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National Hero Marko Kulić¹

Abstract: This paper deals with the biography of the national hero Marko Kulić, an important person in the history and culture of Pančevo, not only of this city. Marko Kulić was only 27 years old when he died, but that is not an indication of the content of his life or the variety of topics and questions to which his life points. These topics and questions, together with the understanding of the influence, causes, and consequences that determined Kulić's life orientation, form the focus of this research so that the results can be seen and applied, which, through understanding the individual, strives to understand society. The key events of his life are covered: birth, childhood, attending elementary school, moving to Vojvodina, completing the shoemaking trade, the question of coming to Pančevo, founding "Abrašević", leading strikes, World War II in the city, and engagement during the war, as well as arrest and torture in the "Svilara" Camp. The basis of the research was archival material found in the Historical Archive of Pančevo, then valuable oral sources obtained from interviews with Kulić's descendants and heirs, as well as the press, field research, and numerous professional literature, chosen with a reserve, considering the ideological framework of the post-war regime in which it was created.

Keywords: Marko Kulić, national hero, communism, World War II, Pančevo

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Birth, Origin, Childhood and Kulić's Environment

Piva is a vast area in the north-west of Montenegro, which became part of it after the Berlin Congress (1878). Bordered by natural boundaries in the form of rivers (Piva and Tara) and numerous mountains, it has existed as one specific entity over the centuries, which is mostly caused by geographical factors, considering the dominant mountainous relief with plateaus and various karst, fluvial, glacial landforms, etc. They influenced the tribal organisation of the population, which remained present for a long time in the form of people's connections, to overcome all the adversities that threatened them. The population of Piva remained almost completely ethnically and religiously homogeneous, i.e., with a Serbian national identity and Orthodox Christian religion. Piva had about 1,400 (in 1901) to about 7,900 (in 1921) inhabitants who were mostly engaged in primary economic activities: farming and animal husbandry, given the favourable agricultural resources and undeveloped industrial potential that this region offers.²

Marko Kulić was born on May 8 (St. Mark's Day) in 1914,³ in the village of Prisojni Orah.⁴ Golubović, Kulić, and Filipović (Balandžić) families inhabited the village, and it is recognisable by the first two families even today. In the first half of the 20th century, the Kulić family had four houses in Prisojni Orah because most of the family had moved to other areas of Piva in the previous period. Kulić's parents were Ilija (1877–1937) and Obrenija Kulić, née Todorović (1886–1957). They were ordinary peasants, semi-literate due to the unfavourable educational conditions. They spent their days in hard agricultural work and jobs that brought income for the whole house. Ilija and Obrenija had ten children, only six of whom survived to

² Обрен Благојевић, *Пива*, (Београд: Српска академија наука и уметности, 1971), 380–382; Светозар Томић, *Пива и Пивљани*, (Београд: Janus, 2001), https://www.rastko.rs/rastko-cg/povijest/stomic-pivljani_c.html (13. 11. 2021), <http://www.montenegro.org.au/piva.html> (accessed 13. 11. 2021).

³ The information on the date of birth refers to the then-used Julian calendar, which is why today April 25 is considered the day of his birth.

⁴ Or just Orah, as the local population most often calls it and as it can often be found in literature and sources.

adulthood.⁵ Of the five surviving brothers, as many as four died as sympathisers of the labour movement and partisan organisations in the Second World War (Miloš, Marko, Veljko, and Milorad). The whole family lived in an old "savardak"⁶ in the basement of which cattle were kept. The difficult and almost monotonous village life, in which large families often barely survived, and the war events witnessed by Kulić's parents and ancestors, certainly left a "stamp" on him and his brothers.⁷

No sources were found about other important data or daily events in Marko Kulić's childhood in his birthplace. However, the author of this paper managed to get in touch with his nephew - Jovo Kulić,⁸ who conveyed a part of the atmosphere from the life of this national hero. According to his father's oral tradition, his uncle was an extremely hard-working, capable, and dexterous boy. He was nicknamed Delja because, during one school lesson, he happened to carve out part of the school desk, which became the subject of a joke and the material for his interesting nickname. Marko Kulić's brother also recalled the days when they looked after cattle together

⁵ Miloš (1908–1941), Marko, Đorđije (1917–2000), Veljko (1920–1944), Milorad (1924–1942) and Mileva. Information about the names and years of birth and death of Marko Kulić's brothers was found in several sources. However, no unique data can be found in them, instead there are discrepancies. The website of the Jasenovac Research Institute lists the victims of fascist and Nazi terror in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, so that research provides the most accurate data so far. – https://mail.jasenovac.org/victim_list.php (11. 8. 2021). Similar or the same data can be found at <https://www.scribd.com/document/465221132/Spisak-stradalih-u-Pivi-1941-1945> (November 13, 2021), as well as on the monument in the village Prisojni Orah. The sources from which we can come to the assumption of incorrectness are the family tombstone erected by the Municipal Board of the Plužina Fighters' Union and a clipping from an unknown newspaper with an article by Milovan Tufegdžić (we learn from a conversation with him that the text was written on the basis of oral traditions). It should be emphasized that due to this problem, other data on key years must be viewed with caution.

