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P. COUNILLON, *L'Istros dans la Géographie de Strabon* · M. VASILJEVIĆ, *Translations of Saints' Relics in the Late Medieval Central Balkans* · V. SIMIĆ, *Popular Piety and the Paper Icons of Zaharija Orfelin* · A. SORESCU-MARINKOVIĆ & M. MIRIĆ & S. ĆIRKOVIĆ, *Assessing Linguistic Vulnerability and Endangerment in Serbia: A Critical Survey of Methodologies and Outcomes* · A. LOUPAS, *Interethnic Rivalries and Bilateral Cooperation: Aspects of Greek-Serbian Relations from the Assassination of Alexander Obrenović to the Annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1903–1908)* · V. G. PAVLOVIĆ, *Le révolutionnaire professionnel 1934–1936 Tito à Moscou* · S. G. MARKOVICH, *History of Hellenic-Serbian (Yugoslav) Alliances from Karageorge to the Balkan Pact 1817–1954* · D. GNJATOVIĆ, *Evolution of Economic Thought on Monetary Reform in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the Great War* · G. LATINOVIĆ & N. OŽEGOVIĆ, *“St. Bartholomew’s Night” of Banja Luka: The Ustasha Crime against the Serbs in the Banja Luka Area on 7 February 1942* · I. VUKADINOVIĆ, *The Shift in Yugoslav-Albanian Relations: The Establishment of Ties between Albania and the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija (1966–1969)* · M. RISTOVIĆ, *Yugoslav-Greek Relations from the End of the Second World War to 1990: Chronology, Phases, Problems and Achievements* ∞

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“St. Bartholomew’s Night” of Banja Luka

The Ustasha Crime against the Serbs in the Banja Luka Area on 7 February 1942

Abstract: Based on the preserved and accessible sources from seven archives and from the relevant literature, the authors seek to reconstruct the causes, course and consequences of the crime committed by the Ustashas against the Serbs of the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike, and in the Rakovac mine, near Banja Luka on 7 February 1942. The authors attempt to point to the main instigators and perpetrators of the crime and to estimate the number of victims. For understanding the broader context of the events, they point out the ideological roots and main features of the genocidal policy pursued by the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) against the Serbs from 1941 to 1945. Special attention is paid to the events in the area of Banja Luka during 1941, because they provided the chronological and spatial context for the crime that followed in February 1942.

Keywords: Independent State of Croatia (NDH), Ustasha, genocide, Serbs, Bosnian Krajina, Banja Luka, Drakulić, Šargovac, Motike, Rakovac

The Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH) was proclaimed on 10 April 1941, a few days after the attack of Germany and its allies on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The ideological basis of the NDH and its policy of genocide against the Serbs was grounded in the political platform of the Croatian Party of Rights (*Stranka prava*) and the proselytism of the Roman Catholic Church. The ideology of annihilation of the Serbs in the territory which the Croatian nationalists and Roman-Catholic circles considered the Croatian historical territory was conceived in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Serbs were described as immigrants in the Croatian lands in which there could be no other “political” people/nation except Croats. At the same time, the Serbs were accused of being a tool in the hands of the Austrians and Hungarians against the Croats, as well as a tool of the “Greater Serbian” ideology and policies; moreover, the Orthodox Christian Serbs, who belonged

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to the Byzantine cultural circle, were regarded as a “foreign body” in the Croatian Roman Catholic territory.¹

The NDH pursued the policy of genocide against the Serbs in the territory it encompassed in April 1941, including the whole of annexed Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the instigator of that policy was the ruling Ustasha movement. The nucleus of that movement was founded in Italy, in Bovegno near Brescia, in the second half of 1931.² “The Ustasha - the Croatian Revolutionary Organisation” developed its constitution in 1932. It set down as its goal the creation of a fully independent Croatian state “in all of its national and historical territory”,³ where the Serbs would be “driven from their [Croat] sacred soil by force and deadly weapons”.⁴

According to the May 1941 statistics from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Orthodox Serbs accounted for 1,925,000 out of some 6,300,000 inhabitants (or over 30% of the population).⁵ The German Plenipotentiary General in Zagreb, Glaise von Horstenau, recorded that the Croatian *Poglavnik* (Leader), Ante Pavelić, intended to kill 1,800,000 Orthodox Serbs, “at any cost and by all means” as early as April 1941.⁶ In early June 1941, Hitler himself told Pavelić that if the Croatian state wanted to last, it had to pursue an intolerant national policy for at least fifty years. At the beginning of July 1941, the intelligence service of the German Foreign Ministry reported to Berlin which stated that “wide circles” in Croatia believed that Serbs had no place in their country.⁷

The genocide against the Serbs in the NDH began as early as April 1941. It “destroyed all moral bonds that make one society a human community.” The headquarters of the Italian Second Army reported in June 1941 that “Croatian ultranationalism, which is losing all sense of proportion, has established a re-

¹ For more, see Vasilije Krestić, *Genocidom do Velike Hrvatske* (Belgrade: Catena mundi, 2015); Dušan Berić, *Hrvatsko pravaštvo i Srbi*, I-II (Novi Sad: Orpheus, 2005); Milan Koljanin, “Ideologija i politika uništenja Srba u NDH”, *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 1 (2011), 66-91; Viktor Novak, *Magnum crimen: pola vijeka klerikalizma u Hrvatskoj*, I-II (Belgrade: Catena mundi, 2015).

² Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 19832), 83.

³ Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941-1945* (Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber and Školska knjiga, 19782), 21-22.

⁴ Filip Škiljan, *Organizirana prisilna iseljavanja Srba iz NDH* (Zagreb: Srpsko narodno vijeće, 2014), 31-32.

⁵ Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, 106; Koljanin, “Ideologija i politika uništenja Srba u NDH”, 69-70; Jovan Mirković, “Zločini nad Srbima” u *Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj: fotomonografija* (Belgrade: Svet knjige and Muzej žrtava genocida, 2014), 67-68.

⁶ Koljanin, “Ideologija i politika uništenja Srba u NDH”, 81.

⁷ Vasa Kazimirović, *NDH u svetlu nemačkih dokumenata i dnevnika Gleza fon Horstenau 1941-1944* (Belgrade: Nova knjiga and Narodna knjiga, 1987), 106-111.

gime of violence and terror, the intensity of which is constantly increasing. The political struggle is inspired by the religious struggle and integrated into it. (...) This Croatian political-religious struggle assumes truly wild aspects, in that the Usthas get involved in a revenge and repression that can only be compared to the most obscure times of the Middle Ages."⁸ Glaise von Horstenau concluded that behind the Croatian determination to get rid of the Serbs once and for all, there was a "strong and devilishly skilfully fuelled religious intolerance - the constant effort of the Catholic Church to suppress and destroy the schismatics."⁹

The number of the murdered Serbs has never been established. In a Gestapo report dated 17 February 1942, compiled for Heinrich Himmler, it was stated that the Croats killed about 300,000 Serbs and that, because of these crimes, many Serbs fled to Serbia.¹⁰ George William Rendel, British Minister to Yugoslavia (1941-43), wondered whether the "Serbs can forget the 600,000 killed by Croats."¹¹ Major General Ernst Fick reported to Himmler on 16 March 1944 that the Usthas had taken 600,000-700,000 of "politically different" people to camps and "slaughtered them in the Balkan way."¹² Based on the reports he had received, Hermann Neubacher, Hitler's special envoy to the Balkans, estimated in his memoirs, originally published in German in 1956, that "the number of the slaughtered innocent, unarmed Serbs is about 750,000."¹³ Therefore, several hundred thousand people were killed in the NDH, including a large number of children, and the sadism and cruelty of the killings shocked the Nazi commanders, who wrote about it with contempt. With the exception of the German occupation authorities in Eastern Europe, the Croatian regime set up the largest concentration camps on the continent and started to carry out the Holocaust months before the Wannsee conference in January 1942.¹⁴

In the execution of their annihilation policy, the NDH and the Roman Catholic clergy paid special attention to the area of north-western Bosnia, i.e., Bosnian Krajina, in which Banja Luka was the regional centre. That area was part of the Vrbas Banovina, one of the nine large administrative divisions of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. According to the 1931 census, the Vrbas Banovina had

⁸ Milorad Ekmečić, *Dugo kretanje između klanja i oranja: istorija Srba u Novom veku 1492-1992* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2007), 446.

⁹ Kazimirović, *NDH u svetlu nemačkih dokumenata*, 109.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 128-129.

¹¹ Vasilije Dj. Krestić and Mira Radojević, *Jasenovac* (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 2017), 53.

¹² *Srbi u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj: izabrana dokumenta*, eds. Nikola Živković and Petar Kačavenda (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1998), 262.

¹³ Herman Nojbaher, *Specijalni zadatak Balkan* (Belgrade: Službeni list SCG, 2005), 50.

¹⁴ Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: the Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism 1941-1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), vii.

