

**Jovana
Milovanović**

Department of Art History,
Faculty of Philosophy,
University of Belgrade

ADVENTUS OF THE MONARCH SHAPED FOR ETERNITY: THE RELIEF OF KING PETER I ON THE CITY WALLS OF DUBROVNIK

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Abstract

*After WWI, a new state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was formed in the territories inhabited by South Slavs. The changing political landscape in the former Austro-Hungarian territories required a strong representative monumental culture, supposed to embody the new regime and reinforce the new Karađorđević dynasty in the minds of citizens. This was especially the case in all newly acquired territories, including the City of Dubrovnik. The citizens of Dubrovnik commissioned Meštrović to make a “monument to liberation”, so he carved a representative square-shaped relief of considerable size depicting King Peter I Karađorđević. The monument to deceased ruler was ceremoniously unveiled on December 1, 1924, at the western entrance to the City of Dubrovnik. He was portrayed following the Roman imperial tradition of royal triumph, according to the formal *Adventus Augusti* model. This monument was on the city walls until the outbreak of World War II, when NDH units and Italian troops occupied Dubrovnik and dismantled the relief in an act recognized as *damnatio memoriae*. However, analysis of preserved materials allows its contextualization within the monumental art of interwar Yugoslavia, the City of Dubrovnik, and the formal and ideological contributions of Ivan Meštrović.*

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INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

The installation of the equestrian relief of King Peter I Karađorđević at the entrance to the city of Dubrovnik in 1924 had a strong ideological and political background, while its formal execution was grounded in the European artistic and cultural tradition (**fig. 1**). The establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, led by the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty, marked the realization of the goals of the ideologues of “national unity” for South Slavs, among whom the sculptor Ivan Meštrović (1883–1962) played an important role in the period before and during World War I.¹ The ideology of integral Yugoslavism, based on the myth of identical ethnic origin and most prominently reflected in the common language, provided significant symbolic and political support for the unification of the South Slavs. It was one of the main driving mechanisms in constructing a coherent Yugoslav identity based

¹ Norka Machiedo Mladinić, “Političko opredjeljenje i umjetnički rad mladog Meštrovića” [The Political Commitments and Artistic Work of Young Meštrović], *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 1 (2009): 143–170.

on the vision of tribal unity over confessional and historical divisions.² Meštrović expressed his belief in Yugoslav national and cultural unity by participating in Yugoslav art exhibitions in the first decade of the 20th century and organizing the Pavilion of the Kingdom of Serbia in Rome in 1911,³ in which his works inspired by the Kosovo myth were exhibited, culminating in the model of the Vidovdan Temple.⁴

The beginning of King Peter I Karađorđević's reign in 1903 coincided with the culmination of Yugoslav ideology. The new king was expected to achieve one of the ultimate goals, not only of the Kingdom of Serbia but also of the other South Slavic peoples from the territories of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire – the liberation of the “enslaved brothers under foreign rule.”⁵ The end of the Great War brought long-awaited liberation and unification of the South Slavs, which, on a level of symbolic politics, required an emphasis on the royal personality in order to institutionalize the dynasty as a paradigm for the new state community. In accordance with this, a cult of King Peter I Karađorđević was created based on the epithet “Liberator”, which was the reason for attributing military characteristics and victorious power to him, as well as the aura of a Messiah of ultimate national liberation. After King Peter I's death in 1921, the process of his heroization began, and building monuments throughout the Kingdom, especially in the newly annexed territories, was intended to send a message of the indivisibility and strength of the new state.⁶ During this period, in 1922, an initiative was launched to erect a monument to King Peter I in Dubrovnik, which was unveiled on December 1, 1924, on the anniversary of the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.⁷



Fig. 1. Ivan Meštrović, *The Relief of King Peter I Karađorđević*, 1924, marble.

2 Aleksandar Ignjatović, *Jugoslovenstvo u arhitekturi* [Yugoslavism and Architecture] (Beograd: Građevinska knjiga 2007), 33–39.

3 See more in: Antonia Tomić, “The Echo of Ivan Meštrović’s Participation in the International Fine Art Exhibition Held in Rome in 1911 in His Homeland,” in this volume.

4 Marina Adamović, “Nacionalna umetnost na svetskoj izložbi u Rimu 1911. godine – umetnost i politika” [National Art at the 1911 Rome Exhibition – Art and Politics], *Balkanica*, no. 21 (1990): 277–301; Aleksandar Ignjatović, *Vidovdanski hram Ivana Meštrovića, stvaranje Jugoslavije i paradoksi nacionalizma* [Ivan Meštrović’s Vidovdan Temple, the Foundation of Yugoslavia and Paradoxes of Nationalism], in *Dan vreden veka: I-XII-1918*, eds. Radovan Cukić, Veselinka Kastratović Ristić and Marija Vasiljević (Beograd: Muzej Jugoslavije, 2018), 75–92.

