

Jelena Borošak-Marijanović: Flag-Shaped Badges The Symbols of Countries in WWI

Abstract: *The Croatian History Museum in Zagreb holds a valuable collection of over 6000 badges of different kinds. A special part of the collection is a group of about fifty so-called patriotic badges that were made in WWI and were used as an expression of patriotism in war propaganda. These badges are of very high quality and aesthetic value and are mostly made from enamel with gilding. These first-rate designer specimens represent flags of certain allied countries through their shape, symbolism and other features: either featuring a flag of an individual country or different combinations of flags of allied countries. In other words, these approximately 40 mm badges represent miniature flags, that is, based on vexillological criteria, they are reduced forms of national flags. These badges not only feature a flag in the narrow sense of the word, but also a flagpole with a finial. Therefore, this group of badges is rightfully considered a reduced form of authentic WWI flags.*

Patriotic badges were the integral part of the Austro-Hungarian war propaganda during WWI and the purpose of this presentation is to introduce you to their symbolism. Many of these badges are currently on display in the Croatian History Museum in Zagreb in the exhibition called "I gave gold for iron".

The Croatian History Museum in Zagreb holds a valuable collection of over 6000 badges of different kinds. A special part of the collection is a group of about fifty so-called *patriotic badges* that were made during WWI and were used as an expression of patriotism in Austro-Hungarian war propaganda. The profit made from selling these badges was used for financing the war efforts and providing relief for war-stricken civilians. The making and distribution of patriotic badges were under the supervision of the War Relief Bureau at the Ministry of Interior, the War Assistance Office of the Ministry of War and Red Cross. During the War, many humanitarian organizations such as the Imperial and Royal Society of the White Cross, the Imperial and Royal Society of the Austrian Silver Cross, Austrian Society of the Golden Cross and Black-and-Yellow Cross started to make and distribute badges.

Both soldiers and civilians wore patriotic badges. The badges were mostly of very high quality and aesthetic value and were usually enamelled and gilded. These first-rate designer specimens represent flags of the allied countries through their shape and symbols: they either depict the flag of an individual country or different combinations of several national flags. Based on vexillological criteria, these approximately 30 mm badges represent miniature flags – they are reduced forms of national flags. These badges not only feature a flag in the narrow sense of the word, but also depict a flagstaff with a finial. Therefore, this group of badges is rightfully considered a reduced form of authentic WWI flags.

The badges/flags which you are about to see carry a significant documentary value from a vexillological standpoint since there are very few authentic flags from this period (at least this is the case with the Collection of Flags in the Croatian History Museum where this type of flags is scarce). Due to this, these badges can be seen as authentic flags created in a different medium through which they still operate as flags on the level of social communication.

The flag-shaped badge (inv.no.12119) is typologically similar to the mentioned badge, but has fewer symbols: it features only the Hungarian tricolour, while the medallion depicting the portraits of the two emperors, which symbolize the dual alliance, is somewhat larger. (Neither motto nor date are present!!)



The following badge (inv.no.12195) is similar to both of these badges in shape, type and size. It features a medallion with a portrait photograph of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed V and the year 1914, and in that way, it symbolizes the expansion of the alliance by

Turkey's joining the Central Powers. The badge/flag depicts the combination of the Hungarian national flag and the flag of the Black-Yellow Monarchy; however, the symbols of the other ally – Germany, are not present on the badge.

The badge (inv. no. 12111), shaped as a flying flag hoisted on a staff, depicts the combination of the Hungarian national flag and the flag of the so-called Black-Yellow Monarchy, that is, the Habsburg Empire. In the centre of this combined flag is a medallion featuring a portrait of the Austrian and German Emperors (Franz Joseph I and Wilhelm II), and the motto VIRIBUS UNITIS, while the year 1914 is inscribed on the lower edge of the flag. As you can see, the flag is divided into two equal fields: the Hungarian tricolour is situated in one field, and the German tricolour in the other. This badge is a symbol of the dual alliance between Austria-Hungary and Germany – members of the Central Powers. Austria-Hungary is symbolized by its national flag and the portrait of its ruler, and Germany is represented only by the portrait of the Emperor; VIRIBUS UNITIS was the motto of the Alliance.



