

el Periòdic News

INTERVIEW

Jorge Cebrián

DIRECTOR OF THE DOCUMENTARY "BORIS SKOSSYREFF, THE FRAUD WHO WAS KING"

«Boris Skossyreff, by proclaiming himself king of Andorra, put it on the international map»



Jorge Cebrián began his research into Boris's identity about ten years ago. He interviewed relatives, neighbors and residents of Boppard, Germany, the place of Boris's death. One-third of the respondents knew Boris Skossyreff personally. The rest of the respondents included historians, biographers from various countries, university professors, diplomats, etc. He studied secret service reports, police files, and public documents found in archives—such as those in The Hague, Netherlands—and ended up collecting a total of 6,000 documents. We spoke to Jorge about this historical figure who has played a very important role in Andorra's history and, with the involvement of international media, made the country fa-

mous throughout the world.

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—**Boris Skossyreff is a historical character shrouded in mystery. How would you characterize Boris in a nutshell?**

—He was a resourceful man capable of survival—very clever, well-informed and well-connected, thoroughly researching the places he travelled to in order to be able to pull off his scams. He stood out in attractiveness and was well-liked by women and men. His charisma was impressive and allowed him to get away with the most extreme situations. Boris spent five years in one of the harshest Gulag camps in Siberia, and was in concentrati-



on camps where he managed to become a barrack chief. He was an absolutely extraordinary individual until the last moment of his life.

Boris was married twice. The first time he married a multi-millionaire from Marseille who, despite her fortune, was far from the peak of her financial prosperity when she met him. This woman had supported him financially for most of his life and was 15 years older than him. Later, when he no longer needed her, he divorced and married a young woman who was 40 years younger than him. She was not rich, but she was useful to him in his German affairs. She also had family support that covered all their family expenses.

Boris also had mistresses, including some very famous ladies, such as Florence Marmon, the former wife of Howard Carpenter Marmon, the founder of the Marmon Motor Car Company, and Natasha Rambova, wife of Rudolf Valentino. There are letters from women who sent him money and helped him get out of prison in exchange for visits.

During his time in the French concentration camp at Verne, according to the documents, he had 15 mistresses at one time—and they all thought they were the only ones!

—**What a person! Why is he called the "Tsar of Russia" if he was originally from Lithuania?**

—At that time, Vilnius belonged to Russia; later, it came under Polish rule before becoming its capital when Lithuania became independent.

—**How did Boris get the title of King of Andorra and how many days was he in power?**

—He made up his family tree, claiming to be a descendant of the French royal family. As you know, the history of Andorra dates back to the 13th Century, when a territorial conflict between the French Count of Foix and the Bishop of la Seu D'Urgell was settled by an agreement on the division of power in the region, which led to the emergence of Andorra as an independent state with its own parliament in 1278. Of course, always under

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the tutelage of two co-rulers: the Count of Foix, the future King of France, and the Bishop of la Seu d'Urgell. However, France became a republic, so Boris claimed that the President of the republic had usurped the seat belonging to the French crown, of which he was supposedly the representative.

He convinced his entourage — as a “descendant and envoy of the royal family”— that he had

the right to be king. Boris tried to negotiate with the bishop and managed to convince a small group of people who had power in Andorra at the time (it was minimal support, but it was there nonetheless).

Moreover, through his cunning and media connections, he made sure that the news of his proclamation as King of Andorra appeared in the mainstream media around the world, inclu-



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ding The New York Times...

—Well, that's why journalism is called the "fourth power"... And how many days was he King of Andorra?

—Nine days elapsed between the time he proclaimed himself king and the decree of his banishment.

He then travelled to Spain, where he was convicted and spent some time in prison in Madrid. He was later exiled to Portugal, but returned to Spain just as the Civil War broke out and managed to escape. He was later arrested in France and spent some time in French concentration camps. When he was about to be sent to Auschwitz, he began to collaborate with the Nazis. We have official documents confirming that he was a member of the National Socialist Party of Germany.

At the end of the Second World War, Boris was arrested, handed over to the Russians and put on trial, which found him guilty of war crimes. When he was about to be executed, the sentence was commuted: Boris was sentenced to 25 years in the camps.

—How long did he live?

—He died in February 1989, but his date of birth varies between



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1893 and 1900, according to various sources. There are several birth dates that he used according to his interests to appear older or younger, depending on whether he wanted to get a military position, get married, or get some kind of job.

—What did the Constitution of King Boris say? This Constitution was considered to be a very liberal document, wasn't it? Are there any similarities with the current Constitution of Andorra?

—Among other things, the Constitution of King Boris stipulates that the government should have the right to appoint ministers (in those days the country didn't even know what they were). Boris proved to be a visionary. Many of the suggestions he ma-

de to persuade people to believe in him—such as opening the country to foreign investors, building a ski resort or opening a casino—saw the light of day many years later.

