

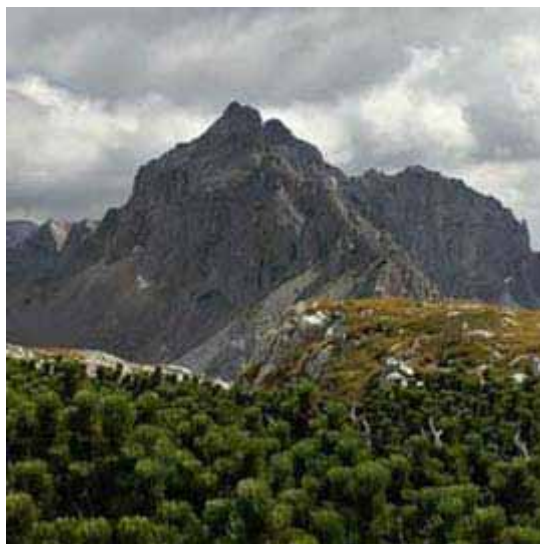


PICTURE STORY

Realm of the Black Mountain

July 2007

Realm of the Black Mountain



We at ESI have been working on Montenegro since 1999. In June 2006 it became Europe's newest state. But, if you want to know anything about the country, we realised that there are hardly any good, up to date and accessible books about it. And then, luckily, along came Elizabeth Roberts and her major work: *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro*. We think it is a very interesting and comprehensive work about one of Europe's least known countries and have teamed up with the publisher Hurst to bring you a series of extracts from it. Montenegro has an extraordinary amount of history, some of it pretty bloody, so our extracts are only snapshots. If you want the whole picture, you will need to read the book!

Elizabeth Roberts is a former Australian diplomat who lived in Belgrade in the 1990s and has taught Balkan history at universities in Ireland and lectured in the United States and the UK. She has been an expert witness to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee and has contributed articles to The World Today (the Chatham House journal), the Scotsman, Oxford Analytica and the British Army Review.

Realm of the Black Mountain has been the subject of reviews in the Economist, the Spectator (Simon Sebag Montefiore), the Guardian (Tim Garton Ash) and one in the TLS by Chris Patten, the former European Commissioner for external relations and now Chancellor of Oxford University.

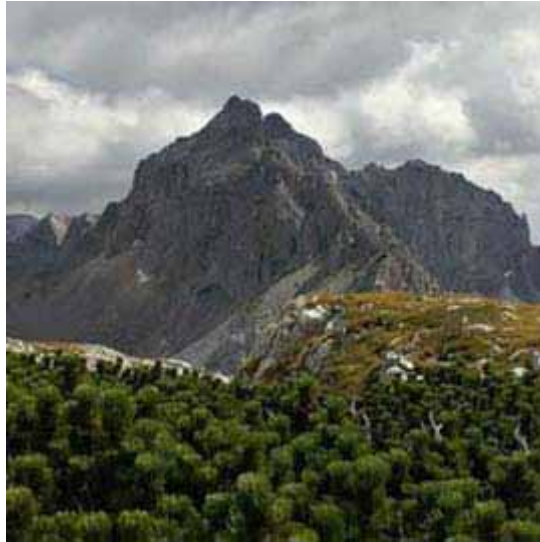


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Who Are the Montenegrins?



People from Crna Gora (Montenegro). 1910

"Who are the Montenegrins?" asks Elizabeth Roberts at the beginning of her book. "Montenegrins are not simply a collection of mountain Serbs, nor are they 'pure' Montenegrins. Identities are neither primordial nor set in stone, as nationalists would have us believe. Instead they are, within limits, fluid and opportunistic; they evolve over time." Besides which, of Montenegro's 672,000 people some 26% of them are minorities - Albanians, Slav Muslims (Bosniaks), Croats and Roma, all of whom as Roberts notes are "'Montenegrins' in the political sense of being citizens of that territory." However it is amongst the Orthodox majority that one finds ambivalence and a contest for identity:

How then are we to describe and account for the problem? One prominent Montenegrin sociologist, Srdjan Darmanović, describes the Montenegrin condition as that of a 'national homo duplex, a victim of his 'double or divided consciousnesses'. Why is this so? Why if Croats define themselves clearly as Croats and Serbs as Serbs are Montenegrins different? The most common explanation is that the sense of shared Serbian-Montenegrin identity conferred by religion and language - both powerful totems of ethnicity in the Balkans - is offset in Montenegro's case by recent political history. As Darmanović explains, 'Many of those who nationally declare themselves Montenegrins have besides their "Montenegrin-ness" a strong Serbian ethnic feeling, based on sharing the same language and religion. Consequently Montenegrins as a nation have been caught - especially in the twentieth century - between their "Montenegrin-ness" and their "Serbian-ness", between the particular interests of the Montenegrin state and those of Serbs in general.'

[pp. 3- 5]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

The Beginning of History



Fresco in Stari Bar

"There is no fixed line at which Montenegrin history can be said to begin," writes Roberts, but what of its famous name, full of foreboding? That, at least we can talk about with more certainty.

The name Montenegro - the Black Mountain - (Crna Gora in the language that used to be called Serbo-Croatian) - has a timeless ring to it, but this is deceptive. According to the Montenegrin historian Šerbo Rastoder, the name was first mentioned in a papal epistle of 1053 in which the Latin *Monte nigro* referred to an area within the medieval state of Duklja, while Cyrillic sources mention it for the first time in 1276. Yet the name was only brought into common use by Venetian sailors in the late fourteenth century when it applied to Mount Lovćen and the surrounding mountainous hinterland of the Gulf of Kotor (Ital. Cattaro, Serb. Boka Kotorska), a spectacular drowned river canyon (invariably referred to as a fjord)

set deep into the Adriatic coast and for centuries the principal gateway into Montenegro. At the time Montenegro was not a country but simply a wild region, yet its identity had been recognized, as had its enduring if quasi-mythical link with another South Slav state, former Raška, later medieval Serbia.

[p. 2]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

1219: Between East and West



Church door, Stari Bar

In 395 the Emperor Theodosius divided the Roman Empire between east and west, a fault-line which Roberts writes, "would be maintained when in 1054, the church finally split into its Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic branches...The region that would one day become Montenegro was astride the cultural line: Kotor was incorporated within the Western Empire, while the Eastern Empire controlled future Montenegrin lands to the south

and the east." The early seventh century saw another momentous change; the arrival of the Slavs. Eventually they were to give rise, in Raška, to the early Serbian entity, which was in turn intimately connected with those lands now in Montenegro, Duklja and Zeta. "By the beginning of the twelfth century," however "the focus of Serb power had shifted conclusively from Zeta to the rival state of Raška." It was what was to happen there which was to decisively shape the Balkans we know them today. In 1219, Sava, brother of the Nemanjić King Stefan, and now celebrated as St Sava, was able to "to secure a vital agreement with the Byzantine patriarch..."

The agreement granted the Serbian Church autocephalous status and Sava became its first archbishop. Thereupon King Stefan supported his brother and set about distancing himself from the Catholic Church. Dioceses were set up throughout Raška and in Zeta, where the bishop established his seat on the Prevlaka peninsula in the Gulf of Kotor. The inclusion of Zeta within the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church was of great significance for these lands. It not only helped to undermine the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, hitherto particularly strong in this part of the western Balkans, but also encouraged the inhabitants of Zeta to establish closer links with the Serbs of Raška and develop a sense of shared identity.

