

# FIELD-MARSHAL BARON SVETOZAR BOROEVIC VON BOJNA ON MEDALS

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1. Borojević addressing his soldiers, c.1916, postcard, private collection, Berlin.

'So!' The Count sighed with relief. 'We have passed the most dangerous part. Hetzendorf lies on the other side.' The emperor pointed to the alley, stretching towards Laxenburg, and then, because the name of this castle reminded him of the aristocratic title of the field-marshal, asked the count what Conrad was doing at the moment.

'Wiping dishes', replied Erdödy.

'How do you mean?'

'Wiping dishes, after his wife has washed them. There is most probably not much to wash, therefore neither to wipe. Conrad dries dishes in Innsbruck, other generals are doing this in Vienna. Borojević is wandering around Klagenfurt, because the Yugoslavs refuse to pay him a pension, just as the Roumanians don't pay it to Arz. Other officers paint, make objects out of leather, give lessons, attend courses for shoemakers, whereas several more cunning ones, who did not move from their chairs, sit in insolvency offices and hope to stay there for their entire lives.'<sup>1</sup>

Much has been written about Svetozar Borojević (1856-1920), beginning with newspapers and pamphlets printed during the First World War, through serious history books written at the time, down to those published more recently. He is, for example, frequently mentioned by General Edmund Glaise von Horstenau in his memoirs published in 1980.<sup>2</sup>

Borojević was a model soldier of the Croatian Military Frontier (K. u. K. Militärgrenze) and rose steadily through the ranks: corporal in August 1872,

staff sergeant in July 1873, cadet in November 1874, lieutenant in May 1875, first lieutenant in May 1880, captain in May 1886, major in May 1892, lieutenant colonel in May 1895, colonel in 1897, major general in May 1904, field-marshal lieutenant in May 1908, infantry general in April 1914, colonel general in May 1916, and finally field-marshal in May 1918. This was a significant achievement, as the great majority of field-marshals in the service of the Austro-Hungarian empire were Austrian archdukes. Brave, extremely serious as far as his professional work was concerned, loyal to his emperor and to his country, and a very good strategist, he was also hard, inflexible and stubborn. When the First World War ended in catastrophe for the empire, his destiny could not be anything but tragic, and he died in a miserable exile, abandoned by almost everyone.

In 1880 he had married Leontine von Rosner (1877-1963), the daughter of an Austrian officer, but as a private person he also had personal weaknesses, and in his later years his family life was marked by tragedy. The couple's only son Fritz (1901-18) was drowned in the river Drava near Maribor in Slovenia in November 1918, as he was crossing a partially destroyed bridge by night. His body was not discovered until two days later.

Borojević played a part in the First World War from very nearly the beginning. When Italy decided to change sides in 1915, another front was opened, and it was then that Borojević began to excel as one of the most effective Austro-Hungarian generals. In May of that year he was ordered to proceed to the Italian front,



2. Bachmann: Svetozar Boroević, 1915, pewter, 51mm., Zagreb Archaeological Museum.



3. Guschner: Emperor Franz Joseph / The fifth army, 1915, tombak, 37 x 20mm., private collection, Zagreb.

and he soon became commander of the empire's fifth army. The emperor Franz Joseph I (r. 1848-1916), who once sent Boroević a portrait of himself on horseback, trusted him as a commander, and, unlike, for example, Baron Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf (1852-1925), he was also able to inspire an identical confidence in the next emperor, the young Karl (r. 1916-18), who came to inspect the Isonzo front on several occasions in person. Boroević had been raised to the nobility by Franz Joseph in 1905, with the title 'von Bojna',<sup>3</sup> Bojna being a village in what was the administrative community of Maja in the county of Zagreb, and in June 1917 Karl awarded him the cross of the Order of Maria Theresia, through which he automatically became a baron.<sup>4</sup> It is said that he wished to be known as count of Isonzo (Soča), but it is the title of baron of Bojna that appears on his tombstone in Vienna. It was the emperor Karl who, from his Swiss exile, paid for Boroević's second funeral, in Vienna's central cemetery.