1,037,382 inhabitants, of whom 600,529 were Orthodox Serbs (58%), 250,265 Muslims (24%) and 172,787 Roman Catholics (17%) - mostly Croats. The Banja Luka district had 98,002 inhabitants, of whom 58,730 Orthodox Serbs (60%), 26,696 Roman Catholics (27%) and 11,030 Muslims (11%). The city of Banja Luka had 22,165 inhabitants, of whom 8,039 Muslims (36%), 6,769 Orthodox Serbs (31%) and 6,486 Roman Catholics (29%).¹⁵ The Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac, spoke in October 1939 about the planned colonisation of north-western Bosnia, adding that Bosnia would “soon be Croatian”.¹⁶ With the capitulation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on 17 April 1941 and the division of its territory, the NDH set up its own authorities, the basic administrative unit of which was a *velika* [great] *župa*, which was divided into *kotars* (county). In June 1941, ten such *župas* were established, and the following month, the territory of NDH was divided into 22 *velika župa*s. One of them was the *Velika Župa* of Sana and Luka, with its seat in Banja Luka, and it also included Prijedor, Sanski Most, Ključ and Kotor Varoš. Nonetheless, the key figure in the administrative structure of power in Banja Luka and Bosnian Krajina was Viktor Gutić,¹⁷ with the rank of *stožernik*, i.e. the head of the Ustasha *stožer* (headquarters) in Bosnian Krajina from April 1941 – he thus was the “liquidator of the former Vrbas Banovina”.¹⁸ Gutić arrived in Banja Luka on 17 April 1941, just two days

¹⁵ *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31. marta 1931. godine*, vol. II: *Prisutno stanovništvo po veroispovesti* (Belgrade: Opšta državna statistika, 1938), 110; Perko Vojinović, *Vrbaska banovina u političkom sistemu Kraljevine Jugoslavije* (Banja Luka: Filozofski fakultet, 1997), 34–36.

¹⁶ Koljanin, “Ideologija i politika uništenja Srba u NDH”, 69–70.

¹⁷ Viktor Gutić was born in 1901 in Banja Luka. He graduated in law from the University of Zagreb and then worked as a lawyer in Banja Luka. He was a member of the regional leadership of the Croatian Peasant Party, but became a supporter of Ante Pavelić after 1931. He served a prison sentence in Sremska Mitrovica for propagating Ustasha ideology and politics. He had no reputation in Banja Luka and was known only for his drinking and unpaid bills, and he was exposed to ridicule due to his homosexuality. After the proclamation of the NDH, he became the head of the Ustasha headquarters in Bosnian Krajina from April to August 1941, holding the levers of power in his hands and pursuing the state policy of genocide against the Serbs. He plundered the property of Serbs and Jews, and donated large sums of money acquired in this way to the Croatian Roman Catholic organisations. At the end of August, Pavelić transferred him to a higher position in the Ministry of the Interior of the NDH in Zagreb. From April to August 1942, he was a high-ranking official in Karlovac and then returned to Zagreb. After the collapse of the NDH, he fled to Italy via Austria, where he was arrested by the Western Allies and extradited to Yugoslavia. He was sentenced to death and hanged as a war criminal in Banja Luka in 1947. See *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu: studija Milana Vukmanovića i izbor iz gradje*, eds. Verica M. Stošić and Vladan Vukliš (Banja Luka: Udruženje arhivskih radnika Republike Srpske and Arhiv Republike Srpske, 2017), 33–35.

¹⁸ *Hrvatska Krajina*, no. 25, Banja Luka, 15 June 1941, 1.

after parts of the German 183rd Division entered it.¹⁹ He was Head of the Ustaša Headquarters in Bosnian Croatia and the Committee for the former Vrbas Banovina, as the political-administrative body based in Banja Luka was called, until mid-August 1941, when he was transferred to Zagreb to a new position.²⁰ The term "Bosnian Croatia" referred to the whole of Bosnia, not only Bosnian Krajina (renamed "Croatian Krajina"), i.e. the former Vrbas Banovina.²¹ Gutić was "the main commander, organiser and instigator of all the crimes committed at that time in Banja Luka, Sanski Most, Prijedor and other places".²² Even before the Second World War, he had used to say that he was "thirsty for Serbian blood".²³

Besides Gutić and his Ustaša headquarters, the Roman Catholic monastery in Petrićevac was the other centre from which instructions were given for the persecution, killing and violence against the Serbs in Banja Luka and its outskirts.²⁴ The highest-ranking Roman Catholic prelate in Bosnian Krajina, Bishop of Banja Luka Jozo Garić, was an ardent supporter of *Stožernik* Gutić and his politics, assisting in conversion of Orthodox Serbs to Roman Catholicism.²⁵ His attitude was in line with Archbishop Stepinac's proclamation to the Roman Catholic clergy of 28 April 1941 to the effect that they should respond to the "sublime work of preserving and promoting the NDH", which was "a long-

¹⁹ Dušan Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica u ratu i revoluciji* (Banja Luka: Savez udruženja boraca NOR-a Opštine Banja Luka, 1968), 90.

²⁰ *Hrvatska Krajina*, no. 49, Banja Luka, 10 August 1941, 1; *Hrvatska Krajina*, no. 50, Banja Luka, 13 August 1941, 2.

²¹ *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu*, 35.

²² Arhiv Republike Srpske [Archives of the Republic of Srpska, hereafter ARS], Banja Luka, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators, 1941–1946 [Okružna komisija za ispitivanje ratnih zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača 1945–1946], no. 414/45, 30 November 1945.

²³ Arhiv Srpske pravoslavne crkve [Archives of the Serbian Orthodox Church], Belgrade, The Synodal Commission for Investigating the Ustaša Crimes in 1941–1945 [Sinodska komisija za istraživanje ustaških zločina 1941–1945], Reports of Refugees [Izveštaji izbeglih], The Banja Luka Diocese [Banjalučka eparhija], Document: Izveštaj protorejera Dušana M. Mačkića, paroha i arhijerejskog namjesnika banjalučkog, Vranjevo, Banat, 22 October 1941; Bojan Stojnić, Radovan Pilipović and Veljko Djurić Mišina, *Svjedočenja o zatiranju: prilozi za istoriju stradanja Srba Banjalučke eparhije 1941. godine* (Banja Luka: Arhiv Republike Srpske and Udruženje arhivskih radnika Republike Srpske; Belgrade: Muzej žrtava genocida, 2016), 75.

²⁴ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Document: Report on the crimes in Banjaluka County, 13 November 1945.

²⁵ *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu*, 82, 126.

dreamed and desired ideal”, and fulfil “their duty to the young Croatian state”.²⁶ Cordial relations between the Ustashas and the Roman Catholic clergy in Banja Luka and Bosnian Krajina were confirmed in mid-May 1941 when Gutić visited the Petrićevac monastery and praised the Franciscans for their pre-war cooperation with the Ustashas. He declared in front of the Roman Catholic friars: “Every Croat who stands up today for our most recent enemies is not only a bad Croat, but also an adversary and a hindrance to the premeditated, well-calculated plan to cleanse our Croatia of unwanted elements.”²⁷

In his confidential report to General Glaise von Horstenau of 14 June 1941, Captain Artur Hefner stated that Gutić had been the main initiator of the systematically committed crimes against the Serbs in Bosnian Krajina since April, adding: “All the Serbs who did not manage to hide in the woods or to cross the border were slaughtered without mercy. Thus, often neither women nor children were spared.” Captain Hefner sent another report to General Horstenau on 7 August 1941: “Given that the Serbian population, absolutely the most numerous and exposed to the night-time bandit and murderous raids on the part of Ustashas, have been driven from their villages into the woods with no conditions for survival for a longer period, resistance has been bound to emerge, which is now being suppressed under the pretext of being a Serbian rebellion. But this is not at all about the Serbs fighting against the Croatian state, nor are they [Serbs] some chetniks or communists, but simply persecuted people driven to despair who would rather die with a weapon or even just a piece of wood or a stone in hand [...] than let themselves be slaughtered like cattle night after night, or starve in the woods.”²⁸

Pavelić had decided to make Banja Luka the “state centre” of the future Croatian state as early as late 1939.²⁹ The *Poglavnik* and Gutić talked on 23 May 1941 about Banja Luka as the capital city of the NDH. Pavelić “confirmed the decision made” and told Gutić that he knew the city well because he had resided there as a young man. The Italian envoy in Zagreb, Raffaello Casertano, reported on 24 May 1941 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome that there were rumours about the transfer of the seat of government to Banja Luka to avoid a possible rebellion in that region, because even the politicians failed to hide their concern about the growing dissatisfaction. On 25 May 1941, Gutić stated at a gathering in Banja Luka that “the capital and the surroundings should

²⁶ Novak, *Magnum crimen*, II, 37–39; Gojo Riste Dakina, *Genocid nad Srbima u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj: budi katolik ili umri* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1995), 47–48.

²⁷ *Hrvatska Krajina*, no. 12, Banja Luka, 16 May 1941, 3.

