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Architectural shaping of Belgrade University Center (1921–1931)

ABSTRACT: The main idea of this article is to discuss one of the most ambitious interwar architectural endeavors in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (since 1929 Kingdom of Yugoslavia) – the construction of Belgrade University Center in the third decade of the 20th century. In order to illustrate the complex nature of the visual manifestation of the University Center architecture, history and contemporary public reception of Belgrade University will be considered. Next, the University Center would be discussed in regard to interwar Belgrade urban planning. Finally, the last part of the paper will focus on four University buildings constructed during the 1920s, on the Racecourse location.

KEY WORDS: Belgrade, Yugoslavia, University Center, urbanism, state architecture.

The University – shrine of scholarship, education and knowledge – represents a significant pillar of a society, an established, often state, institution of power and prestige. Not many universities of the world are as closely connected to the historical courses of a society as has been the University of Belgrade, not only because it has been the only Serbian university for a long time, yet it has been an active constituent of country's political, cultural and national conditions. When financed by the state – and the state institutions – highly demanding patrons, pieces of architecture are expected to befit the importance, power and longevity of these institutions and with its expressive forms persuasively convey their patron's idea of the world. Ambitious and resourceful, Belgrade University has advocated construction of a suitable object ever since its establishment. Even if often mentioned in prolific discussions focused on other subject matters, architecture of University buildings has not been separately studied within the course of Serbian architectural historiography. Aiming to encourage thorough future researches of this particular subject, the main idea of this article is to discuss the architectural shaping of Belgrade University Center in the third decade of the 20th century. First of all, history and contemporary public reception of Belgrade University will be concisely depicted, in order to illustrate the complex nature of the visual manifestation of the University Center architecture.

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Next, the University Center would be discussed in context of interwar Belgrade urban planning. Finally, the last part of the paper will focus on four edifices built during the third decade of the 20th century on the Racecourse location, as part of an attempt to physically construct an academic haven and transform Belgrade into a spiritual, enlightened capital of Yugoslavs.¹

The period of active efforts to establish the first Serbian university started with the initiative of Stojan Bošković (1833–1908), at that moment Rector of the Higher School, later Minister of Education, who had made a draft proposal of an Act on University in 1893 (BOJOVIĆ 1986: 69–82, POPOV, VUČIĆ 1988). Since this point on, the establishment of Belgrade University would last little over a decade. The process had been significantly slowed down by perilous political circumstances, overshadowing all other daily subjects, including the question of education (MITROVIĆ 1988: 7–208). It was only after the 1903, when the question of Constitution had finally been resolved, that the political focus could be shifted elsewhere. General economic conditions were being considered as the second difficulty. Interestingly enough, though at that moment the local economy actually thrived, a number of political figures have been advocating that Serbia is a poor country of modest incomes (JANKOVIĆ 1988: 51–62). Finally, conservative Serbian society, on the greater part consisting of farmers and merchants with a few intellectuals, has not, at first, recognized the need for changing the present status of Higher School (ANONYM 1905: 2–3). However, in the end, the efforts and voices of intelligentsia have prevailed – in the year 1905 the Act on Universities was enacted and the King Peter the First Karadorđević (1844–1921) signed the decree of its coming into force, granting the Belgrade University full autonomy (BOJOVIĆ 1986: 69–82).

Layered architecture of University buildings has been shaped to befit the significance and solemnity of the state institution it would shelter, conveying its messages and suggesting high position Belgrade University has occupied within the Serbian power hierarchy. In order to grasp political and social contexts of architectural formation of Belgrade University Center, one should firstly be familiar with the contemporary public reception of the institution itself. The University was widely accepted as an important constituent of Serbian society, one which would significantly contribute to the country's consolidation and help future unification and liberation of Serbian population living under the reign of Habsburg Monarchy and the Ottoman Empire. With the idea of establishment of an autonomous Serbian University came the thought of its wider pan Slavic significance as well. Advocating the establishment of Belgrade University, the program of the National party stated that, enabling Serbian students to gain education and undertake academic researchers in their homeland, the prestigious institution would become the highest cultural and scholarly epicenter of Serbianism which would attract not only Serbian but also scholars of other Slavic nations. Andra Nikolić (1853–1918), the Minister of Education, insisted that, enabling academic research, almost nonexistent in the Higher School, a Serbian University would instigate the independence of Serbian scholarship and, in that way, help preparing the ground for absolute independence of Serbia. After the

