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*Cultural Diplomacy, Preservation and Construction of National Identity:
Dragutin F. Pokorni in North Africa during the Great War*¹

Abstract:

In the context of centenary of World War I, the focus of this text are results and strategy of cultural diplomacy which were conducted by a leader of the Serbian military band officially called the Band of the Cavalry Division (*Muzika Konjičke divizije*). The stage for these activities was in North Africa (1916–1918), where part of the Serbian army recuperated from retreat across the mountains of Albania. This paper is a result of an extensive archival research of the National Library of Serbia's collections and periodicals published during the Great War in North Africa. The article also sheds light on the work of a musician, Dragutin F. Pokorni. This paper also highlights key points in the fruitful encounter between Serbian military musicians and the multi-layered cultures of the Maghreb countries and examines the importance of the BCD's promotion of Serbian culture overseas, as a type of cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: Great War, Dragutin F. Pokorni, The Band of Cavalry Division, Tunisia, Bizerte, Maghreb, correspondence, cultural elite

In third year of celebrations marking the Centennial of the WWI, despite an extremely wide range of different sources including several digital,² there still exists a lack of musicological discourse on this historical period. Obviously, it's not easy dealing with music in the Great War, be it military, folk or popular. There's always fear and doubts present among musicologist during research: music intended to be useful, or they find it too simple, since music during the war celebrated concrete political and military battles or personal longings of scattered people. More importantly, not only historians but also scholars from other arts and humanities branch were primarily concerned with glorifying the 'heroism' and sacrifice of Serbian soldiers while keeping silent on the some quiet and lyric episodes of the Great War, like activities of the Serbian army in the North Africa from March 1916 to December 1918. Finally, there are only few historians interested in episodes of this dramatic period of Serbian and world history without presence of the Serbian dynasty and politicians.³

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² The largest place for digitized sources is project *Europeana 1914–1918* <http://www.europeana-collections-1914-1918.eu/> (The National library of Serbia was part of the same project with *The Great War* digital library: www.velikirat.nb.rs) and there's also many others events, publications etc.

³ For instance, retired air force colonel, Predrag Pejčić was the only one who wrote in-depth study about Serbian army in Tunisia. His research covers rich archive sources and periodicals, and his book was important source for

By placing the activities of one musician, Dragutin F. Pokorni (11 October 1867 Čermákovice in Czech –1956 in Belgrade),⁴ leader of the second best Serbian military band officially called the Band of the Cavalry Division (*Muzike konjičke divizije*), and examining his role in the broader context of Serbian cultural diplomacy in the Great War, this paper offers an unconventional answer to the current debates in the humanities regarding new approaches to WWI, but also to the sociological issue of (non)existence of cultural elite.



Dragutin F. Pokorni was musician of Czech origin who lived in capital of the Kingdom of Serbia since 1899. Up to his arrival in Belgrade, Pokorni worked as accompanist and horn player at Karlstheater in Vienna, where distinguished musicians made their careers. During two periods, from 1897 to 1904 and from 1906 to 1910, Pokorni occupied position of conductor at the National Theatre of Serbia and Žarko Savić's Opera on the Boulevard, located at the site of the later building cinema "Balkan" in Belgrade.⁵ Musicologist Roksanda Pejović, a renowned expert on Serbian music from this period, on examining overall orchestral performances in Belgrade of that time, singles out concerts of the theatric orchestra conducted by Pokorni in 1899, year when he came to Belgrade, with the Serbian premiere of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, and his appearance as conductor on a concert held at the

our research. See П. Пејчић, *Српска војска у Бизерти (1916–1918)* [The Serbian Army at Bizerte], Завод за уџбенике и наставна средства, Belgrade, 2003. Pejić also paid attention to cultural activities of the Serbian army in North Africa: 135–140.

⁴ National archive of Moravia in Brno, Brno Bishopric, Oberkaunitz (1649–1949), A registration form of D. F. Pokorni, <http://actapublica.eu/matriky/brno/prohlizec/1348/?strana=154>

⁵See also: G. Krajačić, *Vojna muzika i muzičari 1831–1945* [Military Music and Musicians], Vojska, Beograd, 2003, 120, 69–71; His biography in English was provided in: M. Vasiljević, „'Quiet African episode' for Serbian army in Great War: Music of Cavalry Division and Dragutin F. Pokorni in North Africa (1916–1918)“, *New Sound*, Beograd, 43 (2014), 128–129. In addition to orchestral conducting at Belgrade opera houses and military bands, Pokorni was also dedicated to vocal music practice, and he directed the First Belgrade Singing Society, the Stanković Choral Society and Serbian-Jewish Choral Society.