⁶ Savardak is a type of mountain hut with a round shape, with stone walls and a straw roof.

⁷ Историјски архив Панчево, Фонд 12, Збирка докумената о политичким збивањима и личностима (Ф. 12), 388; Благојевић, *нав. дело*, 410–411; Милован Туфегџић, „Крст и петокрака“, *Гласник*, мај 2016; The family tombstone in Prisojni Orah and the monument erected by Đorđije Kulić with his mother Obrenija, also in Prisojni Orah.

⁸ Jovan Kulić was born in 1953 and lives in Prisojni Orah, on the same estate owned by his grandparents, Marko's parents, Obrenija and Ilija. Jovo is the son of Marko's brother Djordje Kulić, who told him a lot of interesting anecdotes from their life together. The interview with our interlocutor was conducted on February 17, 2022, in his home.

in the forests and on the pastures, when Đorđije was "afraid of being eaten by wolves", while Marko bravely, singing, went through the daily obligations imposed by life in the countryside.

First Contact with Communist Ideology

The question arises as to how a man, before he left his homeland as a young man, became a sympathiser of the labour movement in a patriarchal region like Piva, at a time when there were no opportunities for fast transmission of information and news. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) was founded in 1919 and was guided by the ideas of the October Revolution in Russia (1917), which had a great resonance not only in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes but throughout Europe. Therefore, the Party included the national question and the social revolution in the mandatory ranks of its political programs. The KPJ had the opportunity to see the first test of its influence among the people in the elections for the Constituent Assembly in 1920. The *Politika* newspaper followed the results of those elections every day, so it was possible to see the significant results the Party achieved. In the tabular review from December 1920, the KPJ won as many as 57 out of 419 mandates, making it the third most influential party in the country. However, in Montenegro, she had the highest percentage of support, so she won 4 out of 10 mandates there.⁹

Young people from Belgrade, mostly students, had the greatest role in spreading the communist ideology to the population of Piva because, during the part of the year when people had to work on their properties and around their livestock, they were with the population and physically helped them and psychologically guided them towards their interests. That influence was perhaps best described by Obren Blagojević with the words: "In the summer, scythe and axe in hand, as in other peasants, and in the winter, books and political struggle at universities and schools

⁹ Десанка Пешић, *Југословенски комунисти и национално питање (1919–1935)*, (Београд: Издавачка радничка организација „РАД“, 1983), 20–53; „Резултати избора“, *Политика*, 5. 12. 1920, 1.

for the interests of the people." That political propaganda among the peasants of Piva managed to win over a population exhausted by the war and dissatisfied with the social order and the new state system, which could not solve their problems of poverty and deprivation. As a result, KPJ received the most votes in Piva in the first general elections.¹⁰ That is why the four sons of Ilija and Obrenija Kulić were supporters of the partisan movement at the beginning of the Second World War.

The Law on the Protection of the State outlawed the KPJ, and communist activity became illegal. The party did not participate in subsequent elections. However, the spirit that the communists instilled in the mass of the Piva population did not die out during their illegality..¹¹

Education and Arrival in Pančevo

Not much is known about Marko Kulić's education. Since there are no reliable and, very often, no historical sources that would testify about his schooling before he arrived in Pančevo, it is impossible to reconstruct that part of his life with certainty and complete correctness. Nevertheless, by collecting data, analysing the context, and with the help of oral sources, this topic can be partially illuminated.

Marko Kulić attended the elementary school that opened in 1887 in the nearby village of Stabna, where education lasted four years until the second half of the 20th century. It is not certain who his teacher was, but if it is assumed that he attended elementary school between the ages of seven (when he started school) and thirteen (when he left Piva), there is information that the teachers during those school years were Dimitrije Adžić and Mašan Šuković. In the schools in the Piva region, as in the rest of Montenegro, from 1919 to 1929, classes were conducted according to the amended Law on Public Schools from 1904, which was valid for the Kingdom of

¹⁰ Батрић Јовановић, *Тринаестојулски устанак*, (Титоград: НИО „Побједа“, ООУР Издавачко-публицистичка дјелатност, Београд: НИРО „Четврти јул“ Београд, 1984), 15–16; Јован Жарковић, *Дурмиторско подручје ослонац Народноослободилачког рата и револуције*, (Београд: Војноиздавачки институт и новински центар Београд, 1987), 15–16; Благојевић, *нав. дело*, 533.