However, certain coastal cities still retained a large proportion of Catholics who continued to practice their faith alongside their Orthodox brothers. In Kotor, for example, the largely Catholic population was guaranteed many privileges, which were at times fiercely contested by another Catholic coastal city, Bar. And channels to the Catholic West were by no means entirely cut off. In the later Middle Ages an important land route ran along the shores of Lake Skadar, across the mountains of Montenegro to Peć and then through Kosovo to Niš. Called the Via di Zenta (a variation on the name Zeta), it was used by the Venetians and the Ragusans (inhabitants of present-day Dubrovnik) in their trading operations with Serbia and Bulgaria.

[pp: 43, 58 & 62-63]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Zeta and a Life of Toil



Stephan Uros IV. Dušan

"There is at least some evidence," writes Roberts, "favouring a sense of Zetan identity." But, she concedes, there is precious little to prove beyond doubt that the people, or rather the nobles of Zeta who ruled the kernel of what was later to emerge as Montenegro, felt a particular distinctiveness from their Raškan overlords, even in 1332, when the Serbian emperor Dušan, "had to suppress a serious revolt that broke out when some nobles in Zeta tried to secede and form their own principality."

Whether the ordinary people felt any sense of Zetan identity is still more doubtful. Borders were

porous and constantly changed. In the feudal society of Dušan's time it is likely that the inhabitants of Zeta would have felt themselves to belong to a particular locality and to have owed allegiance to the local lord or bishop. In a hierarchically ordered world rulers, nobles and ordinary people, whether free or in a state of serfdom, were bound together by military and personal obligations rather than by effective state administration and abstract concepts of patriotism and statehood...Zeta at this stage was thus one of a number of inherently unstable and loose-knit Balkan kingdoms, whose *raison d'être* was the concept of loyalty to a particular potentate or ruling dynasty. Lacking clearly defined territorial boundaries and offering little to their populations beyond a life of toil and military service, these entities were vulnerable both to conquest and to internal revolt and fragmentation whenever a powerful ruler died. Such a fate was soon to befall even the greatest of these, Dušan's empire, which would make way for the emergence of new magnates and powerful families in the Zetan lands.

[pp: 70, 71]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Kosovo: 1389 and All That



The Battle of Kosovo of 1389

The Battle of Kosovo on 28 June 1389 has been, says Roberts, "depicted by Serb historians as the most tragic and sacred event in Serbian history - a heroic defeat that ushered in five centuries of Turkish Muslim rule while reserving for the Serbs the moral high ground. For nineteenth century Serbian national leaders the need to avenge Kosovo became the most potent source of inspiration in the uprisings against the Turks."

However, she continues, "for Montenegrins...the import of the story is slightly different."

In popular culture Montenegrins trace their origins back to the flight of the Serb nobility who sought shelter in their mountains after the fall of the empire at Kosovo. Yet here the emphasis is less on victimhood than on heroism born of the desire to avenge the defeat. Certainly it is likely that at least some of the vanquished remnants of Lazar's forces did seek refuge from the Ottomans in the more remote regions including Montenegro's Dinaric Mountains. Yet many more were killed, while others stayed on to accept Ottoman overlordship and even serve in the Ottoman armies. Moreover, inaccessible as they were, the mountainous areas of the western Balkans already sheltered groups of people - many of them Vlachs - who had fled from earlier invaders. In the years that followed the battle of Kosovo, these groups were to be joined by others as Christian populations from the more accessible regions withdrew from the advancing Ottomans. The notion that the people who were eventually to become Montenegrins are direct descendents of the warriors of Kosovo Polje thus contains more myth than reality; nonetheless it continues to provide an important strand in the tangle of Montenegrin identity.

By 1391 the Ottomans were launching raids as far as the coast and soon the scene was to be set in Zeta for the pattern of history for centuries yet to come.

From their base in Skadar the Ottomans began to consolidate their position in Albanian lands putting pressure on local lords who usually had no choice but to submit or seek terms with the other major power in the region, Venice. In their weakened state the leading noble families oscillated between Venetian and Ottoman suzerainty, often fighting wars with one another on behalf of their patrons.

[pp: 83-85]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Life in Zeta



Crnojević dynasty seal

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the western Balkans, writes Roberts, throw up a "confusing succession of rulers and battles, of alliances and betrayals, of towns and hostages taken and surrendered."

The reason for this is clear, that is that this period "was one of great and traumatic change" in the whole of the Balkans as the Ottomans advanced and consolidated their control:

Meanwhile, over roughly the same period, Venice was extending its control of the eastern shore of the Adriatic, an expansion that impacted directly on Zetan lands. As the fifteenth century progressed, little Zeta and its rulers were increasingly squeezed between two giants.

But there is another reason says Roberts that the history of this period relies on the story of battles and kings:

Although we know quite a lot about the principal families and something of the clergy, we can be sure of very little about the life of the common people. Books and written records were few, and excepting some of the monks and leading families, like Jelena Balšić and Djuradj Crnojević, illiteracy was the norm. The lives of ordinary people were hard, less because they tilled the soil - most were pastoralists who moved frequently with their flocks - than because the harsh terrain and uncertain weather meant that reliable food supplies were short and they often lacked enough to eat. To the precarious nature of daily life could be added the danger of raiding by bands of marauders, often soldiers from the Ottoman armies, whose activities gradually pushed the population into the less fertile and more mountainous areas. As central authority weakened, the tribe or clan increasingly stepped in to organize defence, administer justice and fulfil any number of other essential roles.

[pp: 99-100]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Art: Monasteries and Masters



Savina Monastery, near Herceg Novi

Despite the harshness of life in fifteenth century Zeta or Montenegro churches were built and communities of monks "produced liturgies, gospels, psalters and other devotional works notable for the quality of their illuminations."

The monasteries and churches themselves were generally decorated with frescoes

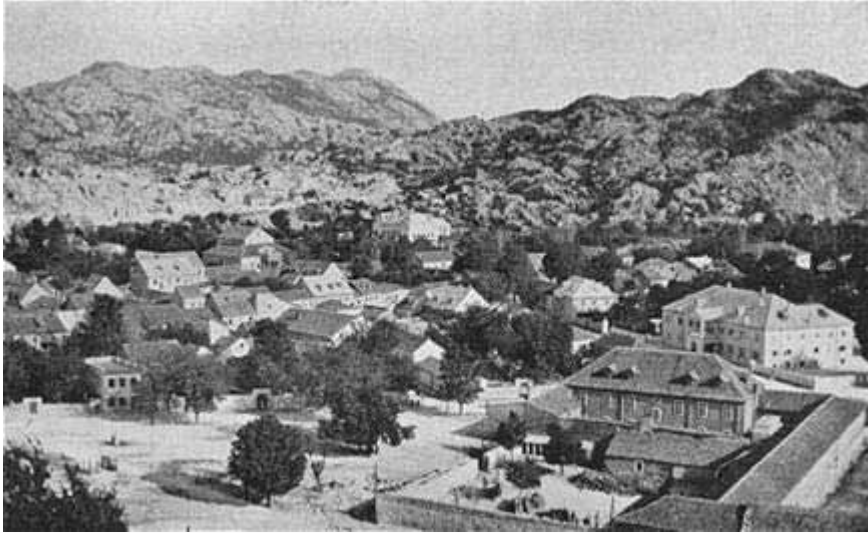
but because of their destruction we do not know whether they were in the Byzantine tradition of the preceding Nemanjić era or were influenced by the separate tradition of the 'Greek' painters of the coast. As the Ottomans advanced, scriptoria were established further inland in monasteries around Bijelo Polje, Pljevlja and Morača. There copying and illumination were undertaken by some of the best painters of the day, continuing in some places even under Ottoman occupation.