National Theatre to celebrate the birthday of a new King, Peter I Karađorđević in 1903.⁶ Before the outbreak of the First World War, he already participated as bandmaster of the Band of the Cavalry division (BCD) in the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), which was second Serbian military band with structure of symphonic orchestra in time when civil symphony orchestra didn't exist in the Kingdom of Serbia. Shortly before the Austria-Hungary declared war to Kingdom of Serbia, Pokorni was appointed as the first manager of the Military Music School established during first months of 1914 in the small city Grejač near Niš.

According to historical evidence, even before leaving the territory of the Kingdom of Serbia, all military bands of the Serbian army were active. In fact, already in the first days of the WWI, Pokorni invited representatives of the Karađorđević dynasty and the members of the Serbian elite to support his charity concerts in Vrnjačka banja with Band of the Cavalry division enriched by teachers and cadets of the mentioned Military Music School,⁷ and continued with concerts during 1915 in Veles and Niš.⁸

However, like many other military musicians of that time (most of them of Czech origin), Pokorni was only rarely mentioned by musicologists. Pejović only notes that intensification in orchestra performances in Belgrade following Dragutin Pokorni's and Stanislav Binički's (1872–1942) respective entries into the city's musical life, in 1897 and 1899.⁹ But, we cannot find any appraisal of Pokorni's work by a Serbian musicologist. Dragutin Pokorni, we could finally notice, made his artistic career in the shadow of dominant person of Belgrade music life of that time – Stanislav Binički, composer of first premiered Serbian opera *At Dawn (Na uranku)*, 1903). During the Great War Binički was conductor of the best Serbian music band Orchestra of the Royal Guard (*Muzika Kraljeve garde*), and he was in charge of all bands of the Serbian army. Finally, he was remembered in the first place as an author of famous *March to the Drina (Marš na Drinu)*, 1915), music symbol of the WWI for later generations, which was often used by politicians for construction of remembrance of the Great War and as a Serbian national(istic) song. Still, it should be borne in mind that Binički has not practiced correspondence with foreign diplomats during the Great War or it has not been preserved.¹⁰ Otherwise, rich correspondence and notes of Pokorni are important source for research and interpretation of “peacetime” and recovery time of the Serbian army in Tunisia and relations with other Maghreb countries. It should be also mentioned that alongside his own discourse Pokorni translated numerous music critics from Tunisian and Algerian newspapers from French to Serbian,¹¹ and published them in the

⁶ Until now there were only few musicological reviews on orchestral conducting of Pokorni, see: R. Pejović, *Srpsko muzičko izvođaštvo romantičarskog doba* [The Art of Performing Music in Serbia in the Romantic Period], Univerzitet umetnosti, Belgrade, 1991, 316, 320, 322, 325, 333; S. Đurić Klajn, *Orkestri u Srbiji do osnivanja Filharmonije* [Orchestras in Serbia before the Foundation of the Philharmonic], Beogradska filharmonija, Belgrade, 1977, 23–27.

⁷ National library of Serbia, Collection of concert programmes, Announcement for Prince Alexander, Vrnjačka Banja, 11. 7. 1914, <http://velikirat.nb.rs/items/show/1061>

⁸ *Српски југ*, „Концерт у Велесу” [The Concert in Veles], No. 348, 2, 14. 7. 1915.

⁹ Cf. R. Pejović, op. cit., 321.

¹⁰ Binički have to lead correspondence with Serbian Supreme Command during the War, especially on regrouping of military bands and procurement of music instruments: Military Archive, Fond Republika Srbija: Vojska Kneževine/Kraljevine Srbije 1847–1920 (VKKS), Popisnik br. 3, Ratna arhiva Vrhovne komande srpske vojske i svih njenih odeljenja od 1914. do 1920. godine [War Archive of the Serbian Supreme Command and all their Departments from 1914 to 1920], Box 249, Fasc. 272 and 72. These important, but still scarce letters of Binički were thoroughly used in article about activities of all Serbian military bands during the Great War: M. Васильевић, „Српске војне музике у земљама савезника током Великог рата (1916–1918)“, *Војноисторијски гласник*, 2 (2014), 20–41.