5 Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790–1918*, 1. tom [The Making of Yugoslavia 1790–1918, Vol. 1.] (Beograd: Prosveta, 1989).

6 Olga Manojlović Pinter, *Arheologija sećanja: Spomenici i identiteti u Srbiji 1918–1989* [Archaeology of Remembrance: Memorials and Identities in Serbia 1918–1989] (Beograd: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, Čigoja štampa, 2014), 263–264.

7 Ivan Viđen, “Ivan Meštrović i Dubrovnik” [Ivan Meštrović and Dubrovnik] (Bachelor’s thesis, University of Zagreb, 2009).

The specific circumstances and historical moment in which Ivan Meštrović intellectually formed himself in a way predetermined his subsequent political and artistic activity. The May Coup of 1903 and the accession of Peter Karađorđević to the Serbian throne led to a change in the political course and atmosphere throughout the Kingdom of Serbia. The political situation in the Dual Monarchy further intensified the dream of South Slavic unity, which was particularly nurtured among circles of pro-Yugoslav oriented youth, to which the young Meštrović belonged.⁸ He began his collaboration with prominent political and cultural circles in the Kingdom of Serbia in 1904, and one of his first undertakings was to create a portrait of the *people's king*.⁹ Meštrović's specific artistic poetics were largely determined by the "South Slavic national code", and the sculptor was labelled in public discourse as the "prophet of national art" and the "genius of the South Slavic race."¹⁰

The city of Dubrovnik, where the monument to the first king of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was placed in a public space, had its own *Yugoslav history* that to some extent determined the emergence and formulation of Meštrović's relief. Situated in the southern region of the Eastern Adriatic, Dubrovnik, thanks to its turbulent history but also rich cultural heritage, played an important role in the constitution of the Yugoslav idea before World War I.¹¹ In the years after the abolition of the Dubrovnik Republic, its cultural achievements were particularly emphasized. By the end of the 19th century, *Libertas* as the central symbol and ideal of the political legacy of the Republic positioned it as a model in the struggle for the freedom of the South Slavs. The most important representatives of Dubrovnik's intellectuals in that period, the Vojnović brothers, Ivo and Lujo, with whom Ivan Meštrović collaborated, as well as members of the Karađorđević family, played a major role in changing the perspective. The mythical status that Dubrovnik already possessed when it came into contact with the modern, integrationist ideology of Yugoslavism was based on the perception of Dubrovnik's history as a brilliant episode from the history of statehood of the South Slavs. The duration of the *independent state* of the Republic was represented as the opposite of the rest of the national entity, which lost its freedom under foreign rulers – however, at the end of the 19th century, the roles were reversed. In the 1890s, the Vojnović brothers and other members

8 Miloš Vojinović, *Političke ideje Mlade Bosne* [Political Ideas of Young Bosnia] (Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 2015), 116–119; Sandi Bulimbašić, *Društvo hrvatskih umetnika "Medulić" (1908.–1919.) umjetnost i politika* [The "Medulić" Society of Croatian Artists (1908–1919): Art and Politics] (Zagreb: Društvo povjesnicara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 2016).

9 Ivan Meštrović, *Uspomena na političke ljude i događaje* [Reminiscences of Political People and Events] (Zagreb, Matica hrvatska, 1969), 7–10.

10 Danijela Vanušić, "Podizanje spomenika Pobjede na Terazijama" [The Erection of the Monument to Victory in Terazije], *Nasleđe*, IX (2008): 198–199.

11 Milan Ž. Živanović, *Dubrovnik u borbi za ujedinjenje (1908–1918)* [Dubrovnik in the struggle for unification 1908–1918] (Beograd: Istorijski institut 1962, first edition; Novi Sad: Prometej, 2018).

of intellectual circles hoped for the unification of the South Slavs under the leadership of the young Serbian or Montenegrin kingdom.¹²

The new ideological atmosphere, as well as the state borders within which the city of Dubrovnik found itself, initiated two complementary symbolic practices that accompanied the change of almost every regime – *de-commemoration* and *commemoration* – that is, the abolition of old and the establishment of new markers of identity and collective memory in the public sphere of the city.¹³ A monument is by definition a cultural artifact that preserves the memory of a glorious person or event from the past that stimulates, initiates, and shapes institutionalized memory that acquires an integrative social function, primarily in the construction of a broader social and national identity. In addition, a monument is also a political document expressed through an artistic medium that introduces a symbolic dimension into the field of action of the monument itself.¹⁴ They become a key to understanding the space and time in which they were created, and their visual manifestation points to the expression of the collective identity of the group that initiated the given monument artifact.¹⁵ The disintegration of the young Yugoslav state began immediately after its establishment, especially due to the emergence of national questions on the part of the individual nations that made up the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, which represented a continuous source of instability for the common state.¹⁶ The new political situation in which the united South Slavic peoples found themselves, as well as the new ideological paradigm, would influence the specific shaping of public symbols that were supposed to contribute to the strengthening of the idea of an integral Yugoslav nation, but also to the legitimization of the new regime led by the Karađorđević dynasty.¹⁷

12 Lovro Kunčević, *Mit o Dubrovniku: Diskursi o identitetu renesansnoga grada* [The Myth of Dubrovnik: Discourses on Identity of the Renaissance City] (Zagreb, Dubrovnik: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zavod za povijesne znanosti u Dubrovniku, 2015), 207–211.

