlightenment rationalism and romantic nationalism. Except diplomat Ban, the other three authors were lawyers, and the influence of legal reasoning is also evident in their dramas on Kosovo and presentation of the problems faced by the Kosovo heroes. As a rule, they demand action in accordance with law and that their opinion is respected – for example, the accusation of Miloš Obilić of betrayal should be supported by evidence and the witnesses accusing him should be checked up. In addition, the decision to wage war against the Turks is presented in these dramas as the result of an argumentation-based discussion (especially in Ban's *Tsar Lazar*). Not all nobles at Lazar's court agree with the decision, but they all respect it because it was "democratically" made. The right to think freely is also approved by Ban's Lazar although, as can be expected from a medieval ruler, it is granted only to nobility: "Every nobleman can freely express his thoughts to the Tsar, even if he does not agree with the Tsar's" (Ban 1858: 265). Thus, after more than three centuries, the Enlightenment-rationalist interpretations of the Battle of Kosovo in the dramas of these authors from Vojvodina built upon the scene in Feliks Petančić's *Historia Turcica* (Turkish History) in which this Dubrovnik humanist and their colleague (Petančić worked at the criminal court of the Dubrovnik Republic) introduces Obilić transformed into a citizen of the Republic and aware of his rights guaranteed by law.

## THE BIRTH OF THE SERBIAN NATIONAL MYTH OF KOSOVO

Ban's drama is a good example of how since the mid-1860s the feudal value system and the rationalist and Enlightenment worldview in the accounts of the Battle of Kosovo gradually gave way to romantic nationalism. While preparing



the new edition of *Tsar Lazar* for publication (it appeared in 1866, the same year when the United Serbian Youth was founded in Novi Sad), Ban changed Lazar's and Miloš's political statements on their responsibilities, so that – instead of referring to the state, Lazar's court and nobility, as it was written in the first edition of this drama published in 1858 – they now referred to their concern about the people, their well-being and respect for their opinion. In the first edition, Lazar says that he needs the "mightiest strength of all nobility" (1958: 254), while in the second one he needs the "mightiest strength of all people"; in the first edition he demands that his nobles "help save the country", while in the second edition the word "country" was replaced with the word "people". In the first edition, Miloš is concerned because he is accused of "betraying the country", while in the second one the word "country" was replaced with the word "people".

By intervening in the text of his drama about Prince Lazar, Matija Ban linked it more tightly to the nationalist discourse than in the first edition. Namely, in the second half of the 19th century such a discourse gradually imposed itself as the dominant one. The ideological focus was increasingly resolutely shifting from the values of the feudal system and Enlightenment rationalism to the values celebrated by romantic nationalism, so that the memory of Kosovo in literature, historiography and political discourse was increasingly linked to the cult of the people, nation and nation state. The Kosovo narrative was increasingly turning into the story about a nation (mostly the Serbian one), its struggle, death and resurrection, and although there is no mention of pagan mythology gods, it has all characteristics of a myth because it is presented as an unquestionable and practically compulsory story or, more precisely, it demands the status of such a story for itself.

Vuk Karadžić and Njegoš were most responsible for the formation and affirmation of the nationalist discourse in the regions with the South Slavic population, especially in Vojvodina, Montenegro and Serbia. The value that was particularly respected by them included the people and their allegedly natural "Nationalismus", as it was written by Vuk. As for the interpretation of the documents containing the memories of Kosovo, the people assumed a dually important role: they represent the value in the name of which the Kosovo heroes are fighting and, what is probably more important, they are the guardians of the memories of those heroes, the successors and admirers of the message left allegedly to them and which will begin to be called the "Kosovo covenant", "Kosovo testament", "Kosovo commitment", "Kosovo thought" and the like. Therefore, the folk poems collected and published by Vuk assumed a key role in the documents about the Battle of Kosovo, became the source of the figures, images, symbols and hints that would form the Kosovo narrative as a national myth. The most important task was not only to show the antiquity of folk poems, created allegedly immediately after the Battle of Kosovo, but also that they survived among the people and that "Obilić's faith", as it was said by Njegoš, was still alive and that the people were ready to confirm it by poem and deed. What important deed had to be done by the people became known in the mid-19th century: revenge over the Turks and the restoration of Dušan's empire.

In the second part of the 19th century, revenge for Kosovo and the restoration of the empire – and, in that context, the restoration of Serbian or South Slavic national unity – were not only the themes that repeatedly appeared in folklore records, literary and historiographic texts, but were also the more or less openly presented goals by the political circles. They became the goals of Serbia's policy when it gained independence. In other words, the Kosovo myth discourse became an instrument of state

propaganda, resulting in the close cooperation of the political and military circles with historians, philologists and writers who studied, interpreted and published church and folklore texts, which allegedly confirmed that Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia used to be the Serbian lands and that the people living there still kept alive the Battle of Kosovo. This provided historical and ethnographic arguments that allegedly confirmed that the new Serbian state had the right to expand its power to the territories that were once Serbian. As it was written by Ilija Garašanin, the minister during the reign of Alexander Karadjordjević, the Serbian state “which has already seen its good start, but must strive to expand and become stronger, has its roots and firm foundation in the Serbian Empire of the 13th and 14th centuries, and in the glorious and rich Serbian history” (Garašanin: 34-35).