Although he was feared as something of an ogre by his soldiers, his careful planning and successful actions made Boroević a popular idol throughout the empire. Postcards bearing his photograph were produced in large quantities (fig. 1), and he was one of the most

frequently portrayed generals on the medals and badges that were made to raise funds for charitable purposes connected with the war. Issued in the course of the years 1915-17, these illustrate one particular stage in his career, giving him the ranks of field-marshal lieutenant, infantry general and colonel general; soon after he was promoted to the rank of field-marshal, the war was lost and the empire dismantled. These medals and badges were made by skilled engravers, some of whom are identifiable, and struck at mints in Austria and Germany. The one outstanding artist to have made a relief portrait of Boroević was Robert Frangeš-Mihanović (1872-1940).<sup>5</sup>

One of the earliest is a fine portrait medal by the little-known Viennese medallist R. Bachmann, produced in 1915 and giving Boroević the rank of colonel-general (fig. 2); on the reverse an Austrian soldier stands in an Alpine landscape.<sup>6</sup> This exists in silver and pewter. One badge of the fifth army of the same year bears a portrait not of Boroević but of the emperor (fig. 3), but a well-known medal, inscribed ISONZO-ARMEE 1915 on the reverse, has an excellent portrait of Boroević, giving him the rank of infantry general (*General der Infanterie*) (figs 4, 5). The reverse



4. Hermann: Svetozar Boroević, 1915, silver, 70 x 48mm., private collection, Zagreb.



5. Hermann: Svetozar Boroević, 1915, silvered bronze, 44 x 24mm., private collection, Zagreb.

represents one of the twelve bloody battles that took place on the Isonzo: in mountainous scenery four Austrian soldiers shoot and hurl a rock down onto the enemy, while an aeroplane flies above. The medal is by Georg Hermann of Vienna. As well as existing in two sizes, the medal was issued in various metals (silver, bronze and possibly pewter).<sup>7</sup> The reverse was also used independently for a badge, which was struck in the same sizes and metals.<sup>8</sup> The inscriptions on the medal boxes, also produced in two sizes, reveal their charitable purpose (figs 6, 7), although one example was put to a different end, being attached to a sabre presented to Borojević by his soldiers. A similar medal of 1916 is known to have been produced in silver and pewter, and there is also a 1917 version,<sup>9</sup> as well as a uniface badge of 1916 that still exists in considerable numbers (fig. 8).<sup>10</sup> On these Borojević is given the rank of colonel general (*Generaloberst*). The design was also used for a badge for the Karst front,<sup>11</sup> and there are probably others.

An unusually-shaped uniface medal with a portrait of Borojević was produced by the medallist K. Schwarz in 1916 (fig. 9). The head is set against a background of laurel leaves within a circular medallion. The subject's rank is made visible by the two stars on his collar and the inscription below. The same year saw another successful portrait, in a silver medal struck by the well-established Nuremberg firm of Ludwig Christian Lauer (1842-73); it is the work of Otto Hoppe (1882-1967; fig. 10). Borojević is here described as imperial and royal colonel general. On the reverse is a chain bridge



8. Hermann: *The Isonzo army*, 1916, silvered bronze, 44 x 30mm., private collection, Zagreb.



9. Schwarz: *Svetozar Borojević*, 1916, bronze, 138 x 97mm., private collection, Zagreb.



6. Box for a medal of Svetozar Borojević (fig. 4).



7. Box for a medal of Svetozar Borojević (fig. 5).



10. Hoppe: Svetozar Borojević, 1916, silver, 33mm., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Struck by Lauer.



11. Unidentified artist: Svetozar Borojević, 1916, silver, 33mm., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Struck by Mayer & Wilhelm.



12. Svetozar Borojević surrounded by members of the Zagreb university senate, Postojna, 1 February 1916, photograph, Diocese of Syrmia-Bosnia, Dakovo, archives.