13 Srđan Radović, *Grad kao tekst* [City as Text] (Beograd: XX vek, 2013), 12–13.

14 In the past few decades, monuments have often been the subject of scientific consideration both abroad and locally: Thomas Nipperdey, “Nationalidee und Nationaldenkmal in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert” [The Idea of the Nation and National Monuments in Germany in the 19th Century], *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 206, no. 3 (1968): 529–585; Hans-Ernst Mittag, “Das Denkmal” [The Monument], in *Kunst: Die Geschichte ihrer Funktionen*, eds. Werner Busch and Peter Schmoosk (Berlin, Weinheim: Quadriga, Beltz, 1987), 457–489; Rudy Koshar, *From Monuments to Traces: Artifacts of German Memory 1870 – 1990* (London: University of California Press, 2000); Igor Borozan, *Reprezentativna kultura i politička propaganda: Spomenik knezu Milošu u Negotinu* [Representative Culture and Political Propaganda: The Monument to Prince Milos in Negotin] (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet u Beogradu, 2006).

15 Aleida Assmann, *Duga senka prošlosti: Kultura sećanja i politika povesti* [The Long Shadow of the Past: the Culture of Memory and Politics of History] (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 2011); Michal Sládeček, Jelena Vasiljević, Tamara Petrović Trifunović (comp.), *Kolektivno sećanje i politike pamćenja* [Collective Memory and Politics of Remembrance] (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, 2015); Olga Manojlović Pintar, *Arheologija sećanja: Spomenici i identiteti u Srbiji 1918–1989* [The Archaeology of Memory: Monuments and Identity in Serbia, 1918–1989] (Beograd: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2014).

16 Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije I-III* [Cultural Politics in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia] (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 1997), 329–395.

17 Ignjatović, *Jugoslovenstvo u arhitekturi*, 39–41.

RESTORING DIGNITY TO DUBROVNIK: THE INITIATIVE TO RAISE A MONUMENT TO LIBERATION

After a period of over a century, the “Athens of Yugoslavia”¹⁸ was once again liberated, a triumph that had to be clearly marked in the public space of the city. During the process of transforming Dubrovnik from an Austro-Hungarian to a Yugoslav city, there was an initiative to erect a monument to Liberation as part of a wider project that involved the arrangement of the passage between the outer and inner gates of Pile, the western entrance to the historic center of Dubrovnik, between 1922 and 1924.¹⁹ At that time, Ivan Meštrović was in the city, working on the Račić family mausoleum at the cemetery in Cavtat. The chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Angels was executed in accordance with the expected attributes of the Roman Catholic dogma, but Meštrović did not miss the opportunity to reaffirm the idea of Yugoslav unity through his artistic and iconographic solution, which he was strongly committed to, just like the commissioners of the mausoleum.²⁰

The presence of Meštrović in the city and his repeatedly confirmed Yugoslav sentiment undoubtedly influenced the *Committee for Raising of the Monument to the Liberation from Austrian Rule* to choose the established artist as their first and only choice. In the years before the war, the construction of a mythical narrative about Ivan Meštrović as the ideal national artist began, in whom the *genius of the Yugoslav race* was embodied, capable of producing works imbued with an authentic Yugoslav spirit.²¹ The decision to engage the artist was made by the members of the Committee themselves, who were also admirers of Meštrović’s artistic and political stance.²² When the distinguished painter Marko Murat contacted Meštrović and asked him to create the aforementioned monument, it was not yet precisely defined what form it should take. The decision to embody the abstract Dubrovnik ideal of *libertas* in the form of an equestrian statue of King Peter I Karađorđević was made later, during a public debate, at the proposal of the distinguished Dubrovnik citizen, the Catholic Serb Marquis Luka Bona.²³ At that point, it was still not decided whether the Monument to Liberation would be in a free-standing form or whether it would take some other shape. Considering the lack of finances available for

18 Kunčević, *Mit o Dubrovniku: Diskursi o identitetu renesansnoga grada*, 215.

19 Viđen, *Ivan Meštrović i Dubrovnik*.

20 Dragica Hammer Tomić, *Jugoslavenstvo Ivana Meštrovića* [The Yugoslavism of Ivan Meštrović] (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2011), 28–31; Ernest Katić, “Meštrovićev mauzolej u Cavtatu” [Meštrović’s Mausoleum in Cavtat], *Nova Evropa*, vol. VI, no. 7, November 1, 1922, 201–206.

21 Norka Machiedo Mladinić, “Političko opredjeljenje i umjetnički rad mladog Meštrovića” [The Political Commitments and Artistic Work of the Young Meštrović], *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, no. 1 (2009): 143–170.