¹¹ Благојевић, *нав. дело*, 358, 533.

Serbia. The curriculum of that period often changed due to many state factors, but the subjects taught in that period were certainly: the lectures on religion and morality, Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian languages, initial real training, geography, history of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, arithmetic with geometry, knowledge of nature, drawing, calligraphy, singing, gymnastics, and children's games. In any case, one can create at least an approximate picture of how the school curriculum and state policy directly affected his education and the development of knowledge and abilities.¹²

Regarding the continuation of his life outside Piva, his nephew Jovo Kulić stated in an interview: "Commander Viko Radoičić selected the boys he took to the trade from those poor families, and there were also many children. He also appointed Marko in 1927, who completed his shoe-making trade in Kula, without any particular reason for that position. Probably Viko directly had someone there. Marko also came home in the summer during his trade, so he helped the family with all the chores, and he would also bring if he earned something in Bačka". Certain information is known about that part of Kulić's schooling in Kula, where he completed his shoe-making trade. His name appears on a facsimile from the records of the craftsmen's association in Kula about students in 1928 and in the register of assistants employed in the period from 1939 to 1940 in Pančevo. The documents state that he entered the trade on February 28, 1928. The same document also states that he finished the third and last class of apprenticeship on March 6, 1932, with master

¹² Божирад Тадић и др, *Монографија Пива и Пивљани: V/1 школство*, (Подгорица-Плужине: Удружење Пивљана у Подгорици, Општина Плужине, 2010, 75–76, 88–89); Љубодраг Димић, *Културна политика у Краљевини Југославији 1918–1941. Део 2, Школа и црква*, (Београд: Стубови културе, 1997, 117, 119–120); Момчило Исић, *Основно школство у Србији 1918–1941. Књ. 1*, (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије, 2004), 47.

Mihajlo Vilan,¹³ when he was issued a workbook numbered 8/932, entering the register of shoemaker's assistants.¹⁴

The following period of five years is the only one during which there are no reliable sources about him. There are three interpretations of that period. The first one is mentioned in a part of the literature that talks about Kulić's arrival in Pančevo in 1934, his joining the union, and the beginning of active work to improve the lives of city workers. Another is the story of Jovo Kulić, who said during the interview: "Marko had to serve in the military in 1933, and since he didn't do it, he went underground, and since then, all traces of him have been lost." Then the gendarmes came to the village and tortured and interrogated the grandmother and grandfather¹⁵ because they thought the grandparents were hiding him, but he did not come home. They say he was in the area around Gacko but didn't answer, so they wouldn't find him. There was an officer who used to come on vacation in the summer, to whose grandmother he went to "katun" and asked about his son. He says that he saw and met him in front of a bar, and the officer stopped him: 'Well, Masja, come, sit, and I'll talk to you; I was in Piva; he says that he only saw him off, and neither saw him again nor knew anything about him". And the third possibility is his moving to Belgrade and doing regular military service. After that, he got a job at the shoemaker's house "Arambašić" and joined the trade union, through which, on official duty, he moved to Pančevo in 1937.¹⁶ Given the lack of sources about Kulić before 1937 in Pančevo, this "scenario" seems the closest to the correct one. However, there is room for research in the Belgrade archives to establish his presence in the capital.

¹³ The aforementioned register also contains data describing its physical appearance. It is stated that he is of medium height and has an oblong face, that his hair is black, his eyes are brown, and his mouth is regular. It was also added that he shaves his moustache and beard, so he didn't have them, which can be seen in all the photos we found, in which he is. In one clipping from an unknown newspaper, it is also stated that he was short and narrow-shouldered.

¹⁴ IAP, F. 12, 1237; IAP, F. 12, 388; Interview of the author of this paper with Jovo Kulić.

¹⁵ Marko Kulić's parents, Ilija and Obrenija.

¹⁶ Rosa Svirčević, *Mi vas nećemo zaboraviti*, (Pančevo: Narodni muzej Pančevo, 1977), 16.

