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## **From Icon to Punk Portrait: The Iconicity of the Ruler Image in the Context of the Transformation of the Idea of the Serbian State<sup>1</sup>**

### **From the icon to the icon**

In 2016, at the Residence of Prince Miloš in Belgrade, i.e. the 19th century residence of the Obrenović dynasty, the current host of the object, the Historical Museum of Serbia (Istorijski muzej Srbije) presented a series of artistic works by Aleksandar Leka Mladenović, the contemporary Serbian artist of the middle generation, entitled *Pank portreti dinastije Obrenović* (Punk portraits of

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the Obrenović dynasty), an unusual collection of images of female and male representatives of the princely and royal family, the progenitor of which was Miloš Obrenović, the leader of the anti-Turkish uprising of 1815. The exhibition was presented in a historic building of the late-Ottoman style whose interiors combine traditional Turkish decoration with elements of bourgeois design, Biedermeier furniture, bric-a-brac and old paintings from the period.

The very concept of creating such a peculiar series of portraits was born in 2003 as part of an original project devoted to the phenomenon of punk culture. The Serbian artist used the esthetics of this current as well as its driving force, i.e. the philosophy that affirms “lifestyle through action”, as the object of an artistic experiment (Младеновић, 2016, p. 3). The historical formal portrayals of the Obrenović family by renowned 19th-century painters, lithographers and photographers (Uroš Knežević, Paja Jovanović, Anastas Jovanović, and others) became an object of transposition. These portraits were known to the general public thanks to reproductions in school textbooks, museum exhibitions and media, all of which had made them commonly recognizable and emblematic. Using a reservoir of means that are characteristic of (neo-)punk design, in his works Mladenović transforms classic images of representatives of the national political elite who are associated with academism and court art. He applies graphic interventions inspired by op-art and pop-art: vivid, fluorescent colors, sharp contrasts, clashes of colors, as well as simplified drawing modelled after fanzines, comics and the language of street art. Above all, however, he uses the collage technique as a method of deconstructing pictorial messages; he also uses a form of serigraphy inspired by Warhol’s portraits of Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and Mao Zedong. Thus, he plays a game with the pop icon phenomenon, referring it to the native symbolic universe and iconographic traditions rooted in Serbian culture. As regards visual solutions, Mladenović refers to nonconformism and the artistic revolt of dadaists, whom he considers not only as precursors of pop art but also as ancestors of punk aesthetics, which by definition is of an alternative and subversive nature and an emanation of opposition to what is official, hierarchical and commercial<sup>2</sup>. In this way, the author carnivalizes images through violating the integrity of form and the principle of *decorum*, which are particularly

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<sup>2</sup> The aesthetics of punk stems from the pop-art experience (e.g. in terms of artistic techniques), and, at the same time, being at its core a product of public/social resistance, it ques-

important in the case of a portrait of the ruler; after all, it is *ex defintione* an iconographic representation of the order maintained by this ruler, while the complementarity of form and content is a visible sign of the indisputability of the authority of the ruler.



Fig. 1. Aleksandar Leka Mladenović Prince Miloš Obrenović – White Riot (ink, acrylic, watercolor, paper, 55.5 x 45.5)



Fig. 2. Aleksandar and Draga Obrenović (mixed media, canvas, 56 x 42)<sup>3</sup>

It could be expected that an exhibition set in the aesthetics of punk subculture and directed against social order and power is going to question and negate this order *per se*. However, the artist decided to play out the tensions arising here in an unobvious way. The infringement of portrait conventions has a deeper meaning in Mladenović's works. The creator provocatively associates the revolutionary Serb uprising of the early 19th century, the face of which was the popular leader Miloš Obrenović, with the anarchist rebel-

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tions this type of expression (or a kind of artistic experiment) as ideologically barren. One of the basic strategies of punk subculture is iconoclasm.

<sup>3</sup> Iconographic material made available by the author, whom I thank for agreeing to publish selected works from the series *Pank portreti dinastije Obrenović*.

lion of punk subculture. He interprets both of them as an expression of protest against class divisions and imposed power (Младеновић, 2016, p. 5). The reference to rebellion as the basis of social distinction brings the difference between the “old” and the “new” order to the forefront (Heath & Potter, 2010, p. 129), and therefore the artist raises the status of the potential of creation that is present in both phenomena more than the subversive force: the uprising under Miloš Obrenović’s command eventually led to the formation of the state, while punk ideology achieved its most lasting expression in the sphere of artistic work<sup>4</sup>.

