



## **Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program**

### **Research Report**

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Topic: "Petar II Petrovic Njegos, the Great Powers and Modernization: 1830-1851"

Country: Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The results of my research in Montenegro were most rewarding. The topic of my dissertation research is Petar II Petrovic Njegos, his relations with the Great Powers, and his attempts at modernizing Montenegro from 1830-1851. Njegos was a bishop as well as ruling prince of Montenegro. In the archives of Kotor and Cetinje, I was able to access a wealth of information concerning this ruler and the circumstances of his rule. This is an important subject not only because there is so little written about it in English today, but also because it is a key to understanding the Montenegrins and their identity in the present day. Also, it provides an important historical context for understanding the relationship between Montenegrins and Serbians: while having similar goals, they had different methods for reaching these goals, and took different paths historically, economically, and politically before they both became part of Yugoslavia in the twentieth century. By examining the historical roots of the Montenegrin state and identity construction, it may be possible to achieve a clearer understanding of these people's relationships within the Former Yugoslavia, with their Balkan neighbors, and with Western Europe today – a contemporary topic of a highly emotional and controversial nature.

I was not only interested in the political correspondence between Njegos and the Great Powers' representatives, but also in piecing together exactly what

Montenegro was like in the middle of the nineteenth century. Many Montenegrin historians have been interested in only the political documents and the big historical events and individuals of Njegos's time or his poetry. I, however, am interested in what Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie calls *l'histoire inconsciente* (the structures and cycles of everyday life and their reciprocal relationships with what has been considered great events.) Therefore, I collected agricultural, economic, population, and criminal statistics in an effort to reconstruct Montenegrin society, economics, and politics for the period 1830-1851. My thesis is that the decisions Njegos had to make for his nation, and the results of these decisions, were not solely dependent upon the policies of the Great Powers, but on how the ramifications of these decisions actually fit in with daily life in Montenegro.

On this research trip I visited the Historical Archive in Kotor, and in Cetinje: the National Museum Archive, the Njegos Museum, the National Archive, and the National Library. I discovered there were more letters and documents relating to daily life in Montenegro – the running of the country, management of the population, etc. – than there were concerning diplomacy with the Great Powers. Many of these documents were not even written to individuals outside of the Balkans, but rather to Dubrovnik, Kotor, and Belgrade. Njegos's priorities seem to have been constructing a Montenegro which would meet the daily needs of its people: he had to correct the imbalances, not of Great Power maneuverings in the Balkans, but of famine and plague, of local disharmony and neighbor disputes. Njegos's dealings with the Great Powers, seen in light of this information, seem to be more along the lines of asking for financial help for this poor country so that he could strengthen it and make it independent. Unfortunately for Njegos and his people, this money did not come without strings attached. For example, Njegos repeatedly had to ask for a yearly pension that was promised his predecessor by Russia, and when it finally arrived, it did so only with the express condition that Montenegro stay in peace with both of its neighbors, the Turks AND the Austrians. And the money did not come directly to Njegos, but passed through many hands – of friends and of enemies – so it seems that everyone knew of his dealings with the Russians and the conditions under which the money was granted.

Another important discovery I made, first by talking to Montenegrins, and then by reading archival documents, is that the anthropologist Christopher Boehm's thesis that Montenegro was/is a refuge area is completely justified perhaps even more than he had imagined. It seems that despite the claims of some historians and politicians that Montenegrins are the same people as the Serbians, the Montenegrin culture is more of a hybrid one that seems to reflect many characteristics of the Balkan peoples, and not just those of Serbia. For example, Montenegrin Orthodoxy is quite different from that of the Serbian Orthodox church. Njegos has often been portrayed as a very lax religious leader, but after reading some archival documents and discussing religious matters with scholars, I believe that he may have been just a more accurate reflection of his people's religiosity, which seems to have been a mixture of Orthodoxy, Bogomilism, and

Islam. Also, it seems that the Montenegrins were more linguistically distinct from the Serbs in the nineteenth century than ever before or after. Although the language is viewed as only a variant of Serbian, the language of nineteenth century Montenegro reflected the varied nature of the people – including elements of Old Slavonic, Russian, Albanian, Turkish. The language of Njegos is a mixture of this as well as Western/Classical sentiments.

In summary, my research trip to Montenegro has provided me with the insight that this topic is much more complex than I had previously believed. I have discovered more questions and avenues of information to explore to make my dissertation a much more interesting and complicated argument. I would suggest for any scholars who are planning future research into the history of Montenegro to be forewarned that very little has been done outside of Yugoslavia on the area, and that the secondary literature is sometimes very politically charged. While Montenegrin history on the whole needs to be researched and written about in English, I would suggest that scholars first delve into the two other periods of modern state and identity construction: the period before Njegos, Petar I's rule (1782-1830); and the period after Njegos, Prince Danilo and King Nikola (1851-1918).