Kulić's Work and Activities before the Second World War

The situation in Pančevo in 1937, when Marko Kulić was already there, was one of the key factors that directed the entire history of the city, and the life of the ambitious young man who took part in it. The second wave of industrialization had just taken place in the city. There was also a large number of dissatisfied workers who, due to unfavourable circumstances in the country, often found themselves in hopeless financial and work situations. Because of this, they participated in strikes, protests, and demonstrations and in the Workers' Movement, which had already nurtured a long tradition in the city.¹⁷

Since 1937, when there is reliable information about Marko Kulić that he lived in Pančevo, he had several employers as a shoemaker: Petar Dimitrov, Imre Madve, Milivoj Stefanović, Đorđe Mrkobrad, Žarko Bradić, etc. The literature and oral sources agree that he did not like injustice and openly acted against it, so he did not stay with a particular employer for long. Nevertheless, he built his position in the labour union, which even had a branch of the shoemaker's subsidiary, so that he went from being a participant to a leader of workers' strikes and one of the representatives of the civil struggle against inequality and for the rights of "ordinary" workers. The sources often mention how he was a "fiery speaker" and how he was able to attract the crowd and organise it, especially at key moments. The shoemakers were particularly active in the protests in Pančevo. The most successful shoemaker protests were in 1938, led by Marko Kulić and Ivan Kurjački.¹⁸

The KPJ was inactive in Pančevo from 1936 to 1938. However, its structure changed with the arrival of Josip Broz Tito at its head in 1937, and a new wave of

¹⁷ Branislav Damjanov, Elza Heš, *Pregled razvoja zanatstva na području udruženja zanatlija Pančeva, Kovačice i Alibunara 1795–1985*, (Pančevo: Istorijski arhiv Pančevo, 1985), 75–77, 79–80.

¹⁸ Ivan (Ivo) Kurjački was a shoemaker from Pancevo and a member of the KPJ Local Committee. He was active in the pre-war period by being involved in the labour union and leading the most important strikes in the city. He was arrested and hanged in 1942. ИАП. Ф. 12, 388; Jovana Dukuljev, "Pregled štrajkova i tarifnih pokreta u Pančevu u periodu 1805–1941. godine", *Информатор* 20 (1985): 7, 18–23.

spreading the idea of social revolution occurred, which was soon reflected in the South Banat. Marko Kulić joined the Party in 1938, and he actively participated in all the activities that were intended for him and about which he had heard in his childhood in his native village. After two years, he became a member of the KPJ District Committee for South Banat, while during the Second World War, he was the secretary of the Local Committee, which made clear his high and important position in the action against the occupiers.¹⁹

The Pančevo communists wanted to expand their influence. Therefore, they established a local branch of the United Workers' Art Group "Abrašević". Marko Kulić was instrumental in this endeavour and he became the art group's secretary. Kulić held that position until he died.

"Abrašević" was a group that served for, as stated in the founding documents, "contribution to the development of progressive communist thought, revolutionary consciousness, and cultural-artistic and political-ideological activities of the working class," and its activity took place primarily through music, drama, and chess, but later expanded its actions.²⁰

The Second World War and Marko Kulić's Death

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia had a neutral foreign policy orientation until it entered the Tripartite Pact. Two days after that act, on March 27, 1941, in the capital, Belgrade, a military coup was carried out, and there were mass demonstrations that expressed the attitude of a part of the people about the perspective that the country

¹⁹ Grupa autora, *Narodni heroji Jugoslavije*, (Beograd: NIP Mladost, 1975), 419–420; <http://www.zsf.rs/vesti/narodni-heroji-jugoslavije-i-banata/> (13. 4. 2022).

²⁰ ИАП, Ф. 595. КУД „Абрашевић“ ПИК-а „Тамиш“ – Панчево 1937 – 1986, 10, 54; „Рад 'Абрашевића'“, *Панчевац*, 13. 12. 1958, 5; Milan Todorović, *Kulturno umetničko društvo „Abrašević“ Pančevo 1937–1977*, (Pančevo: Istorijski arhiv Pančevo, 1988), 12–16; Milan Todorović, Jovana Dukuljev, “KUD „Abrašević“ Pančevo 1937–1977”, *Информатор* 14 (1978): 7–11.

had entered. Adolf Hitler ordered the bombing of Belgrade and the occupation of Yugoslavia.²¹

Even outside the capital, people dissatisfied with the decisions of their state leadership gathered. In Pančevo already in the morning hours of March 27, one could witness the tense situation in the capital, which additionally provoked its citizens to go out into the streets and start gathering and demonstrating. The communists led Pančevo workers to the streets in protest. Groups and their leaders were determined, so Kulić was the head of the shoemakers, Vlada Petrov the tailors, Sima Gvozdenović the high school students, etc. According to post-war literature, communist sympathisers and union activists addressed "fiery speeches" to the crowd of demonstrators, which grew over time. The leaders spoke against the Tripartite Party and fascism, for the defence of the country, and for the importance of the determination of the moment in which it will be shown that the working class is ready to defend the country, after which the realisation of the main goal—the revolution—could follow.²²

Apart from the demonstrations, Pančevo witnessed the bombing of Belgrade as well as other air battles in its vicinity. The German army occupied the city on April 12. In Pančevo, there was already a German minority – *Volksdeutscher*, who, in the political sense, were equal to the Serbs, had the right to vote, freedom, and speech, and lived in an atmosphere where there was no conflict with the Serbian people. However, when the propaganda about the exalted German community began, their loyalty to Yugoslavia ceased, and they experienced the German occupation as a liberation mission. Thus, the previous friendly relations between the two nations collapsed, and various actions were taken to oppress the conquered Serbian part of

²¹ Душан Богданов-Сенко, *Антифашистички покрет у Јужном Банату 1941–1944*, (Панчево: Историјски архив у Панчеву, 2005), 17.