¹¹ Reviews of BCD concerts appeared in the following papers: *La Dépêche Tunisienne* in Tunisia, *La Dépêche d'Alger*, *L'Echo d'Alger*, *Le Petit Oranais*, *L'Echo de Bizerte*; *Le Républicain* and *La Depeche Constantine* in Constantine; *La Tribune Bonaise*, etc.

Serbian journal *Napred/En avant*. Through his translations, it becomes possible that the news on success of BCD spread to the wide territory where citizens/soldiers of the Kingdom of Serbia were scattered.

Correspondence and travel notes of musician and Captain 1st class in Serbian Army, Dragutin Pokorni, incurred during his stay in the Tunisian port city Bizerte from March 1916 to September 1918, as a part of recovery process of Serbian army and the BCD with them.¹² Therefore, this article builds on recent research on complex and dynamic concert activities of the BCD in North Africa,¹³ whereby focus is primarily on personality of Pokorni.

Travel Notes by Dragutin Pokorni

On one hand, Pokorni left stirring descriptions of the North Africa and cities he visited with the BCD in a form of travel notes. On the other, these travel notes contain his reflections and detailed portrayal of social context in which BCD made concert performances in North African cities. These notes were obviously intended for publishing, and many of them had that kind of destiny, mostly in Serbian journal *Napred/En avant* (Bizerte, Tunisia, 1916–1918), which was issued in Bizerte until the departure of the Serbian army.

For instance, Pokorni thoroughly describes his long journey by train to Algiers, through Amfreville, Boufarik, Blida and Oran, while mentioning their culture, economic and architectural characteristics, but also residents and their religious and linguistic identities.¹⁴ Pokorni narrated in detail about his concerts with the BCD as well, especially about response and the opinion of the audience and music critics, and he regularly mentioned views and attitudes of political and military officials.¹⁵ These memoir travel books indicate not only the first-class education of Dragutin Pokorni and his knowledge of foreign languages, but also his ability of organization and the obvious social intelligence. These qualities of his personality allowed him to manage contacts with elite members of societies in Tunisia, Algeria and Marocco, and to maintain, expand and cultivate friendship with these countries. Finally, most of his impressions on Maghreb countries and concerts were published in the form of travel notes in the journal *Napred/En avant*.

Correspondence by Dragutin Pokorni

Pokorni led correspondence with many elite members of North African societies, officials like mayors and directors of institutions, politicians, high military personnel, artists etc. Among them were a series of important personalities who have stayed or lived in the North Africa during the Great War. Primarily we should single out Charles de Galland (1851–1923), who was mayor of Algiers from 1910 to 1919 and the most important personality of Algerian revival, but who also participated in urban and education reforms in the city of Algiers, where renowned city Park was named after him (now Park of Freedom). Pokorni then corresponded with Émile (Paul Amable) Guépratte (1856–1939),¹⁶ celebrated

¹² NLS, Special fonds, Arhiva Dragutin Pokorni [The Dragutin Pokorni Archives], fond R-291, fasc. I–IX.

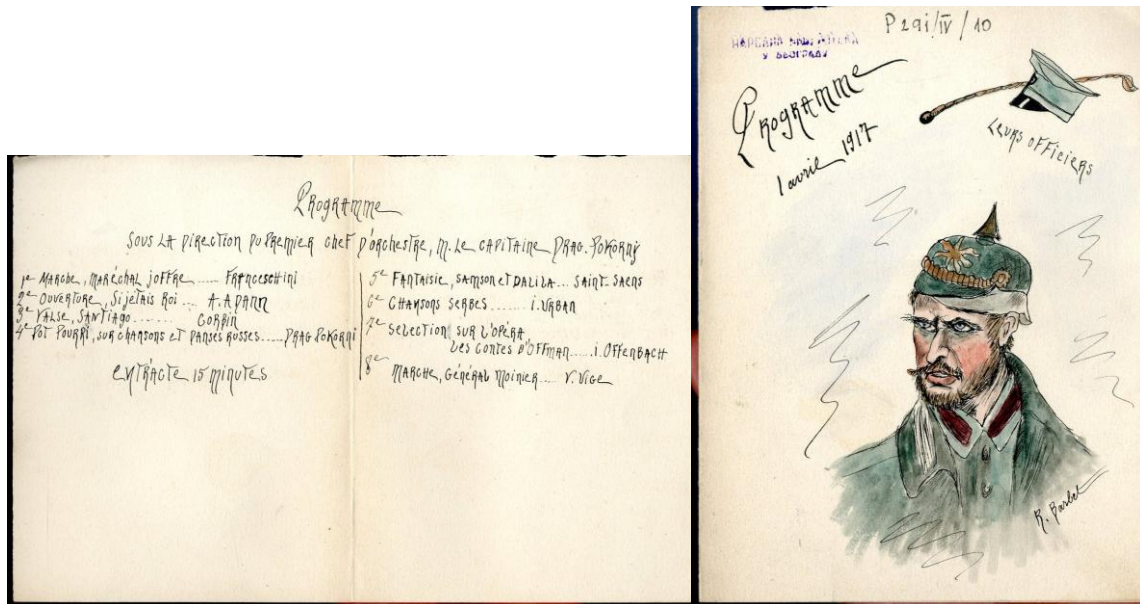
¹³ M. Vasiljević, “Quiet African episode for Serbian army in Great War”, 123–156.