In the second half of the 19th century, the collection of folklore material in Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia was the project of national importance because, as it will later be explained by ethnologist Tihomir Djordjević, folklore was a “powerful tool for determining national borders” (Djordjević, T.: 19). Therefore, the theologian and publisher of folk poems Bogoljub Petranović and historian Miloš S. Milojević obtained financial support from Prince Michael’s government, or probably worked in accordance with its direct instructions – for their research into folk culture in the regions under Turkish and Austrian rule in the 1860s, and for publishing folk poems and other materials, which allegedly testified that the majority of the population in those regions remained faithful to the Serbian ethnos and “Kosovo covenant”. At the time when the “Bosnian question” was topical in Serbia, Petranović published the folk poem “Propast carstva srpskog” (The Fall of the Serbian Empire), created by the Bosnian gusle player Ilija Divjanović – which was commissioned by the former and created with his assistance, as it was established later on – in which

Prince Lazar ponders over geopolitical issues in the way being very close to the way in which Prince Michael’s government was thinking about these issues, that is, laying emphasis on the idea that Kosovo, Macedonia, Vojvodina and Bosnia and Herzegovina had always formed part of the Serbian state. “I have all my state”, says Lazar, “Skenderia and Rumelia, Arnautluk and Macedonia, and all Bosnia and Herzegovina, flat Srem and half of Zemun, in addition to all Serbia” (“Propast carstva srpskog”, verses 145-150).

The celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in 1889 will show that the Serbian government and the court (at that time, this was the court of the juvenile King Alexander Obrenović, which was governed by his regents) came to the conclusion that this event could be a good opportunity for the King and the Serbian army to present themselves as the guardians of the memory of Kosovo and the “Kosovo covenant”, the successors of Prince Lazar and the Kosovo heroes, and especially as those being ready to lead the people into the long-awaited victorious battle that will avenge the ancestors who fell in Kosovo. In this connection, the government and the court were supported by the church and intellectuals gathered in scientific and artistic societies, including the Serbian Royal Academy founded a few years earlier. The central part of the celebration took place in Kruševac and its most important political messages can be found in the speech delivered by Metropolitan Mihailo. One of them was the call on the Serbs to be loyal to the King in the name of Kosovo: “Let the memory of the patriotic heroes of Kosovo teach their descendants patriotism, let the generations of our people look up to them and – as they did – love their country, their people and their ruler, young King Alexander, never letting go of any thoughts of infidelity and betrayal” (Durković-Jakšić: 381). The other message – in the form of an appeal to the Kosovo heroes – was the hope that the Serbian people would unite and restore Dušan’s Empire. The Kosovo

heroes were called upon to intercede with God to seek help “in restoring the Serbian Empire and unifying the Serbian people” (Ibid: 365).

This event was also an opportunity to show the strength of the Serbian army whose members, wearing dress uniforms and firing honorary salutes, participated in the greater part of commemoration programme in Kruševac, as well as in Belgrade and other towns in Serbia where the army was stationed. On the occasion of marking the 500th St Vitus Day and wishing to emphasize that in the late 19th century the Serbian army was following the path of Prince Lazar’s army, the foundation for the new military powder mill, which was to be called “Obilić’s Powder Mill”, was laid (Ibid: 384). In the report on this event, published in *Srpske novine*, it was emphasized that the “restored Serbian Kingdom wishes to remember the Kosovo heroes not only by holding a memorial service, but also by continuously cherishing its military strength” (Markuljević: 316).

In Serbia during the subsequent decades, the memories of Kosovo will also be used for political propaganda in order to present the Serbian monarchs – the rulers from the Karadjordjević family after the assassination of Alexander Obrenović in 1903 – as the guardians of the “Kosovo covenant” and that the political and military activities undertaken by the state could be legitimised as the fulfilment of that covenant, that debt to the heroic ancestors. The victories in the Balkan Wars, which enabled the merger of Kosovo and Macedonia with the Serbian state after the withdrawal of Turkey, were greeted as the finally achieved revenge for the defeat in the Battle of Kosovo, as the joyful national resurrection from the “Kosovo grave”, as these victories were greeted by poet Velimir Rajić (Rajić, V.: 139). King Peter and his son Alexander were awarded the honorary titles of “Kosovo avengers”. In 1913 and 1914, St Vitus Day obtained the new meaning. It was celebrated as

the Liberation Day. However, in all praises with which the Kosovo avengers were welcomed, it was often emphasized that their revenge was not complete, that the job was not finished and that Serbia should also recover the territories in the west and east which belonged to it both historically and ethnically. Inspired by the Kosovo covenant, the fighters expelled one enemy from the Serbian land, but they also had to square accounts with another one, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. As it was said by the Serbian Orthodox theologian Nikolaj Velimirović, “One empire has broken. One more will have to, in order for the Kosovo prophecy to become true” (Velimirović 1914: 57).