¹ The Racecourse was a large field located on Belgrade's rim, between Boulevard of King Alexander, Beogradska Street, Street of Queen Maria and the last tram stop. On the initiative of Prince Miloš Obrenović, a great hippophile, since the year 1863 the field has been used as a ground for horse racing, the favorite pastime in Belgrade. Though the name remained the same, the racecourse was relocated in 1906. The ground has been used as the cattle market ever since, probably till the construction of the University Library – the first building of the University Center in Belgrade: BOGUNOVIĆ 2005: 481–486.

May Overthrow and related changes in Serbian internal and foreign policies, whenever the University of Belgrade was mentioned, its national and political roles were accentuated. Member of the Old Radical party, Milić Radovanović (1860–1936) underlined that Belgrade University would expand the thought of the unification of Serbians well beyond country's political borders and that, as an important cultural center, it would be the most powerful tool for expansion of Serbian influences. The first rector of Belgrade University, Sima Lozanić (1847–1935), compared Serbian University with the ones in Germany and Italy and their national role in the preparation for unification German and Italian peoples, stating that the University of Belgrade will play the same role within the Serbian nation (POPOV, VUČIĆ 1988: 51–62).

After the First World War University of Belgrade has played a crucial role in betterment of all aspects of devastated Serbian society and, at the same time, has significantly contributed to the construction of Yugoslav national identity (DIMIĆ 1997: 339–371). According to statistics of Paris Peace Conference, Serbia has lost 28% of its population during the war. After the war was over, vast losses of human lives left Serbia in great need for experts in various fields, capable to carry out the rebuilding of the country. Under such grave conditions, the University of Belgrade, at that moment the only one in Serbia, played a crucial role, providing the country with much needed human resources. On the other side, the highest educational institution in the country, actively contributing to the upbringing of Yugoslav youths, Belgrade University represented a significant ideological tool in the construction of homogenous national Yugoslav identity (JANKOVIĆ 1988: 209–240).

Elected the capital of the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (since 1929 Kingdom of Yugoslavia), after the First World War Belgrade city was being enthusiastically transformed into a suitable administrative, political, economic and socio-cultural center of a much larger state than Serbia used to be (VUKSANOVIĆ-MACURA 2014: 115–127). Though financial potentials of the young kingdom were not corresponding to the ambitious political ideas and ideological tendencies, physical manifestation of a grand University Center would contribute to capitol's status of spiritual and center of knowledge of all Yugoslavs – fact which probably caused vast state investments in University buildings in spite of lack of resources between the World Wars. The building expansion of Belgrade University, simultaneous to severe reductions of the academic staff, book purchases and equipment, could also be explained in relation to an interesting theory. In his article on correlations between architecture, politics and public realm David Milne discusses stabilizing function of the architecture (MILNE 1981: 131–146). He argues that architecture, when funded by the state, may be expected to provide an important political service, typically conducted by spectacularly designed buildings and structures which enshrine each civilization's code of "law and order". Suggesting Patron's power, strength and durability, monumental pieces of architecture are employed in order to camouflage deeper contradictions and perils of actual political conditions. Considering political undercurrents within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as well as the difficult financial condition Belgrade University was struggling with, Milne's observations about stabilizing function of architecture which conveys strength and longevity of the patron-institution could be incorporated in interpretation of architectural shaping of University Center in Belgrade.