I will now present the badges shaped like miniature flags without departing from vexillological principles. The badge (inv.no.12141)

shaped like the national flag of Hungary - horizontal red, white and green stripes - is gilded and enameled. It is a simple longitudinal badge, rectangular like a flag. It is very contemporary

in design, just like the badges nowadays worn by statesmen on their lapels. Then, there is the badge shaped like the flag of the Ottoman Navy (inv.no.12204) made from gilded tombac (tombac is an alloy essentially of copper and less than 20% zinc) and enameled in the famous workshop in Budapest (it has a



maker mark MORSZANYI J. BUDAPEST on the safety pin). The field of the flying flag depicts a crescent moon and a star which are the symbols of the Ottoman Empire. There is also the badge (inv.no.12213) of the Austro-Hungarian Navy (*Kaiserliche Kriegsflagge*) 19x23 mm large, forged from tombac, enameled and gilded. It is shaped like a flag flying from a staff which is indicative of the way it was usually displayed. The badge features horizontal stripes (red-white-red) with a crowned Austrian coat of arms. The pin hook has the maker mark engraved on the reverse.



Another similar badge is the one featuring a flying Croatian tricolour flag (inv. no.12227) made in the same manner from the same materials (tombac, enamel, gilding), and is approximately the same size. This group of badges also includes the badge (inv. no. 12233) shaped like the flying

German naval flag – the so-called *Kriegsflagge*. It is made of gilded tombac and enamel. The flag is



of the Habsburg Imperial Navy is placed inside a green laurel wreath. The maker of the badge is one of the numerous *Flottenverein* associations.



The design of this badge (inv.no.12223, 27 x 22 mm) is very interesting. It presents a combination of the flags of the Yellow-Black Monarchy and Hungary hoisted on flagstaves. The badge is made of tombac, with enamel and gilding.

The badge (inv.no.12173, 23x18mm) features

an interesting combination of the national colours and symbols of the members of the Triple Alliance. It is in the form of a vertical flag with its lower edge decorated with tassels. The flag field combines the national colours





divided into 4 fields by a black cross. In its centre is the Imperial Prussian Eagle and in the canton, the Bismarck tricolour (instituted in 1867) with the Iron Cross.

This badge (inv. no. 12146) presents the combination of three naval flags of the Central Powers. The flag is vertical and features the flying flags of the German Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire. It is made in the same technique and from the same materials as other badges (tombac, gilding and enamel).

This badge (inv.no. 12224) belongs to the same group of badges; however, the flying flag



The flag field combines the national symbols of Germany and Hungary which serve as the background for the crossed flags of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, and the year of the formation of the alliance: 1914. This flag is also made of tombac, with gilding and enamel.



This badge (inv.no. 12185) is also included in this group. It looks like a brooch and features crossed naval flags of Germany and Austria-Hungary, as well as the Hungarian coat of arms hanging like a pendant. This badge is very similar (inv.no.12186), but the pendant is, in this case, the Ottoman coat of arms.





The badge (inv.no.12147) features three separate vexillological symbols joined into one item - a badge - with a safety pin. The Hungarian coat-of-arms is placed between the

flying flags of the Habsburg Empire and Germany.

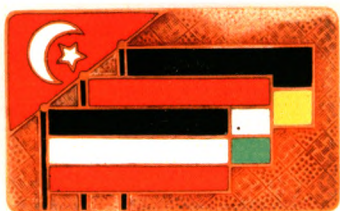
Another type of badges are those that are not shaped like flags (they are round, triangular, rectangular or of any other geometrical shape), but they use national colours in different combinations. These badges are also made from the same materials and in the same technique.