Although Mladenović strikes at common perception habits, he actually does not disturb the aesthetic correctness and norms of imaging both power and a cultural hero. The posed aestheticization of neo-punk style based on an intericonic game characterizes the Serbian artist’s approach to the historical portraits of the reviver of Serbian statehood and his family, and the curator’s decision to place their punk portraits in the stately interiors of the princely court – today transformed into a state museum – definitely softens the blade of subversion and invalidates the anarchist message of punk ideology, which is an important multidimensional frame of reference for the author. The author uses these connotations to intensify the rhetorical strength of visual composition – to implement a sophisticated concept that in fact places the discussed collection of portrayals closer to court art (practiced by an academic creator who is conscious of form) than to an ideologically anarchic, nihilistic and anti-aesthetic punk gesture. The curator’s device results in a situation in which the painting variations on the subject of a dynastic portrait cease to be a form of ideological resistance, but they gain in importance as a field of re-evaluation and creation of senses by means of a visual medium because the purpose of artistic transformations is not to devalue or undermine the authority of history but to modernize the image of historical figures through problematizing the functions attributed to this image and the mechanisms of building it.

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<sup>4</sup> The remembrance of Miloš Obrenović – renounced first by the Karađorđević and then by the communist authorities – was reactivated on the rising tide of “retraditionalization” of the Serbian culture (Naumović, 2009), and this process became the key to redefining the Serbian national identity and the change of political paradigm during and after the breakup of socialist Yugoslavia. The monuments erected in honor of Prince Miloš in Arandelovac (1989) and in Gornja Dobrinja (1991) became an eyewitnessing harbinger of the renewal of the remembrance of Prince Miloš (Антохијевић, 2003, pp. 154, 167).



Fig. 3. *Prince Mihailo in Austro-Hungarian uniform* (mixed media, paper, 100 x 70)

Fig. 4. *God save the queen* (acrylic, oil, canvas, 180 x 90)

Combining two at-first-glance contradictory strategies of apology and provocation, the exhibition *Pank portreti dinastije Obrenović* undermines the monolithic and monologic nature of the conventional image and liberates the polysemy and dialogical character embedded in the portrait's medium. It provokes reflection on the condition of traditional graphic representational forms and the manners of using them in political messages and perceptions of power. The author tests their persuasive range. He checks to what extent, in a world colonized by images, this classic type of message retains a purely historical value (perhaps even a value that borders on anachronism), and to what extent it is possible to see and move the nerve of modernity in them. The essence of Aleksandar Leka Mladenović's experiment is a question about the principle governing the formal image of a ruler, i.e. about the iconicity of representation, which should be defined as a separate kind of performativity rooted in visual experience. Such performativity consists in the symbolic

presence of power in the public sphere, built using the medium of image, and in the influence on it that leads to a change.

Mladenović's series of punk-portraits, especially the questions he raises as a collection of meta-images (thematizing their own image condition), inspire me to discuss the category of iconicity as the causative presence of power *in effigie* on the example of historical dynastic representations of the Middle Ages and the 19th century. I believe that this juxtaposition will show how the idea of the Serbian state and the local political culture that constitutes the context of this idea are transforming at the threshold of modernity, and on what terms the exchange of the symbolic code accompanies this process<sup>5</sup>. In accordance with W. J. T. Mitchell's postulates, the deliberations focused around these issues assume that visibility is recognized as an area of social practices where the image enters into dynamic relations with discourses and institutions and thus acts – creates and transforms reality (Mitchell, 2013). The agency character of iconographic forms which serve to concretize and show abstract ideological content lies in the fact that they are carriers or “embodiments” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 37) of a particular state model and participate actively both in the expression and in the creation of the field of power; they perform social and political reality – they also induce a change and model its course. Therefore, in this approach artistic activity is not only nonautonomous but also fully reveals its social ontology. It should be added that such a perspective also allows us to see the historical changeability of the interpretation of the very principle of iconicity, and therefore the analysis of its evolution will help indicate both permanent definition elements of the category and semantic shifts resulting from the journey made by the concept of icon – starting from the phenomenon rooted in religious experience and theological reflection to the reactualization of this term in accordance with the logic of mass imagination.

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<sup>5</sup> I understand political culture in an anthropological way as a field of social phenomena and activities that produce political qualities, such as organization, hierarchy, power, ideology, systems of dependence, system of values, as well as their meanings and symbolic representations. Political anthropology, as defined by Ted C. Lewellen, is interested in which cultural manner “the idiom of politics is expressed through the medium of apparently nonpolitical institutions, ideologies, and practices” (Lewellen, 2003, p. 11). This approach broadens the semantic field of the concepts of politics and politicalness. In this perspective, the visual representation of power – in various historical-cultural and genre modalities – may be treated as a relevant institution of the culture of power.