²² Slogans such as: "Better war than pact!", "Better grave than slave!", but also "Long live the Communist Party of Yugoslavia!", "We want an alliance with the Soviet Union!" could be heard in the streets of the city; Богданов-Сенко, *нав. дело*, 17–21; Branislav Popov, *Nemački zatvori i koncentracioni logori u Banatu 1941–1944*, (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1992), 8.

the population.²³ Soon, the Volksdeutscher took over all the power in Banat, which did not fundamentally change even with the formation of the "Government of National Salvation" by Milan Nedić.²⁴

The situation deteriorated with the beginning of Germany's war operations against the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, when all Communist parties received an order to resist the German army. That is why the central, provincial, regional, district, and local committees of the KPJ focused their activities on the fight against the occupier and his helpers. On the other hand, the German army, the police, and the Gestapo started mass arrests with the help of the Banat German minority. The "Svilara"²⁵ prison camp opened in the buildings of the silk factory on the same day Pančevo was taken. There were political opponents: communists, Jews, Roma, and all those who would oppose the new regime.²⁶

The communists decided to go underground because most of them were already known for their previous activities, and became easy targets for the police, spies, or traitors. Stevica Jovanović, a delegate of the Bureau of the KPJ Provincial Committee, was in Pančevo, which was chosen as the centre of action for the entire Southern Banat due to its important strategic position and proximity to Belgrade. The KPJ decided to start immediately with small-scale diversions such as cutting

²³ In addition to the removal of important cultural and historical monuments that could be seen in the city until then, there were unjustified mass shootings and hangings, during which innocent citizens accused of hostile behaviour and attitudes died.

²⁴ Богданов-Сенко, *нав. дело*, 17–21; Миховил Томандл, *Аутобиографија*, прир. Ивана Спасовић, (Нови Сад: Матица српска, 2021), 339–355; Зоран Јањетовић, "Југословенски Банат 1941. године", у: *Срби и рат у Југославији 1941. године*, ур. Драган Алексић, (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије, Музеј жртава геноцида, Институт за славистику РАН, 2014), 293–296.

²⁵ The "Svilara" camp was opened on June 22, 1941, on the outskirts of Pančevo in the extremely poor conditions of the silk factory building. From its establishment to the closing of the camp in November 1941, about 800 prisoners passed through it and were severely tortured. The documentation about it was burned by the Germans, but the camp inmates survived who, in addition to the building itself in Pancevo, bear witness to that historical "scene".

²⁶ Богданов-Сенко, *нав. дело*, 28, 57; Ивана Спасовић, *Страдања у Панчеву и Јабуци за време Другог светског рата*, (Панчево: Историјски архив у Панчеву, 2011), 21–30; „Тренуци које Панчевци неће никада заборавити“, *Панчевац*, 8. 10. 1954, 3.

telephone wires and poles, disabling vehicles on trucks, cutting air brakes on wagons, etc. The first of the actions was a diversion on the railway where German military transport for the Eastern Front was passing. A part of the railway on the Vladimirovac-Alibunar section was chosen as a suitable place, and all prominent representatives of the Party, who formed the core of the First South Banat Partisan Detachment, joined the preparation of the action. Stevica Jovanović, Braca and Olga Petrov, Marko Kulić, Sava Pandurov, Paja Bulovan, and others devised the operation, finally carried out on July 11, 1941.²⁷ However, it was unsuccessful because some supervisors and peasants reported saboteurs who were surrounded and defeated in the fields near the place designated for the action. Nevertheless, this act on the railway near Vladimirovac had political significance because it represented an echo of the uprising in South Banat and the first warning to the occupier.²⁸

There is no report about the specific activities of Marko Kulić during the Second World War, but he is often mentioned as a participant in all important events that took place within the Communist Party and the South Banat resistance movement. He became the secretary of the KPJ Local Committee, which earned him a special status among the workers in the city. Memoirs of the surviving communists paint the atmosphere in which Marko Kulić lived during the war. Đura Čakovan was a shoemaker, organised in a trade union, and a member of the Communist Party. He states that he knew Kulić from the trade union, that he met with him after the start of the war, and that they talked about the situation. However, at the time of the German attack on the Soviet Union and the formation of the "Svilara" camp, Čakovan was not arrested but moved semi-illegally, unlike Kulić, whom he therefore helped when he needed a person "to watch his back." Back then, Kulić often went to the pier, where a communist woman arrived from Belgrade, with whom he exchanged mail and verbal

²⁷ More about the squad and the mentioned heroes can be read in collections of national heroes such as: Slobodan Petrović, Dragi Milenković, *Zbornik narodnih heroja jugoslavije*, (Beograd: Omladina, 1957.