Meanwhile on the coast and at Kotor in particular a rich cultural and artistic life continued. Goldsmiths from Kotor enjoyed considerable prestige, even in Italy. Painting flourished there with the famous school of 'Greek' painters whose blend of Byzantine iconography with later techniques was a feature of their style. At times saints venerated in both the Catholic and the Orthodox traditions were portrayed on the same church walls with parallel inscriptions in Old Slavonic and Latin, an indication of the degree of religious interpenetration at the time. The most famous of these fifteenth century painters of the domestic school was the master Lovro Dobričević of Kotor, whose work reflects the transitional stage between the Gothic and the Early Renaissance. One of the best known of Dobričević's work's, still extant, is the icon of Our Lady of the Rocks (Gospoda od Škrpjela), which adorns the altar of a little church sited on a small island in the Gulf of Kotor. Painters in Kotor worked with artists from abroad - from Venice, of course, but also from Dubrovnik -, and their work was sent as far afield as Prague.

[pp. 100, 101-2]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

The Foundation of Cetinje



Cetinje

In the late fifteenth century the Ottomans "launched a mighty wave of attacks against Zeta" and its leader Ivan Crnojević. In 1481 he launched a counter-attack. "Faced at that moment with an Albanian revolt, Bayezid II agreed to allow Ivan to occupy a small area between the coast and the Zeta River extending as far as Lake Skadar."

In return Ivan was to pay tribute, relinquish any control over foreign relations and surrender his youngest son Staniša as a hostage. Although, under the agreement, Ivan was spared the presence of Ottoman officials in his tiny principality, he was to suffer further indignity when his son, following the prevailing practice, converted to Islam, taking the name of his father's former companion-in-arms against the Turk, Skanderbeg.

The centre of Ivan's greatly reduced patrimony was now the small settlement of Obod above a river draining into Lake Skadar, not far from the Crnojević's earlier citadel of Žabljak. As Ottoman raids became ever more frequent Ivan resolved on a further move to the still more remote site of the future royal city of Cetinje at the foot of Mount Lovćen. Here in 1482 he brought his monks and began work on the court and monastery that were to form the austere 'capital' of his remaining lands. Although his territory was small, Ivan's vision must have been expansive since he commissioned masons from Dubrovnik to build the church in what, sources reveal, was the early renaissance style. In 1485, with the church completed, the Metropolitan of Zeta was brought to Cetinje to establish the bishopric. Neither the monastery nor the church was to survive after suffering Turkish attacks on many occasions, but the bishopric itself was to prove the single most durable institution - indeed the central core - of the future Montenegro.

[pp: 96-97]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

The Eagle's Nest of Freedom?



Sultan Bayezid II – Monument to Ivan Crnojević in Cetinje

Montenegro during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is, for historians, writes Roberts, "the proverbial backwater". Yet this is an important period for an understanding of "the emergence of the small theocratic state that Montenegro was to become in the course of the eighteenth century." In 1503 the Venetians, "signed a peace treaty with Sultan Bayezid II under which they formally recognized

Ottoman authority over all Crnojević lands." [See Page 8, The Foundation of Cetinje] By 1513 Montenegro had become a *sanjak* in its own right "under the control of Skanderbeg (not to be confused with Skanderbeg, the Albanian hero who fought the Ottomans), Ivan Crnojević's Islamicised youngest son." This was a small barren territory, "roughly no more than 30 by 60 km in extent", however as Roberts argues, "it derived a paradoxical benefit from its unpromising geography:

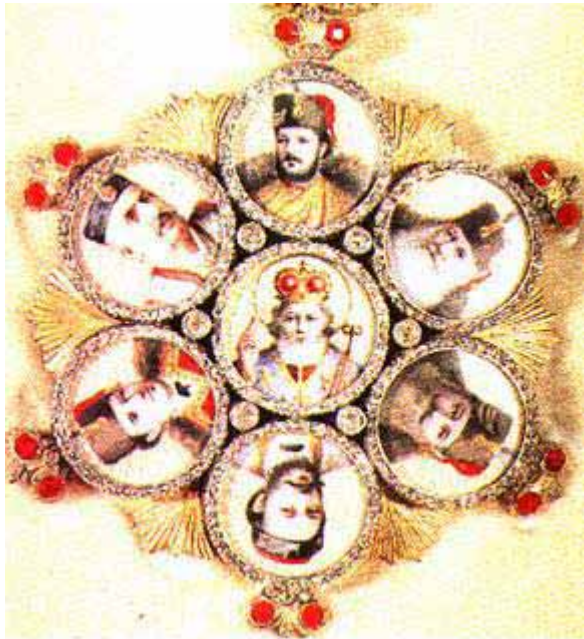
To begin with, its proximity to the Venetian-controlled coast provided an important yet easily defensible gateway to the non-Ottoman world. Moreover, an area so mountainous and infertile was scarcely worth the trouble of subduing and holding it, a fact its inhabitants were quick to exploit. Therein lies the historical importance of the 'Under Lovćen' region. Although in the sixteenth century it was not the 'eagle's nest of freedom' romantic historians and mythmakers later proclaimed it to be, this rocky heartland already provided a kernel of separateness from which the future independent principality of Montenegro would grow....

The Ottomans may at first have believed that their appointment of Skanderbeg as ruler of the former Crnojević lands would significantly assist their occupation of the region. Not only might his Crnojević background help to conciliate the fractious Montenegrin tribesmen, but to the Venetians it could even, and for the same reason, represent him as continuing the rule of their former allies. Skanderbeg did indeed play a skilful hand in dealings with his neighbours, but his treatment of the native Montenegrins was harsh. In the lands they had previously overrun the Ottomans had built garrison towns and fortresses such as those at Podgorica and Medun, outposts from which they now attempted to control their new and less easily secured territories. But success was not always guaranteed or, when it came, necessarily lasting. When almost a century and a half later, the Turkish traveler and writer Evlija Çelebi broke his journey at 'the merciless fortress of Podgorica, which is at the extreme frontier', he admired the size and structure of the fortress and noted that its seven hundred 'doughty ghazis' were occupied in 'battling day and night' against their enemies, among whom he numbered not only the population of Kotor but also 'the Albanian [sic] infidels of...Kelmendi and Montenegro.'

[pp: 103, 105-107]

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The Eighteenth Century



Vladikas from the Petrović clan (1697-1851)

The eighteenth century was to see the development of the embryonic Montenegrin state based on a tiny territory centered on Cetinje. It was also to develop as a theocracy led by the 'Vladika', a man who was at the same time bishop and prince and who was to hail from the Petrović clan. These were also the years when Montenegro was to develop close relations with Russia, briefly accept as ruler 'Šćepan Mali' ('Stephen the Small'), an imposter claiming to be the murdered Russian tsar Peter III, and when Austria was to feature ever more prominently as an actor in Montenegrin politics. These were years of change but despite that, cautions Roberts, "the developments that had taken place during the eighteenth century" still left the country "an essentially conservative society in which the tribal chiefs played a

predominant part."

Few ordinary Montenegrins knew much of the world beyond Kotor [Venetian from 1420 to 1797] and most lived in isolated hamlets. There were no schools. The extent of tribesmen's insularity and backwardness had been demonstrated by their readiness to accept the false tsar and, except during Šćepan's period of draconian rule, by the continued prevalence of the blood feud and raiding.