## From the embodiment of the sacred to the epiphany of race

The state is invisible, as David I. Kertzer notes in his monograph on relationships between power and ritual; therefore, in order to be able to see, understand and love it, one must imagine, symbolize and personify it (Kertzer, 2010, p. 16). Hence, there is a need for visual presentation of the figures that represent a given community; they are, after all, the guarantors of the sense of identification with the abstract entity that is the state, so they can function as its embodiments. The likeness of a leader becomes an *imago* of values and ideals professed by a particular community to which this leader is to testify by means of his or her existence. In the link between an idea and its concretization in the image of a given historical figure, the image is subjectified. This subjectivity of the image has the power to be present, so images of the protagonists of political reality often become the actors of ceremonies and rituals. These are situations in which the power of image – the ability to affect human ideas, attitudes, behavior and emotions – is revealed with increased force.

In Serbian political culture, the practice of portraying the ruler has a long tradition. Its beginnings are determined by medieval iconography, mainly Orthodox polychromes and icons, as well as the wood and copper engravings that were popular later. The ideological framework of the first such representations was created by religion, both physically through their exposition in temples, namely in areas of worship, and doctrinally, namely in the principles of creation and the use of images. The strong and even symbiotic relations between politics, religion and art in this historical period were undoubtedly an impulse to the development of local artistic culture. Firstly, they stimulated the improvement of painting techniques and artistic language, as well as the codification of themes, formal patterns, iconographic programs and canons. Secondly, they favored the consolidation of the circle of creators, founders and recipients; in other words, they supported the formation of an aesthetic community which recognized itself as a political subject exactly in specific images, styles, shapes and appearances; it identifies itself with them and through them also articulates its own collective identity and legitimizes the continuity of its existence. At the same time, the practice of producing painting representations of authorities as religious visualizations – strongly connected with the ideological complex of Christianity and the institutional apparatus of the Orthodox Church – influences the formation of an idiomatic model of the native culture of power. Frescoes, icons or illuminations

of manuscripts affect the creation and codification of symbolic structures, which are constitutive of the Serbian political imagination, and from now on they will constitute a permanent foundation for the social order and political organization. The visual message here (on the pattern of the theological principle of the equivalence of Image and Logos) is an area of constructing a symbolic image of power and its sacralization, and this area is complementary to the medium of the word. The sanctity of a ruling person is expressed in medieval Serbia through hagiographic texts<sup>6</sup> (the spiritual continuity of the Nemanjić dynasty forms the core of the historiography of the medieval state) and by means of visual representations. Apart from biblical scenes, they are the nucleus of the iconographic program of temples erected in the territories subordinate to Serbian rulers so as to define the area of their reign and to gain God's favor (the iconographic expressions of which are portraits of founders holding in their hands a model of an Orthodox church-monastery offered to God as a sign of covenant).

Embedded in the doctrine and religious practice, the cult of dynasty made the sphere of power transform into a space of evoking and establishing *sacrum*, among others, precisely by means of aesthetic qualities. The visual representation of this phenomenon is an emblematic iconographic motif, which in the literature on the subject is referred to as *loza sveterodna*, i.e. a 'vineyard bearing holy fruit'. Conceptualized by the Byzantine model as an equivalent and sometimes also as a development of Biblical genealogies, it symbolically presents the lineage of canonized rulers. First of all, it is a motif applied in polychromes used to decorate the interiors of temples that were founded by the representatives of the holy dynasty. In addition to the monumental frescoes that have been preserved to this day in, among others, the monasteries of Gračanica, Dečani, Matejča, Studenica, sometimes *loza* is also an iconographic theme that appears in legal documents; we can find it in the form of miniatures, for example in royal endowments for monasteries (the so-called *povelje*) (Андрејић, 2005, pp. 9–10).

Genealogical portraits of the royal family are incorporated by *zografs* into the sacred topography of a temple<sup>7</sup> where the cosmic drama of salvation takes

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<sup>6</sup> Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić writes extensively about hagiographic texts as narrative portraits serving as mediation between the sphere of the sacred and the profane, the visible and invisible world (Марјановић-Душанић, 2017, pp. 243–265).