22 Members of the committee were: Dubrovnik mayor Otmar Nonveiller, Stijepo Knežević (Vice President), Marko Murat, Ernest Katić (secretary), Melko Čingrija, Niko Gjivanović, Pero Banac (treasurer), Nino Bjelovučić, Frano Bizzarro, Arturo Saraca, Jerko Kovačević, Jovo Berdović, Mihailo Popara. Quoted in Viđen, *Ivan Meštrović i Dubrovnik*, 2–3.

23 *Ibid.*, 2.

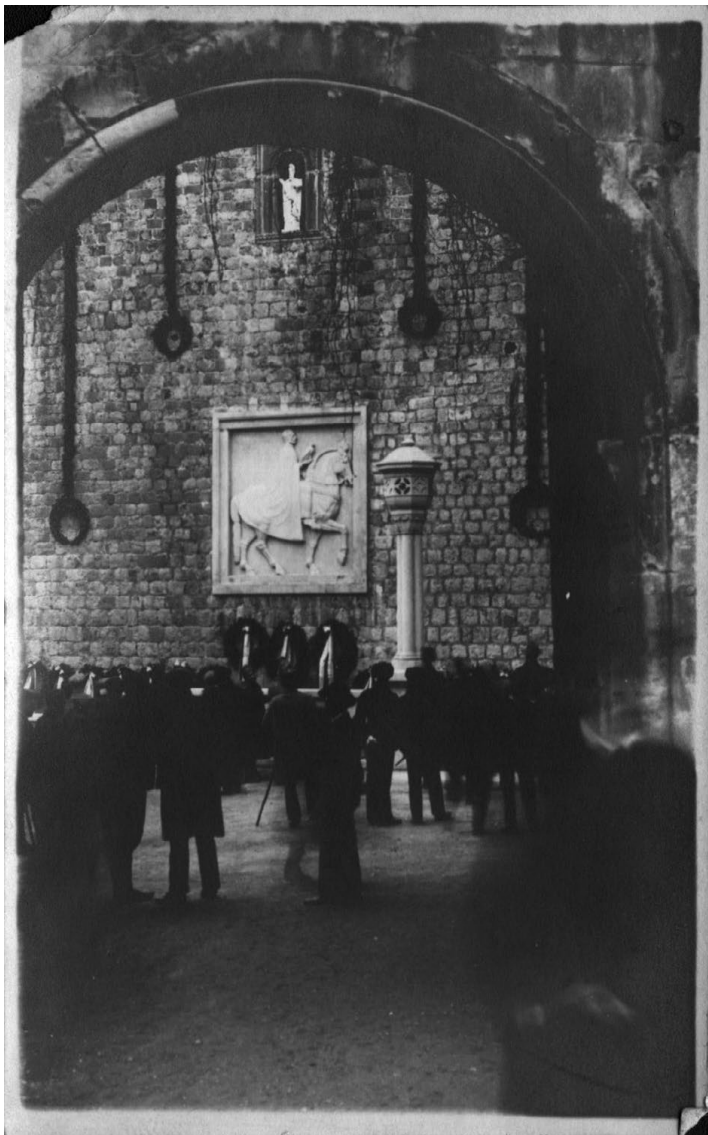


Fig. 2. The Unveiling Ceremony, December 1, 1924, Dubrovnik, photograph, Archives of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

Committee for Raising the Monument to Liberation, to whom Ivan Meštrović gifted it, as the two were friends.²⁹

the statue, Meštrović proposed carving “one large relief”, which would be placed at the city’s western gate.²⁴ All arrangements for the construction of the monument were completed in the middle of 1922. However, some complications postponed the demolition of the Austrian military building until June 1923. Over this entire period, as stated in his memoirs, Meštrović worked on carving the monument in his barracks in Lapad and finished it quickly.²⁵

Since the monument has been out of the public eye for decades, one can reconstruct its original appearance based on preserved photographs from the opening ceremony²⁶ (**fig. 2**) and those taken before 1941.²⁷ In addition, the Ivan Meštrović Museums keep the artist’s sketches for the construction of the Monument to Liberation in Dubrovnik with the equestrian figure of King Peter I Karađorđević²⁸ (**fig. 3**, **fig. 4**). However, the most important resource for the reconstruction of the monument is the preserved plaster model, with dimensions of 110 x 115 cm (**fig. 5**). It is housed in the private collection of the Bulajić family in Zagreb, Croatia. It was made in 1922 in Dubrovnik; on its basis, Meštrović made a relief of much larger size, cut in stone, in 1923. This plaster model comes from the property of Ernest Katić, a member of the

24 Meštrović, *Uspomena na političke ljude i događaje*, 145–146.

25 *Ibid.*, 146.

26 The Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, Serbia, keep photographs taken at the unveiling of the monument in Dubrovnik. Unfortunately, they are not registered but were still given to us to write this paper, courtesy of Đurđa Borovnjak, an archivist responsible for the organization and archiving of photographs, whom we thank.

