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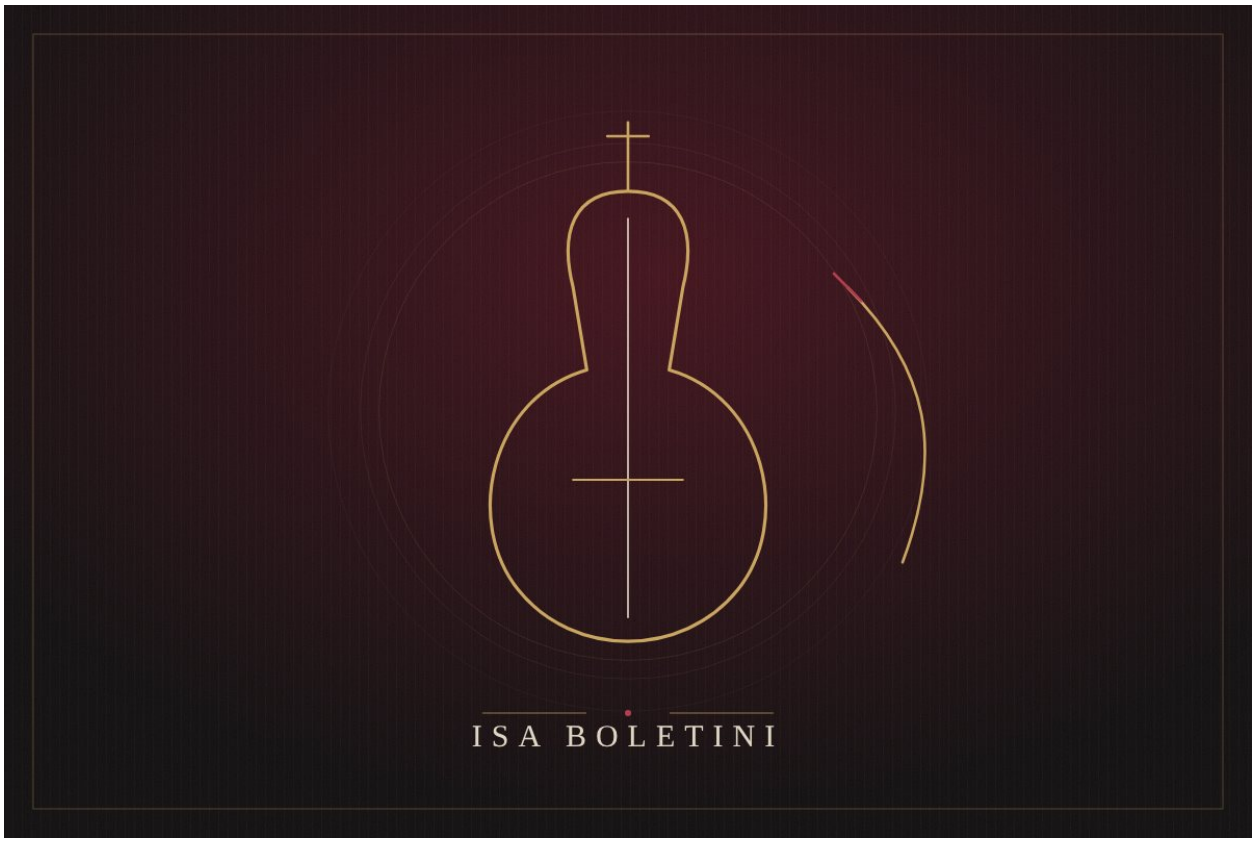
Heritage

Isa Boletini: from the Kosovo uprisings to Vlorë and London

A leader from Mitrovica in the uprisings of 1910 and 1912, and his death in Podgorica in 1916

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Translated from the Albanian original by the editors.



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Isa Boletini was born on 15 January 1864 in the village of Boletin, near Mitrovica, then part of the Ottoman Empire. His family was Albanian and Muslim, and the surname comes from the name of the village. As a young man he took part in the League of Prizren and in April 1881 fought against Ottoman forces at the battle of Slivova.

The 1910 uprising

In the first years after the Young Turk Revolution, the new Ottoman government tried to centralise power, collect taxes and disarm the highlanders. In Kosovo this provoked uprisings. In 1910 Boletini was one of the main leaders: after meeting highland fighters, he agreed with other chiefs on joint action and for two days held out against Ottoman forces at Carraleva before withdrawing.

1912

In the spring of 1912 he again led the uprising in Kosovo, together with Hasan Prishtina, Bajram Curri and others. The insurgents advanced on Skopje, which was taken on 12–15 August. On 18 August, persuaded by the moderate wing, Boletini accepted the agreement with the Ottoman government and returned home. A few months later the Balkan War began.

> *Boletini links two worlds: the battlefield in Kosovo and the diplomats' table in London. Both were necessary for Albania.*

Vlorë and London

Boletini took part in the events of the Declaration of Independence in Vlorë in November 1912. The sources differ on the details: according to one, Ismail Qemali declared independence without waiting for him; according to another, he entered Vlorë with about 400 horsemen that day. In 1913 he was part of the Albanian delegation that went to London, together with Ismail Qemali, during the Conference of Ambassadors. A well-known anecdote survives from that visit: when asked at the British Foreign Office to hand over his pistol, he produced a second one as well.

His death

During the First World War Boletini was in Shkodër and was later arrested in Cetinje. He was taken to Podgorica, where he was killed in January 1916 together with several relatives. The date (23 or 24 January) and the exact circumstances differ by source: some say he was killed by Montenegrin gendarmes on a bridge over the Morača; the historian Owen Pearson writes that he was killed after a dispute, while virtually a prisoner. It is honest to mention these differences.

Remembrance

A monument to him was raised in Shkodër in 1986, and in South Mitrovica in 2012. For many Albanians, Isa Boletini remains the figure of the highlander who did not bow, but

also of the man who understood that freedom required allies and diplomacy too.

Sources

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