<sup>7</sup> Displaying the images of rulers in a temple has a long tradition dating back to the ancient times and later taken over by the Byzantine Empire. This measure was a kind of signature; it was



place; its scene is depicted by frescoes evoking biblical events, images, speaking the language of Mircea Eliade, reactualizing the Christian myth, meditating between the spheres of *profanum* and *sacrum* – between the domain of power and the order of ideas. Originally, the painting image of the state-forming family takes the shape of a horizontally situated prayer procession in which Stefan Nemanja, the founder of the dynasty, and his sons are heading to the throne of God (such paintings were created, among others, in the monasteries of Sopoćani, Studenica, and Mileševa). With time, another characteristic graphic scheme becomes established: figures (kings and the highest church dignitaries<sup>8</sup>) are placed in the motif of a vertically climbing vine crowned at the top with a figure of blessing Christ giving the royal regalia to the dynasty. The inspiration for this composition was an artistic image of the genealogy of Jesus in the form of the Tree of Jesse, as well as the words of the Saviour written in the Gospel of St. John: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. [...] I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:1–8 New International Version (NIV), <https://www.biblegateway.com>). The ideological sense of this symbolic representation is defined by Serbian political theology: here, by the power of baptism, the history of the earthly state is included in God’s plan of salvation; this history becomes an integral part of this plan. In this way, *loza* (alike the donor portraits of kings) acquires an epiphany character which has a definite influence on political reality. Under the rule of the Nemanjić (11th–14th centuries), *loza* was a sign of the institutionalization of reign; it was church-legal evidence of the noble genealogy of a particular ruler, legitimizing his prerogatives to the throne and privileges. It was a figurative emanation of the ideology of the Serbian state, the stability of which was to be based on the principle of dynasticity. It was understood as a remembrance of sacred genealogy and, above all, as a family succession of royal dignity and divine provenance of the anointment of power (in Serbian: *pomazanje*).

The cult of Serbian rulers, built by means of references to patterns taken from the Bible, which serves as an archetext in this system, as well as through ritual gestures (e.g. practices related to relics) and sacred art

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intended to indicate under whose protection – both administrative and symbolic-spiritual – a given object is (Пејић & Продановић, 2010, p. 30).

<sup>8</sup> The frescoes depicting *loza* showed also female figures, provided they were unmarried (according to the principle of patrilineality, a marriage meant belonging to a different family). The exception was Stefan Nemanja’s wife, Anna, as a co-founder of the dynasty.

representations, remained deep-rooted in the theocratic vision of a state as an image of the Kingdom of Heaven, derived from the Byzantine tradition. The form of royal rule adopted in Serbia had a doctrinal foundation in the form of the principle of parallelism of a monarch and God. Since royal reign was perceived in terms of God's governorship, it was sacralized (Uspienski & Żywow, 1992, p. 15). The exaltation and sanctification of both power and a ruler was carried out in two ways: firstly, through the recognition of the charism of function in accordance with the dogma; secondly, through the attribution of sanctity to the life and deeds of a sovereign (merits and sacrifices offered to promote and defend Christianity), which was reflected in posthumous canonizations of successive rulers and at the same time validated the politics and family succession to the throne and formed the pantheon of saints of the native autocephalous Orthodox Church. In this way, the sacralization of a ruler based on theological foundations was made a fundamental part of the Serbian dynastic ideology. It had a profound symbolic meaning: political leaders of the state became at the same time spiritual leaders, depositaries and defenders of the faith thanks to their religious vocation.

The popularity of this paradigm can be proved by the fact that the notion identifying spiritual values and religious functions with political leadership emerged particularly strongly after the fall of the state during the Ottoman invasion, and the Orthodox Church art supported the vision of a state flourishing thanks to the rule of the worshipped Nemanjić, as the golden age in the history of Serbia (*loza* in the Orahovica Monastery in Slavonia comes from the period of the Turkish rule). These artistic representations, certainly in a new style and context, will be then presented in the Baroque iconography treasuring the memory of deceased rulers (kings, princes and Orthodox patriarchs), seeing in this practice an important element of national and religious identification<sup>9</sup>. The motif of Nemanjić's mystical genealogy became a part of the political imaginary that was unusually resistant to the changing course of history and was deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of Serbs. In the iconographic tradition, *loza* will remain

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<sup>9</sup> An example is Hristofor Žefranović's heraldic-historiographic work entitled *Stematografija*, dating from the mid-18th century, with the graphics of coats of arms made in the copper engraving technique and portraits of the most important Serbian kings and patriarchs.

a key representation of the founding legend of the Serbian state. Apart from the liturgical and church sphere, the image of the holy family of medieval rulers will begin to be part of the sphere of national mythology, sacralizing its message. The mystical bond between Serbian ancestors, symbolized graphically by the interlaced branches of a vine, will be extended to the entire nation (Gil, 2005).