²⁸ Kazimirović, *NDH u svetlu nemačkih dokumenata*, 112.

²⁹ Rafael Brčić, “Kombinacije ustaša o Banjoj Luci kao centru Nezavisne Države Hrvatske”, in *Banja Luka u novijoj istoriji (1878–1945): zbornik radova s naučnog skupa održanog u Banjoj Luci od 18–20. novembra 1976. godine* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 1978), 654.

be cleansed of Serbs, Jews and Roma" to make room for government officials in the city and for Croats from abroad as well as construction workers in the surroundings.³⁰

General Fortner, commander of the German 718th Division headquartered in Banja Luka, opposed Gutić's actions against the Serbs because they strengthened the Serbian insurgent movement in Bosnian Krajina. In late July 1941, there were open arguments between Fortner and Gutić – the German general threatened to arrest Gutić and his associates. For that reason, Pavelić was forced to recall Gutić from Banja Luka and keep him in Zagreb as an official of the Ministry of the Interior (on 25 August 1941). On 17 September 1941, Lieutenant Mirko Beljan was appointed head of the Ustasha Headquarters in Banja Luka.³¹ However, Gutić remained quite influential in Banja Luka and Bosnian Krajina even after leaving for Zagreb, since the local authorities consisted of his trusted associates. Besides, even after August 1941, he continued to visit Banja Luka and spend some time there, as for example from December 1941 to April 1942.³²

Apart from the Ustasha Movement, it was the Roman Catholic Church that played an important role in the implementation of the policy aimed at the complete destruction of Serbs. At least 133 Roman Catholic priests took part in the atrocities committed against the Serbs in the NDH from 1941 to 1945 as organisers, 27 were personally involved in the crimes, whilst another 128 performed the rite of conversion of Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism. Pavelić decorated 219 Roman Catholic priests.³³ One of the most notorious perpetrators of atrocities against the Serbs was the Franciscan friar Miroslav Filipović, known as Fra Tomislav and also under the names of Vjekoslav and Mijo, or under the surname of Majstorović, but the most telling is his nickname "Fra Satan".³⁴

³⁰ *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu*, 55, 57.

³¹ *Hrvatska Krajina*, no. 67, Banja Luka, 1 October 1941, 1; Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 106–107.

³² *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu*, 100, 291.

³³ Dakina, *Genocid nad Srbima*, 61.

³⁴ Miroslav Filipović was born in Jajce in 1915. He attended the Roman Catholic schools in Visoko and Sarajevo, joined the Franciscan Order in 1932, receiving the name Fra Tomislav, and became a priest in 1939. He came to Banja Luka in mid-1940. He was a chaplain in the Petrićevac monastery and a pastor in the village of Šargovac near Banja Luka. He took part in the crimes against the Serbs in the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike on 7 February 1942, following which he joined the Ustashes and received the rank of an officer. It should be noted that the surname Majstorović, under which he became known after these crimes, was derived from the word *majstor* ("master" in the sense of a skilled practitioner), which was, according to another prominent Ustasha, Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, a reference to his prowess in massacring the Serbs. Fra Tomislav was one of the commanders in the system of the Jasenovac-Stara Gradiška concentration camp from June 1942 to March 1943. He

The armed resistance of Serbs which started in reaction to the Ustasha atrocities led to a regrouping of German troops. German military units left Banja Luka on 7 January 1942 to participate in the operations against the Serbian insurgents in Eastern Bosnia. On the initiative of Viktor Gutić, a battalion of the Poglavnik's Bodyguard Brigade, which was made up of Croats from Herzegovina, was brought from Zagreb to Banja Luka. The Italian Vice-Consul in Banja Luka, Oberto Fabbiani, wrote on 13 January 1942 that the Bishop of Banja Luka, Jozo Garić, publicly expressed his satisfaction that German soldiers had left the city. Fabbiani recorded that after the arrival of Ustashas from Zagreb a major cleansing of "outlaws" would be carried out – he was told that "this city needs to be cleansed of all those disloyal and suspicious elements that could launch an activity in favour of the rebels or against the current regime".³⁵ For that purpose, Pavelić sent his well-equipped and well-trained military unit under the command of Captain Nikola Zelić.³⁶

During January and February 1942, Gutić was in Banja Luka. He officially had no authority there because the local Ustasha *stožernik* was Mirko Beljan, while the head of the *Velika Župa* of Sana and Luka from July 1941 to April 1942 was Colonel Ladislav Aleman, a former Austro-Hungarian officer (he was later transferred to the Ministry of Home Guard in Zagreb). Even so, Gutić was the main decision-maker in Banja Luka and its surroundings. The decision to kill the Serbs in the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike was made in Gutić's house.³⁷ According to a German report, on 6 February 1942 a meeting was held in the Petrićevac monastery between Gutić, Ferdo Stilinović, Chairman of the Banja Luka Court, and many Roman Catholic priests, "among whom a certain priest Filipović, who then attended the slaughter itself".³⁸ Thus, Gutić, Miroslav Filipović and several other prominent Croats from Banja Luka made final arrangements for what was to follow on 7 February 1942 – it was decided to use cold weapons for the killing of Serbs as the gunfire could alarm the villagers and help them flee. On 7 February 1942, between three and four

personally participated in the slaughter of children and came to be known among the camp prisoners as "Fra Sotona" (Fra Satan). He later served in Mostar, Lika, Eastern and Central Bosnia, and he stayed in Banja Luka several times during the winter of 1944-1945. After the collapse of the NDH and the liberation of Yugoslavia, Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović was sentenced to death and executed as a war criminal in Zagreb in 1945. See Joža Horvat and Zdenko Štambuk, *Dokumenti o protunarodnom radu i zločinima jednog dijela katoličkog klera* (Zagreb: Štamparija Rožanski, 1946), 166; Novak, *Magnum crimen I*, 155-160; *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu*, 96-97.

³⁵ Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 187-188.

³⁶ Mirković, *Zločini nad Srbima*, 159.

³⁷ *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu*, 72, 291.

³⁸ Kazimirović, *NDH u svjetlu nemačkih dokumenata*, 122.

o'clock in the morning, the Ustasha battalion surrounded the village and started the slaughter.³⁹

An account of the situation in Banja Luka and the preparations for the massacre of February 1942 was also given by Dušan Ivezić, a civil servant, on 25 December 1946 in Sarajevo before the State Commission for Investigating the War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators (Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača). According to him, the instigator of the atrocities committed in Banja Luka and its outskirts was, in fact, Fra Kruno Brkić, the pre-war secretary of Bishop Garić. Fra Kruno Brkić was a supporter of Gutić. Distinctly sympathetic to the Ustasha movement, he showed his loyalty to the NDH in 1941 by paying reverence to Pavelić. The intimacy and friendship between Brkić and Gutić began when Gutić, in order to curry favour with the Roman Catholic Church, settled the debts of the Banja Luka Diocese to the First Croatian Savings Bank with the money he had collected as "contributions" of the Banja Luka Serbs. One of the prominent Serb merchants who was imprisoned and forced to "contribute" was Djoko Koljević. According to Dušan Ivezić, Fra Kruno Brkić proposed not just the destruction of the local Serbs, but also the settlement of Croat refugees from Herzegovina in their place. The rationale of such action was to cleanse the area in the vicinity of the Petrićevac Monastery from non-Catholic population. Moreover, Brkić came into conflict with some Muslim organisations which demanded the settlement of Muslim refugees in the same area. The decision to annihilate the Serbs was reached at a conference organised by Gutić in late January 1942.⁴⁰ There is further evidence for the preparations which had long preceded the execution of the crime. Jovo Mitrović, an eyewitness from Drakulić, testified that he had been informed by local Croats that the slaughter had been planned for the evening of 2 August 1941, but it had not taken place because no weapons had arrived from Banja Luka.⁴¹

³⁹ Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 188–189.

⁴⁰ Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia, hereafter AJ], Belgrade, The State Commission for Establishing the Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators [Državna komisija za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača], Fonds no. 110, Evidence Material [Dokazni materijali], Dossier nos. 4210–4227, fascicle 463, inv. no. 60288; Record made on 25 December 1946 before the State [Zemaljska] Commission for Investigating the Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators in Sarajevo, 1–2; *Ibid.*, inv. no. 60303, Record on the Interrogation of Viktor Gutić. On that occasion, Gutić also referred to Fra Kruno Brkić as follows: "In 1941, he went with other Catholic priests to pay reverence to Pavelić and to give him his blessing for the newly-established state, by which the priests recognised the Ustasha state as their own."