27 The monument to King Peter in Dubrovnik was often presented in various newspapers and magazines published in the Kingdom of SCS / Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period. We singled out some of them: *Ilustrovani zvanični Almanah – Šematizam Zetske Banovine* [Illustrated Official Almanac – Schematism of the Zeta Banovina] (Sarajevo: Državna štamparija, 1931); *Četvrta konferencija 77 distrikta Rotary International. Dubrovnik, 2. i 3. maj 1936* [Fourth Conference of the 77 Districts of Rotary International. Dubrovnik, May 2 and 3, 1936] (Dubrovnik: Jadran, 1936), 28.

28 Ivan Meštrović, *Skice za spomenik kralju Petru u Dubrovniku* [Sketches for the Monument to King Peter in Dubrovnik], inv. no. 529, inv. no. 530, inv. no. 556, Meštrović Gallery, Split.

29 The available documents in the collector’s possession state that the mentioned model was cast after the original model, and is considered the original among three or four of them.

Fig. 3. Ivan Meštrović, *Study for the Memorial Relief of King Peter I Karađorđević*, 1923, blue ink on paper, Meštrović Gallery, Split (GSM 529). Photograph by Zoran Alajbeg.



Fig. 4. Ivan Meštrović, *Study for the Memorial Relief of King Peter I Karađorđević*, 1923, blue ink on paper, Meštrović Gallery, Split (GSM 556). Photograph by Zoran Alajbeg.



Fig. 5. Ivan Meštrović, *Plaster Model of the Memorial Relief of King Peter I Karađorđević*, 1922, plaster, 110 × 115 cm, private collection.

FORM AND FUNCTION OF THE MONUMENT

The equestrian image of King Peter, which people of Dubrovnik commissioned Ivan Meštrović to sculpt, relies on his portrayal a decade earlier on a bronze medal titled *Kosovo Avengers* (fig. 6).³⁰ However, one can

³⁰ Ivan Meštrović, *Kosovo Avengers* 1912–1913, bronze medal, National Museum of Serbia.



Fig. 6. Ivan Meštrović, *Kosovo Avengers*, 1913, bronze, National Museum in Belgrade.

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explain some of the formal variations between these two presentations due to the political situation within which Meštrović made these artworks. Amid patriotic fervour and victories in the Balkan Wars of 1912, Meštrović portrays King Peter I as a prototype of the King of Yugoslavia who embodied the abstract idea of uniting the South Slavic peoples. This medal shows King Peter I riding a horse, holding the reins firmly in his right hand and a falcon in his left. The King is represented in profile, dressed in a cloak, with a crown on his head. The physiognomy of his face corresponds to the usual presentation of King Peter's aquiline nose, typical of the Karađorđević dynasty. However, this was not just a genetic determinant but a characteristic identification of the ruler with a mighty bird, emblematically recognisable by its bent beak.³¹ Apart from the nose, the artist emphasised the King's rustic facial boniness and moustache, which is why Dimitrije Mitrinović, a proponent of Meštrović's art, described him as "the People's King". Besides the face of the "Peasant King", the artist also emphasised his crown, very similar to the one with which Petar Karađorđević was crowned in 1904, designed by Mihailo Valtrović.³²

31 Igor Borozan, *Слика и моћ: представа владара у српској визуелној култури 19. и почетком 20. Века* [Image and Power: Representation of the Rulers in Serbian Visual Culture of the 19th and early 20th century] (PhD diss., University of Belgrade, 2013), 41–42.

32 Mihailo Valtrović was an architect, archaeologist, and manager of the National Museum, a researcher of Serbian medieval antiquities, and a cultural worker in the Kingdom of Serbia. As one of the greatest authorities in the study of the Serbian past, he headed the Main Board for Organising the Coronation of King Peter I Karađorđević. Valtrović designed the royal insignia – the crown, the cloak, the sceptre, the orb and the cloak buckle. Ljiljana Mišković Prelević, "Vlatrovićevi nacrti za krunidbene predmete Petra I Karađorđevića" [Valtrović's Drafts for the Coronation Objects of Petar I Karađorđević], *Zbornik Muzeja primenjene umetnosti*, no. 24/25 (1980/1981): 119–126; Nenad Makuljević, *Crkvena umetnost u Kraljevini Srbiji (1882–1914)* [Church Art in the Kingdom of Serbia (1882–1914)] (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet, 2007), 24–25.