—Are these really his initiatives?

—Partly yes, but I am sure he was influenced by Switzerland. In that sense, his proposals were generally very modern.

—A philosophical reflection: whether the people of Andorra were more naïf naïve than they are now? Why did people believe him? Do you think it's possible that today someone would have come along, presented his ideas, and that current Andorrans would accept him as their leader?

—When Boris visited Andorra in

1933, the reality was quite different, as Andorra was going through troubled times. A group of young men locked themselves in protest in the Casa de la Val, the former seat of Andorra's parliament, to demand universal suffrage for men over the age of 25. After all, until then, only heads of families could enjoy suffrage. Andorrans were fed up with how little popular sovereignty they had, with co-rulers always having the last word.

This situation occurred at a time of protests by workers at the local energy company, FHASA (today it's FEDA). Boris took advantage of Andorra's political and economic instability to propose a series of initiatives that would appeal to the majority of the population. In other words, Boris was a personality ahead of his time.

Later, there were other "Boris's" who came to Andorra to try their scams. But these were people of a completely different level, incomparable to Boris. After all, it was Boris who played a crucial role in putting Andorra on the international map. In 1934, Andorra became a topic of discussion in the world's leading newspapers, even though many people had no idea of its existence.

—What are the rarest and most exclusive documents about this man?

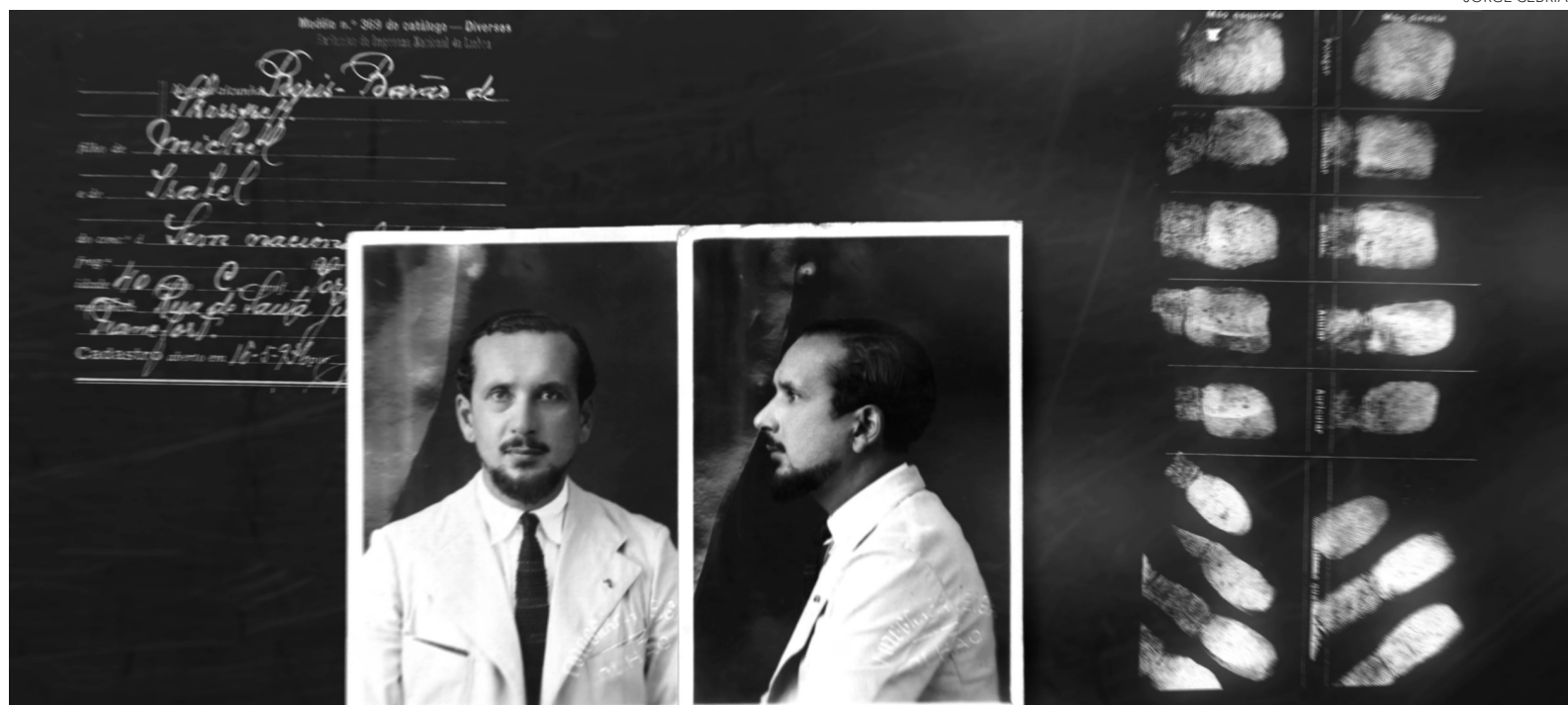
—It is important to note that we conducted this research together with my colleagues from Spain, Portugal, France, and Germany.