⁴¹ Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine [Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, hereafter ABiH], Sarajevo, The State Commission for Investigating War Crimes [Zemaljska komisija za utvrđ-

The Croatian authorities, both local and regional, produced their own reports on the atrocities of 7 February 1942 against the Serb civilians in the Rakovac mine and in the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike. On 8 February 1942, the Banja Luka *zdrug* [the joint military force of the city] informed Zagreb that the Ustasha company of the Poglavnik's Bodyguard Battalion had killed 31 miners in the coal mine with pickaxes and about 500 people in the village of Motike afterwards. The *zdrug* requested that such arbitrary actions, undertaken without its approval, be prevented "because there is a danger that the remaining, still peaceful, civilians will join the rebels out of fear of violence".⁴² Two days later, the head of Banja Luka County reported to the police department in Banja Luka that Andrija Golub, the mayor of Budžak, had informed them that in the early morning of 7 February an Ustasha detachment had come from Banja Luka to the villages of Drakulić and Šargovac, and "killed all Greek-Easterners [the Orthodox Christians] regardless of their gender and age. All families from about 150 households were killed. Probably 1300-1500 people were killed. The killing was done with axes." The report also stated that the corpses of the killed were lying around and that "people" were burying them, while some corpses were dragged by dogs and pigs. The livestock and grain were transported to Banja Luka and stored in the Ustasha and military warehouses.⁴³ The head of the Banja Luka district reported to the county police department on 10 February that he had learned from Marko Marić, the mayor of Saračica, that an Ustasha detachment had come to the village of Motike on Saturday, 7 February 1942, around six o'clock in the morning, and killed all the "Greek-Eastern" inhabitants from about fifty houses, "women and children alike. The killings were carried out partly with rifles and partly with knives, axes, etc." The exact number of victims was unknown, but Marić's estimate was 500-600 people. The inhabitants of Saračica had to surrender the remaining livestock, grain and other things to the Ustasha Battalion.⁴⁴

On 11 February 1942, Colonel Aleman, the Veliki Župan of Sana and Luka, sent a report on the situation in Banja Luka to the Vice-Prime Minister of the NDH, Džafer Kulenović. He reported that the Ustasha Battalion had arrived in Banja Luka a month earlier, and that its officers and non-commissioned officers had looked for accommodation. On that occasion, they had been very arrogant and surly both in front of government officials and of citizens. They had

jivanje ratnih zločina], Minutes [Zapisnici], Banja Luka County, box 3, Drakulić (village) 1945-1946, inv. nos. 16907-55461, Minute inv. no. 27766.

⁴² Vojni arhiv [Military Archives, hereafter VA], Belgrade, The Crimes in the NDH [Zločini u NDH], Daily reports on the situation in the cities in the NDH [Dnevni izvještaji o situaciji u gradovima NDH].

⁴³ VA, The Crimes in the NDH, 1, Report on the killings in the municipality of Budžak.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Report on the killings in the village of Motike.

made excessive demands and required immediate and complete compliance. The Ustasha Battalion patrolled the city, breaching the agreement reached with the military and civilian authorities in Banja Luka and interfering in their work. The actions of the patrolling Ustashes were cruel and unrestrained. Some people were arrested and some of the arrested disappeared – there was a reasonable suspicion that they had been killed.⁴⁵

On 7 February 1942, at four o'clock in the morning, ten members of the Ustasha Battalion took control of the Rakovac mine. Several workers of the "Greek-Eastern" faith, who were sleeping in mine barracks, were killed immediately. Another fifty Ustashes arrived at around eight o'clock and waited for the second shift workers. Upon their arrival, the Ustashes asked for their identifications and separated the "Greek-Easterners" from the others, tied their hands behinds their backs, took them outside the mine and "knocked them down by hitting them on the back of their heads with blunt tools. After knocking them down, they finished them off with pickaxes." The Ustashes did the same with the third shift miners after they had come out of the pit. "They killed 37 out of the total of 68 Greek-Eastern employees at the mine." But more of them were probably killed in the slaughter in the villages of Motike, Šargovac and Drakulić. After the crime in Rakovac, the same Ustasha unit, under the command of First Lieutenant Josip Mišlov⁴⁶ and accompanied by Fra Tomislav Filipović, continued the "slaughtering of the Greek-Easterners in Drakulić near Banja Luka. There, they gathered residents from a number of houses, carrying small children in their arms, and, having crowded them together, slaughtered them with axes and pickaxes. Around 1500 people were killed in that manner." One of the victims was a servant of the Croatian Minister of Transportation and Public Works, Hilmija Bešlagić. The Ustashes drove away the sleigh and the car of Minister Bešlagić. Another atrocity took place in the village of Šargovac. On their way back to the city, the Ustashes also slaughtered the inhabitants of the village of Motike, where about 70 families with some 715 members were killed. Colonel Aleman claimed that "the total number of victims in the slaughters committed was about 2300 people". The Croat inhabitants of the surrounding villages were ordered by the Ustashes to bury the bodies of the murdered villagers. On that occasion, they found some twenty severely injured survivors, who were then hospitalised

⁴⁵ Ibid., Report on the Situation in Banja Luka, 11 February 1942.

⁴⁶ Josip Mišlov was born in 1906 on the island of Ugljan near Zadar. He was a sailor, and in 1935 he underwent Ustasha training in the Lipari Islands, Italy. He was a company commander in the Second Battalion with the rank of first lieutenant. He was one of the most notorious perpetrators of the crime against the Serbs in the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike. For more, see Lazar Lukajić, *Fratri i ustaše kolju - zločini i svedoci: pokolj Srba u selima kod Banja Luke Drakuliću, Šargovcu i Motikama 7. februara i Piskavici i Ivanjskoj 5. i 12. februara 1942. godine* (Belgrade: Fond za istraživanje genocida, 2005), 30, 158-159.

in Banja Luka. After the crime, Aleman wrote, the Ustashas had taken away the plundered food, cattle and furniture and, according to the unverified information, sold some of the cattle to local butchers. Aleman also stressed that such actions raised the threat of retaliation against the Roman Catholic and Muslim population of the neighbouring villages on the part of "Chetnik-communist gangs". "A few days ago," he added, the same battalion had killed about 80 hostages arrested by the German military authorities.⁴⁷

"The Greek-Easterners in the villages where the slaughter took place were completely loyal and peaceful citizens. As these villages are surrounded by those inhabited by Croats, they were not even able to make any contact with the rebels. Therefore, it is not possible to suspect any illegal or insurgent actions on the part of the killed people, which the command of the Ustasha battalion has stated as the reason for its described action," Aleman did away conclusively with the explanations put forward by the responsible Ustashas. He also stated that the crime had caused huge excitement and resentment in all classes of Banja Luka citizens, who condemned in the harshest words the atrocity against the innocent population, fearing both the revenge of Serb Chetniks and further illegal actions of Ustashas (depending on their religious affiliation). "It is generally believed that the spiritual instigator of this carnage is Dr Viktor Gutić, a great prefect [*veliki župan*] assigned to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, currently in Banja Luka, in view of his previously proven outrages. It was established that he was in constant contact with the command of the Ustasha battalion and all the contempt and revolt of the citizens was directed to him." The citizens of Banja Luka had no hope for normalisation and improvement of the situation, Aleman asserted, as long as Viktor Gutić, his brother Blaž and his closest associate Stjepan Momčinović were in the city and had any influence on the authorities and institutions. Aleman asked Kulenović to remove them from the city and strip them of all possibility of interfering in local affairs. Due to the abovementioned and similar events which had taken place in the Velika Župa of Sana and Luka during Gutić's term as *Stožernik* and Commissioner for the former Vrbas Banovina, Colonel Aleman concluded, it was understandable why the Ustasha movement was not popular among local people.⁴⁸ Aleman's report was understood in Zagreb as a criticism levelled at Pavelić himself and his policy. Therefore, as early as 13 March 1942, he was dismissed by Poglavnik's order and placed at the disposal of the Ministry of Home Guard. At the end of the same month, Petar Gvozdić was appointed the new head of the Velika Župa of Sana and Luka.⁴⁹

On 11 February 1942, the head of the Ustasha and Supervisory Service for the Velika Župa of Sana and Luka sent a letter to Eugen Dido Kvaternik,

⁴⁷ VA, The Crimes in the NDH, I, Report on the Situation in Banja Luka, 11 February 1942.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 193-195.