There was, however, some opening to the outside world compared to the two preceding centuries. The many letters written to the authorities in Russia, Austria and Venice and the journey's undertaken by [the Vladikas] Danilo, Vasilije and Sava and others acting on their behalf testify poignantly to the Montenegrins' attempt to develop links with the powers which they believed could protect them and engender a degree of prosperity. Also, the considerable number of émigrés, especially to Russia, offered them an additional though somewhat opaque window on the outside world.

Yet the end of the eighteenth century saw a weakening of the link with Russia, which had been one of the most important developments of the period. That a shared Orthodoxy lay at the root of this connection was ironic given the notorious vagueness of the Montenegrins, who had originally been so much admired in Russia as defenders of Orthodoxy against Islam, on the doctrinal basis of religion. An Austrian report of the time noted 'Except that they keep the fast, they have no religion.' Religious practice was heavily influenced by traditional beliefs and local superstitions. Priests were often poorly educated, more at ease bearing arms than discussing matters of doctrine.

[pp: 160-161]

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1806: Sacking Dubrovnik



Dubrovnik - view from Mount Srd

In 1991 Montenegrin forces, then as part of the Yugoslav Army, besieged Dubrovnik and looted and laid waste to the surrounding areas. [See Page 25, Plunder and the Ecological State] They had been here before. In May 1806 Napoleon's troops had taken Dubrovnik which was promptly besieged by Montenegrins and their Russian allies.

The siege was broken by the end of June and the French pushed southwards. General Marmont (later Marshal and Duke of Ragusa [Dubrovnik]) then enforced "the French claim to all the surrounding coastal territory. Marmont's fellow-countryman Colonel Vialla de Sommières, subsequently commandant of Castelnuovo (Herceg Novi) and for six years governor of the French-ruled province of Cattaro (Kotor), left the following account of the Montenegrins' offensive tactics and eventual defeat:"

When the French force approached Castel Nuovo, it was suddenly attacked by 10,000 Montenegrines, united to Russian troops, who had landed on the banks of the Saturina [Sutorina]. Our army was thus thrown into disorder, and was thus obliged to retreat to Ragusa, which the Montenegrines entered in the confusion of the pursuit. They immediately took possession of the town, levied contributions, laid waste Old Ragusa, and burnt Santa Croce, better known by the name of Gravosa, or the Port of Ragusa. In a second engagement they were, however, completely defeated and dispersed, being unable to sustain the regular attack of our battalions. The Russians, who had placed great reliance on the Montenegrines, were, in consequence, obliged to re-embark precipitately; renouncing, on the one hand, the advantages of an excellent position, and on the other, the aid of a numerous squadron, which, while it intercepted the entrance to the mouths of Cattaro, would have dealt destruction along the plain of the Salterns, Sutorina, which we occupied. Forty-eight hours sufficed for the retreat of the enemy's force. The Vladika, who, two days before, had been animating the courage of his hordes, and leading them on with extraordinary courage and skill, now hastily retired to the convent of Savina, which was covered by the line of Castel Nuovo and the Spanish fort. There he rallied his forces, and, on third day commenced his march towards Montenegro.

[p. 171]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Njegoš and the Mountain Wreath



Petar Petrović II (Njegoš)

Perhaps the best known of all of Montenegro's prince-bishops is Petar Petrović II better known as Njegoš after his birthplace of Njeguši. He was born in 1813 and ruled from 1830 to 1851. He succeeded his uncle Petar I.

Like his uncle Njegoš was a religious ruler and would-be centraliser, but his impact on his people's history was due less to his spiritual and political activities than to his poetry. However, his fame as a poet did not come immediately. As Milovan Djilas points out, some thirty years elapsed before scholars began to draw attention to the importance of his work. Once established, however, his reputation was assured, at least until dissenting voices were raised in the present age. In particular, his great epic poem *The Mountain Wreath* crystallised for Serbs and Montenegrins everywhere the nationalistic spirit of the age....The poem's setting is early

eighteenth-century Montenegro and it takes as its immediate subject the alleged massacre of Muslim converts in the time of Vladika Danilo. However, its broader message - that of the need for Serbian Orthodox Christians to rise up against their Ottoman Muslim oppressors - emerges powerfully from the poem's dramatic choruses and monologues, recounting the Kosovo disaster and glorifying the fourteenth century Serbian hero Miloš Obilić, assassin of the Ottoman Sultan Murad. Not only is tyrannicide celebrated, but the poem insists that a murderous struggle between Christians and Muslims is the price to be paid for future liberty:

*As Wolf does on the Sheep impose his
might,*

*So tyrant lords it over feebler fellow;
But foot to place upon the Tyrant's neck
To bring him to the consciousness of Right*

-

*This of all human duties is most sacred!
If thou canst calmly bloody sword
embrace,*

*If thou canst swim through blackest night,
Such sacred strife shall sanctify thy dust.
Europe's cleric from his Christian altar*

*Doth scoff and gibe at Asia's Minaret:
With thunderous strokes the Asiatic club
Shatters those fanes where Crucifix is
reared,*

*Blood innocent is shed within our shrines,
And relics scatter'd to the winds in dust.*

*Above a world of travail God keep silent:
The Crescent and the Cross, great symbols
twain,*

*Do no advantage gain save in a world of
slain.*

For most of the modern period *The Mountain Wreath* popularized Montenegro as the crucible of resistance to foreign oppression and did so at a time when struggling against foreign oppressors, particularly those of an alien faith, was seen as particularly noble. That the country was small, poor and mountainous added to the piquancy of its plight and the heroism of its struggle.

[pp: 186-187]

Billiards and Head Chopping



The Monastery of Cetinje with Biljarda and Eagle's Crag

In 1838 Njegoš abandoned his priestly robes for a colourful mountain chief's costume. He had struck a medal for heroism and began to use princely rather than ecclesiastical titles. He also began the construction of a new residence after being "forced to move from room to room in order to accommodate the Saxon King Friedrich Augustus." In the wake of the visit though he was; "infuriated by German press reports highlighting the primitive character of Montenegro."

Determined to live down such insults, Njegoš involved himself closely in the planning and supervision of the twenty-five-room residence, soon to be dubbed the Biljarda after the billiard table, which he had transported from the coast on the backs of a team of strong men. But if the Biljarda, with its introduction to gentlemanly pursuits, was intended to dispel the charge of primitivism, it was perversely ill-sited: the windows of Njegoš's apartment overlooked an unfinished round tower festooned with stakes on each of which was impaled a decapitated Turkish head. For European visitors the spectacle held a grisly fascination. John Gardner Wilkinson's description of the tower as it appeared during his visit to Cetinje in 1844 is but one of many:

On a rock, immediately above the convent [Cetinje monastery], is a round tower, pierced with embrasures, but without cannon; on which I counted the heads of twenty Turks, fixed upon stakes, round the parapet, the trophies of Montenegrin victor; and below, scattered upon the rock, were the fragments of other skulls, which had fallen to pieces by [sic] time; a strange spectacle in a Christian country, in Europe, and in the vicinity of a convent and a bishop's palace. It would be in vain to expect that, in such a condition, the features could be well-preserved, or to look for the Turkish physiognomy, in these heads, many of which have been exposed for years in this position, but the face of one young man was remarkable; and the contraction of the upper lip, exposing a row of white teeth, conveyed an expression of horror, which seemed to show that he had suffered much, either from fright or pain, at the moment of death.