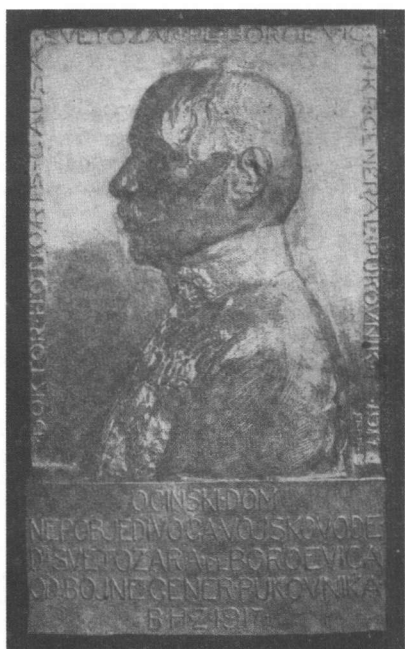


13. Frangeš-Mihanović: Svetozar Borojević, 1917, bronze, 92 x 49mm., Croatian History Museum, Zagreb.

situated in a hilly landscape, with an eagle with closed wings standing on each of its pillars and in the foreground a standing soldier barring the way with his rifle. The inscription on the front right pillar translates as 'Gorizia and Trieste', and the exergue inscription as 'Closed for Italians'. The artist's signature appears on both sides of the medal.<sup>12</sup>

Another well-known firm, Wilhelm Mayer & Franz Wilhelm of Stuttgart, struck a medal commemorating the second anniversary of the outbreak of the war, which bore on its obverse a bust of Borojević and on its reverse the coat of arms of the Austro-Hungarian empire, as it appeared during the short reign of the emperor Karl (fig. 11). The inscription is in both German and Hungarian and translates as 'World war, 1914-16'. On this medal Borojević figures as a field-marshal lieutenant (*Feldmarschalleutnant*), although he had been promoted twice since holding that post.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most unusual events in the history of Zagreb university (known then as the Croatian University of Franz Joseph I in Zagreb) was the granting in 1916 of honorary doctorates to the commanders of the Isonzo front, Borojević and Archduke Eugen (1863-1954).<sup>14</sup> A party including Fran Barac (1872-1940), rector of the university and dean of the Faculty of Divinity, and Milorad Stražnicki, dean of the Faculty of Law, journeyed to the front, in order to present the two celebrated generals with their honorary doctorates in law and statesmanship. Archduke Eugen received his on 30 January 1916, and Svetozar Borojević on 1 February.<sup>15</sup> Some excellent photographs witness these events (fig. 12). The rector and his colleagues were accompanied by the Croatian sculptor and medallist Robert Frangeš-Mihanović, who can also be seen in the photographs. His task was to make portrait studies of the generals, and immediately upon the expedition's return to Zagreb he made two portrait plaques of the new doctors. These were cast in bronze and exhibited in the university's rectorate, and they were also shown in a Zagreb war art exhibition of that year.<sup>16</sup> Late in 1918 they were removed from display, and Borojević's plaque (fig. 13) was not seen again by the public until an exhibition dedicated to the First World War held at the Croatian History Museum in 2006. A version of this plaque with a different lower section was commissioned by the Brethren of the Croatian Dragon and placed on the field marshal's



14. Frangeš-Mihanović: Svetozar Borojević, 1917, bronze, formerly Mečenčani (destroyed).



15. Hummel: The Austro-German offensive on the Isonzo, 1917, silver, 33mm., private collection, Germany.

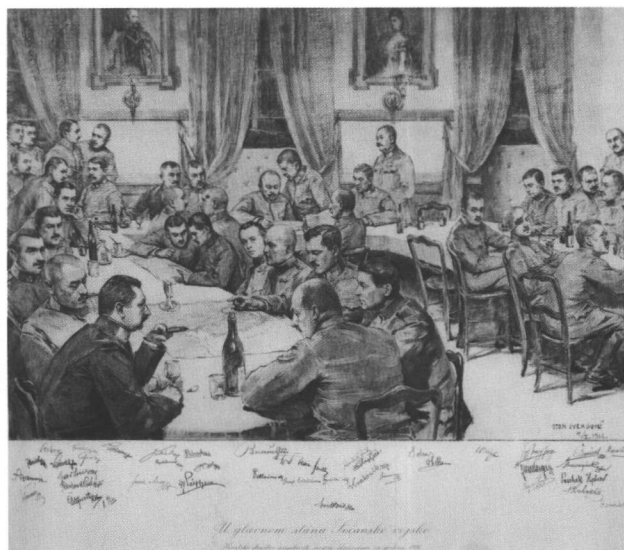


16. Unidentified artist: Svetozar Borojević, 1917, pewter, 23mm., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

family home at Mečenčani, as the house in which he had been born was no longer standing (fig. 14). It was unveiled on 28 October 1917, but has since been removed – probably in 1918, although, according to some rumours, this happened as late as 1945. Frangeš-Mihanović also made a bronze statue of Borojević on horseback, a plaster cast of which exists in the Glyptothek of the Croatian Academy of Science and Arts.<sup>17</sup>