Commander of the Ustasha Supervisory Service in Zagreb, in which he provided another account of the most recent outrage. He also stated that the action was carried out by a company of Poglavnik's Second Bodyguard Battalion led by First Lieutenant Josip Mišlov and accompanied by Reverend Vjekoslav [Miroslav] Filipović, a priest from the Petrićevac monastery and now a captain in the Ustasha battalion. Around four o'clock in the morning of 7 February, about ten Ustashes came to the Rakovac mine. Several "Greek-Eastern" Christian workers were called out of the mine and the Ustashes took them away and murdered in the immediate vicinity. At eight o'clock in the morning, the rest of the Ustasha company arrived and they caught the first shift workers, who came to work, asked for their identifications, set the "Greek-Eastern" believers aside from the rest, took them away with their hands tied and killed nearby. "The killing was carried out by hitting individuals in the back of their head with blunt objects and finishing them off by hitting them in the head with pickaxes." Having murdered them all, they captured the third shift workers coming out of the mine pit and murdered them in the same way. The remaining workers were ordered to dig a pit and bury the slain miners. "37 were buried and, according to the statements of some workers, up to 52 were killed." At three o'clock in the afternoon, the Ustashes arrived again at the mine and checked the identity of all workers, but this time no one was hurt. In the Rakovac mine, there were 68 Serb miners and those who survived took to the woods.⁵⁰ Anto Josipović, a Croat from Motike, who was a student and a mining intern at the time of the crime, testified on 1 December 1945. According to him, it was Franjo Petrović and Filipović-Majstorović (clad in Ustasha uniform) who asked the miners to produce their identifications. After the Serbs had been singled out, 36 were killed, and the manager ordered the rest to continue working.⁵¹

From Rakovac, the Ustashes proceeded to Drakulić, where those of them who were locals (Ivo Jurić, Stipe Golub and Šimun Pletikosa) showed them the houses of "Greek-Easterners", from which they took people out and killed them "one by one, men and women, and children too". Massacre was also carried out in the village of Šargovac and the number of victims was between 1,300 and 1,500. "The killing was done in the same way as in the Rakovac mine, only in these villages they used axes as well." On their way back, the Ustashes stopped by the village of Motike and slaughtered another 70 families in the same manner. The

⁵⁰ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Document: Information about the Ustasha action in the villages of [Podaci o akciji ustaša u selima] Rakovac, Šargovac, Drakulić i Motike - Izvještaj R. Z. povjerenika i pouzdanika Ustaške i nadzorne službe za Veliku župu Sana i Luka na ruke Eugenu Kvaterniku zapovjedniku Zapovjedništva Ustaške nadzorne službe u Zagrebu, 11 February 1942.

⁵¹ ABiH, The State Commission for Investigating War Crimes, Minutes, Banja Luka County, box 8, Minute inv. no. 27758.

Ustashas ordered the Croat inhabitants to bury the killed ones – the burying began the same day and ended on 10 February. “There were corpses eaten by pigs and dogs.” The Ustashas then returned to the three villages and pillaged food, cattle, poultry and furniture.⁵²

The motive for this “action” could not be established, apart from the allegation that the “Greek-Easterners” had supplied the Chetniks with explosives used for the destruction of railways, and that some of the villagers had fled into the woods and joined the Chetniks. However, the author of the report claimed that the “Greek-Easterners” were peaceful and not assisting the Chetniks, since they were completely surrounded by Croat villages. The report stated that such behaviour of the Ustashas and their interfering in the powers of local authorities caused great indignation and panic among the people, including the surrounding Croat villagers who feared Chetnik retaliation. It was deemed necessary to put a stop to the arbitrariness of the Ustashas in the interest of peace and order, and also because it was ultimately detrimental to the standing of the Ustasha movement.⁵³

Several local Croats gave their testimonies about the abovementioned atrocities. Ante Josipović said on 11 February 1942 that 70 families were killed in Motike and that only the family of Trifun Brković survived because they hid in the basement. Ivo Jurić, a local Ustasha perpetrator, testified on the same day that the Ustashas “called people to come out of the house one by one and usually killed them behind the house, hitting them in the head with an axe. They then carried the children who remained in the house out and gather them together and kill them too by hitting them in the head with an axe.” Another local Ustasha from Šargovac, Andrija Golub, confirmed Jurić’s account: “The killing was carried out in such a way that they were usually hit in the head with a blunt object and then beaten down, the blunt object appearing to be an axe. They [Ustashas] finished the killing there quickly and went towards Drakulić. They first stopped at the house of Djuro Glamočanin and that’s where they started killing. They gathered all Greek-Easterners from the whole village, men as well as women and children, and killed them. I think they finished the job in Drakulić by 12 o’clock and then they went to Šargovac, where they did the same thing. All Greek-Easterners were killed one by one, starting from a day-old child up, men and women alike.” Some resistance was offered in a single house in Drakulić, but the Ustashas overpowered the people and killed them after having tortured them.⁵⁴

⁵² ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Document: Information about the Ustasha action in the villages of [Podaci o akciji ustaša u selima] Rakovac, Šargovac, Drakulić i Motike, 11 February 1942.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 189-191.

The Ustasha guides were also Ante Pletikosa, Stipo Jurić and Mirko Jurić,⁵⁵ and Ante Marić, Antun Holić, Niko Kovačević and Ilija Kovačević in Motike.⁵⁶ The surviving witnesses similarly described the course of events in a statement given on 17 July 1946 in Drakulić. According to them, it all started at five o'clock in the morning of 7 February 1942. At the house of Djuro Glamočanin, Miroslav Filipović (Fra Tomislav) took a six-month-old child in his arms and, after giving an encouraging speech to the Ustashas, cut his head off. By eleven o'clock in the morning more than 700 people had been killed near their homes with cold weapons. Some 70 people, including many children, were burned alive in the barn of Mitar Mihajlović. After two or three months, the Ustasha authorities settled Croats from Herzegovina and the Livno, Duvno and Glamoč area in the houses of the murdered Serbs, and they remained in Drakulić until the end of the war.⁵⁷

On 23 February 1942, the German security police commander also reported on the massacre of Serbs: "The Poglavnik's bodyguards slaughtered the miners of the Orthodox faith from all three shifts. The number of the killed varies between 31 and 63 people. In the village of Drakulić everyone was killed, from a baby in a crib to a 90-year-old man. The village of Motike was dealt with in the same way. There was also a bloodbath in the village of Šargovac. The murders were committed on orders of the Catholic priest Filipović and two sons of Marko Pletikosa from Budžak. People from 124 households were killed – a total of 1,500 people in one day. In the barn of the peasant Mitrović, 50 people were set on fire. In Drakulić, all families with the surname of Glamočanin were killed, and in Šargovac, it is said that 53 children from the public school were killed. Small children were impaled on bayonets by the Ustashas..."⁵⁸

A head of the Banja Luka district reported to the Banja Luka police department on 25 February that the population of the "Greek-Eastern faith" in the villages around the city had been peaceful prior to the Ustasha outrage. But, on 7 February 1942, about 100 members of the Ustasha battalion, including Filipović-Majstorović from the Petrićevac monastery, slaughtered the Serbs in the Rakovac mine and in the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike; "about 1,600-1,700 Greek-Eastern men, women and children were killed with axes and ... knives". It was noticed that, since then, Serb villagers sought refuge in the woods and the remaining ones were so frightened that they did not stay in

⁵⁵ Horvat and Štambuk, *Dokumenti*, 167-168.

⁵⁶ Lukajić, *Fratri i ustaše kolju*, 168.

⁵⁷ AJ, 110, Evidence Material, Dossiers nos. 4210-4227, fascicle 463, Minute no. 7, inv. no. 55461, Document: Zapisnik sastavljen 17. jula 1946. god. u Drakulićima, srez banjalučki, po Zemaljskoj komisiji za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njegovih pomagača, 1-2.

⁵⁸ *Godišnjak Muzeja žrtava genocida – tematski broj. Dragoje Lukić – roditelj pokošenog naraštaja* (Belgrade: Muzej žrtava genocida, 2008), 122.

their houses during the night, but rather slept in barns, pigsties and elsewhere. The feeling of depression, insecurity and fear also spread among the Croats and Muslims, and there was a great interest in the results of the investigation and the punishment of the perpetrators.⁵⁹ On 28 February 1942 the Ustasha Supervisory Service [*Ustaška Nadzorna Služba*] from Zagreb ordered the Banja Luka police department to arrest Fra Tomislav Filipović from the Petrićevac monastery. Three days later, this task was assigned to Mirko Matijević and Dragutin Grgić, who reported the next day that they had not found Fra Tomislav – they had learned that he had set off with a group of Poglavnik's bodyguards in the direction of Bosanska Gradiška.⁶⁰

Another report also detailed how an Ustasha company under the command of First Lieutenant Josip Mišlov, together with Friar Vjekoslav Filipović, took control of the Rakovac mine, separated 37 Serb miners from the rest and killed them with pickaxes in a nearby field. Then the village of Drakulić was besieged, where about 1,430 Serbs were murdered. After the slaughter in Drakulić, the Ustashas committed the same crime in Motike and Šargovac. A native of Motike, Mile Kasipović, acted as their guide in his native village, where 672 Serbs from 90 households were killed; 114 Serbs from 18 households were slain in Šargovac, while ten people escaped. The same report gave a total number of 2,216 murdered Serb civilians, men, women and children. It should also be noted that Eugen Dido Kvaternik promoted Miroslav Filipović (Fra Tomislav) to the rank of Ustasha captain and sent him to the Jasenovac concentration camp, where he became a commander under the name of Miroslav Majstorović.⁶¹ A note made by the political department of the German Embassy in Zagreb also confirmed the course of events near Banja Luka: "An Ustasha detachment under the command of two officers and the Franciscan Friar Filipović is conducting a cleansing operation in Motike, Drakulić and Šargovac in which over 880 people of the Orthodox religion were killed, of whom 53 school children from Šargovac..."⁶²

On 24 April 1942, the district authorities in Banja Luka had information that there were large quantities of grain as well as cattle in the "cleared area", and decided to give the poor residents and refugees in Banja Luka part of the property left behind the murdered Serbs.⁶³ Thirty-three horses and 261 head of cattle were confiscated from all three villages; 157 head of cattle were given to the city slaughterhouse for the purpose of feeding the population; 102 Croats

⁵⁹ VA, The Crimes in the NDH, 3 Report from Banja Luka [Izvjestaji Glavnom stožeru, Izvještaj iz Banjaluke].