Wilkinson elsewhere recounts his attempt to persuade the Vladika to have the Montenegrins abandon the practice of cutting off and displaying the heads of their enemies. Njegoš immediately agreed in principle only to come up with a serious objection: the Turks would never agree to do the same thing, and in these circumstances any first move to discontinue head-taking by the Montenegrins would be construed as weakness and serve simply to invite attack.

[pp: 202, 203-204]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Nikola's Own Country



For more than half a century Montenegro was dominated by Nikola, prince from 1860 to 1910 and thenceforth king until his deposition in 1918. These were years that saw not only a vast increase in Montenegro's territory but its international recognition as a state in 1878 and ultimately its incorporation into the first Yugoslavia. In this extract Roberts discusses how life changed in the country in the earlier years of his reign.

Prince Nikola Over these years Prince

Nikola's youthful experience of a world beyond his country's confines led him to introduce a number of changes, intended to move the country in the direction of the modern world. Many schools offering elementary education were opened in different parts of the principality including, in Cetinje, the first school for girls, established with Russian help in 1869. Communications were improving. In 1869 Montenegro was for the first time connected to the outside world by telegraph, and two years later the first post office was established. In 1874 construction began on a proper road linking Cetinje and Kotor, funded by Austria-Hungary. But the prince's broad education, knowledge of languages, and experience of 'civilised' Europe were not shared by the mass of his subjects, over whom he ruled with autocratic powers, if not in the despotic manner, of his predecessor Prince Danilo. The evident contradiction implicit in such an approach was later at least partly the cause of Nikola's undoing, but at the time widespread acceptance of his style as one of paternalistic benevolence helped to earn him the respect of his people and the admiration of an increasing number of foreign visitors.

Later Roberts writes about the Montenegro of the turn of the century:

Montenegro...entered the twentieth century with the traditional system of government virtually intact. The ruler as an institution was connected with all the decisive events in public life, and Nikola treated the state as if it were his family domain. Foreigners often commented on the Ruritanian aspect of Cetinje - the miniature capital had its own theatre and reading room which, already in 1879, was stocked with newspapers from all parts of Europe, among them the *Illustrated London News* and, somewhat surprisingly in view of the country's poverty, a pamphlet entitled *Die Private Spekulation an der Börse* [sic]. There were no regular budgets till 1907. Russian subsidies supplemented by Austrian loans provided the bulk of the country's financial resources, which were insufficient to cover the basic requirements of the population. Grain and textiles had to be imported, although Nikola attempted to improve agriculture by creating an experimental farm at Danilovgrad and ordering every Montenegrin to plant a vine.

[pp: 234, 269]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

1878: Congress of Berlin



Congress of Berlin

The anti-Ottoman wars of 1875-78 and the Congress of Berlin which was to see Montenegro recognised as an independent state saw a huge increase in the size of the territory under Cetinje's control. While the Congress left Serbia which had hoped to acquire Bosnia disappointed Roberts notes that Montenegro:

...appeared to have emerged from it in a far

better position than Serbia. To the north, in what had been Hercegovina, it kept Nikšić, a town which would soon lose both its Muslim population and distinctive Turkish houses and markets as incoming Montenegrins and its local Orthodox Hercegovinians set about eliminating all traces of the 'oriental'. Arthur Evans [correspondent of the Manchester Guardian] was...an eyewitness and his account, though generally favourable to the Montenegrin side, was not without sympathy for the departing Muslims.

It has been a striking sight to watch long cavalcades of Turkish fugitives, sometimes as many as sixty at a time, streaming out of town. Now and then one of the little ones would look disconsolate enough, but the women were muffled in long white sheets, so you could see hardly as much as a nose, and the men were too proud to betray any symptom of regret, and were even dressed out in their brightest holiday costume. How dull look the Montenegrins who escort them beside these brilliant Orientals! How strange and characteristic is this transformation of which I am at this moment a witness!

Montenegro gained other parts of Hercegovina and also areas to the south which as Roberts points out "contained ever greater concentrations of Albanians." Podgorica too was acquired in 1878. A former Ottoman fortress, it was then still largely a Muslim town. The country also finally gained an outlet to the sea at Bar but provisions in the treaty closed it to warships, ie., the Russians and stipulated that "all Montenegrin ships using the port should fly the Austrian flag."

All in all, the Congress of Berlin left Prince Nikola and the Montenegrins deeply disappointed and for a simple reason: although the Ottoman Empire had been forced into retreat, Montenegro now found itself effectively ring-fenced by Austria-Hungary.

[pp: 252, 253, 254]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

1913: Scutari



Quay and Caravanseraï in Scutari

The Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913 radically changed the shape of south-eastern Europe, as the Ottomans were pushed out of Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia and indeed virtually back to the gates of Istanbul. The Great Powers determined that in the new dispensation the newly born Albania should have what was then known as Scutari which is Skadar in Serbian and Shkodër in Albanian. But King Nikola wanted the old capital of Zeta for Montenegro and besieged the town. His forces entered it on 24 April 1913. Edith Durham, whom Roberts quotes here, was a

famous writer on the Balkans.

Edith Durham, who entered the city on the same day in the company of a Mr Loch of The Times described the scene that awaited them: 'In the poorer houses [the occupants] lay on the ground in the last stages of misery. Tortoises, frogs, hedgehogs, dandelions had all been used as food. [...] I saw a man drop in the street, and I fed a skeleton child.' Another eyewitness, Joyce Cary, was one of the first three over the bridge in Scutari after the surrender. Cary, who unlike Durham was sympathetic to the Montenegrins, nonetheless recalled: 'The crowds peered in silence from the dark caverns of the open stalls, Every man and woman of them expected massacre at nightfall, but their attitudes and looks expressed for the most part nothing but indifference made easy by famine.'

The expected massacre by Montenegrin soldiers did not take place, a fact uncharitably ascribed by Nikola's detractors to his awareness that the eyes of the world were upon them. Elsewhere, in Peć, Djakovica and Gusinje, Montenegrin troops carried out a widespread policy of forced conversions, to which the alternative was generally death. The Montenegrins were especially feared for their practice of facial mutilation. As a Montenegrin schoolteacher explained to Edith Durham on the eve of the war, 'It is our old national custom...how can a soldier prove his heroism if he does not bring in noses? Of course we shall cut noses; we always have.'

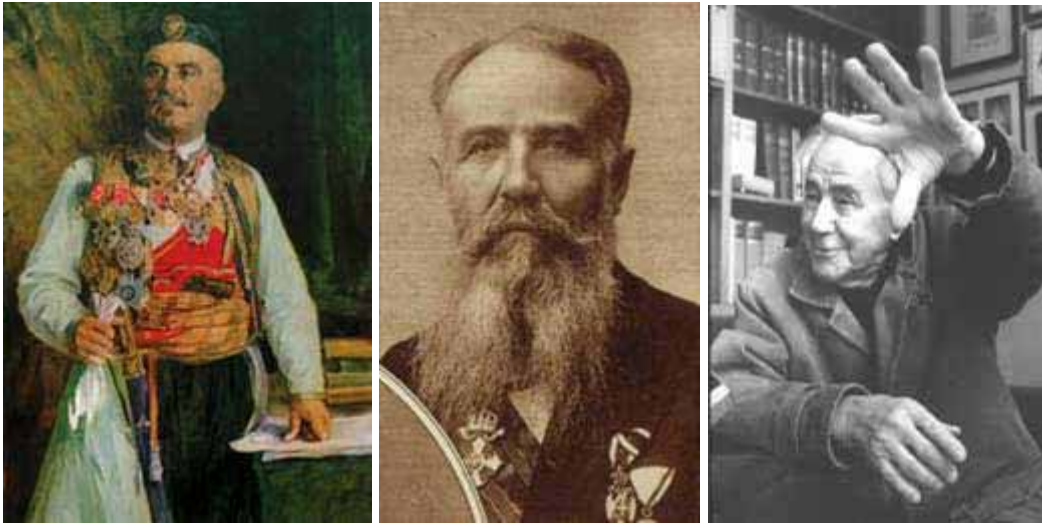
Austria was prepared to go to war to force Montenegro out of Scutari but the Powers were nervous as to whether Russia would just stand by and allow this.