The process of architectural shaping of Belgrade University Center is officially dated into the period between the World Wars. However, the idea of forming a piece of architecture

suitable one of the most significant state institutions has been connected to the ever growing needs of the University, and can be traced back to the first decades of the 20th century. Soon after the University of Belgrade had been established, vast numbers of students made it obvious that the old building, Kapetan Mišino zdanje, would not suffice. At first, the solution has been searched in suitable transformations of the old building and the surrounding spaces. French Architect Alban Chambon, the author of the first complete urban plan for Belgrade from 1908, proposed transformation of public space in front of the old University building, reshaped into a French park, framed by public buildings which accentuate the visual effect of the main University edifice (MAKSIMOVIĆ 1978: 60–62; MILATOVIĆ 1980: 221–238). Two years later, discussing the matter of Belgrade’s public buildings, Jefta Stefanović, suggested the necessity of providing suitable objects for the University of Belgrade and National library (STEFANOVIĆ 1910: 4).

The idea to construct a University Center on the location of the Racecourse has for the first time appeared in November of 1913. In their official letter addressed to the President of the Municipality of Belgrade, the University Council stated that, discussing the matter of ever growing numbers of students, they have concluded that one large University building would not represent the adequate solution. Needs of various faculties could be met with the construction of a University Center, containing several objects. However, it would be near to impossible to find enough free space for such an endeavor within the boundaries of the city center. With that thought, the Council proposed the construction of University buildings on the spacious location of Racecourse, next to the Boulevard of King Alexander, one of the most important traffic arteries of Belgrade.² The Board of Belgrade Municipality adopted the Council’s proposal during their session on December 20th 1913, granting the University part of the Municipality’s Racecourse grounds and, during the following 1914, demanded on several occasion site plan of the University buildings.³

The situation plan of prewar Belgrade, made in 1921, depicts the layout of the University buildings which were supposed to be erected on the Racecourse plot (MAKSIMOVIĆ 1967: 92). The Belgrade Municipality had presented the University of Belgrade with the approximately trapezoid parcel of land. The anonymous architect had placed the three main buildings next to the Boulevard of King Alexander, using their monumental shapes to conceal smaller, probably administrative, buildings of lesser significance, which were supposed to be constructed towards the Ratarska Street. Having in mind strict budget and financial difficulties the University was struggling with, it can be assumed that the smaller, secondary University objects would be of relatively modest forms. In contrast, three edifices facing one of the city’s main traffic arteries would be monumental, thoughtfully ornamented architectural pieces, communicating the power, stateliness and significance of Belgrade University. Keeping academic knowledge and scholarly experiences of the world, the University Library, a smaller object, would be erected in the center of the “monumental axis” of the University Center, flanked by two capacious Faculty buildings. However, the prewar idea of moving the Serbian “center of knowledge” away from the city core had its opponents. Discussing the translocation of the University in his article published in 1914, Stanojlo P. Babić severely criticizes it (BABIĆ 1914). Accentuating

² State Archives of Serbia, Belgrade University G-200, f IV p 364/913.

³ State Archives of Serbia, Belgrade University G-200, f II p 217/914.

that the presence of a significant state institution deeply influences city ambiances and demands carefully designed surrounding spaces, Babić warned that monumental architectural ensemble of University edifices would sharply contrast existing, modest residential buildings of that area and extremely raise the housing prices.

On the initiative of Serbian association of engineers and architects, early after the First World War was finished, in the year 1919, the Board of Belgrade Municipality had decided to open an international competition for urban planning of Belgrade, officially announced in August of 1921 (NEDIĆ 1977: 301–309; VUKSANOVIĆ 2015).⁴ After the competition has been closed and the winners announced, in May of 1922, a Committee of fourteen respectable experts was formed in order to create the general urban plan for Belgrade, incorporating some of the participants' ideas (MAKSIMOVIĆ 1980: 239–269). By the July of 1923 the urban plan has been prepared and was, finally, officially accepted by the Minister of Construction a full year later. The chief of the Committee, Russian emigrant architect Grigory Pavlovich Kovalyevsky (1888–?), whose individual contributions to overall design were well noticed and awarded a bonus of 20.000 dinars (ANONYM 1923a: 5), heavily influenced the layout of urban plan with his conservative taste, shaped by the traditional experiences of Russian Empire. The program of the competition stated that new University buildings and the National library should be erected near the Tašmajdan Park, on the Racecourse location chosen for this purpose before the First World War (NEDIĆ 1977: 308).⁵ The University complex represented a monumental, well balanced urban composition which was supposed to be constructed on approximately trapezoid parcel of land. The shorter sides of the lot were supposed to be trimmed with monumental buildings of the Faculties, while smaller University objects would be positioned along the longer ones. The capacious edifice of the Technical Faculty was set as the main, crescendo accent of the axial spatial composition, facing the smaller National library building across the Grobljanska Street.