I was impressed by the personal letters, particularly those from his first wife. I was also very interested in the intelligence reports, because, for example, when Boris entered Andorra, he could not have imagined that the French intelligence services were already following him. These documents are kept in the diplomatic archive in Nantes. From the archive, one can learn how French intelligence officers tracked and culled information, as well as how impressive the dossier compiled on Boris in the 1930s was. The speed with which information was disseminated at the time is impressive.

—Please tell us about your documentary “Boris Skossyreff, the Fraud Who Was King”...

—I have been making documentaries for over 20 years. I have worked as a journalist in various media outlets in the country, such as *Diari d'Andorra* and *Andorra Televisó*, as well as in the editorial offices of Spanish media and in public organizations such as the Barcelona City Council and the Andorran government. I am currently working at Andorra Business and am very grateful to its Director, Judith Hidalgo, for facilitating my task of completing this research work.

The documentary film about Boris is the eighth that I have made. I had conducted other historical research that was reflected in documentaries, such as the recent story of the execution of a man in Andorra, and a film about Andorrans who passed through Nazi concentration camps. Curiously, during the making of the previous documentaries, the figure of Boris always appeared. When I started researching him, I realised the significance of this character. He had quite a complicated life, and it took me a long time to get into



the details of his biography.

Together with the production company Qucut Comunicació and one of its founders, Albert Cristòfol, who is also the producer and cameraman of the documentary, we applied for a film subsidy from the Andorran government. In 2023, we received part of the funding.

We reached an agreement with Chris Bouwer, who supported us during a difficult moment with the project. The Spanish Embassy, the delegation of the Catalan government in Andorra, the representative of the French co-prince, Estrella Andorra and Quiver Tree Media also made contributions that allowed us to finalize the project. We agreed with TV3, the Balearic Islands Television, and Andorra Television to broadcast the film at the end of the year. Everyone contributed as much as they could, and I am very grateful to everyone for their support and faith in the project.

Last October we held a private presentation with partners and participants, including some politicians. The film will be released in September 2025. Filming took place in Andorra, Sitges and la Seu d'Urgell. Interviews were recorded in the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal, France, Andorra, and Spain. About 60 people worked on the film.

The lead role is played by Manel Piñero, known as Homo APM (*Alguna Pregunta Més*), from the TV3 comedy program. Their resemblance is impressive! When you watch the film, from the

very first moment there will be a feeling that you are seeing Boris. And when he puts on his monocle—it's really impressive!

The film also stars Irina Robles, a wonderful Andorran actress who plays the role of one of Boris' lovers. The soundtrack was composed by Moe Espinosa of the Persefone band. The graphic design was done by Mimi Delgado and the sound designer was Pere Revert, who did an amazing job. The voiceover is credited to Sergi Zamora, who has voiced some Hollywood stars.

Our whole team, with the exception of Manel Piñero, was made up of Andorran professionals who once again showed their great talent.

—How often do films get made in Andorra? Is it common to do filming here, or is it the exception?

—Making a film, whether in Andorra or elsewhere, is a very complex process, as it involves a significant economic investment and many resources. It is true, however, that Andorra is placing more and more emphasis on the audiovisual sector and that the Government is making efforts and increasing the subsidies available.

To be honest, I found that filming in Andorra was much easier than in other places, thanks to the proximity, the speed of administrative procedures and the collaboration of government bodies. What's more, we have excellent professionals in the country and you don't have to go abroad to get the highest qua-

lity.

—Why has Boris attracted so much attention now?

—Boris is a well-known and popular figure, but with the exception of Gerard Lang, his main biographer, no one has gone into much detail about his life. In fact, as Gerard Lang told us, we were the sixth team to attempt to make a documentary about Boris. The other teams never made progress because the story seemed too complex to be captured in a documentary. Moreover, separating truth from fiction, gathering all the necessary documents, and developing a script that tells the story of Boris's life was not an easy task.

This documentary required more effort than all my previous seven films put together. Let me repeat: I find Boris to be a very interesting character. He was a professional con man, an adventurer, an organiser of orgies for the elite, a man who has survived extremely difficult times (including prisons and concentration camps) and, most importantly, a full-fledged gigolo.

Ultimately, he's an entertaining character, but as you'll see in the film, he also has a rather dark side that hasn't been touched on until now. We're dealing with that and we didn't want to soften his image, because there are both positive and very negative aspects to him, which are also revealed throughout the documentary. The film will be showing in the cinema in September. ●