Incidentally, some peculiar reference to royal portraits preserved on temple frescoes is worth recalling. We can find it in the dissertation of the Croatian ethnopsychologist Vladimir Dvorniković, entitled *Karakterologija Jugoslovena* (Characterology of the Yugoslavs) published in 1939 in Belgrade. In the chapter *Antropološki podaci za našu rasnu i psihološku istoriju u živopisu srpskih srednjovekovnih zadužbina* (Anthropological data for our racial and psychological history in the painting of Serbian medieval foundations), the author suggests a new interpretation of old painting images of the Nemanjić in the context of the idea of integral Yugoslavism, which he tries to define according to the racial and ethnopsychological criteria popular at the time<sup>10</sup>. In the extended collection of images he includes portraits of Saint Sava, kings Milutin, Uroš, Vukašin and Dušan, and Prince Lazar of the Hrebeljanović family, as well as photographs, paintings, sculptures, drawings, caricatures of famous figures (Petar Petrović Njegoš, Nikola Tesla, and others) and anonymous persons. This portrait gallery is to show the bio-psychological diversity of groups of people living in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, forming the collective body and psyche of the Yugoslav nation. In this part, Dvorniković's treatise in many ways makes us think of the projects of national portrait galleries popular in the interwar period, including the most famous ones that were developed in the Third Reich. In Dvorniković's work we find a gesture of "ennoblement of physical perception", like in the works by German authors fascinated by physiognomy (Schmölders, 2010, p. 8).

In his interpretations, the Croatian researcher completely disregards medieval artistic strict discipline and iconographic conventions, treating

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<sup>10</sup> The reactualization of the Nemanjić traditions in the interwar Yugoslavia, initiated in the 19th century, was aimed at legitimizing the concept of a state in which the Serbian political factor plays a dominant role. This vision was supported by numerous scientific initiatives (archaeological research, historical and philological treatises, symposia), as well as artistic and architectural initiatives. The price was the transposition of the idea of Great Serbia into Yugoslav nationalism (Игњатовић, 2018, p. 138).

likenesses as realistic representations on the basis of mimicry. On the basis of a 14th-century portrait of King Milutin, he evaluates:

The portraits of King Milutin are the most expressive ones. In that in Studenica (Royal Orthodox Church), he looks best in artistic and physiognomic terms (...). The figure is personalized and looks distinctly Dinaric, even in such details as eyebrows and cheeks. The nose is hooked and pointed, there is something of a predatory bird in this physiognomy that does not attract an observer at all. The artist also reflected clearly the Dinaric asymmetry of face (Дворниковић, 2000, p. 220).

Thus, in the holy ruler, whose head in the fresco is surrounded by a halo, he recognizes a “normative face”, a racial archetype of the “Dinaric man”. Creatively developing the concepts of anthropological types of Jovan Cvijić, the Croatian researcher seeks the signs of physiognomic expression in medieval iconography. For example, he writes about “heroized biology” and the “active principle of spirituality”, of “epic” mentality, the expression of which is a distinctive profile, sharp facial features and the characteristic facial expression of Dinaric men. On the basis of these retrospective genealogical constructions, subordinated to the assumption that *ethnos* evolves into *polis*, he tries to prove that it is the anthropophysically measured and described Dinaric type that dominates in the Balkan region and that turns out to be capable of creating a political community and therefore represents the race with a state-forming potential. “The Dinaric man has a particularly developed sense of honor and patriotism, or rather local-patriotism”, convinces Dvorniković, “He is a natural warrior” (Дворниковић, 2000, p. 217). The aim of this national “racial aesthetics”, a sample of which we receive on the pages of the treatise entitled *Karakterologija Jugoslovena*, is to create a psychological image of the Yugoslavs as a political subject and a community consolidated in the plan of psychological values. A contemporary reader is struck by the riskiness of this concept, encumbered with errors of anachronism and simplifications, which is a projection of a particular world view, referring to the convention of a family photo album, and at the same time placed in the order of scientific evidence and theories in the field of psychology, physical anthropology, ethnography and philology... For our deliberations, this “physiognomy of the Yugoslav idea” is a valuable example of the performative impact of an image – already “disenchanted”, purged of any reference to the religiously defined *sacrum* – in the field of political ideology, which in modern times seeks support and validation in scientifically verified empirical knowledge.