On the occasion of the joint Austro-German offensive of November 1917 the Nuremberg engraver A. Hummel produced a medal with portraits of four military leaders: von Below, von Hötendorf, von Borojević and von Krobatin (fig. 15). A uniface medal of the same year, showing Borojević facing to the right and provided with a loop and ring for suspension, was made by an unknown medallist (fig. 16). These are the last known medals to portray Svetozar Borojević, although a heliogravure of 1916 by Oton Iveković depicting the headquarters of the Isonzo army with all its officers, with their signatures below, attained great popularity (fig. 17).<sup>18</sup>

On 13 December 2006 the sesquicentenary of the field marshal's birth was marked by an international conference focussing on Borojević and the part he played in the First World War. This was organised by Marino Manin of the Institute of Croatian History in Zagreb and held in the village of Mečenčani, where Borojević was born. Fifteen papers were read and at the conclusion of the conference a documentary television film by Mladen de Trnski, *Lion of Isonzo*, was shown. In addition exhibitions dedicated to Borojević were held in the school at Mečenčani, where the conference was held, and in the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb (organised by the archivists, notably Milan Pojić). As a curiosity it may be added that Mrs Neda Prpić, who



17. Iveković: The Isonzo army headquarters, 1916, heliogravure, 36.5 x 54.5cm., private collection, Zagreb.

knew Borojević's widow Leontine ('Tante Leo') well, attended some of the conference. Between the two world wars Mrs Prpić used to meet Baroness Borojević at the manor house in Medlog, Slovenia, owned by her relative Slavko Kvaternik (1878-1947), who was one of the officers serving in Borojević's headquarters and his personal friend.

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NOTES

1. 'So!' Der Graf atmete auf. 'Das gefährlichste Stück wäre überstanden. Dort drüben ist Hetzendorf.' Der Kaiser deutete auf die Allee, die sich von dort nach Laxenburg og. Un dann, durch den Namen jenes Schlosses an das Adelsprädikat der Feldmarschalls erinnert, fragte er den Grafen, was wohl Conrad jetzt treibe.

'Geschirr abtrocknen', erwiderte Erdödy [Count Tamás Erdödy (1886-1931), who accompanied Emperor Karl I during his attempt to regain the Hungarian throne].

'Wie meinst du?'

'Er tocknet das Eßgeschirr ab, dass seine Frau abgewaschen hat. Zuviel wird nicht abzuwaschen und daher auch nicht abzutrocknen sein. Conrad trocken in Innbruck Geschirr, andere Generäle in Wien. Boroević geht in Klagenfurt spazieren, weil ihm die Jugoslawen die Pension ebensowenig zahlen wollen wie die Rumänen dem Arz. Andere Offiziere malen, machen Lederarbeiten, geben Nachhilfestunden, halten Schusterkurse ab, und ein paar ganz schlaue, sitzen in liquidierenden Ämtern und hoffen, bis zu ihrem Lebensende dort amtieren zu Können.' From Bruno Brehm, *Weder Kaiser noch König. Der Untergang der Habsburgischen Monarchie* (Munich, 1933), pp. 365-6. The conversation is supposed to have taken place on Good Friday 1921.

2. Peter Broucek, *Ein General in Zwielficht. Die Erinnerungen Edmund Glaises von Horstenau*, 3 vols (Vienna, Cologne and Graz, 1980-88), i, pp. 168, 226, 306, 311, 372, 397, 430-31, 436, 468-70, 478, 494, 497, 519; ii, pp. 200, 384; iii, pp. 85, 158.

3. Viktor Anton count Duišin, *Zbornik plemstva u Hrvatskoj, Slavoniji, Dalmaciji, Bosni-Hercegovini, Dubrovniku, Kotoru i Vojvodini. Codex de la noblesse en Croatie, Slavonie, Dalmatie, Bosnie-Herzégovine, Raguse (Dubrovnik), Kotor et Voïvodine. Kodex des Adels in Kroatien, Slavonien, Dalmatien, Bosnien-Herzegovina, Dubrovnik, Kotor und Vojvodina*, i (Zagreb, 1938), pp. 92-3; József Gerő, *A király könyvek az I. Ferenc József és IV. Károly király által 1867-től 1918-ig adományozott nemességek, főnemességek, előnevek és címerek jegyzéke* (Budapest, 1940), p. 28.