¹⁴ NLS, ADP, R-291, I.

¹⁵ See, for instance: NLS, ADP, R-291, “U Konstantini i Boni” [“In Constantine and El Bouni”], I/4.

¹⁶ In the process of construction of memories of the Great War, French (vice) admiral Emile Guepratte has special place. According to historical sources and memoirs, Guepratte show helpfulness, compassion and respect to Serbian soldiers and he was popularly called “Serbian Mother”. Also, during his visit to Belgrade in 1930, when he was carried by citizens from the train station to Slavija Square (through street which also was

expert in the navy and commander of the French army in Tunisia, with the rank of vice-admiral since 1915. Pokorni stayed in touch with C. de Galland and E. Guépratte even after his return to Belgrade during 1920s.¹⁷ During his stay in Tunisia, Pokorni and BCD performed many times with Guepratte in the audience, and also on ceremony of his birthdays and retirement from military profession,¹⁸ as well as for Commander of the French North African Forces, Charles Émile Moinier (1855–1919).¹⁹



Finally, Pokorni made truly and long lasting friendship with Italian composer Francesco Santoliquido (1883–1970), who, having studied in Rome at the Santa Cecilia Lyceum, found himself in the Tunisian town of Hammamet in 1915. On 22nd June 1918 at the City Theatre in Bona (Algeria), the BCD led by Pokorni premiered symphonic work of Santoliquido *Le Parfum des Oasis Sahariennes* along with compositions by Offenbach, Monthéus, Rastell, Rendla, Heillingé, Massnet, M. Rique Marbot, Saint-Saéns, Celli, Nedbal, and national anthems of France and Serbia.²⁰ After the war, Santoliquido became a prominent neoclassic composer who has made music research in the eminent French centre IRCAM.

named after him), was regularly used in historical discourse for the picturesque evocation of the French-Serbian friendship and alliance in the Great War.

¹⁷ NLS, ADP, R-291, I-4, II-31.

¹⁸ Václav Rendla (1869–1933) distinguished himself as the composer of symphonic piece *Admiral Guépratte's March* written on the occasion of Admiral Émile Guépratte's birthday and retirement. He was a member of BCD. Piece was premiered in 16 December 1916: P. Pejčić, op. cit. 136.

¹⁹ Let us mention that Moinier received following medals in his military career: Chevalier de la [Légion d'honneur](#) (11 juillet 1891); Officier de la Légion d'Honneur (17 octobre 1909); Commandeur de la Légion d'honneur (12 janvier 1912); grand-officier de la Légion d'Honneur (12 juillet 1916); Officier du [Nishan İftikhar \(4^e R.T.T\)](#); [Médaille commémorative du Maroc](#); [Officier d'académie](#); [Army Distinguished Service Medal](#) à titre posthume. He wrote about his military career and significant battles in two publications: *L'Expédition de Fez. Avec 114 photographies et deux cartes...* Préface du général Moinier, Paul AZAN, Charles Émile Moinier; and *Les Secrets du Maroc espagnol : L'épopée d'Abd-el-Khaleq Torrès, (1910–1970)*. Václav Nigl (1857), another member of BCD presumably wrote *General Moinier's March* which was premiered in 1 April 1917: NBS, ADP, R-291, IV/10.