Although Meštrović's Dubrovnik relief depicting King Peter is quite similar to the described medal, there are still some differences. One of the key differences between the medal and the relief is in the presentation of Valtrović's crown, made from Karađorđe's cannon from the First Serbian Uprising, an emblem associated with King Peter I and the coronation ceremony.³³ The relief has a somewhat modified representation of the crown, i.e., reduced to a typical representation of this crucial royal ceremonial object. In addition, the King's image on the relief differs from reality and the portrait on the medal. Here, the King's figure is shaped after the imaginary picture of the archetypal Yugoslav monarch, cloaked in markers of royal dignity that were meant to indicate the difference between King Peter as the King of Serbia and the King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The king's distinctive ermine mantle from his coronation, rich in Serbian national symbols, was reduced to a generic representation of a ruler's vesture. The image of King Peter that Meštrović carved corresponded with the inscription on the relief THE FIRST YUGOSLAV KING. The inscription in the upper left corner of the relief, "PRVOM JUGOSLOVENSKOM KRALJU PETRU VELIKOM OSLOBODIOCU" (TO THE FIRST YUGOSLAV KING PETAR THE GREAT LIBERATOR), which, as the artist noted in his memoirs, was added only on his own initiative, without consultation with the Committee,³⁴ once again emphasizes the undoubted artistic and political personality of Meštrović. The sculptor consciously avoided the official name of the country – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes – despite opposition from local supporters of the National Radical Party, opting for the epithet "Yugoslav" which indicated national unity beyond individual ethnic divisions. Interestingly, the official name of the state would only change to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. The final decision for the inscription to remain came from the top, from Belgrade, which illustrates Meštrović's relationship with the political elite, especially with King Alexander, with whom he fostered a friendship.³⁵

Throughout its existence, the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia often experienced political instability caused by interethnic conflicts. In such an atmosphere, public sculpture, characterized by direct communication and the possibility of persuasion by propaganda, was an important tool in the hands of ruling bodies to visualize the abstract ideal of the Yugoslav community – "a simulacrum of the desired unity of nation and state."³⁶ This climate influenced the frequent use of the image of King Peter on horseback as a monument throughout the Yugoslav territory, and free-standing statues of King Peter on

33 Nenad Makuljević, *Umetnost i nacionalna ideja u XIX veku: sistem evropske i sprske vizuelne kulture u službi nacije* [Art and the National Idea in the 19th Century: The System of European and Serbian Visual Culture in the Service of Nation] (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike Beograd, 2006), 317.

34 Meštrović, *Uspomena na političke ljude i događaje*, 145–146.

35 Hammer Tomić, *Jugoslavenstvo Ivana Meštrovića*, 36–37.

36 Ignjatović, *Jugoslavenstvo u arhitekturi*, 192.

horseback could be found in Veliki Bečkerek (now Zrenjanin),³⁷ Pančevo,³⁸ Bijeljina,³⁹ Sarajevo,⁴⁰ Skopje,⁴¹ and Ljubljana.⁴² The equestrian form was derived from the iconographic model of the equestrian statue that dominated the European cultural space from ancient times. Its return to the public sphere in the mid-15th century heralded the dominance of this sculptural form in public space throughout the continent in the coming centuries. The symbolic language of communication used by equestrian imagery in political discourse is based on the representation of dominance and power.⁴³ The image of the ruler on horseback, executed in a permanent medium, unequivocally indicated the king's immortal political body, as opposed to his mortal body, which could not overcome the inevitability of death.⁴⁴ Linking royal power to horses allowed the image of the ruler to be presented as a more upright, potent master not only of his own body but also of death itself, managing to overcome it, thanks to artistic intervention.⁴⁵ This iconographic model was shaped in the Roman imperial tradition, and its formal role models were artistic depictions of the emperor's solemn entry into the city – *Adventus Augusti*. The term *Adventus Augusti* refers to the ceremony held to celebrate the arrival of a ruler or a Roman emperor in a city, riding a white horse or in a quadriga. The ruler was recognised as having some divine prerogatives and welcomed as a saviour, benefactor, and master.⁴⁶ The *Adventus* was part of an older and more complex tradition of Roman triumph (*triumphus*) – a public ceremony in ancient Rome, religious at its core and organised in honour of a military commander who had been successful in war.⁴⁷

The tradition of Roman triumph has been an unavoidable model for celebrating military success in European monarchies for centuries,⁴⁸ as

37 Uglješa Rajčević, *Zatirano i zatrto: oskrnavljeni i uništeni srpski spomenici na tlu prethodne Jugoslavije* [Concealed and Obliterated: The Desecrated and Destroyed Serbian Monuments in Former Yugoslavia] (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2001), 50–52.

38 Ibid., 78–79.

39 Igor Borozan, “Politička ikonografija i skulptura u službi memorisanja narodnog kralja: Spomenik kralju Petru I Karađorđeviću u Bijeljini” [Political Iconography and a Sculpture Serving the Memory of the Folk King: Monument to King Petar I Karađorđević in Bijeljina], *Zbornik Matice za likovne umetnosti*, no. 45 (2017): 249–266.

40 Rajčević, *Zatirano i zatrto*, 219–220.

41 Ibid., 232–233.

42 Renata Komić Marn, “Men on Horseback: Role and Reception of the Equestrian Monument in Slovenia,” *Acta Historiae Artis Slovenica*, vol. 18, no. 2, (2013): 75–94.