## **From the portrait of a hajduk to the *persona publica* of a ruler**

In Serbia, the anti-Ottoman uprisings at the beginning of the 19th century are becoming the threshold of modern thinking about political leadership and building the political sphere according to European standards. The complex process of transforming the culture of power is accompanied by the transformation of the visual codes used by this register of social reality. An excellent illustration of the modernization of the iconographic program constituting the ideological message and legitimizing the actions of the ruling elite is the evolution of the representative portrait of Prince Miloš Obrenović, the leader of the so-called Second Serbian Uprising of 1815 and the initiator of the restoration of the Serbian statehood. This goal will be pursued by his successors so as to proclaim the Kingdom of Serbia in 1882. In the aesthetic dimension, the secular, “disenchanted” format of a ruler’s portrayal as a genre embedded in the mechanism of political propaganda in the second half of the 19th century remains connected with the consolidation of academic realism in the Serbian fine arts under the influence of European centers, primarily art schools in the area of the Habsburg monarchy. The transformation of aesthetic codes, which means the adaptation of European artistic styles (e.g. Biedermeier, Classicism, Romanticism, Symbolism) and modern techniques (such as photography), corresponds to the development and gradual stabilization of the structures of the Serbian state and the progressive occidentalization of the model of governance. The liberation from Turkish hegemony was replaced with the expansion of the European semantic and axiological order, which Serbs sometimes see as a kind of new colonization leading not so much to the full inclusion of their country and culture in the main development trends as to the marginalization and deepening the sense of provinciality of what was Serbian (Цвергић, 2013, p. 407). The conflict of civilisational oriental-Balkan and European paradigms in which the 19th-century Serbia became involved on the one hand created favorable conditions for national emancipation (taking place here by negating the dominant centers – the Ottoman and Habsburg ones), but on the other hand it caused fears of blurring identity under external influence and, as a result, inhibited the process of forming a modern political subjectivity, i.e. meeting the civilisational and social needs of the time, inalienable for the stabilization of the state.

In the first phase of regaining independence, the charismatic leadership of the protagonists of the anti-Turkish uprisings is an institution that can help consolidate the community and build its identification with the idea of national statehood and thus strengthen its subjectivity (Антонијевић, 2003). This leadership, rooted in the experience of hajduks, interpreted in the 19th century in terms of heroism and patriotism like in folk songs, becomes a starting point for the formation of a new type of power system in the political and civilization conditions of the time. Therefore, the procedures for producing bureaucratic governance mechanisms adjusted to the European model require the use of specific forms of political persuasion. As Lidija Cvetić reminds us, in Serbian lands, as early as during the first uprising, secular official and historical portraits became popular as artistic genres that serve to visually represent and legitimize the high position of a given person or institution in the administrative hierarchy, and thus such portraits are more and more willingly used in political propaganda. The art of portraying reaches Serbian lands mainly through artists from Pest and Vienna, but also enters the repertoire of local authors very quickly. The growing influence of the family means that this art develops intensively in the courts of Miloš Obrenović in Kragujevac and Belgrade, as well as in the konaks (residences) of his brothers: Jovan in Čačak and Jevrem in Šabac (Цветић, 2013, pp. 410–411).

Thanks to this patronage, the visual message (also developed thanks to modernized graphic technologies and then photography), as a way of popularization of political ideology becomes an inherent element of the Serbian spectacle of power. Its axis was the measure of personalizing politics, in which there could be seen an effective tool for organizing national culture around a strong figure of a cultural hero or a pantheon of contemporary and historical figures symbolizing the values professed by the collective, and such a tool was tried and tested in the past. The concept of presenting rulers as national heroes became the basis for the cult of Stefan Nemanja, Tsar Dušan and Prince Lazar in the 19th century, who were made the pillars of the artistic and didactic program of shaping national memory and consciousness, supported by the Orthodox Church and the political circles, which resulted in an abundant production of paintings devoted to these persons (Макуљевић, 2006, p. 94, etc.). The historical figures interpreted in the romantic key contributed to the Serbian imaginarium of revival, strongly influencing the social perception of the leaders of the national liberation uprisings of the early 19th century. So then not theology or religion but history was supposed to be a guarantee of their power and a source of personal patterns.