⁶⁰ VA, The Crimes in the NDH, 1, Arrest of Priest Tomislav Filipović.

⁶¹ Mirković, *Zločini nad Srbima*, 159.

⁶² *Srbi u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj*, 214; Mirković, *Zločini nad Srbima*, 159.

⁶³ Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 191.

and Muslims from Banja Luka and the surrounding villages were each given a head of cattle.⁶⁴

Very few Serbs survived the slaughter in the villages of Drakulić, Motike and Šargovac. The survivors were protected by some Croatian families from the neighbouring villages, for example that of Jozo Lipovac. Mile Todorinović described his ordeal as follows: "I came to my house and it was deserted; only cows were mooing in the barn. When I came out of the house, I heard some squeaking. I came closer and found a heap of bodies - some 70 men, children, women, about a hundred metres from my house. One of them was sitting and sobbing. I came closer and called him, but he didn't understand me. He was cut in the cerebellum. I recognised him - Sredić Stojan. He had a shoe on one foot and the other one was bare. It seemed to me that one little corpse was my youngest daughter and then I fainted. After a while I got up and went away. They were still moaning and calling out. The snow was red all around for about fifteen metres. I set off because the Ustashas were coming, singing their song."⁶⁵ Mile Todorinović, one of the survivors from Drakulić, testified on 30 July 1945 that Ivan Gagula, a Croat commissioner (*povjerenik*) for Drakulić, told Fatima Grbić in May 1942 that they had killed the Serbs "so that they wouldn't spread". According to the testimony of Desa Jokić, Gagula managed the property of the killed Serbs. On one occasion, Gagula asked Desa Jokić how she had stayed alive, cursing her Serbian mother. He not only refused to give her any grain, he intended to kill her, but was prevented by "some agent".⁶⁶

Jovo Vukobrad, who found himself in the village of Budžak, where he brought some hay, provided another testimony. He was anxious and asked Marko Lipovac, a Croat, if he had seen the column of Ustashas heading towards Drakulić. Lipovac hid Vukobrad and a few others, telling them: "Hide in my barn, all your families have been killed. The Ustashas are slaughtering and killing one by one." This group of people spent six days in his barn and then Lipovac went to the abbot of the Petrićevac monastery to ask him if there was any chance to save the survivors. The abbot replied: "Our Poglavnik is doing everything with God's approval, and the Church has blessed all that has been done and it [Church] will not regard that as a sin, so there is no other way for those who have remained than to meet the same fate as the others who happened to be in the village on the day of the massacre."⁶⁷

The news about the February 1942 massacre reached Belgrade through the Serb refugees who gave statements to the Commissariat for Refugees and Displaced Persons. Milorad Novaković gave such a statement as early as 19

⁶⁴ Lukajić, *Fratri i ustaše kolju*, 319-323.

⁶⁵ Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 190-191.

⁶⁶ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes.

⁶⁷ Horvat and Štambuk, *Dokumenti*, 166-167.

February, estimating the number of victims at “about 2,800 Serbs, maybe more. Certainly not less.”⁶⁸ Djordje Bajić, a caterer from Banja Luka who fled to Belgrade in April 1942, had witnessed the Ustashas drive the plundered cattle to the city. He claimed that the leader of the Banja Luka Muslims, Hilmija Bešlagić, interceded with Pavelić and thus prevented the crimes to assume even larger scale. The Serbs in Banja Luka and its surroundings were protected, at least temporarily, but they were forced to convert to Roman Catholicism.⁶⁹ In mid-March 1942, the head of the Serbian collaborationist regime, Milan Nedić, was informed of the atrocities near Banja Luka by the intelligence department of the headquarters of his armed forces.⁷⁰

After the war, the newly-established communist authorities in Yugoslavia also investigated these crimes. On 25 August 1945, the Intelligence Section of the Command of the Banja Luka Military District sent a report to the headquarters of the Sixth Yugoslav Army which stated that the main organiser of the savage killings had been Viktor Gutić. According to still incomplete information, 1,089 Serbs were killed in February 1942 near Banja Luka, of whom 529 were murdered in Drakulić, 426 in Saračica, 98 in Šargovac and 29 in Kobatovci. Along with Gutić, Filipović-Majstorović, Stipe Golub from Petrićevac, Andrija Golub from Šargovac and Viktor Nanut from Budžak were the ringleaders, while the bulk of executioners came from the Poglavnik’s Bodyguard Battalion “deployed in Banja Luka at the request of the abovementioned organisers”.⁷¹

A later inquiry (9 November 1945) into these atrocities collected information about 2,300 murdered Serbs, “men, women and children”, in Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike.⁷² Four days later, the District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes of the Occupiers and Their Collaborators (*Okružna komisija za ispitivanje ratnih zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača*) had another report that the Serbs in these villages “were killed, slaughtered, impaled on bayonets, from babies in cribs to old men and women of 90 years of age”. In the execution of the crime “a group of seven Ustashas, whose names are still unknown, were the most bloodthirsty”. The Commission was informed that the slaughter had been committed on the order of a Roman Catholic priest, Filipović, and

⁶⁸ Arhiv Srbije [Archives of Serbia], Belgrade, Commissariat for the Refugees and Displaced Persons, 1941–1944 [Komesarijat za izbeglice i preseljenike 1941–1944] G-2, Refugees’ Statements [Izjave izbeglica], Banja Luka District [Okrug Banja Luka], 1941–1944, fascicle 4, R. 65/1942.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, R. 38/1942.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, R. 34/1942.

⁷¹ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Document: Izveštaj Komande banjalučkog vojnog područja, Obavještajne sekcije, Štabu Šeste armije, Obavještajnom odeljenju, 25 August 1945.

⁷² *Ibid.*, Document: Izveštaj Sreskom narodnom odboru, 9 November 1945.

two sons of Marko Pletikosa from Budžak. All members of 124 households in Drakulić were killed. "The number of the murdered people cannot be known definitely. According to the official data, about 1,750 souls were killed." Ustasha Colonel Tatek bragged that some 1,500 people had been killed. The report also specified that some 50 people were forced into the barn of the Mitrović family in Drakulić, which was then set on fire and the people were burned to death.⁷³ Djordje Brković from Drakulić testified that 70 people were forced into the barn of Mitar Mihajlović and burned alive.⁷⁴ These 70 people were mostly members of the Mitrović, Vuković and Mihajlović families.⁷⁵ Eighteen inhabitants of Drakulić managed to escape.⁷⁶ Among them was Lenka Kuruzović with five children; she later went insane.⁷⁷ Local Croats also took part in the crime in Šargovac, killing children and women "with whatever they could get: with logs, axes, pitchforks and various other tools". It appears that among the miners killed in Rakovac was a Croat who could not prove that he was a Roman Catholic. A member of the Croatian Cabinet, Hilmija Bešlagić, who was in Banja Luka in those days and whose servant was also killed, went to Zagreb immediately and, as it seems, prevented further mass murders which were expected in Banja Luka.⁷⁸

On the eve of the crime, none of the local Croats revealed to their Serb neighbours what was about to happen to them. At 4 p.m. on 6 February 1942, the village of Motike was blocked by the so-called "Legion of Motike population", who welcomed the Ustasha troops and remained in positions, making sure that none of the Serbs escaped. This group consisted of local armed Croat residents.⁷⁹ The District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes had an incomplete list of 23 local Croats who had participated in the crime in the three

⁷³ Ibid., Document: Report on the crimes in Banja Luka County, 13 November 1945.

⁷⁴ *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu*, 259.

⁷⁵ AJ, 110, Evidence Material, Dossiers nos. 4210–4227, fascicle 463, Minute no. 7, inv. no. 55461, Document: Zapisnik sastavljen 17. jula 1946 god. u Drakulićima, srez banjalučki, po Zemaljskoj komisiji za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, 1.

⁷⁶ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Document: Report on the crimes in Banja Luka County, 13 November 1945.

⁷⁷ Arhiv Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti [Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts], Belgrade, Document: Saslušanja srpskih izbeglica na razmišljanje članovima Savetodavnog odbora, Akcija franjevacu.

⁷⁸ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Document: Report on the crimes in Banja Luka County, 13 November 1945.