43 Ulrich Keller, “Reiterstandbild” [The Equestrian Statue], in *Handbuch der Politischen Ikonographie I–II*, eds. Uwe Fleckner, Martin Warnke and Hendrik Ziegler (München: Verlag Beck, 2011), 303–306.

44 Ernst Kantorowicz, *Dva kraljeva tela: studija o srednjovekovnoj političkoj teologiji*, trans. Ljiljana Nikolić [The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology] (Beograd: Fedon, 2012).

45 Peter Hammond Schwartz, “Equestrian Imagery in European and American Political Thought: Toward an Understanding of Symbols as Political Texts,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 4 (1988): 655–656.

46 Sabine MacCormack, “Change and Continuity in Late Antiquity: The Ceremony of *Adventus*,” *Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, vol. 21, no. 4 (4th Qtr., 1972), 721.

47 Yvonne Rickert, “Triumph,” in: *Handbuch der Politischen Ikonographie, I–II*, eds. Fleckner, Warnke and Ziegler, 456–464.

48 Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009), 2.

evidenced by the monumental practice in Interwar Yugoslavia. The zero point in commemorating war victories was transposing a real or imagined image of power (of individuals or dynasties) into an equestrian statue or relief depiction.⁴⁹ Apart from the complex structure of the Roman triumph, which will not be discussed in this paper, the triumph itself implied the constitution of a new political reality. Relying on modern practices and using the ancient form, Meštrović, an educated and experienced sculptor familiar with European traditions at the time, decided to create the monument to “the first King of Yugoslavia” following the concept of military triumph after victories in World War I, but based on the *adventus* as well. The equestrian relief of King Peter I was placed at the entrance to the city, which corresponds to the essence of the *adventus* ceremony and the city’s new status, as Dubrovnik was liberated after more than a century under Habsburg rule. Although King Peter never visited Dubrovnik after the war (neither did his successor, King Alexander, before the unveiling of the monument), the relief that came out of Meštrović’s workshop was supposed to be a harbinger of a new reality introduced after 1918, when Dubrovnik became part of the Kingdom of SCS.

The relief, as one of the expressions of the sculptural medium that stands on the border between the two-dimensionality of pictorial representation and the three-dimensionality of the sculptural medium, was often used for the depiction of the ruler’s image, as we have seen in the interwar period, and for the depiction of the ruler’s figure. However, when it comes solely to formal execution, it is noticeable that Meštrović’s Dubrovnik monument to King Peter I to some extent succumbed to schematism. The relief image is characterized by the geometrization of form, the absence of personal authority that should emanate from the represented personality, but also the absence of artistic creativity that would overcome the political. As time passed and the ideology of integral Yugoslavism was transformed in ways that did not imply national unity, this was reflected in public art practices in which Meštrović still played an important role.

In 1935, another monument to King Peter I Karađorđević, also the work of Meštrović, was to be placed in the public space of Split, the central coastal city of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Known as the King’s Stone, the monument was designed as a double-figure relief depicting the equestrian figures of King Tomislav, the first king of Croatia, and King Peter I Karađorđević, the first king of Yugoslavia. It was never realised. Nevertheless, the plaster model of the monument is preserved in the Ivan Meštrović Gallery in Split, and its design is similar to the Dubrovnik relief. In the same period, Meštrović was commissioned to arrange the newly formed Square of King Peter I the Liberator in Zagreb (today the Square of the Victims of Fascism), where he planned to raise a free-standing monument to the first king of Yugoslavia. However, that

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3–4.

idea was abandoned in favour of constructing a functional building dedicated to the memory of King Peter I.⁵⁰ Construction works of the House of Fine Arts of King Peter the Great Liberator were completed in 1938. Above the entrance was a relief depicting the ruler to whom the house was dedicated,⁵¹ which testifies to the continuity of Meštrović's engagement in presenting the image of King Peter I Karađorđević in relief throughout the Interwar Period.

THE UNVEILING AND THE REMOVAL OF THE MONUMENT

The unveiling ceremony of the Monument to Liberation on the walls of Dubrovnik was held on December 1, 1924, which also marked the anniversary of the unification of the South Slavs into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and was closely followed by the press.⁵² The newspaper reporter of *Vreme* concludes his report with the following words: "Dubrovnik, famous for its patriotism, has not witnessed, for a long time, a more beautiful national ceremony, nor has it so spontaneously shown its fondness for unity, the King and the state."⁵³ Since the journalist did not specify which king he was talking about – King Alexander or his late father, King Peter I – the "eternal body of the monarchy" was summed up in a singular king. Thus, the verbal culture served as support in legitimising the current ruler through the authority of his predecessor.