The oval badge (inv.no.12143) features the Ottoman coat-of-arms in the centre with a detail from the German national flag on one side of the coat-of-arms, and the Hungarian tricolour on the other. The badge is trimmed with the flag of the Habsburg Monarchy. The round-shaped badge (inv.no.12205) presents an interesting combination of the national colours of the Triple Alliance members with the Ottoman coat-of-arms in the centre. It is, like most of the badges, made in Vienna.



The rectangular badge (inv.no.12209) also features the flags of the Triple Alliance members, but in different order. However, the symbol of the Ottoman Empire holds the central position in this badge. The same can be noticed on the triangular badge (inv.no.12210) adorned with the national colours of the members of the Central Powers, as well as on the shield-shaped badge (inv.no.12221) which also features a combination of the national colours of Germany, Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy.



Another group of badges that can also be interpreted within this topic are those that resemble a brooch or even a medal, and use national flags, that is, national colours as ornaments. The badges that belong to this group are: the badge (inv.no.12142) shaped like an oval brooch depicting a flying Hungarian tricolour on a yellow background, and a similar badge (inv.no.12235) that features the flag of the Black-Yellow Monarchy and the Hungarian tricolour flag with crossed staffs.



The ellipsoidal badge (inv.no.12112) features a combination of flag details and portraits of emperors Wilhelm II and Franz Joseph I, which symbolize the alliance between the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.



The badge (inv.no.12222) made of tombac, with gilding and enamel, brings together the flags and coats of arms of the Central Powers members. The badge (inv.no. 16062) features flag symbols as well as the motto GOTT STRAFE ENGLAND which aimed at emphasizing the reason for the existence of the Central Powers alliance.



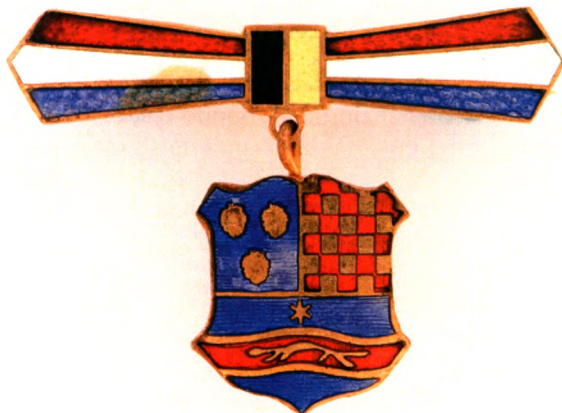


This medal-shaped badge (inv.no.12133) has a form of an isosceles cross, where each arm of the cross is enamelled in the national colours of the Central Powers member states. In the centre of the cross lies a silver-gilded medallion with the portraits of emperors Franz Joseph I and Wilhelm II. This group of medal-shaped badges includes the badge (inv.no.15975) with a “ribbon” enamelled in the colours of the Habsburg Monarchy and the German Empire, and the inscription AUS / GROSSER / ZEIT.



The brooch-shaped badge (inv.no.12253) is of great significance for Croatian vexillology and phaleristics: it features a stylized bow in the colours of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy with the Triune Kingdom coat-of-arms which was instituted by the Croatian-Hungarian Compromise in 1868.





About the author



Jelena Borošak-Marijanović, born in 1951, studied history and archaeology at the University of Zagreb, where she graduated in 1975. Since 1976 she is a museum adviser and today head of the collection of flags and that of uniforms at the Croatian Historical Museum in Zagreb. Since more than 15 years she is involved in the museological and historical treatment of flags. She prepared several historical exhibitions and the Museum published in 1996 her catalogue of the flags collection under the title *"Flags through the centuries"*. At the 1st congress of Croatian historians in 1999 she read a paper on *"Nations and national symbols: the influence of the Croatian national idea on the symbolism on flags in the 19th century"*. In 2000 she read in Budapest a paper *"Symbols of the Habsburg Monarchy and the Hungarian Kingdom on flags in the collection of the Croatian Historical Museum"*.

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