However, when it finally came to the construction phase during the third decade of the 20th century, few years after the general urban plan for the city of Belgrade has officially been accepted, and the physical architectural manifestation of the University Center determined, the main site plan was neglected. First of all, design and the position of the Technical faculty building were drastically altered, executed in accordance with the prewar idea. The main façade of the building was aligned with the Boulevard of King Alexander and the overall architectural conception was changed. Next, the Archives of Serbia, institution not included into the complex of University buildings, was placed in its center and constructed behind the Library edifice. Finally, one building, primarily omitted from the overall design has been added to the University complex – a dormitory for the students of Belgrade's University, funded by the King Alexander the First.

The University Library is the oldest and one of the most significant buildings of the University Complex (POPOVIĆ 1926: 206–209; PAVLOVIĆ 2014: 353–362; KADIJEVIĆ 2016: 104) (Fig. 1).

⁴ The urban planning of Belgrade represented a rather popular topic, a subject of interest to the wider public, regularly reported and discussed in contemporary media: ANONYM 1922a: 3; 1922b: 3; 1922c: 3; 1922d: 1–3; 1923a: 5; 1923b: 5; 1923c: 5.

⁵ Among other references cite in this article, it is important to mention the prolific lecture titled “The new University Center of interwar Belgrade” by Dr Marina Pavlovic, participant at the conference *From Ottoman City to „Belgrade Waterfront“: critical history of visual transformations of Belgrade's public spaces*, Faculty of Philosophy of Belgrade State University, Belgrade 6. July 2015.



Fig. 1. University Library of Belgrade (1921–1926), architects Nikola Nestorović and Dragutin Đorđević

Internationally well-known devastations the city has suffered during the First World War as well as the status of a rising star in European political sky recommended Belgrade, the capital of the newly established Kingdom, for the support of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (ANDREW CARNEGIE 1835–1919). After the USA declared war on Germany, the Executive Committee of the Carnegie Endowment has decided to pass a new resolution, stating that, after the war was over, as an act of sympathy, funds would be attributed specifically to France, Belgium, Serbia, Russia and some parts of the Ottoman Empire (AUKHUND 2011: 3–21). The construction of the University Library in Belgrade should be considered as a part of a larger project, a triple operation, almost simultaneously conducted over few years, also involving the cities of Louvain and Reims. The three cities were chosen because, for the public opinion, their countries were bound together by war as well as on their symbolical significance – university library of Louvain was one of the oldest in Europe; Rheims, the crowning city of France, represents French tradition and spirit; Belgrade, a young South Eastern Europe capital bearing a strategic significance (AUKHUND 2011: 3–21). With the incentive of Serbian dignitaries living at that time in the USA – famous professor of physics, Mikhail Pupin (1858–1935) and Yugoslav ambassador, Slavko Grujić (1871–1937), the Carnegie Foundation has officially decided to sponsor the construction of the new University Library in Belgrade in February of 1920 (ŠUPUT, BOŠNJAK 2005: 65–84).