The destruction of Austria-Hungary was a much more difficult and uncertain venture than the expulsion of Turkey from Kosovo and Macedonia, while the defeats and suffering of the Serbian army during the First World War – when this army, enduring great losses, retreated across Kosovo and Albania up to Corfu, together with King Peter and Regent Alexander – contributed to the prevalence of dark shades in patriotic poetry, the premonition of a new defeat at Kosovo and new loss of the state, as well as the glorification of the Serbian fighters and their rulers as the new Kosovo martyrs. In one article published in *Srpske novine* on St Vitus Day in 1917, it was predicted that the future generations would remember King Peter and his son as the martyrs who took over the martyr’s cross from the Kosovo heroes and say: “We are doing our duty. This example has remained from the Field of Kosovo. The old martyrs have shown it to us”.

## YUGOSLAV KOSOVO

When the Great War ended in the defeat of the Central Powers and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Serbia could again celebrate its revenge and victory, while after the

death of King Peter in 1921, his successor, King Alexander, was again glorified as the Kosovo avenger. Apart from this honorary title, he also held another two: King Liberator and King Unifier. The second title emphasized Alexander's merits for the creation of a new state – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. One could say that he especially liked the Unifier title because his policy was primarily oriented towards the preservation of the unity of the new state. The Kosovo myth also served for the same purpose and the King tried to put his political ideas and actions in the context of the ceremonial memory of the Battle of Kosovo. Thus, St Vitus Day became a state holiday in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while the constitution of the new state was proclaimed on 28 June 1921.

After 6 January 1929, when King Alexander dissolved the parliament and introduced dictatorship, while his kingdom obtained the name Yugoslavia, the royal policy was oriented towards elevating the royal subjects beyond their ethnic or, as it was said at that time, "tribal" differences, and integrating them into a new nation, like other European nations created by suppressing ethnicities. During the 1930s, the ceremonies marking St Vitus Day served to show that the memory of Kosovo was still living in all parts of the Kingdom and make it known that the state administration, army, educational system and all social organisations throughout the country were imbued with the spirit of Kosovo and were loyal to the "Kosovo covenant". As it was written by Dimitrije Mitinović, the then apologist of the King's policy of integral Yugoslavism, for *Politika* on St Vitus Day in 1930 – the day when Alexander proclaimed dictatorship and changed the official name of the state to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was the "moment of the manly and free will of the Ruler who has inherited the Kosovo covenant and has handed it on to the great future of Yugoslavia".

Giving the Yugoslav character to the Kosovo myth was not a novelty. As early as the first decades of the 19th century, the representatives of the Illyrian movement found the confirmation of the cultural similarity of the South Slavic peoples on which their political unification could also be based – in folk poems about Kosovo, which were widespread not only among the Serbs, but also among other South Slavic peoples. The Slovene Stanko Vraz, who wrote in Croatian, found the descendants of the Kosovo heroes in Croatia, who continued to fight against the Turks there, while Grga Martić, a Franciscan monk from Bosnia, collected and, starting in 1844, published the poems of the "Slavic people", including several ones about the Battle of Kosovo. After the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, Martić will distance himself from the Illyrian ideas and in the collection of his poems published in 1886, in cooperation with the Croatian linguist Armin Pavić, which was offered as an integral Kosovo epic, he tried even more to include Croatian knights in the Battle of Kosovo – as part of a Hungarian detachment – forgetting their "Slavism". After the Congress of Berlin, the ideologist of the Bosniak national movement, Safvet-beg Bašagić, tried to link the Bosniaks with the glorious Battle of Kosovo, by describing the victory over the Turks, which was won in Kosovo in 1831 by Captain Husein Gradaščević, who rebelled against the Sultan, as a revenge for the defeat inflicted by the Turks on their Bosniak Slavic brothers at that place.

Like Martić and Pavić at that time, Bašagić also did not care so much about South Slavic unity; rather, he tried to contribute to the recognition of the autochthonous Bosnian nation. However, their attempts to make the members of their peoples the Kosovo heroes or Kosovo avengers testify that, in the last decades of the 19th century, this myth also enjoyed great prestige outside Serbia and Montenegro, and that it remained as a tool for the affirmation of the renewed projects



of building South Slavic cultural and political togetherness in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This is also testified by the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo at the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences in Arts in Zagreb in 1889, which turned into the manifestation of the common cultural and historical heritage of the Serbs and Croats, as the constituent parts of the same people, which was especially pointed out in the lectures delivered by Franjo Rački ("Boj na Kosovu. Uzroci i posledice /The Battle of Kosovo. Causes and Effects/) and Toma Maretić ("Kosovski junaci i događaji u narodnoj epici" /The Kosovo Heroes and Events in Folk Epics/).