4. Peter Frank-Dofering, *Adelslexikon des Österreichischen Kaisertums 1804-1918* (Vienna, 1989), p. 250. In 1917 Karl also ennobled Boroević's brother Nikola, a colonel in the army; Duišin, *Zbornik plemstva*, i, p. 93.

5. Ivan Mirnik, 'Robert Frangeš-Mihanović', *The Medal*, 14 (1989), pp. 60-62; Ivan Mirnik, 'A ceremonial hammer', *The Medal*, 18 (1991), pp. 60-66.

6. Nada Todorović, *Jugoslovenske i inostrane medalje. Médailles yougoslaves et étrangères* (Belgrade, 1964), p. 109, no. 284; Ivan Mirnik, *Medalja u Hrvatskoj 1700-1900. Katalog izložbe* (Zagreb, 1981), p. 11, no. 33.

7. *Mitteilungen der Oesterr. Gesellschaft für Münz- und Medaillenkunde in Wien*, xii (Vienna, 1916), 1 (308), p. 5, no. 5; pl. 13, no. 2; Leonard Forrer, *Biographical dictionary of medallists*, 8 vols (London, 1904-30), vii, p. 445; Janez Svajncer, *Odlikovanja in znaki na Slovenskem. Decorations, medals and badges in Slovenia* (Maribor, 1978), p. 97, no. 143 (reverse); Mirnik, *Medalja u Hrvatskoj 1700-1900*, p. 11, no. 32; Ivan Mirnik, *Zbirka medalja Berislava Kopača. The Berislav Kopač medal collection* (Zagreb, 2005), p. 57, no. 84 (reverse); Gabrio Collodel and Francesco Romanzi, *1915-1918. Dallo Stelfio al Piave. Il fronte italo-austriaco visto attraverso i Kappenabzeichen, i distintivi da beretto dell'esercito austro-ungarico* (Udine, 2005), p. 115, no. 169.

8. Collodel and Romanzi, *1915-1918*, p. 115, no. 169; p. 118, no. 174.

9. Collodel and Romanzi, *1915-1918*, p. 117, no. 173.

10. Collodel and Romanzi, *1915-1918*, pp. 103-46.

11. Svajncer, *Odlikovanja in znaki*, p. 97, no. 142.

12. Jacques Schulman, *La guerre européenne 1914-1918. Médailles, monnaies, papiers-monnaie et monnaies des camps de prisonniers*, lxvii (Amsterdam, 1917), p. 82, no. 823 (silver and iron); Forrer, *Biographical dictionary of medallists*, vii, p. 463, nos 535-7.

13. Forrer, *Biographical dictionary of medallists*, viii, pp. 37-40.

14. The only member of the university senate who voted against this proposal was Fran Milobar (1869-1945), an economics professor in the law faculty. When, soon after the end of the war, the senate decided to annul the two doctorates, the only vote against this decision came again from Professor Milobar, who asked for an explanation as to the offences the two honorary doctors had committed against the dignity of the university.

15. Vladimir Bazala, 'O sveučilišnim insignijama [On university insignia]', *Alma Mater Croatica*, i (Zagreb, 1937), 2, p. 41; Josip Milić and Ranka Franz-Stern, 'Počasni doktori Sveučilišta u Zagrebu. Doctores honoris causa Universitatis Zagrabienensis', *Sveučilišni vjesnik. Universitatis Zagrabienensis informationes*, xlv (Zagreb, 1999), 1-2, p. 48; Ivan Mirnik, 'The insignia of Zagreb university', *The Medal*, 35 (London, 1999), pp. 44-55, at p. 48; Ivan Mirnik, 'Insignije Sveučilišta u Zagrebu [Insignia of the university of Zagreb]', *Sveučilišni vjesnik. Universitatis zagrabienensis informationes*, xlv (Zagreb, 1999), 3-4, pp. 117-18, 131.

16. Zdenka Marković, *Frangeš Mihanović. Biografija kao kulturno-historijska slika jedne epohe hrvatske likovne umjetnosti* (Zagreb, 1954), p. 276.

17. Marković, *Frangeš Mihanović*, p. 276.

18. Snježana Pintarić, *Oton Iveković. Portret* (Klanjec, 1995), pp. 13, 21.