⁷⁹ AJ, 110, Evidence Material, Dossiers nos. 4849–4900, fascicle 492, J–542, Dossier no. 4889, F–24379, inv. no. 55478, Document: Zapisnik sastavljen 26. jula 1946. godine u Pavlovcu, srez banjalučki po Zemaljskoj komisiji za utvrđivanje ratnih zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača; Lukajić, *Fratri i ustaše kolju*, 154, 158, 190.

villages near Banja Luka. One of them was Marko Gagula who personally killed Dane Vukobrat.⁸⁰ The Banja Luka district committee sought intelligence information on Captain Zelić, Lieutenant Tatek and a certain Dragec.⁸¹ On 15 May 1946, the Banja Luka district prosecutor indicted 18 local Croats before the district court for having, inter alia, participated in the slaughter of more than 2,300 Serb civilians in the Rakovac mine and the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike.⁸² The first on the list was the 49-year-old Andrija Golub from Šargovac, who had become a member of the Ustasha organisation in 1938 and, after the proclamation of the NDH, the mayor of the Budžak municipality. In that capacity, he was one of the main organisers of the crime, together with Viktor Gutić and “a priest Filipović”. After the massacre, he distributed the property of the victims, keeping a large part for himself. Before the war, he had been tried by the Banja Luka District Court and sentenced to eight months in prison for “spreading banned propaganda”.⁸³ The 40-year-old Ilija Popović, a miner and father of four, was one of the most savage perpetrators. Together with another Ustasha, he killed the whole family of Risto Vasić and then the Savanovićs; he cut off Mihajlo Prnjavorac’s head and threw it to the pigs, and he also beheaded the Brković brothers, Djordje and Pavle, with an axe; he killed Djordje’s wife, sister-in-law and children.⁸⁴ Branko Brković, hidden in a barn, witnessed the massacre of his own family, including a one-year-old child. Among the perpetrators, he recognised Ilija Popović, Ante Pletikosa, Šime Golub and Stipo Golub. Some of the victims were first shot and then massacred with axes and blunt objects.⁸⁵ The names of 39 witnesses were listed in the indictment and its conclusion was as follows: “The event that took place on 7 February 1942 in the villages of Drakulić, Motike and Šargovac in the immediate surroundings of the city of Banja Luka is a rare example in the history of mankind. It is very reminiscent of St. Bartholomew’s Night in Paris when the Huguenot population of Greater Paris was killed. But judging by the mass massacre and the way in which it was carried out, what happened in the mentioned villages exceeds the wildest fantasy and shows what a savage and systematically stirred up crowd is able to do.” The cause of the crime was alleged to be the idea emerging after the establishment of

⁸⁰ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes.

⁸¹ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Document no. 439/45, 12 December 1945.

⁸² AJ, 110, Evidence Material, Document: Banja Luka District, Group indictments and verdicts, Public Prosecutor of Banja Luka District, no. I: 995-46, E: 816-46, 15 May 1946, Banja Luka, 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 1-2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 2-5.

⁸⁵ ABiH, The State Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Minutes, Banja Luka County, box 6, Document: Motike (selo) 1945, inv. no. 17051-27776, Minute no. 249, 1945.

the NDH that the Serbs from those villages "had driven a wedge in the Croatian – Catholic area". It was emphasised in that regard that it had been the "Ustasha slaughterer priest Filipović" who had "constantly stirred up the Catholic masses against their Serb neighbours".⁸⁶

The role of Miroslav Filipović(-Majstorović) - Fra Tomislav from the Petrićevac monastery – in the described atrocities deserves further attention. Besides being one of the main instigators and organisers of the slaughter, Fra Tomislav personally took part in the killings.⁸⁷ According to the post-war testimony of the teacher Dobrila Martinović, herself a Croat and Roman Catholic, Fra Tomislav and twelve Ustashas entered her class in the elementary school in Šargovac and asked her to call a Serb child to her desk. Not knowing what was going on, she picked an eleven-year-old girl who "was slaughtered in front of the other children, the teacher and the Ustashas" by the friar. The children started to scream and cry. The Serb children were taken out and murdered in front of the school, as witnessed by another teacher, Mara Šunjić, also a Croat and Roman Catholic. The entry in the school log book says that the Serb children "died on 7 February 1942".⁸⁸ There were 53 children, all pupils of the elementary school in Šargovac. But Bishop Garić justified Fra Tomislav, as reported by the Italian Vice-Consul Fabbiani on 4 March 1942. Garić said that the friar "went over to the wounded to take confessions" and "to bring the last religious consolation to the wounded".⁸⁹ Josip Loparević from the Petrićevac monastery also testified that Fra Tomislav had participated in the slaughter in the villages near Banja Luka, after which he left the monastery and joined the Ustashas, where he received a rank. "As a commander" in the Jasenovac concentration camp, "he committed mass murders and crimes against the prisoners".⁹⁰ A letter of Petar Pajić, a Roman Catholic priest from Vrbanjci near Kotor Varoš, confirming Fra Tomislav's crimes near Banja Luka, was sent to Franjo Kralik, the editor of the *Catholic weekly* in Sarajevo. It reads: "We have sinned horribly by shedding innocent blood and plundering. Just imagine! They slaughtered a huge Vlach [Serb] village of Motike and Drakulić. About 2,400 people died. They slaughtered pregnant women and children in wombs. I shudder and grieve. Before the slaughter,

⁸⁶ AJ, 110, Evidence Material, Document: Banja Luka District, Group indictments and verdicts [Grupne optužnice i presude], Public Prosecutor [Javni tužilac okruga] of Banja Luka District, no. I: 995-46, E: 816-46, 15 May 1946, Banja Luka, 7.

⁸⁷ Horvat and Štambuk, *Dokumenti*, 166; Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 192-193.

⁸⁸ ARS, Elementary School in Šargovac. School log book [Narodna osnovna škola u Šargovcu, Dnevnik iz osnovne škole]; Lukajić, *Fratri i ustaše kolju*, 111-112; Dušan Lukač, *Tri genocida nad Srbima u XX veku* (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 1998), 174-175.

⁸⁹ Lukač, *Banja Luka i okolica*, 191-193.

⁹⁰ ARS, District Commission for Investigating the War Crimes, Document no. 414/45, 30 November 1945.

they came by the Petrićevac Monastery. They ate there, had dinner, whatever. Then, under the command of Filipović they went to Drakulić. He alone killed 57 people with an axe. He was all covered in blood. And then he handed the axe to someone else ... Mass graves are in front of the houses. Our villagers from the neighbouring villages – Catholics took away blooded pillows...”⁹¹

After the war Fra Tomislav admitted that he had been “a pastor” of the Poglavnik’s Second Bodyguard Battalion and that “one night with the battalion (...) he went into action. (...) I saw Ustasha soldiers coming back from the slaughter covered in blood, it was later said that 2,000 people were killed on that occasion.”⁹² He admitted to Vojdrag Berčić⁹³ that he participated in the crimes, adding: “Well, my dear Sir, it wasn’t just me who did it. Everyone was killing whoever they could and everyone is lying if they say they weren’t killing.” He defended himself at the trial that he had slaughtered children so that “they would not become criminals when they grow up”. One of the Ustashes who committed the crimes on 7 February 1942 confirmed that Fra Tomislav had participated in the atrocities and that he loved to slaughter children.⁹⁴

It is estimated that during Filipović’s command in Jasenovac from the end of June to the end of October 1942, between 20,000 and 30,000 people were killed there, and he admitted that he had murdered some hundred prisoners himself.⁹⁵ One of the surviving prisoners left his testimony: “Friar Filipović behaved nicely and pleasantly, except during slaughters. Then he would become unbelievable. [...] He would go out every night to lead the slaughter and return at dawn with his cassock completely covered in blood. None of the murderers possessed his stamina. One day, while he was having lunch, one of the Ustashes approached him and whispered something in his ear. The Ustasha then headed to the camp fence and returned with a prisoner. Fra Filipović got up and killed him. The unfortunate man fell to the floor. The friar sat down again and, calmly finishing his meal, shouted: bring in the undertaker.”⁹⁶ At the hearing held on 25 June 1945, Fra Tomislav invoked the claim of Ljubo Miloš, one of the commanders of the Jasenovac concentration camp, that during the four years of the

⁹¹ *Godišnjak Muzeja žrtava genocida – tematski broj*, 123.

⁹² *Zločini u logoru Jasenovac* (Zagreb: Zemaljska komisija Hrvatske za utvrđivanje zločina okupatora i njihovih pomagača, 1946), 67.

⁹³ In his capacity as military court investigator, Vojdrag Berčić, a communist partisan and a lawyer, interrogated many Ustasha criminals in liberated Zagreb, including Fra Tomislav. Decades later Berčić directed a documentary about the February 1942 massacre in Banja Luka under the title *De hoc tristissimo eventu – O ovom pretužnom događaju* (1981).

⁹⁴ Lukajić, *Fratr i ustaše kolju*, 119-120, 302-304.