²⁸ Jovana Dukuljev, "Akcija na pruzi kod Vladimirovca", *Информатор* 9 (1971), 66–74.

messages. However, since he was one of the most wanted by the police, he had to take refuge in a marshy area across the Thames, where he hid and had the misfortune of falling ill. That is why Đura took him to his apartment, with a high degree of risk, considering Kulić's status and the circumstances in which Đura Čakovan's apartment was searched several times. That's why, immediately after his recovery, Kulić went to a "safer" place. Radinka Stojanović also shared her memories of Kulić. According to her story, he would come to her home to listen to the news on the radio, after which he would eat something and quickly leave.²⁹

The very end of Marko Kulić's life followed very quickly. According to Radinka Stojanović, the Gestapo managed to find him, thanks to the betrayal of a certain Ljupka who met Kulić and Radinka. Ljupka was seen with fascist officers, and there were rumours about her betrayal. He was caught by the Volksdeutscher, with whom he was friends and fought together for common rights before the war. The Gestapo took Marko Kulić to the Svilara prison camp. They tortured him to extract information about the resistance, but Marko Kulić did not say a word. Stevan Vlajić, one of the surviving camp inmates, shared his memory: "When they returned Marko Kulić to the cell after the interrogation, I was shocked. I couldn't recognise him. It was all black as coal. During daylight, I put him on my back and carried him to the toilet because they crushed him so much that he couldn't move."³⁰ He did not escape the terrifying crimes of the Nazis and died on July 29, 1941. There are two different versions of how he died: shooting and beating. However, the result was the same: disastrous and terrible. Đura Čakovan states that he learned from a sister of Đura Njagra that Kulić was killed and that he told her, since she was on good terms with

²⁹ ИАП, Ф. 65. A collection of memoir materials (Ф. 65), 483; ИАП, Ф. 65, 1158; ИАП, Ф. 65, 1266.

³⁰ In the literature, it is stated that he was beaten, that nails were driven under his nails and into the soles of his feet, and then he was made to walk on a beam. According to oral sources, after unsuccessful attempts to get information, the Germans cut off his body part by part with a tank track, which is debatable, considering the reality of the story, the reliability of the source and the story of the burial of his body.

the gravedigger, to remember where they buried him so that he could be reburied later. On October 24 of the same year, the public notary drew up his death certificate based on the testimony of the city disinfectant Branko Pejić.³¹

Remembering Marko Kulić

Communities remember and celebrate the deeds of significant historical figures. Because of that, this article aims to present a clear overview of the situation regarding today's attitude and memory of Marko Kulić.

The first thing available when talking about Marko Kulić is the title of national hero, which he received on November 27, 1953, by decree of Josip Broz Tito. The Yugoslav communist regime valued his commitment to the party, work to improve the status of workers, and activities aimed at implementing the revolution. In sources where speeches at certain ceremonies were recorded when talking about Kulić, his title of national hero, which he received from the citizens of Pančevo, was always emphasised. Local officials needed local national heroes as founders of ideology. In the conducted interviews, we could also hear that Kulić's friendly relations with high-ranking official Aleksandar Ranković contributed to the achievement of this goal, which cannot be verified due to the lack of sources. Post-war local literature, whenever it "turned" to the subject of the war or the pre-war activities of the communists, was always associated with Marko Kulić, and in it, one can often find his short biography, as well as his importance and honorary title, and he took the place in many anthologies of national heroes.³²

³¹ ИАП, Ф. 65, 483; ИАП, Ф. 65, 1158; ИАП, Ф. 65, 1266; ИАП, Ф. 12, 90; Срђан Божовић, "Логор „Свилара“", *Гласник Музеја Баната* 7 (1996): 100; Interviews with Jovo Kulić, Mirko Vuković (communist from Piva, member of the Union of Associations of Fighters of the National Liberation War (hereinafter SUBNOR)) and Milovan Tufegdžić (former president of SUBNOR in Plužina).

³² However, none of these biographies resulted from relevant research. In addition, through our survey within the framework of this work, conducted at several levels (among citizens of Pancevo and Plužine, students of the Gymnasium "Uroš Predić" and via social networks), we can reach results that show that even the most basic data about the life of Marko Kulić, and also that the recognition of material sources that refer to his life is at an extremely low level (below 2% of respondents).