The ethos of struggle became the symbolic center of the image strategy of Miloš Obrenović (as well as Karađorđe), in which the folk epic tradition played a key role. In retrospective paintings presenting the Takovo Uprising of 1815, painted by Đura Jakšić (1877), Vinzenz Katzler (1882) or Paja Jovanović (1898), he is the leader of the popular resurrection, “*delija*”<sup>11</sup>, i.e. a fearless warrior, a rebel. In turn, in an allegorical work by Đorđe Krstić *10. Avgust 1972 i posljedice njegove* (10 August 1972 and its consequences), we can see Miloš in the role of a restorer of the medieval Serbian state. While in the art representations of the events of recent history, the virtue of bravery is elevated and heroized by recalling the prince’s figure, and the egalitarianism of the uprising and its national idea are emphasized (Obrenović is a member of the fighting group), and in formal portraits the aspect of his position and political efficiency comes to the fore. An example is a painting from 1835 by Uroš Knežević in which the prince poses in a full dress uniform holding a sabre in one hand and a Sultan ferman granting Serbia autonomy in the other. In these official representations, clothing becomes a dominant meaningful feature. It is an indicator of the social status and political prestige of the prince, but it also shows his political and/or cultural orientation. For example, an early portrayal by an unknown author shows Miloš in an oriental attire, in a red kaftan with a fez on his head; in another picture, painted around 1823 by Pavel Đurković, this Serbian leader appears in a turban – an ornamented headscarf wrapped around a fez suggests his economic power (Цветић, 2013, p. 412). The oriental features of the image inform us about the vassal dependence of the Principality of Serbia on the Ottoman Empire; a similar role is performed by a medallion with the likeness of the sultan that is resting on the prince’s chest, as is presented on many portraits. In paintings from later years, Miloš Obrenović becomes increasingly more similar to European rulers, although his formal dress, which is supposed to be a sign of a modern image and a firmly established statehood based on military and political power, is a combination of different styles and forms: first of all, it resembles Hungarian uniforms, but also has elements of Austrian and Russian formal costumes. The sumptuous ornaments of the prince’s clothing – gilding, epaulettes, decorations (Russian, Austrian, Turkish, Greek) – are to prove the Serbian independence from the Ottoman influence (the Turks

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<sup>11</sup> The Serbian term *delija* comes from the Turkish word *deli*, which originally meant a madman.

prohibited Christians from wearing lavish clothes; Анђелковић, 2015, p. 15), the ability to create sovereign institutions, and are also a sign of the growing aspirations of the Serbs in international politics. In his travel reports, the Serbian writer Joakim Vujić recalls his visit to the Obrenović court in Kragujevac, where in one of the chambers, among the portraits of twelve Russian emperors, Miloš's portrait was also displayed (Цветић, 2013, p. 411). This visual move, which is a special act of seniorizing towards an ideological protector – applying the tension between the categories of hierarchy and equality, dependence and symbolic designation – should be interpreted as a gesture of including Serbia as a subject in European politics (on the side of the Turkish opponent) and including the young state leader in the circles of the ruling elites of the time.



Fig. 5. Jovan Isailović the Younger, *Prince Milan Obrenović on the catafalque*, 1839<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Iconographic material made available by the National Museum of Belgrade, whom I thank for agreeing to publish aforementioned image.



In addition to the aforementioned classic historical and formal artistic images, which are an iconographic component of the process of the institutionalization of the authority of the ruler, the painting made by Jovan Isailović the Younger entitled *Knez Milan Obrenović na odru* (Prince Milan Obrenović on the catafalque) of 1839, which is unique in the 19th century Serbian painting collection, should be mentioned. It shows a catafalque with the corpse of Milan, who died only a dozen or so days after his eldest son, Prince Miloš, had assumed the reign. The deceased, who is dressed in an officer's uniform, is surrounded by family members and friends. In mourning, they listen to the words of a clergyman who stands at the bedhead with an open book in his hands, showing his profile to the viewer in accordance with the principles of Orthodox Church painting. Today, this work, which leaves a lot to be desired in terms of aesthetic values, is of interest to researchers mainly as a document of the court life of the time; it shows not only the funeral tradition and ritual, but also the whole spectrum of male and female clothes of various styles characteristic of the period, from the traditional Serbian style to the Empire style. However, it is valuable for our deliberations because of its intericonicity, which the author builds by means of the picture-in-picture effect. Here on the wall, above the heads of the assembled people, three paintings are visible: in the middle there is a composition of the Crucifixion (reproducing the original icon by Arsa Todorović), and in the side portraits we can see Miloš Obrenović, who was living in exile then, wearing a uniform, and his successor, Prince Milan, in a civil bourgeoisie dress. Apart from the documentary character of this motif, which realistically reproduces the appearance of the figures and the way the court interiors were decorated, both images, based on the principle of iconic equivalence, evoke the presence of superior power and are an obvious sign of its continuity and social objectivization. In other words, in Isailović's artistic commemorative composition we can see the affirmation of dynasticity as a principle applied in the Serbian idea of power and the basis of the leadership form cultivated by the Serbs. The symbolic meaning of dynasticity was undoubtedly reinforced in the conditions of the centuries-old dependence on the Ottoman Empire, when the ancestral social structure was responsible for the preservation of collective historical memory and the transmission of cultural content. The conviction that the dynasty is an institution that guarantees the sovereignty and stability of the state was enhanced in the 19th century by the fact that Serbia remained the only Balkan state in which local fami-

lies ruled: the Obrenović and Karađorđević<sup>13</sup>. It was during their reign that the iconographic image of a ruler became more and more firmly present in the propaganda message, entered into relations with ideologies, embodied social ideas, became an inherent participant of political communication, an instrument of reign.