Designs and construction were supervised by the Committee constituted of seven members. Svetozar Pribičević (1875–1936), the Yugoslav Minister of Education and Percival Dodge

(1870–1936), American ambassador in Belgrade were acting as honorary members, while five executive members – Slobodan Jovanović, Rector of Belgrade University (1869–1958); Leo Capser (1893–1975), representative of Carnegie Endowment; University professors, architects Andra Stevanović (1859–1929), Nikola Nestorović (1868–1957) and Dragutin Đorđević (1866–1933) – were in charge of the building process. In the winter of 1920 architects Nikola Nestorović (Fig. 2) and Dragutin Đorđević have submitted expeditiously prepared first Library designs, which would soon after be officially approved by the Endowment (ANONYM 1921: 2). The corner stone was laid by the King Alexander Karađorđević the First (1888–1934) on 23rd of June, 1923 (MARKOVIĆ, FILIPOVIĆ 2011: 11). Coordinated with the ones in Louvain and Reims and lavishly organized, the Corner Stone ceremony has been open to public and to the press. Local and international public interest in Carnegie’s donations was reflected in the high media coverage of the ceremony – moving pictures of the ceremony were taken by a representative of the New York Fox Film Company, the event was reported in the press by various local newspapers and described in a lengthy article published by the New York Times on 30th of October, 1921. However, enthusiastic initial plans for finishing the construction of the Library during 1922 have been drastically postponed. Though the building had passed technical assessments in 1923, works were being conducted until 1926 when the Library was finally ceremoniously opened on Ss. Ćirilo and Metodije day (ANONYM 1926a: 5; 1926b; 1926c: 6).

Due to the lack of funds originally submitted designs for the Library were slightly changed during the construction, reducing the functionality of the object (NESTOROVIĆ 1973: 342–344). Though altered, the overall T-shaped, symmetrical articulation of floor plans, shaped under the influence of academism, remained similar (MIHAJLOV 2009). The main communication point of the ground floor is a spacious vestibule which opens up to the main reading hall, flanked by several smaller rooms. Connected with sizeable corridors, offices are placed behind the main façade, while the storage rooms for books are located in the lateral wings of ground and first floors. The design of the first floor, with a separate reading room for professors, mainly reflects the ground floor concept.

Eloquently communicating significance of the state institution housed behind its walls, exterior architectural forms of University Library reflect strict classical conception of the floor plans. The style of the edifice is largely neo-classic and was supposed to match the formal conception of other buildings of the University campus. Impersonal and atypical for the individual aesthetics of architects involved, architectural modeling of the edifice was heavily influenced by the “Carnegie Library Model”. Though numerous Carnegie libraries were constructed in very different styles, the overall architectural expression was always simple and formal, with a prominent doorway, a monumental staircase as well as an outside lamppost or lantern as a symbol of enlightenment (AUCKUND 2011: 3–21). Even if uninventive and canonical, the principal façade represents a harmonious, skillfully designed communicative architectural



Fig. 2. Architect Nikola Nestorović (1868–1957)