The next visible indicators are material sources, i.e., cultural monuments created in Kulić's honour. In Plužine and Pančevo, the two most symbolically important cities related to his life (one near which he was born and grew up, and the other where he worked and died), they paid tribute to him with busts in the city centres, which highlighted his importance.³³ He is also reminded of him by plaques on the house where he lived in Pančevo,³⁴ at the "Svilara" camp, as well as at all important houses in Pančevo where meetings were held before and during the Second World War. In Prisojni Orah, Kulić's native village, his brother Đorđije and his mother erected a monument to the fallen brothers, on which a five-pointed cross is particularly prominent.³⁵ The village cemetery holds a family tombstone in memory of the heroes from the Kulić family. However, Marko Kulić was buried in Pančevo, and his tombstone was originally placed in that place in 1946. His remains were moved in 1965, and he received a new tombstone symbolically representing this hero's posture in front of the enemy.³⁶

Four towns have a street bearing his name: Pančevo, Zrenjanin, Vladimirovac, and Plužine, and a proposal for one street in Podgorica was also adopted. In Pančevo, his name can be found in the names of Radic University and Fishing Association, while the primary school in Orah is also called "Marko Kulić".

³³ The monument in Pancevo was sculpted by Olga Jevrić and it was erected in 1954 on today's Trg Kralja Petar I (then Boris Kidrić Square), along with busts of national heroes Stevica Jovanović and Olga Petrov. Please note, the position of his bust is determined so that the "heroes" of communist ideology are glorified, which does not represent a true picture of the share of his importance for the city's history.

³⁴ There were two, in two different houses, one where he lived and the other where he worked, but the other one has not been preserved.

³⁵ On one occasion, Obrenija Kulić told an officer who was in doubt about these two symbols, that the cross was placed because it was the symbol under which she gave birth and baptised her sons, and the five-pointed symbol was the symbol under which they lived and died. That's why she didn't want them to be separated. Милован Туфегџић, „Крст и Петокрака“, *Гласник*, 5. 2016.

³⁶ <https://kultura.rs/objekat/1435-надгробни-споменик-марка-кулића> (13. 4. 2022).

During the research, the author discovered numerous poems written in honour of Marko Kulić. In Montenegro, people, proud of "their" hero's courage, came up with songs that can be analysed and treated as a historical source.

Conclusion

By researching the life of a national hero, such as Marko Kulić, one obtains not only a set of data that contributes to a better knowledge of the past but also space for a large number of topics and questions that need to be thought about and understood to progress in the understanding of history and society in general. Kulić's biography can also be seen as a kind of example of the life of a pre-war communist, given that certain essential parallels can be drawn.

The first key point that carries value in the form of significant influences and causes for the development of Marko Kulić's personality is the first period of his life, his birth and childhood in a mountain village. The harsh living conditions of his family impressed a special value system on the children. Daily work necessary for survival, establishing a large family, religious influences, attending elementary school, and getting to know the school system are some of the aspects that determined the upbringing of this national hero.

Viko Radoičić's initiative and going to Vojvodina for a trade that could provide him with a better future represent the biggest step in the realisation of Marko Kulić's potential. He moved to Pančevo, a city that, due to its pre-war situation, was a "nest" for people like him. The workers' groups of which he became a member, and later a leader, were exactly those that Kulić heard about in his native village from young communists. His difficult childhood instilled in him an idea to fight for the rights and better position of "ordinary" people, i.e., life in an equal world. He believed in the propaganda spread among the poor peasants, and throughout his life, he progressed so much that he became a member and founder of organisations with the same goal.

The Second World War was an insurmountable "obstacle" for all who witnessed it. The revolution was crucial for the communists, so all supporters of this idea, organized the resistance to the occupier and also worked to realize the post-war plans. Marko Kulić died because of that idea and for it. The firmness of his posture in the face of severe forms of torture reflects his firmness of belief in the ideals to which he was attracted in life, as well as the interesting mental structure of his personality. He understood, accepted, and decided to defend his life's calling and, in addition, to allow his like-minded people to continue the fight.

People are more ready to lead a life of slavery rather than try to bring about changes that would shake up everyday life. And Kulić's spirit could not stand still and silently observe something that he considered unjust (whether it was or not). He was willing to do absolutely anything, including risking his life so that the ideals he believed in could survive. In some value systems, the life of an individual is above the idea (ideology) that serves the benefit of the collective, but it is certainly necessary to open the topic of his sacrifice and heroism, taking into account the contexts mentioned in this paper.