The celebration of Kosovo as the common heritage that can provide a basis for the unification of the Serbs, Croats and other South Slavic peoples was intensified in the first and early second decade of the 20th century, while the formulation and popularisation of the Kosovo myth as an ideological and symbolic basis of Yugoslav togetherness was also contributed by numerous Serbian and Croatian scientists, authors and artists, including the poet and playwright Ivo Vojnović, the author of the drama *Smrt majke Jugovića* (The Death of the Mother of the Jugovićs) (performed for the first time in Belgrade in 1906 and then in Zagreb in 1907), Hellenist and author of philosophical and political essays Miloš Djurić, who published his essay *Vidovdanska etika* (St Vitus Day Ethics) in Zagreb in 1914, and, in particular, sculptor Ivan Meštrović, whose sculptures of the Kosovo heroes exhibited in Vienna (1910), Rome (1911), London (1913) and Venice (1914), as well as at the exhibitions in Britain (1915), contributed to the international affirmation of the project of creating the Yugoslav state. These sculptures were intended for the St Vitus Day Temple, a monumental shrine of the civil religion of Yugoslavism, which was designed by Meštrović. Its model was also on display at his exhibition in Rome. He explained that the religion that his temple

would celebrate was "Tsar Lazar's religion", that "all Yugoslav martyrs from Kosovo to the present day and all Yugoslav people are Tsar Lazar's soldiers" and that he "continuously reigns in the soul of the Yugoslav people" (Meštrović 1919:274). However, despite Meštrović's efforts to convince the Karadjordjevićs and Yugoslav government to build the St Vitus Day Temple, the project was not realised. Tito and Yugoslav communists were even less interested than the Karadjordjevićs in this temple when Yugoslavia was rebuilt after the Second World War. Thus, there remained only the sculptural fragments of the St Vitus Day Temple and its model (now on display in the National Museum in Kruševac).

## NEW VERSIONS OF THE SERBIAN KOSOVO MYTH

The period during which the versions of the Kosovo myth were used to legitimise the cultural and political togetherness of the South Slavic peoples ended with the disappearance of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The myth about the struggle, death and resurrection of the nation will continue its political career as an exclusively Serbian national myth. One version of the new Serbian edition of this myth will first be offered by the Quisling government of General Milan Nedić (1941-1944), that is, the supporters of the German Reich and its leader, who comprised this government or were close to it, including Vladimir Vujić, Grigorije Božović, Svetislav Stefanović, Velibor Jonić, Miroslav Spalajković, Dimitrije Ljotić and others. They represented themselves as the worthy successors of the Kosovo heroes because – unlike the Yugoslav government that fled to London – they remained in the country, which was also done by Lazar and other Serbian knights in the face of the Ottoman invasion. "Neither Tsar Lazar nor his nobles fled from Kosovo and took gold with them to faraway countries", said Nedić in a speech in 1942.

Svetislav Stefanović glorified the German Reich as the builder and defender of Europe, and then derived the conclusion about the closeness of Nedić's Quisling government with the Kosovo heroes because they both were allegedly fighting on Europe's side, while in 1941 the Serbian people was pushed into the war against Europe when the Yugoslav government "treacherously violated the Tripartite Pact" and betrayed the "eternal knightly code of honour" ("Zapis leto-pisca na Vidovdan 1941" /Chronicle's Note on St Vitus Day in 1941/, *Novo vreme*, 3 July 1941). The return to the authentic Kosovo myth will be the path that will enable the Serbian people to gain a reputation as the forerunner of conceptual restoration in new Europe, led by the German Reich because, as it was explained by Spalajković, "the ideas incorporated into our Kosovo myth so many centuries ago are only now winning in Europe" (Miroslav Spalajković, "Srpski narodni mit i Evropa" /The Serbian National Myth and Europe/, *Srpski narod*, Easter, 1943).

Among the enemies who, in the opinion of Quislings rallied around Nedić, pose a threat to restored Europe and the restored Serbian nation within it, are primarily the communists, the destroyers of civilisation, who are coming from the East just like those who were met by Lazar at Kosovo. Just like at the time of the Battle of Kosovo, the Serbs will need the courage of the Kosovo heroes and resoluteness to resist the communist menace. If Lazar could resurrect by some miracle, he would also set out fiercely against the communists. In a newspaper article published on St Vitus Day in 1943 it was written: "The honest Prince, as a Serb, a hero and a martyr, would by no means be afraid of this communist evil or stop and despond" (Mihailo Tošović, "Vidovdan" /St Vitus Day/, *Novo vreme*, 28 June 1943).

However, when the communists came to power in Yugoslavia after the Second World War, they found a way to live in peace with Lazar and

other Kosovo heroes, paying a due respect to the memory of their deed and sacrifice. Truly, there was no place for them in the new common Yugoslav political imaginary; rather, there was only a place for the fresh memory of the Partisan struggle against the occupiers and its heroes, including specifically the struggle of the greatest hero among them – Marshal Tito. Yugoslav communists created their own myths, with new mythical heroes and new sites of suffering and victories during the national liberation war. The memory of the Battle of Kosovo was cherished at a lower level, as a local Serbian contribution to the preservation of the spirit of bravery and resistance, the values that will be fully developed only in the communist revolution. Thus, the efforts to give the Kosovo myth the Yugoslav character, which formed part of King Alexander's court policy, was rejected as bourgeois, imperialistic, hegemonistic and un-national.