Then at the eleventh hour on 4 May 1913 Nikola, correctly calculating that the odds were irrevocably stacked against him, backed down and agreed to evacuate Scutari in exchange for a substantial foreign loan. Europe reacted with relief. As the Russian foreign minister was reported to have said, 'King Nikola was going to set the world on fire to cook his own little omelette.' But now the extraordinary period throughout which Montenegro on its own had confronted the Powers and brought Europe to the brink of war was drawing to a close.

[pp: 291-292, 293-294]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

The First World War



Prince Nikola – Nikola Pašić – Milovan Djilas

After the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, Montenegro, writes Roberts, "exhausted by the savage fighting of 1912-13, was not eager at first for another war." So, Nikola attempted to dampen down support for Serbia amongst pro-Serb nationalists "while attempting to negotiate the country's possible neutrality in return for Austria's agreement to permit its expansion into Albania and possibly even a return to Scutari." [See Page 16 – 1913: Scutari] It was not to happen. In 1915 the Serbian Army, government and much of the civilian population began their epic retreat through Sandžak, Kosovo and Montenegro to the Albanian coast. Many Montenegrins died in covering the Serbian retreat. In January 1916 Montenegro capitulated and King Nikola went into exile in France. He did not want to go to Corfu where he feared being pressured into accepting the policies of Serbian premier Nikola Pašić, either for an expanded and unitary Serbian state and kingdom including Montenegro or a Yugoslavia in which Montenegro would also disappear. Meanwhile in Montenegro, now under Austro-Hungarian occupation, the situation had become increasingly "desperate":

At first the occupiers did not treat the population with excessive harshness, although they displayed a 'severity accompanied by...orderliness' that kept people wary and wholly unreconciled by their presence. But as pockets of resistance began to manifest themselves the Austrians increasingly resorted to stronger measures and at times treated the civilian population with considerable brutality.

Milovan Djilas was the later famous communist leader and then dissident:

The father of Milovan Djilas was one of the many thousands of those taken prisoner and held in camps by the Austrians, while others who attacked the Austrians directly or committed acts of sabotage were hanged on public gibbets erected in the countryside. To the fear occasioned by reprisals were added the constant depredations of indigenous guerrillas, some of whom behaved more as bandits, stealing from the local population rather than helping them. As early as 1916 the German press was reporting: 'In Montenegro there is no more bread, no flour, no tobacco, no salt and no oil.' By 1917 famine, never far removed from the lives of ordinary Montenegrins, was becoming an everyday reality.

Austrian troops left Cetinje on 6 November 1918. They were followed rapidly by Serbian irregulars coming from Macedonia and, shortly afterwards, by Serbian Army units. "To these were added" writes Roberts, "French, British and Italian troops who ... were under the overall command of the French..."

The arrangements put in place by the French commander on the spot, General Venel, gave Serbian troops - rapidly reconstituted as 'Yugoslavs' - complete control of the interior of the country, while other Allied forces were largely disposed along the coast. At the same time the French government turned down all of Nikola's requests to return, claiming that the situation in the country was too insecure for him to do so safely. The Allies' de facto policy was thus in contrast to the formal position by which they continued, though with little enthusiasm, to recognise Nikola and his government as officially in charge of the country.

[pp: 304, 318, 319, 320]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

1918: The Podgorica Assembly



Coat of Arms of H.R.H. Prince Aleksandar
Karageorgevich

The departure of the Austrians in 1918 was followed by the appointment of a National Council organised by a representative of the Serbian High Command. "As soon as it was appointed," writes Roberts, "the Council announced its intention of uniting Montenegro and Serbia." A Grand National Assembly was also to be organized.

Significantly the Assembly was to take place in Podgorica, away from Cetinje and tribes of Old Montenegro with their long history of support for Montenegrin independence. Ballot papers were distributed; green for those supporting the continuation of an independent Montenegro and white for those in favour of unification with Serbia.

Elections for the Assembly took place over two weeks in mid-November.

With the Serbian army in control of the countryside and [Andrije] Radović's [pro-union] Montenegrin Committee actively engaged on the ground, the result - victory for the Whites, whose candidates gained almost the totality of the votes - was never in doubt. Nor, given the composition of the Assembly, could there be any uncertainty about the outcome of the deliberations of its 168 members when they were summoned to meet on 24 November.

Within two days the Assembly had proclaimed the deposition of King Nikola and the unification of Serbia and Montenegro under the [Serbian] Karadjordjević dynasty. The accompanying resolutions passed by 163 representatives - five pleading illness, did not participate - endorsed the establishment of an Executive Committee to administer Montenegro until the arrangements for the union could be brought to a conclusion...On 1 December 1918 Prince-Regent Aleksandar proclaimed the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes...Montenegrins received no mention. Instead their National Executive handed over authority to the new state, declaring: 'Montenegro enters into the new fatherland not only as a pure Serbian land, but purified of all dark and criminal elements.' The reference to Nikola and his court could not be misunderstood.

Nearly nine decades later, the Podgorica Assembly remained a subject of contention for supporters and opponents of an independent Montenegro. For supporters it was an illegal assembly not approved by the 1905 Montenegrin Constitution or by the regular Skupština [parliament]. By contrast, opponents discounted the 1905 Constitution which they saw as having been imposed by an autocratic ruler, and argued that the exceptional situation caused war and occupation more than justified the different procedures undertaken by the Assembly. Yet even leaving aside the question of the Assembly's legality, there are solid grounds for believing it to be an unrepresentative body whose role was to affix its imprimatur to the decision on unification which, since it was demanded by the Serbian authorities and indeed by part of Montenegro's population, was to be imposed on all without further consultation or delay.

[p. 321, 322-323]

1918-41: Neglect, Stagnation, Disillusion



Church in Kotor Old Town

"The interwar period in Montenegro," says Roberts, "far from offering a new start, was characterised by neglect, stagnation and widespread disillusionment." And this she says was felt not just by former pro-independence Greens but Whites too, "who had naturally invested much hope in the new union, [and who] were forced to recognise that the new regime was failing to address the economic and social ills which had placed Montenegrins near the bottom of the heap in the new Yugoslav state."

Officially Montenegrins were considered Serbs, and while many of them at the time found this designation acceptable, others resented the sweeping away of state traditions and symbols and the way their people had been pushed aside and overruled on all issues of self-governance by influential Serbs from Serbia proper. It was not merely that Montenegrin officers were expected to join a national army which, despite incorporation of officers from the former Montenegrin and Habsburg armies, retained its old Serbian command structure. More wounding, given its long association with Montenegrin self-rule, was the blow dealt to ... the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, which in September 1920 was formally subsumed into the union of Yugoslav Orthodox churches - an institution placed under the authority of the Serbian Patriarch with his see in Belgrade.