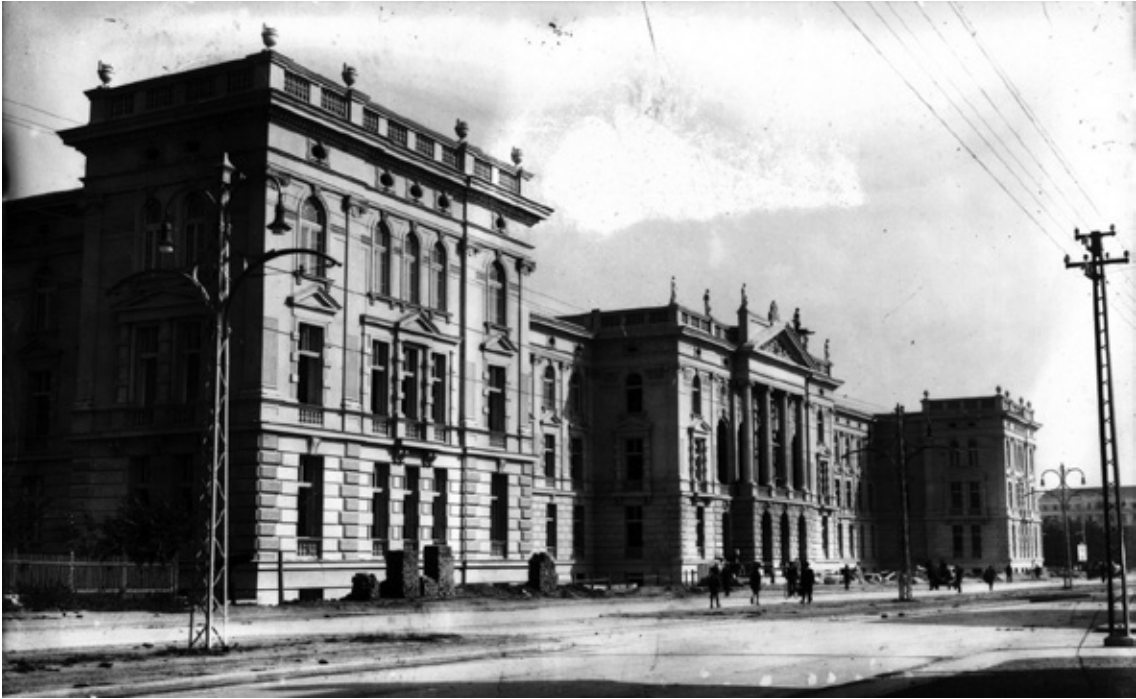


Fig. 3. Technical faculty of Belgrade University (1925–1931), architects Nikola Nestorović and Branko Tanazević

composition. Two long lateral wings, adorned with pairs of colossal Ionic columns, are flanking the elaborate central tract, shaped as a tetrastyle portico, with slender Corinthian columns and highly erected triangular tympanum. Serene, well balanced architectural composition of the University Library, temperately decorated with allegoric sculptures, successfully conveys the significance and enlightened purpose of an important state institution which till the present day continuously contributes to the education, scholarship and culture of Serbian nation.

The construction of Technical Faculty represents the first official deviation of the general urban plan for Belgrade within the University complex (Fig. 3).⁶ The object was one of the longest and most expected University buildings – soon after the University was established, vast numbers of students made obvious that Technical faculty would have to be placed in an individual object. The construction process had started during autumn of 1925 and finished building was ceremoniously consecrated six years later, on 31st of October, 1931 (ANONYM 1929b: 6; 1931a: 7; 1931b: 5; 1931c: 5). The designs were made by two well respected architects, professors of Belgrade University, Nikola Nestorović and Branko Tanazević (1876–1945) (PAVLOVIĆ 2014: 375–387).

Designed in accordance with the prewar urban plan, building of Technical Faculty was erected as a freestanding structure, facing the Boulevard of King Alexander (NESTOROVIĆ 1973:

⁶ On history and architecture of Technical Faculty see documentaion in: Archives of Yugoslavia MG KJ 62, f1471-1474; Historical Archives of Belgrade f 4-7, 8-952; f 4-7-52; f 64-47.

358–361). The building consists of basement, ground floor and three floors – two original ones while the third floor was built after the Second World War. Influenced by consistent application of strict rules of academism, object's designs reflect well balanced symmetry, firm proportions of the interior layout and spatial hierarchy. Floor plans are designed in a pristine, clear manner – four main courtyards are surrounded by the staircases, corridors and various rooms for students and professors. Classrooms and offices are placed along the main street façade, connected with spacious corridors. Compact cubic design is intercepted by the main, administrative block with accentuated central, disproportionately large aula with monumental staircases, reported in the press as unique architectural structure in whole of Belgrade (ANONYM 1929a: 2). Classical architectural vocabulary and strict monochromatic coloring create simple, formal interior ambiences, characteristic of Nestorović's designs for public buildings.

Facades of this colossal architectural structure, at that moment the largest one in the country, are shaped without much imagination, under the strict influence of principles of Academism. Reflecting and simultaneously enabling the primary educational purpose of the building, architectural and decorative elements are in the style of neo-classicism, neo-baroque and neo-renaissance. Facing one of the most important city streets, 156 meters long principal, monumental façade is vertically divided into five segments with accentuated central Avant-corps balanced by the two corner risalits. The central risalit is shaped as a monumental portico with heavily rustic ground floor, colossal Ionic columns and high triangular tympanum with sculptural composition "The Construction Techniques", topped by balustrade carrying allegoric sculptures depicting Sculpture, Physics, Architecture, Industry and Painting (IBRAJTER-GAZIBARA 2006: 69–85; MAJSTOROVIĆ 2012: 105–115; SIKIMIĆ 1965: 21–22). Lateral facades are also divided into five segments but are not as elaborately shaped as the principal one, decorated with modest sculptural programs – solution which would additionally contribute to diminishing of the object's coherency (KADIJEVIĆ 2005: 355–356).