In 1953, the Serbian communist government erected a large monument to Kosovo heroes at Gazimestan in appreciation of the fighting tradition of the Serbian people, which was understood as the announcement of a victorious communist revolution. By commissioning painter Petar Lubarda to create a large wall painting depicting the Battle of Kosovo for the ceremonial hall in the new building of the Executive Council of Serbia in 1953, they somehow continued Lazar's struggle and considered the Prince their ancestor. The design of the above mentioned monument provoked a debate between traditionalists, including the designers of the monument, writer Milorad Panić Surep and architect Aleksandar Deroko, and modernists, whose unofficial spokesman was writer Živorad Stojković. The monument designed in the form of a tower, with the interior decorated with the inscribed fragments of folk poems about the Battle of Kosovo, was created – as it was explained by Surep in the article in which he announced the completion of the monument – in order to emphasize the "Kosovo spirit and atmosphere"

and preserve the memory of an “entire people who knew to make the fateful decision at the fateful moment” (“Kosovski spomenik” /Kosovo Monument/, Politika, 28 June 1953). Commenting on Surep’s article, Stojković criticised him and Deroko because their monument would be like a “stone bunker” or “senseless tower”, while the alleged Kosovo spirit mentioned by Surep was actually the spirit of a reactionary pseudo-Nemanjić architecture cherished by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. He reproached the authorities because they failed to entrust the design of the monument at Gazimestan to those who were closer to new times and “our understanding of the Kosovo myth”, and called for the suspension of its building (NIN, 12 July 1953).

The Party did not directly interfere for a long time (until the early 1970s) in this and other polemics about the role of the memory of Kosovo in post-war Serbia, such as the polemics between Marko Ristić and Zoran Mišić concerning the meaning of the “Kosovo orientation” (Mišić 1961), since they both were on its side and argued only over who was more successful in associating the Kosovo myth with the achievements of the communist revolution. However, this changed when the Serbian communists were called upon by the Yugoslav top leadership to deal with the revival of nationalism and its emblematic Kosovo myth and, as it was said at that time, to “differentiate” themselves in relation to nationalists, especially those involved in cultural activities. At the beginning, the communists carried out the requested differentiation “using the force of argument and not the argument of force”, as they liked to emphasize. Thus, for example, Gojko Miletić, a communist official, stood up against the opinion of art historian Lazar Trifunović that the national development of the Serbian people was neglected and that the Kosovo myth became a forbidden topic, and tried to refute this opinion in an article, published in the same journal in which Trifunović’s controversial text had appeared (L. Trifunović,

“Likovni izraz kosovskog opredeljenja” /The Artistic Expression of the Kosovo Orientation/ Književne novine, 27 November 1971; G. Miletić, “Mit o mitu” /The Myth About a Myth/, Književne novine, 13 December 1971). However, when the Serbian “liberals” (M. Nikezić, L. Perović, M. Tepavac) were removed from power in October 1972, the dispute between communists and Serbian nationalists – and other opponents and critics of the regime – turned into a showdown with the enemies of the regime. So, for example, the Kruševac municipal officials were removed from office because they turned the celebration “Six Centuries of Kruševac” into a nationalist manifestation. For example, they changed the names of the wines of the Župski Rubin Winery to the names of the Kosovo heroes – “Knez Lazar” and “Princess Milica”, while the mineral water of the same producer was named “Nine Jugoviće”.

The Serbian nationalists (“čaršija”, as they were called by the authorities) responded by boycotting the Party’s policy, especially in culture, whose victims were also those intellectuals who stood up against the revival of nationalism in their own name and not under the Party’s directive, such as author Danilo Kiš and literary historian Miodrag Popović. Kiš’s collection of stories *Grobnica za Borisa Davidoviča* (The Tomb for Boris Davidovich) and Popović’s book *Vidovdan i časni krst* (St Vitus Day and the Honourable Cross), both published in 1976, were the reason that the Serbian nationalist “čaršija” put them in a pillory. When Popović was given the City of Belgrade October Award for his *Vidovdan*, this was the proof for the “čaršija” that he was the “outcast of the nation”, his acquaintances were turning their heads away from him in the street, while at the sessions of the Council of the Faculty of Philosophy, where Popović was a professor, none of his colleagues wanted to sit next to him (Miodrag Popović, “Između čekića i nakovanja, partije i čaršije” /Between a Rock and

a Hard Place, the Party and the 'Čaršija', *Danas*, 27-28 February 1999).