392 The fragility of the system that authorized the placement of the relief of King Peter placed on the inner gates of Pile in Dubrovnik, as well as the role of monumental culture, which was supposed to act as a means of cohesion, was evidenced by the obliteration of the first King of Yugoslavia from public memory, known as *damnatio memoriae*.⁵⁴ At the outbreak of World War II in Yugoslavia, Italian and Ustasha⁵⁵ occupation troops entered into Dubrovnik and removed the relief from the city walls. In his book titled *Dubrovnik 1941*, Mato Jakšić states that the Ustasha would probably have ruined Meštrović's artwork

50 The situation in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (which became more unstable after the death of King Alexander I Karađorđević as time went on), unrealized monuments, and the nominal dedication of buildings to King Peter I in the territory of the future Banovina of Croatia testify to the successive dispersal of Yugoslavia and progressive distancing from the idea of integral Yugoslavism. An insight into the monumental dynastic culture of the period sheds light on the nature of that state and the role of public art within its framework. Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika Kraljevine Jugoslavije 1918–1941*, vol. III, [Cultural Politics in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia 1918–1941 vol. III] (Beograd: Stubovi culture, 1997), 297–298.

51 Andrija Mutnjaković, "Meštrovićev Dom umjetnosti: građenje, razgrađivanje i obnavljanje" [Arts Hall by Ivan Meštrović: Construction, Deconstruction and Renewal], *Art Bulletin*, no. 61 (2011): 74–75.

52 [s. n.] "Spomenik Kralju Petru" [Monument to King Petar], *Politika*, no. 5966, year XXI, December 2, 1924; [s. n.] "Otkrivanje spomenika Kralju Petru u Dubrovniku i Starom Bečeju" [Unveiling of the Monument to King Petar in Dubrovnik and Stari Bečej], *Vreme*, December 2, 1924, year IV, no. 1062.

53 [s. n.], "Otkrivanje spomenika Kralju Petru."

54 Uwe Fleckner, "Damnatio memoriae," in *Handbuch der Politischen Ikonographie I–II*, eds. Fleckner, Warnke and Ziegler, 208–215.

55 The Ustasha (Ustaše) was a Croatia fascist and ultranationalist organization, active between 1929 and 1945, formally known as Ustasha – Croatian Revolutionary Movement. The Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*), a comprador state allied with the Nazis during World War II, was led by the Ustasha.

if the Italians had not intervened and ordered the relief to be carefully removed and professionally wrapped. They even boarded it onto a ship for Italy on two occasions, both of which were stopped at the last minute, so the relief remained in the city, though kept hidden from the public. Besides the destructive instinct that underlies this act, it testifies to the magical identity of the image and the ruler's charisma, which should have been abolished. Consequently, *damnatio memoriae* implied a break with the image and symbolic policy of the defeated regime.⁵⁶ The act of *damnatio memoriae* was not merely focused on the image of King Peter I, but the entire system that this image represented. Interventions in the semiotic public sphere directly affect collective memory, so dismantling the relief meant obliterating the overthrown dynasty from collective memory.⁵⁷ Interestingly, the only authentically preserved monument of the Karađorđević dynasty from this period is located far beyond the borders of the former state, in the territory of the French Republic.⁵⁸

CONCLUSION

The erosion of faith in the unity of the South Slavs and disappointment in the fulfilment of the ideology of Yugoslavism in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was inevitably reflected in the monumental culture and the opus of Ivan Meštrović in the Interwar Period. The process reached its climax with the complete disappearance of dynastic monuments in the Adriatic area after 1941. The analysis of Ivan Meštrović's works depicting the image of the "first King of Yugoslavia" begins with the period when King Peter was at the head of "Piedmontese" Serbia. At first, as on the medal *Kosovo Avengers*, Meštrović portrayed King Peter as a prototype of the Yugoslav race, while he depicted the king in a more and more schematic and routine manner in his later works, including the Dubrovnik relief. The form invoked the idea of a mighty Yugoslav King, while the essence signalled the disintegration of the state, which began with its very formation. Having considered the political and social *milieu* before the raising of the Monument to Liberation, and then the entire process from the initiative to erect it to its removal, the justification for viewing monuments as "living organisms" is again clear.⁵⁹ By placing the relief of King Peter the Liberator on the walls that symbolize Dubrovnik and its history of Liberty, the supreme ideal of Dubrovnik's identity inscribed in the ruler's image was once again emphasized. The image of King Peter was constructed as that of a non-historical ruler in the spirit of Meštrović's early equestrian statues, which embodied the Yugoslav vision. The ancient monumental form of the equestrian

56 Fleckner, "Damnatio memoriae."

57 Rajčević, *Zatirano i zatrto*.

58 Jovana Milovanović, "Omaž prijateljima: Spomenik kraljevima Petru I i Aleksandru Karađorđeviću u Parizu" [A Homage to Friends – the Monument of Kings Petar I and Aleksandar I Karađorđević in Paris], *Srpske studije*, no. 9 (2018): 254–280.

59 Borozan, *Reprezentativna kultura i politička propaganda*, 28.

statue was transformed into a relief that lacked the primordial vitality and fearlessness of Meštrović's early horsemen. The monument of King Peter in Dubrovnik can easily be seen as a paradigm of the state that it embodied – somewhere between desired power and real fragility.