One response to grinding poverty, writes Roberts, had been emigration but in the 1920s this declined because of more restrictive US legislation. Thousands however were resettled:

...from the barren karst regions on land expropriated from estate-owners in Kosovo or Macedonia or in formerly Habsburg-ruled Vojvodina. The small plots, the different farming methods required to cultivate the marshy lowlands of Macedonia or the flat plains of Kosovo, and the lack of equipment needed to farm the new land meant that these emigrants often had a struggle to succeed.

"With most political attention...focused on Serb-Croat relations," notes Roberts, Montenegro became a "backwater, both politically and economically." She notes that in the 39 interwar governments with 819 ministerial mandates only four were from Montenegro.

Electoral support for the regime-sponsored coalition declined progressively as the population, largely on dwarf farms, were at the mercy of local middlemen. The unreasonable profit margins left them struggling to cope with unfavourable price differentials between what they received for the small amount of grain they could sell when the harvest had just come in, and the price they could pay as the crop year advanced and their own supplies were exhausted. Despite continuing poverty (in 1931 national income in Montenegro was only 31 per cent the Yugoslav average), almost no funds were allocated to economic development, nor was there any serious attempt to tackle the absence of any major infrastructure, apart from the development of military facilities in the Gulf of Kotor.

[pp: 337, 339, 342-343]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

1941: Wartime



Yugoslavia 'Verificato'

The beginning of the Second World War in Yugoslavia, on 6 April 1941 saw the occupation of Montenegro by the Italians. On 13 July an uprising began, triggered by the events of the day before, when a "group of Italian-backed separatists proclaimed Montenegro's independence, reading out a declaration that had been prepared in Rome."

Far from welcoming the idea of a protectorate, most Montenegrins were outraged at the affront to their independence. To compound their sense of injury the so-called state had already been divested by the Italians of significant chunks of its territory. Not only had they reassigned to a Greater Albania lands surrounding Peć and Dečani [in Kosovo] that Montenegro had gained after the First Balkan War and territory around Ulcinje and Tuzi that had been part of Montenegro since 1878: they had detached a strip of land running from the Gulf of Kotor to Budva for direct annexation to Italy as part of a separate Governatorato (military district) of Dalmatia. The Montenegrins' anger at the Italians' action was reinforced by their traditional belief in Mother Russia; the peasants were eager for a war that they believed would soon end in a decisive victory for the Red Army.

As everywhere in Yugoslavia the war was brutal and pitted neighbour against neighbour, brother against brother. Whilst the Italians and then the Germans cooperated at times with Chetnik, or Serbian-nationalist royalist forces and other Montenegrins, they were also able to enlist support from many Albanian and Slav Muslim irregulars. Yet, by one calculation, at one point some 23 per cent of the entire occupation force in Yugoslavia was tied down trying to control 3 per cent of its population. Roberts quotes from Milovan Djilas, one of the main communist and Partisan leaders in Montenegro whose book *Wartime* "must stand as one of the great memoirs of warfare of modern times." In it she says, Djilas "admits to ordering or acquiescing in both the burning of villages and the execution of individuals who were in no way collaborators but were deemed by virtue of their occupation or social position to be 'reactionaries' and class enemies."

It became increasingly clear to me that our imprudent, hasty executions, along with hunger and war weariness, were helping to strengthen the Chetniks. Even more horrible and inconceivable was the killing of kinsmen and hurling of their bodies into ravines - less for convenience than to avoid the funeral processions and the inconsolable and fearless mourners. In Hercegovina it was still more horrible and ugly: Communist sons confirmed their devotion by killing their own fathers, and there was dancing and singing around the bodies. How many were executed in Montenegro and Sandžak at that time? I don't know but several hundred doesn't seem exaggerated. All too lightly the Communists destroyed the inherited, primeval customs - as if they had new and immutable ones to replace them with. By retrieving the bodies from the ravines and giving them solemn burial, the Chetniks made impressive gains while pinning on the Communists the horrible nickname of 'pitmen'.

[pp: 348, 353, 354, 361-362]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Podgorica, 1945



Milovan Djilas

The Second World War ended officially in Yugoslavia on 15 May 1945. The new representative for Montenegro in the central government was Milovan Djilas, the communist leader and later, famous dissident.

Djilas...returned to a Montenegro where the foundations were being laid for a Republican government which would ensure Montenegro's autonomy on an equal basis with that of its larger neighbours - Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia. It was to be a fresh beginning, launched amid formal celebrations, but the recollections of its official representative depict Montenegro as still for the time being a land devastated by war:

It seemed to me [Djilas wrote] as if all of Yugoslavia was synthesized in Montenegro, in the boundless confidence of the victors and the silence and shame of the vanquished. There were scorched walls along torn-up, demolished roads; rivers without bridges;

railroad trucks with splintered ripped-out ties. In the forests, outlaws - four to five hundred in Montenegro...Titograd [Podgorica] was so devastated by Allied bombings - they say there were over twenty - that it resembled an archaeological excavation through which only one path had been cleared. The people of Podgorica had scattered to the villages or to the caves around the Morača river. From these caves there still came smoke and the cry of children.

[p. 391]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

1946: Borders



Tito visiting Montenegro in 1946

"On past form the Montenegrins could be counted on to be territorially acquisitive," writes Roberts about the post Second World War situation, "and the new leadership soon showed themselves just as ready as the country's traditional rulers to press the case for more land." In this extract she

describes how Montenegro came to gain its borders, which since June 2006 have become the frontiers of an independent country.

As early as January 1944 Montenegro was asserting the right to add the Sandžak - hitherto treated by the Communists as a separate unit – to the embryonic Montenegrin federal unit, a move denounced and described as 'premature' by the Central Committee of the KPJ [Communist Party of Yugoslavia]. But by the following March its robust attitude to the acquisition of territory had been successful in ensuring the return to Montenegro of that part of the Sandžak – Pljevlja and Bijelo Polje – which it had originally acquired after the First Balkan War. In addition Montenegro had secured possession of the invaluable Gulf of Kotor, together with the adjacent Sutorina peninsula (the latter also claimed by Bosnia-Herzegovina), an area it had long coveted and one where Orthodox Serbs outnumbered Catholics by almost two to one. Favourable as they were, these adjustments by no means exhausted the territorial ambitions of the Montenegrin leadership, who continued to press for the Dalmatian city of Dubrovnik, as well as Herzegovina and Metohija (the western half of Kosovo). All these claims were turned down when the borders of the Republics were fixed by the 1946 constitution.

[pp: 396-397]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

With Stalin, Against Tito



Stalin - Tito

In 1948 Tito's Yugoslavia famously split with Stalin and the Soviet Union after it had refused to attend a Cominform meeting in Bucharest. In Montenegro, "as elsewhere in Yugoslavia" writes Roberts "the fundamental belief that 'Cominformism had to be torn up by the roots' gave rise to an extremist culture in which sons were

encouraged to denounce parents, wives to divorce husbands and siblings to approve each other's execution."

As the level of political and social paranoia grew, people were arrested simply for failure to report suspect conversations, and for reading or listening to material that was deemed to have pro-Soviet content. Overall about a third of the total Communist Party membership in Montenegro, some 5,000 people, are thought to have aligned themselves with the pro-Soviet tendency, a level of support far beyond that existing anywhere else in Yugoslavia. So grave was the threat to overall Yugoslav security that in the summer of 1948 a full division of the security service (UDBa) was seconded to Montenegro to engage the growing number of rebels who had taken to the hills and to close the borders with Albania.