## NEW KOSOVO MARTYRS AND AVENGERS

After Tito's death (1980), the influence of the nationalist elite in Serbia's social and political life was increasing, so that from the mid-1980s, the ruling communists were gradually taking over its ideas, especially those related to the problems emerging in Kosovo where the revolted Albanians demanded greater political rights or, more precisely, the transformation of the autonomous province of Kosovo and Metohija into a new Yugoslav republic. When Slobodan Milošević, the head of Serbian communists (President of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia) since 1986, began presenting himself as a politician who protects the rights of the Serbs in Kosovo as well as in Bosnia and Croatia, he explained his stance by their allegedly alarming position the attention to which was drawn by Serbian nationalists rallied around the Serbian Writers' Association, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Serbian Orthodox Church. When he used the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo as an opportunity to present himself at the huge gathering at Gazimestan on 28 June 1989 as the leader calling for a struggle for the revival of Serbia in the spirit of the Kosovo covenant, and said that Kosovo was the "heart of Serbia", the nationalists greeted him as a new Serbian hero and the saviour. "The transformation of Serbs", wrote historian Radovan Samardžić, the then member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, "began again in the sign of Kosovo" (Samardžić 1990: 40).

Milošević's Gazimestan speech was interpreted as the promise of a victorious resolution to the crisis which was allegedly threatening

the survival of the Serbs and the Serbian state, and was described as being dramatic and apocalyptic by Serbian writers, artists, popular folk singers, journalists, church officials, historians and other scholars that year and previous ones. From among the alarming descriptions of the past and anticipated suffering of Kosovo Serbs the following two will be remembered: the collection of political quotes and epigrams by poet Matija Bećković, entitled "Kosovo – najskuplja srpska reč" (Kosovo, the Most Expensive Serbian Word) (*Književne novine*, June 1989), and the film *Boj na Kosovu* (The Battle of Kosovo) (based on Ljubomir Simović's script and directed by Zdravko Šotra). They all contributed that the general public in Serbia formed the opinion that the "Kosovo knot" and other knots fettering the Serbs should be cut instead of trying in vain to unravel them. It was believed that there was both the will and resources to do this and that the Serbs, as claimed by Milošević at Gazimestan, had something to stand up with before Miloš: "It is not difficult for us to answer today the old question: how we are going to face Miloš" (Milošević: 17).

When in 1992 one part of the nationalist elite turned against Milošević being dissatisfied with what he had achieved in the meantime, the Democratic Movement of Serbia (DEPOS) was formed. It was a coalition of political parties, the biggest one being the Serbian Renewal Movement. One of the important aims of this coalition was to present itself as the authentic adherent to the "Kosovo covenant" and expose the commitment of the Milošević regime to it as false and illegitimate. Therefore, the DEPOS decided to present itself to the public at a big rally organised on 28 June 1992 in Belgrade, which was called the St Vitus Day Assembly of Democratic Serbia. Although the DEPOS succeeded in winning over the then important public figures in Serbia (speeches were delivered by Patriarch Paul, Alexander Karadjordjević, Matija Bećković) to its programme, Milošević's position



as the beloved leader and descendant of the Kosovo heroes was not more seriously endangered because he controlled the major mainstream media, army and police, including paramilitary units engaged in armed conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia. The fighters loyal to him also respected St Vitus Day, so that the founder and commander of the Serbian Volunteer Guard, Željko Ražnatović Arkan, called his men the new Obilićes (Politika, 9. October 1994).

During the Bosnian war, the Bosnian Serb leaders were more successful in competing with Milošević as the embodiment of the leader worthy of the Kosovo covenant. Those were, above all, their political leader Radovan Karadžić and their military leader Ratko Mladić, who presented the war against the Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) as the continuation of the Battle of Kosovo, that is, the continuation of the 1804 Revolt against the Dahis, imbued with the Kosovo spirit, which was aimed at expelling the Turks (as they called the Bosniaks) from the Serbian land. Until August 1994, they were supported by Milošević, while the Serbian Orthodox Church supported them until the end of the war. The Serbian state in Bosnia was designed as the “empire of the Kosovo spirit” (Dejzings: 267), while that “Kosovo spirit” was understood as the inspiration to be braver and seek revenge and not as the spirit of sacrifice and commitment to the heavenly kingdom. When Mladić’s army entered Srebrenica on 11 July 1995, he boasted that “finally, after the Revolt against the Dahis, the time has come to take revenge on the Turks in this region”. Bearing in mind these Mladić’s words, it is not surprising that in their songs devoted to the entry of Mladić’s army into Srebrenica, gusle players presented Mladić as the new Kosovo avenger and the massacre committed against the Bosniaks captured in Srebrenica and its surroundings by his army – which was qualified by the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague as a crime of genocide – as a heroic victory. As it is said in one of these poems, Prince Lazar also

congratulates him on this victory: “Lazar kisses him on his face and says: hail, Serbian son, if you were at Kosovo, the Serbs would not perish”.

At the time when Mladić and his army were taking revenge on the Turks for the defeat at Kosovo by committing the massacre at Srebrenica, Milošević was oriented towards peace, trying to present himself as the “guarantor of peace in the Balkans” to the international community, which already decided to stop the war in Bosnia by intervening with military force. At the Dayton Peace Conference in November 1995, he succeeded in being accepted as the representative of the Bosnian Serbs’ interests instead of one of their leaders. However, two years later, when the conflicts between the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo were intensified, Milošević put on the costume of a Kosovo hero and avenger once again and, with such an image, stayed in Kosovo where on the eve of St Vitus Day, now in Priština, delivered a “magnificent speech” – according to media reports – saying that “under no pressure will we give up an inch of Kosovo and Metohija” (Politika, 27 June 1997). When the conflicts in Kosovo evolved into a real war, and until the NATO forces bombed the positions of the Serbian army in Kosovo and targets in Serbia (from 24 March to 10 June 1999), on radio and television one could hear new and old songs about St Vitus Day, while the film The Battle of Kosovo was shown several times with the clear intent to present the war against the West into which Milošević pushed Serbia and its military force as another continuation of the Battle of Kosovo, that is, another glorious military defeat and another even more glorious moral victory.