However, the psychological effect that the title of national hero creates in people's minds is beyond the extent that Marko Kulić achieved. He, based on his last moments of life, acquired it because of the post-war regime, although all his previous activities had average values for significant figures of a place, and it is clear that his value as an individual is not dominant at the level of the whole nation. His unofficial title of hero in the local area, which he had after his death, is enough.

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Illustrations



A photo of Marko Kulić from the Historical Archive of Pančevo, ИАП, Збирка фотографија.



Marko Kulić with his colleagues from “Abrašević” art group, ИАП, Збирка фотографија



Demonstrations in Pančevo, 27. 3. 1941, ИАП, Збирка фотографија



The Svilara prison camp, modern look, photo: author.

90

Среском суду
у Панчеву.

СМРТОВНИЦА


Састављена на основу налога Среског суда у Панчеву бр. Р. П. **341** / 19 **41** год. по
Радловићу Владену
Др. Михајловићу Светиславу, јавном бележнику Панчевачком

Присутни доле потписани.

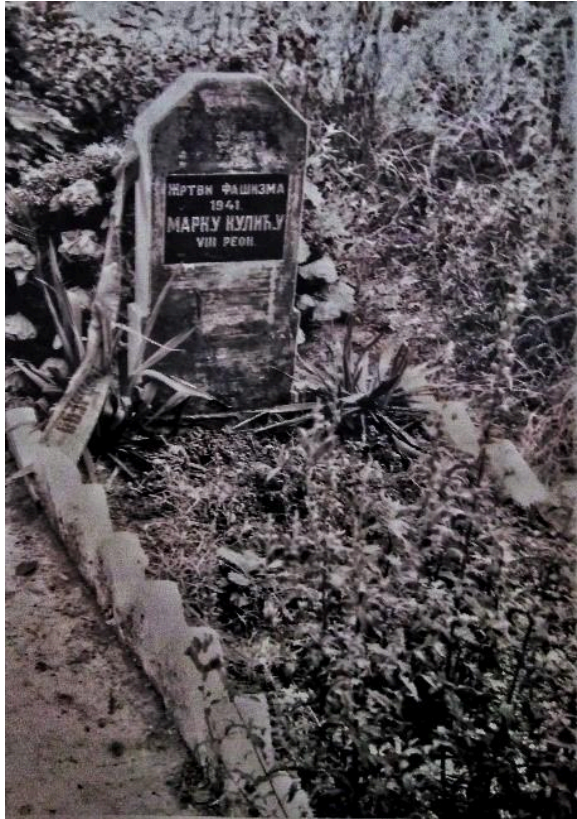
Потписани јавни бележник, као судски повереник на основу исказа **Пејић Бранка**
градског дезинфектора из Панчева

установљује следеће :

1. Породично и рођено име умрлог : **Кулић Марко**
2. Сталеж или занимање : **радник**
3. Година живота : **26 година**
4. Вероисповест : **непознато**
5. Да ли је ожењен, неожењен или удовац : **непознато**
6. Дан, месец, година и час смрти и место где је умро : **29. јула 1941. године у 20 сати у Панчеву**
7. Место и стан где је редовно пребивао : **Панчево, Фабрика свиле**



The death certificate of Marko Kulić, ИАП, Фонд 12. Збирка докумената о политичким збивањима и личностима.



The first tombstone of Marko Kulić, ИАП, Збирка фотографија



The second tombstone of Marko Kulić, erected in 1965, photo: author.



The busts of Marko Kulić in Plužine (left) and Pančevo (right), photo: author

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Народни херој Марко Кулић

Овај рад се бави биографијом народног хероја Марка Кулића, важне личности за панчевачку историју и културу, али и не само овог града. Марко Кулић је имао само 27 година када је страдао, али то није показатељ садржајности његовог живота и разноврсности тема и питања на која нас његов живот упућује. Управо те теме и та питања, уз схватање утицаја, узрока и последица које су одређивале Кулићеву животну оријентацију, чине фокус овог истраживања, тако да се резултати могу увидети и применити, чиме се кроз разумевање појединца, тежи разумевању друштва. Обрађени су кључни догађаји који су чинили његов живот: рођење, детињство, похађање основне школе, прелазак у Војводину, завршетак обућарског заната, питање доласка у Панчево, оснивање „Абрашевића“, предвођење штрајкова, Други светски рат у граду и ангажовање током рата, као и хапшење и мучење у Логору „Свилара“. Темељ истраживања представљала је архивска грађа пронађена у Историјском архиву у Панчеву, затим вредни усмени извори добијени из интервјуа са Кулићевим потомцима и наследницима, као и штампа, теренска истраживања и бројна стручна литература, бирана са резервом, с обзиром на идеолошке оквире послератног режима у којима је настајала.

Кључне речи: Марко Кулић, народни херој, комунизам, Други светски рат.