²⁰ NLS, ADP, R-291, IV/16.



Beside intensive correspondence with some persons we mentioned, Pokorni also received: accolades, positive reviews, greetings, performance calls etc. which testifies on general positive reception of the concerts of the BCD in North Africa.²¹

Results of Diplomatic mission

After in-depth analysis of correspondence and notes of Dragutin Pokorni during his stay in Tunisia, the results of his diplomatic mission by cultural means became clear. First of all, we could single out that he promoted Serbian (and Yugoslav) culture, representatives of Kingdom of Serbia. One of the first results was guest performance of Orchestra of the King's Guard in Bizerte in 1917, when the concert was held on Promenade.²²



However, the most significant or even the ultimate goal to which the activity of BCD was directed was humanitarian work which culminated in fundraising campaign for construction of a Serbian cemetery in Tunisia, which still exists today, and represents one of the largest memorials of Serbian victims of Great war. In that regard, we will review two tours conducted by Pokorni and BCD.

Namely, the initiative to organize the tour of BCD was started by chapel master Pokorni, and it was realized by agreement and with support of General Dragutin Milutinović and Commander Karl Mihel, who were united in view that this could be the way to develop friendship with other Maghreb countries other than Tunisia where they were staying. The higher humanitarian goals of keeping memory of the country that was deserted and soldiers who lost their lives after unsuccessful recovery in Tunisian hospitals could also be attained. So, with financial aid provided by Karl Mihel, commander of Reserve troops and NCO schools, i.e. Serbian army troops recuperating in Bizerte, chapel master of BCD Pokorni organized two successful tours in cities of Tunisia, Algiers and Marocco in 1916 and 1917. .

²¹ See for instance: Acknowledgments of mayor of Bona in letter to Pokorni: NLS; ADP, R-291, II-5, 7-8. 9. 1916.

²² NLS, Dragutin Pokorni (1867–1956) – fotografije, Koncert na promenade [The Concert on promenade], <http://velikirat.nb.rs/items/show/1236>

The official cause of the first tour was fundraising for construction of Serbian cemetery in Bizerta, Feriville, which was successfully completed. The cemetery still represents a significant memorial to suffering of Serbian soldiers during the Great War. Humanitarian concerts in 1916 in Tunisia, Algiers and Marocco had a resounding success, hence they reached higher military and political officials, who then contributed to continuation of the tour in 1917. Thereby, the negotiation process with officials, selection of repertoire and often great ideas to supplement concerts with newly composed works dedicated to Guépratte, Moinier and Galland fostered friendly relations with allied countries. At the same time, perfectly designed programs with respect to local musical preferences, with the inevitable anthems of the Kingdom of Serbia, France and other Allied countries, received positive reviews from music experts. BCD visited numerous places in Maghreb: Tunisia (Bizerta, Susa, Sfax), Algiers (city of Algiers, Amfreville, Oran, Boufarik and Blida) and Marocco (Oujda). Their performances were praised in Algerian press, and especially favorable were reviews of interpretation of orchestral composition *The Spinning Wheel of Omphale* op. 31 (*L'Rouet D'Omphale*, 1871) of renowned French composer Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921), which not only marked numerous performances of this orchestra, but also brought a possibility to Pokorni to connect with numerous members of elites of mentioned societies. It is important to emphasize that they toured Algeria in 1917, encouraged by reception of the first tour.

Thorough analysis of the local political, military and cultural history of the Maghreb from 1916-1918 in notes and correspondence of Pokorni illustrate his great education. In addition to intellectual acumen, Pokorni has demonstrated his organizational skills, with excellent amalgamation of his own goals with the leading strategies of the Serbian army and the Kingdom of Serbia in the war. In terms of music, the BCD through cooperation in the Military Theatre²³ performances realized two important goals, namely: the preservation (and to add construction) of national identity (Yugoslav) and cultural diplomacy. Serbian Supreme Command in this peacetime environment, where the army recovered, operated in terms of cultural diplomacy activities only as a support. Such a relationship, and accordingly support of general Commander of Serbian Troops Karlo Mihel allowed more freedom to conductor Pokorni who carried out the work of a successful music tour with the orchestra at MKD the Maghreb countries as well as deepening Franco-Serbian friendship through music.