Why was there such a high level of support for Stalin in Montenegro? There were of course many reasons but for Roberts the single most important one was an enduring love of Russia.

...for Montenegrin Communists, the centuries-old devotion to Russia had been heightened by their new-found admiration for the Soviet people as the instigators of the October Revolution, for Stalin himself as leader of the international Communist movement, and finally, as proclaimed by official propaganda, for the Soviet Union's glorious role in the Second World War. Added to this was the fact that in Montenegro traditional mores – a lethal combination of dogmatism and idealism – had given rise to a more rigid and in that respect more Stalinist view of Communism.

[pp: 406, 407 & 405]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Where are you Managing?



Ulcinj

As early as the mid-1960s says Roberts, the richer parts of Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Croatia and parts of Serbia, including Vojvodina, were becoming increasingly resentful at the amount of their hard-earned money going to subsidise the poorer parts of the country including Montenegro, whose own citizens were predictably content with the situation.

For those with eyes to see it was already clear that economic differences were driving the Yugoslav Republics apart. More specifically Montenegrins, adept at exploiting both their Partisan past and the resources of the clan system, were resented in the other Republics for the way they were seen as 'colonising' the [federal] bureaucracy' in order to occupy positions of power. Naturally this led to snide jokes at Montenegrin expense, one of which spoke of Cetinje descending on Dedinje, a reference to the number of Montenegrins who had taken up residence in Belgrade's most exclusive suburb, while another claimed that when two Montenegrins met in the street they would greet each other not with the usual 'What are you dong?' (Šta radiš?) but with 'Where are you managing?' (Gdje rukovodiš?)

Economic self-interest helps to explain why Montenegro, along with Bosnia-Herzegovina, remained throughout the Tito period both the most pro-Yugoslav of all the Republics, relatively untouched by currents of liberalism and nationalism that emerged elsewhere in the 1960s. But equally Montenegro's past – the love of Russia, the pre-war strength of the Communist Party and wartime support for the Partisans, even the often alluded-to 'rigid Manichean mores' – all played their part in ensuring that it remained an outpost of Titoist orthodoxy. In 1963 Montenegro had a significantly higher ratio of Party membership per head of population (6.7%) than Serbia (5.3%), where Party membership was in turn higher than in any other of the former Republics. Montenegrins were also heavily represented on the Executive Committee of the Yugoslav League of Communists, which in 1963 had four Montenegrins as compared with five Serbs, five Croats but only three Slovenes and three Macedonians.

[pp: 422-423]

Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro. 2007. [C.Hurst & Co]

Plunder and the Ecological State



Shelled house in Dubrovnik - Bay of Kotor

On 23 January 1990 Momir Bulatović, the leader of the Montenegrin Communist Party presided over the last session of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. It was a key moment in the story of the dissolution of the country. Slovenia and Croatia had walked out and Bulatović was left in a quandary. "He exercised his chairman's right to call a break for fifteen minutes, which, as he subsequently commented, 'lasted throughout history.'" As the country fell apart Montenegro was the only republic to side with Serbia, led by Slobodan Milošević, himself of Montenegrin parentage. On 1 March 1992 some 95.4% of those voting (albeit with a low turnout of 66.0%,) cast their ballots in favour of maintaining a union with Serbia, the subsequent Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. At the time Bulatović was president of Montenegro and Milo Đukanović, who was later to lead it to independence its premier. Montenegro's wartime role was inglorious.

At first the war focused on those parts of Croatia with Serb populations, a theatre at a good distance from Montenegro. But as the battle for Vukovar [in Croatia and ending in November 1991] raged, the Yugoslav army attacked Dubrovnik from Montenegro. JNA [Yugoslav People's Army] soldiers, supported by Montenegrin irregulars, earned a name for lawlessness and rapacity, which prompted a torrent of international outrage and disapproval. Dubrovnik had no military strategic value and was barely defended by the Croats. Nor were there more than a few Serbs living there. Rather the attack seemed to stem from pure vindictiveness or, according to some, from the Montenegrins' traditional appetite for plunder, and led to headlines in the Western press likening the Yugoslav army to barbarian hordes. Although Montenegro was officially detached from the war in Croatia and withdrew its reservists there in October 1991, Montenegrin soldiers from the positions in the hills above Dubrovnik destroyed hotels, yachts and other signs of sophistication or civilisation with a wantonness that caused more damage to Milošević's interests and game plan than he could possibly have anticipated.

Only days before the attack on Dubrovnik, with no apparent sense of irony, the Parliament of Montenegro had declared the country to be an ecological state. Its rhetorical ballast rings particularly hollow in the light of events only days away: 'We are fully aware that dignity and blessedness of a human being are intrinsically connected with blessedness and purity of nature...being committed to the struggle for the dignity of man, we are also called upon to struggle for the dignity of nature.'

[pp: 437, 438-439]

Independence



Montenegrins celebrating referendum results

In February 1997 Milo Djukanović, then premier of Montenegro and in the early 1990s the protégé of Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević, made his irrevocable break with him. From that moment on, for almost the next decade, one topic was to dominate political life in Montenegro – should the republic stay with Serbia in one state or strike out on its own? 'It would be completely wrong for Slobodan Milošević to remain in any

place in the political life of Yugoslavia," said Djukanović. "Milošević is a man of obsolete political ideas..." From then on he began a struggle, not only with Serbia but also with the international community, which was far from encouraging as he moved to an out and out pro-independence position, especially after Milošević's fall in October 2000. For three years, from 2003 until 2006 Montenegro stayed within a loose "state union" with Serbia until, on 21 May of that year its citizens voted in a referendum on independence. "According to the referendum commission, 230,711 voters (55.5 per cent) voted in favour of independence and 184,954 (44.5 per cent) against. Independence was declared on 3 June and Montenegro became the 192nd member of the UN on 28 June, the 617th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo.

As the architect of independence, Djukanović will inevitably be seen as the father of the nation, an impressive feat for someone still in his early forties. And it would be wrong to under-rate the significance of his achievement. He did after all take on the EU's 'Foreign Minister', Javier Solana, and by extension the combined weight of the EU countries over an issue from which the United States had substantially disengaged. Djukanović's consciousness of his potentially historic role was already evident in December 2005 when he theatrically unveiled an imposing statue of King Nikola on horseback in front of the Parliament building in Podgorica. Such concern for Montenegro's past will need to be paralleled by similar sensitivity over its future if Montenegro is to prosper and to vindicate its claim to be an ecological state. There is a clear need to avoid the despoiling of the beautiful coast and to maintain a careful balance in establishing the proposed eco-tourism in the under-developed north of the country...

Whether the Montenegrin state meets the environmental and economic challenges it faces is not a matter for history but for the future. Yet one clear lesson to be drawn from the most recent events is the need to bridge the deep division at the heart of Montenegrin society. Roughly 50,000 more Montenegrins voted in favour of independence than against it, a substantial enough victory but one which still left some 45 per cent of the voting population on the losing side. Prosperity has a way of healing divisions and here the EU and international financial institutions can help. Of course not all of those who voted against independence will in the future be reconciled to the new state: for a percentage of citizens, core beliefs about ethnicity are too deep for that. But many of these who voted against may well be won over by a more equitable distribution of wealth, particularly if it is coupled with a broad respect for minority rights and avoids thrusting 'Montenegrianness' upon those who wish to celebrate the Serbian aspects of their culture and language.

[pp: 452, 473, 474-475]