## CRISIS, EVICTION AND RESTORATION

After the fall of Milošević's regime on 5 October 2000, and his arrest and subsequent deportation to the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague on 28 June 2001, it turned out that the two opposition leaders who assumed the highest positions in the new government – Vojislav Koštunica, President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Zoran Djindjić, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia – had the opposite views about the change and the country's future. Djindjić was convinced that after the demise of Milošević's regime it would be necessary to demolish the ideological foundations of his power, including the Kosovo myth, that is, the myth about so-called "heavenly Serbia". "This myth", said Djindjić, "brought about twelve years of wars, catastrophes and degradation of our land" and added that the Serbian government headed by him "committed itself to implementing the ideals of earthly Serbia". At that time, Koštunica did not express his opinion about the Kosovo myth, but only stated that Milošević's deportation to The Hague was an act of "lawlessness and humiliation", with which the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, Vojislav Šešelj, also agreed, stressing that the decision to arrest Milošević and deport him to The Hague on St Vitus Day was a deliberate disregard of the greatest Serbian holiday. When Djindjić was killed on 12 March 2003, there were some opinions that his assassination was the revenge of Milošević's supporters, while Bishop Atanasije voiced his opinion, ten years after Djindjić's death, that he was killed because he renounced heavenly Serbia and warned Ivica Dačić – who was the Serbian Prime Minister at that time and was saying that his government had to work for earthly, not heavenly Serbia – that the same thing could also happen to him: "The Prime Minister speaks of realpolitik and is not interested in heavenly Serbia. Zoran Djindjić was also saying that and we all know how he fared." (Blic, 11 May 2013).

Vojislav Koštunica had an opportunity to show how much Djindjić's idea that, after freeing itself from Milošević, Serbia should also free itself from the burden of the nationalist Kosovo myth, was alien to him when the parliament in Priština proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Kosovo (27 February 2008). As the head of the Serbian government, he organised a big protest in Belgrade and, as the main speaker, apart from Tomislav Nikolić and Emir Kusturica, addressed the crowd with a series of incendiary rhetorical questions: "Dear citizens of Serbia, what is Kosovo? Where is Kosovo? Who does Kosovo belong to? Is there anyone here who is not from Kosovo? Is anyone here who thinks that it is not his?" However, this protest turned into an uncontrolled outburst of violence in the streets of Belgrade, involving the plundering of shops and burning of the US Embassy, which was one reason why Koštunica and his political party lost the parliamentary majority in the elections held several months after this infamous rally (11 May 2008).

Learning from Koštunica's fiasco when trying to ride the wave of the militant Kosovo myth like Milošević before him, and the ill fate of Zoran Djindjić, who thought that he could openly stand up against the policy based on this myth, the new Serbian leaders tried to show that their commitment to "European Serbia" – as the coalition that won the 2008 elections was called – was not out of step with the "Kosovo orientation". In his statement on the occasion of the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in 2009, the new Serbian President, Boris Tadić, said: "Nobody can take St Vitus Day from Serbia and from Serbs. But Serbia should never again celebrate like it did in 1989, after which, due to its erroneous policy, it was followed by blockages, sanctions, wars, death, robbery of citizens and their poverty and, on top of it all, we were bombed and the same Kosovo which they spoke about so much became a protectorate" (Večernje novosti, 28 June 2009). Vuk Jeremić, the new Serbian

Foreign Minister, also addressed the public, saying that St Vitus Day is a “symbol of defence of Serbian national identity”. He also added that this identity should now be defended by relying on law and diplomacy and that one’s commitment to the Kosovo covenant could also be shown in that way because, as he emphasized, “just as we were determined then, we are equally determined today and we shall remain so forever” (Politika, 29 June 2009).

In fact, after the lost war in Kosovo, the value of the Kosovo myth on the political market in Serbia declined considerably, while the politicians who continued exploiting it tried to adjust to the new, post-war circumstances. For example, after the war, it became very difficult and risky to organise the celebration of St Vitus Day at Gazimestan and other sites in Kosovo, which was used during previous years by the ruling political elite in Serbia as the most important confirmation of its commitment to the Kosovo covenant. During the last years, the Serbian politicians wishing to celebrate St Vitus Day at Gazimestan had to obtain permission from the Kosovo authorities, refrain from making provocative statements at the celebration and risk being booed and insulted by those Serbs who consider them traitors. This happened to Tomislav Nikolić at Gazimestan on 28 June 2014, who responded: “If they had whistled at Lazar when he called on them to go into battle, you wouldn’t have had where to come today”, getting over the fact that he was booed just because he did not repeat Lazar’s call to arms. Instead, he promised uncompromising negotiations: “Serbia has decided – it will negotiate with everyone until the end!” (Večernje novosti, 28 June 2014).