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The analysis of power practices in visual categories reopens for us the problem of establishing, expressing and playing political subjectivity, which is crucial from the perspective of performance studies. The use of a visual representation of the figure of a ruler in the spectacle of power, which creates an “over-frame” for the iconographic expression of the force, shifts aesthetic values from the field of *mimesis* to the field of *semiosis*. The portrait of a ruler is an entirety that presents and organizes meanings, and this is the basis for its ability to control reality, to give it the desired appearance and course. Thus, the iconographic convention, embedded in Christian theology and used in the Nemanjić family’s representations, or the cultural mimicry characteristic of the 19th century images of Miloš Obrenović, which is an element of diplomatic game, are carriers of specific interpretations of the idea of the state and also function as identity codes. In this respect, they turn out to be performative qualities in their meaning – they activate the political power of an image. This interaction is mutual: the image (per)forms the culture of power, and at the same time its political usage models the local iconosphere. Then, the secularization of the image of a ruler extends the registers of the social visibility of power, and at the same time it means placing the experience of the iconicity of the image in a new frame of perception. The artistic representations of Serbian rulers, both medieval and modern, perfectly show that the performativity of an image lies in its ability to mediate between the order of ideas and the order of social practice. Involved in the bloodstream of social reality, they are not only a form of representation of political power, a concretization of abstract content and the everyday visualization of invisible mechanisms and structures of force. Containing collective projections, phantasms, symbolic meanings and emotions, they also create a self-portrait of the community that legitimizes this power.

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<sup>13</sup> It should be mentioned that the rivalry between the two families resulted in a series of political assassinations and had a definitely negative impact on the modernization of the state apparatus (more on this subject: Molas, 2017).

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## Od ikony do punk portretu. Ikoniczność wizerunku władcy w kontekście przemian idei państwa serbskiego

Artykuł dotyczy przeobrażeń ikonograficznych form reprezentacji władzy w kulturze serbskiej jako wyznaczników ewolucji idei państwa oraz kultury politycznej Serbów. W wymiarze wizualnym kluczowym etapom ich rozwoju odpowiadają: w średniowieczu genealogiczny wizerunek dynastyczny o charakterze religijnym (*loza*), a u progu nowożytności „odczarowany” portret historyczny i reprezentacyjny władcy, podporządkowany idei narodowej. Formy te uczestniczą w stanowieniu przywództwa politycznego i wytwarzaniu pola władzy oraz stymulują ich zmianę. Autorka rozpatruje te zagadnienia z perspektywy *visual studies*, które problematyzują zjawisko performatywności obrazu. Jej szczególną odmianą jest ikoniczność, rozumiana jako stanowienie i uobecnianie rzeczywistości za pomocą wartości estetycznych, wizualnych. Celem analizy jest ukazanie, w jaki sposób lokalny, tj. serbski wzór kultury władzy modeluje uniwersalne mechanizmy formowania i legitymizacji autorytetu państwa.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Serbia, kultura władzy, państwo, kultura wizualna, ikoniczność, portret

## From icon to punk portrait: The iconicity of the ruler image in the context of the transformation of the idea of the Serbian state

The article describes transformation in the iconographic forms of power representations in Serbian culture as determinants of the evolution of the idea of the State and Serbian political culture. In visual terms, the key stages of their development correspond to the genealogical dynastic image of the religious character (*loza*) in the middle ages, and the “disenchanted” historical and representative portrait of a ruler that was subordinated to the national idea on the threshold of modernity. These forms not only participate in the establishment of political leadership and the creation of the field of power, but they also stimulate their change. The author examines these issues from the perspective of visual studies, which problematize the phenomenon of the performativity of the image. A particular variation of the performativity of the image is iconicity, understood as drafting and making present reality using esthetic and visual values. The aim of the analysis is to show how the local, namely Serbian, pattern of culture of power models the universal mechanisms of forming and legitimizing the authority of the State.

**Keywords:** Serbia, culture of power, state, visual culture, iconicity, portrait

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