⁹⁵ *Zločini u logoru Jasenovac*, 67; Novak, *Magnum crimen*, I, 158-160.

⁹⁶ Marko Aurelio Raveli, *Nadbiskup genocida* (Nikšić: Jasen, 19992), 97-98.

war "about half a million Serbs" had been killed and died in the fighting in the NDH.⁹⁷

Viktor Gutić was also tried after having been arrested in Italy and extradited to Yugoslavia. At the hearing held on 22 September 1946, he said that he was "aware that at the beginning of February 1942, a slaughter was committed in the village of Drakulić during one night and that it was carried out by Ustasas from the Poglavnik's Bodyguard Battalion on the initiative of Fra Tomislav Filipović, a priest from Petrićevac." He said he had not been aware that those Ustasas would go [to the village], and he had found out about the massacre next day at 12 o'clock.⁹⁸ Gutić was indicted for that crime on 25 December 1946. He was charged with the "intent to destroy the Serbian people" and organising a mass slaughter of the Serbs in the villages near Banja Luka together with his closest associates in the city, although he no longer had direct authority over that territory. He won over the Poglavnik's Second Bodyguard Battalion for the execution of the crime. Thirty-three Serbs were killed then, all miners from Rakovac, "and then almost all the Serb residents in Drakulić and a large part [of the Serb population] in Motike and Šargovac, so that the number of victims was over 2,000 people."⁹⁹ Viktor Gutić was sentenced to death by hanging on 11 February 1947 and executed as a war criminal in Banja Luka.¹⁰⁰

The leadership of the NDH intended to make Banja Luka the capital of the Croatian state, or at least to move some of the state institutions to that city. Their motive was the geographical position of Banja Luka in the centre of the NDH and the need to strengthen the Croatian position in Bosnian Krajina and the whole of Bosnia, which was made difficult on account of the Serbian insurgency as a reaction to the Ustasha crimes. Quite simply, the population structure of Banja Luka and its surroundings needed to be changed. The Ustasha Stožernik Viktor Gutić, the most powerful NDH official in that area, was a crucial figure in planning and enforcing the policy of extermination of Serbs in Banja Luka and Bosnian Krajina during the spring and summer of 1941; even after leaving Banja Luka to assume a new position in Zagreb in late August 1941, he often returned to the city and still played a major role in the crimes against the Serbs. The local NDH authorities indicated that Gutić had been the most responsible for the crime committed against the Serb civilians in the Rakovac mine and the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike on 7 February 1942. Importantly, the

⁹⁷ Krestić and Radojević, *Jasenovac*, 85.

⁹⁸ *Ustaški stožer za Bosansku Krajinu*, 231.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 259.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 317.

Roman Catholic clergy in Banja Luka and Bosnian Krajina not just acquiesced in the genocidal policy against the Serbs, but also endorsed it, as evidenced by the attitude of the Banja Luka Bishop Jozo Garić and Fra Kruno Brkić. Particularly gruesome was the participation of Miroslav Filipović-Majstorović (Fra Tomislav) from the Petrićevac Monastery in the slaughter. On the other hand, the role of Gutić's successor as Ustasha Stožernik in Banja Luka, Mirko Beljan, and that of Captain Nikola Zelić, commander of the Second Battalion of Pavelić's Bodyguard Brigade, has not been fully elucidated, since the reports mostly mention Lieutenant Josip Mišlov. What is more certain is that the atrocities of 7 February 1942 were thoroughly prepared, primarily by Croats from Banja Luka and its surroundings, and that the Poglavnik, Ante Pavelić, lent his support by sending his elite military unit from Zagreb, the members of which were from Herzegovina. However, two central figures in the Banja Luka "St. Bartholomew's Night" in 1942 were Gutić and Filipović. For Gutić, this crime was the culmination of his entire policy since April 1941, while for Filipović, it was only the beginning of his criminal career, which reached its peak during his taking charge of the Jasenovac concentration camp. Although Gutić managed, at least temporarily, to take refuge in Italy in 1945, Filipović failed to use one of the "rat canals" through which the Roman Catholic Church evacuated a considerable number of NDH officials, including war criminals.¹⁰¹ Both of them met with justice in the end, but the members of Poglavnik's Second Bodyguard Battalion, the chief perpetrators of the crime, managed to escape, except those of them who were liquidated by the partisans on the Yugoslav-Austrian border towards the end of the war.

During the Second World War, the Ustashes committed a large number of mass crimes against the Serbs both in concentration camps and on numerous execution sites across the NDH. By the number of Serb victims, the following sites stand out: Garavice near Bihać (1941), Šušnjar near Sanski Most (1941), Prebilovci near Čapljina (1941) and Stari Brod near Višegrad, i.e., Rogatica (1942). However, there is not a site, with the possible exception of large concentration camps such as the Gospić-Jadovno-Pag complex and Jasenovac, on which that many Serbs were killed in a single day as in the villages of Drakulić, Motike and Šargovac and in the Rakovac mine, near Banja Luka, on 7 February 1942. Moreover, these victims were completely loyal to the Croatian state and did nothing whatsoever to provoke the use of violence against them. The peculiarity of the crime committed near Banja Luka also lay in the fact that so many people were slaughtered with cold weapons: axes, pickaxes, knives, bayonets, pitchforks, logs and other sharp and blunt objects, and a number of victims were

¹⁰¹ For more, see Mark Aarons and John Loftus, *Pacovski kanali: kako je Vatikan, krijumčareći naciste iz Evrope, izdao Sovjetima obavještajce sa Zapada* (Belgrade: Glosarijum and Arsvalea, 1991).

burned alive. During the crime, only a few shots were heard, as the Ustashas mostly shot those people who were trying to escape. The fact that the premeditated crime was a closely guarded secret and that it was well-prepared, that the Serbs were taken by surprise because they did not expect the use of violence against them, having been loyal and peaceful villagers, accounted for the absence of any resistance during the whole day, with the exception of a single household. However, after having learned of the crime, a number of Serbs from the Banja Luka area joined the Serb insurgents in Bosanska Krajina.

On the basis of various reports and testimonies, it may be concluded that the Ustashas killed about 2,370 Serbs in the Rakovac mine and in the villages of Drakulić, Šargovac and Motike, although 2,315 people have been identified by name and surname: 1,363 from Drakulić, 679 from Motike, 257 from Šargovac, as well as 16 miners who were from other villages (five from Pavlovac, four from Bistrica, four from Čokori and three from Piskavica). Among the victims there were 551 children, the youngest 11 of them were born in 1942, 45 children were born in 1941, 82 children in 1940. Some women and girls were raped before being killed.¹⁰²

After the Second World War, dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church in Yugoslavia did not speak publicly about the genocide committed against the Serbs in the NDH, or the role of their clergy of Croatian nationality. It was the Bishop of Banja Luka Alfred Pichler, himself of German origin, who had the courage to state the following in his Christmas message in 1963: "In the last war, in this country, our brothers of the Orthodox faith died because they were Orthodox. Those who killed them had a Catholic baptism certificate in their pocket. They were called Catholics. These Christians killed other people, also Christians, because they were not Croats and Catholics. We painfully acknowledge this terrible delusion of those people who went astray and we beg our brothers of the Orthodox faith to forgive [us] just as Christ on the cross forgave everyone."¹⁰³ However, contemporary Croatian historiography is rife with revisionism the purpose of which is to deny the crimes of 1941–1945 in the NDH, let alone the genocide committed against the Serbs, Jews and Roma in an effort to rehabilitate the NDH. This is not done only by marginal groups, but also by scholars from some of the main Croatian institutions. Rarely has anyone gone so far "in the banalisation of evil and the trivialisation of crime" as those Croatian revisionists have.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the most striking example has been the attempt of a Roman Catholic priest, Fra Martin Planinić, to present Miro-

¹⁰² Lukajić, *Fratri i ustaše kolju*, 8, 88, 266, 270, 327–338, 342–402.

¹⁰³ Rastislav V. Petrović, *Genocid s blagoslovom Vatikana: izjave Srba izbeglica* (Belgrade: Fond "Nikola Tesla" za pomoć Srbima van Srbije, 1992), 102.

¹⁰⁴ Mirjana Kasapović, "Genocid u NDH: umanjivanje, banaliziranje i poricanje zločina", *Politička misao* 55/1 (2018), 7, 10–13.

slav Filipović-Majstorović (Fra Tomislav) as an innocent victim of slander.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the efforts of the Croatian revisionists to diminish, or completely deny, the atrocities committed in the NDH have produced, to a large extent, the opposite effect – they have drawn the attention of the world academic community to the genocide against the Serbs, Jews and Roma in the NDH hitherto considered a “lesser-known genocide”, which received “a relatively limited attention in Western historiography”.¹⁰⁶

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¹⁰⁵ Martin Planinić, *Fra Tomislav Filipović žrtva klevete* (Šuica: Tomislavgradske ratne novine, 1992).

¹⁰⁶ Kasapović, “Genocid u NDH”, 25.

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