Conclusion

In the case of Dragutin F. Pokorni, due to circumstances - peacetime conditions in which Music of the Cavalry Division and he as their chaplain had worked - it is possible, on the one hand, to monitor the extraordinary importance of cultural diplomacy and penetration of Serbian military music in the Great War, and on the other, to theoretically discuss about potential interpretations of "cultural elite" and its representatives. According to generally accepted sociological division, there are three types of elites in society: political, economic and military. Since these social groups consist of a limited number of actors at the top of the social ladder, they, again according to definition, have access to the most important social resources. So, we cannot defend view on cultural elite which exist without participation in economic, political or military field. Accordingly, musicians in the military field generally belong to lower ranks, while only a few of them hold senior officer ranks, but they still could

²³ NLS, Department for Special fonds, Dnevnik predstava srpskog vojničkog pozorišta [A Diary of the Serbian Military Theatre shows], fond R-274; O. Марковић, *Српска војничка и заробљеничка позоришта у Првом светском рату*, Музеј позоришне уметности, Београд, 2014; В. Петровић, *Српска војничка позоришта 1916–1918*, Музеј позоришне уметности, Београд, 1992.

become representatives of the military elite in certain circumstances, like Pokorni did with his organization skills and charity concert and missions. However, we cannot forget their specific relationship with civil institutions, and that many musicians have worked in civil orchestras due to lack of manpower (and they have drawn considerable material income from that position), which makes them a special category that has not been investigated either in musicology, or even in historical and sociological studies. After examination of a concrete material, it can be concluded that the case of D. Pokorni is an important indicator of the existence of significant actors in the context of the particular circumstances of the Great War who had additional action potential and certainly attained the elite category after achieving social ties to the military and political elite of the Maghreb countries.²⁴

Summary:

Cultural Diplomacy, Preservation and Construction of National Identity: Dragutin F. Pokorni in North Africa during the Great War (1916–1918)

This paper is focused on one of the representative of cultural elite, Dragutin F. Pokorni (1867–1956), conductor of the second best orchestra of the Serbian Army – the Band of the Cavalry division. As a musician of Czech origin, settled in Kingdom of Serbia since 1899 and shadowed by most prevalent person of that time – first Serbian opera composer and conductor Stanislav Binički (1872–1942) – Pokorni was a well-educated musician, intellectual, and also a speaker of many languages; these traits showed his numerous abilities and especially organizational skills during the Great War. His personal and official correspondence on French and Italian took place in Tunisia, Algiers and Morocco during recovery of army and his division in Tunisian port city of Bizerte from March 1916 to September 1918. Pokorni's correspondence with Major of Algiers Charles de Galland, Admiral Emile Guepratte, Italian composer Francesco Santoliquido (1883–1970) and many other important persons settled in Maghreb countries during the Great War is kept on the Department of Special collections at National library of Serbia; these documents were the most important for this research. In this paper, authors addressed military music at two functional levels: preservation of national identity and cultural diplomacy. In that context, activities and approach of Serbian Supreme Command and other units, as far as they were concerned regarding music activities in Maghreb countries, acted only as a consultant or supporter of ideas that Serbian officer and conductor Pokorni promoted. Such connection resulted in successful musical tours of the Serbian Band of the Cavalry division during 1916 and 1917, and deepening Franco-Serbian relations through music. Finally, with this paper authors proposed answers on recent debates on significance of cultural diplomacy in the Great War and also about methodology of sociological concept of 'cultural' elite.

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Arhiva Dragutin Pokornog [The Archive of Dragutin Pokorni], R-291, fasc. I–IX.

Dnevnik predstava srpskog vojničkog pozorišta [A Diary of the Serbian Military Theatre shows], fond R-274

²⁴ He also founded the Central Musical Archives of the Serbian Army and Navy. Importantly, for a long time (1920–1937), he was in charge of all military ensembles and at the same time conducted the Orchestra of the Royal Guard (for details on the biography of this artist, see G. Krajačić, *op. cit.*, 120, 69–71).

Military archive, Република Србија: Vojska Kneževine/Kraljevine Srbije 1847–1920 (VKKS), Popisnik br. 3, Ratna arhiva Vrhovne komande srpske vojske i svih njenih odeljenja od 1914. do 1920. godine [*War Archive of the Serbian Supreme Command and all their Departments from 1914 to 1920*], Box 249, Fasc. 272 and 72.

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