After 1999, the swearing of Serbian leaders to Lazar and the invoking of the Obilićes on St Vitus Day could be much more successfully performed outside Kosovo. Therefore, over the past years, the central church and state celebration of this holiday has been taking place in Kruševac,

while on 28 June 2014 St Vitus Day was marked in Višegrad or, more precisely, the “Andrićgrad” memorial complex – which was built in this town on the bank of the Drina by Emir Kusturica in cooperation with the Serbian Government and the Government of the Republic of Srpska – showing that at this site in Bosnia, under the flag of the Kosovo covenant, it was possible to gather the representatives of the Serbian political, church, military and cultural elites and demonstrate that the battle for all-Serb interests, imbued with the Kosovo myth, did not stop even after the wars of the 1990s, although in recent times the leaders of this struggle could hope to achieve greater success in Eastern Bosnia than in Kosovo.

Nevertheless, the prospects that the memory of the Battle of Kosovo is also preserved at the sites where it took place should not be underestimated because local Albanians are also interested in it today. As it was pointed out by Anna di Lellio in her book *The Battle of Kosovo 1389: An Albanian Epic*, in an attempt to bring their new state closer to Europe and the European Union, the Kosovo Albanians – that is, their “memory entrepreneurs”, as the creators of a new image of the Albanian national past are called by the author of this book – give new significance and new publicity to folk poems and other documents about the alleged participation of Albanian fighters in the Battle of Kosovo (Di Lellio: 57). In the meantime, some of these documents also found their way into Albanian history textbooks, so that for those following this process of reviving the Albanian version of the Kosovo myth, it was not surprising that Ramush Haradinaj, one of the leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, proposed the erection of the monument to Albanian heroes killed at Gazimestan in 1389 (Blic, 28 June 2016).

## CRITICISM

The Kosovo myth, as a ceremonial and indisputable narrative of the battle, death and resurrection of a nation, has been and still is the object of criticism and polemics concerning particularly its authenticity. The problem was first raised in the form of the question of how much the myth coincides with the historical truth to which critical historiography can now convincingly respond that there is very little historical accuracy in it. A greater challenge for historians and other interpreters of the Kosovo myth is posed by the question which version of the Kosovo myth contains an authentic moral and political message about the Battle of Kosovo if not its authentic account. It is proceeded from the assumption that such a message does not exist, that it is found in cult writings about Prince Lazar and folk poems about him and other legendary figures, but it is very difficult to find it because it has been said either indirectly, practically in a coded language, or because it is hidden under non-authentic messages emerging due to the fact that the Kosovo myth is grossly misused. Some researchers – who defend its allegedly authentic message – argue that the Kosovo myth is most often misused when its spiritual meaning is betrayed, that is, when it is used – opposite to Lazar's message/the message that the heavenly kingdom is more important than the earthly one – for legitimising the struggle for conquering an earthly kingdom or, in other words, for achieving political and military aims. Thus, in 1928, the Croatian philosopher and diplomat Ante Tresić Pavičić stood up against the political misuse of the Kosovo myth in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes: "The choice of the earthly empire is proclaimed to us as the greatest wisdom, while the heavenly one is left to the poor-spirited!" (Tresić Pavičić: 131). In the 1990s, a similar criticism for the forsaking of the

spiritual values of the Kosovo myth was levelled by Milica Bakić – Hayden at the Serbs who do not realise that by aspiring to preserve earthly Kosovo they sacrifice their spiritual salvation (Bakić-Hayden: 127).

Unlike the critics of the Kosovo myth, who oppose the betrayal of the allegedly authentic interpretation, there are those who hold that there is actually no such interpretation and that it only exists as some form of symbolic language consisting of the well-known personages and episodes from the folk poems about the Battle of Kosovo, the language that allows one to express different and even diametrically opposite thoughts and feelings. Sociologist Ivana Spasić (Spasić: 96) holds that the Kosovo narrative is the "common language for dissent"; it is an "internally dialogic" narrative, adds anthropologist Marko Živković (Živković: 250). This criticism of the Kosovo narrative, which opposes its essentialisation and points to the practice of using the personages and symbols from the Kosovo poems in everyday communication and discussion, does not explain how the versions of the Kosovo narrative, which do not permit discussion and dialogue are formed; rather, they are offered and respected as unquestionable truths or, in other words, they function as a political myth. Just like during the last two centuries in Serbia, the freedom of discussion about Kosovo is still limited and allowed in the sphere of private life, but not in public space where moving, especially towards the positions of power, is regulated and guided by signalisation in the sign of the Kosovo myth. As stated by one of the Serbian politicians appearing most often lately in the media, Marko Djurić, Director of the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, at the St Vitus Day celebration in North Mitrovica, "the St Vitus Day oath must be the oath of the whole Serbian people" (Kurir, 28 June 2016).



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