Glorified by the local press as one of the most monumental and grandest edifices in Belgrade, the building of Technical faculty was heavily criticized by professional public. In his critical article published in 1926, architect Dimitrije M. Leko (1887–1964) draw public's attention to the fact that Nestorović and Tanazević used the building of Technical School in Charlottenburg, Berlin as the source of inspiration, incorporating all of the flaws and omitting the values of the Charlottenburg's design (LEKO 1926: 65–66). However, even if the Technical faculty was indubitably shaped under the influence of the Charlottenburg's object and possesses several design flaws, object's strict monumental shapes have not significantly differed from other contemporary public buildings, and till the present day represent one of the most imposing edifices of Belgrade University.

Since its establishment in 1898, one of the most urgent questions concerning the functioning of institution of national importance which collects and keeps Serbian historic sources has been the acquirement of suitable building for housing of State Archives of Serbia (VUJOVIĆ 2003: 300–301).⁷ One year would pass after the general urban plan for Belgrade has officially been authorized when, in 1925, Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov (1864–1939) (Fig. 4), Russian emigrant

⁷ On history and architecture of State Archives of Serbia see documentaion in: Archives of Yugoslavia, collection of plans 449; Historical Archives of Belgrade: 2770 KJ 10.



Fig. 4. Architect Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov (1864–1939)

academician of architecture employed at the Ministry of Construction, has been instructed to design the State Archives building (NESTOROVIĆ 1973: 350; ŠKALAMERA 1983: 109–129; KADIJEVIĆ 1997: 221–255). Even if initially not included into the University complex, the object would be erected at its center. Maybe the problematic decision to purposely neglect the urban plan has been the result of an attitude that the institution committed to the preservation of memory and knowledge of Serbian history would not be inconsistent with Belgrade’s “center of scholarship”, dedicated to education and upbringing of country’s future intelligentsia. However invading and in violation of urban planning, the decision was final (MAKSIMOVIĆ 1980: 257–258).

Executing the instructions of his superiors, Nikolai Petrovich has, in his capable manner, expeditiously finished the first designs for the building – carefully painted aquarelles with filigree details – during the spring of 1925.⁸ The base of the State Archives building, consisting of basement, ground floor and first floor, is T-shaped. Facing the Carnegie Street, the main part of the object contains spacious reading halls, offices, administrative and conference rooms. Depots for the archival sources are located

in the longitudinal ell, projecting into the backyard area. Strict, conservative articulation of the interior spaces dictates the symmetric composition of rooms lining the spacious corridors.

Collecting and keeping relevant historical sources, the institution of State Archives represents country’s legitimacy, stability and longevity. Nikolai Petrovich masterfully transpositioned institution’s character into the architectural sentence of monolithic, hieratically organized elements (Fig. 5). Fort-like character of one of the most important state treasuries is persuasively stated with monumental central risalit shaped in the manner of tetrastyle portico with colossal segmented Doric columns, carrying the triglyph frieze and sculptures of Aristotle and Plato (MAJSTOROVIĆ 2012: 105–115; SIKIMIĆ 1965: 60). Heavy wooden doors with iron rivets, resembling the vault gates, enhance the imposing, stronghold-like character of the building. Heraldic symbols play an important role in semiotic configuration of the principal façade (POPOVIĆ 1997: 103–105). Two-headed eagle with shield upon its chest and proudly spread wings is placed above the entrance doors, while massive, strongly shaped sculptures of lions carrying shields with carved coats-of-arms flank the entrance staircase. Evoking Ledoux’s monolithic barriers with solemn neo-classical morphology and characteristic constructive firmness of the edifice, Krasnov’s adroit mannerist interpretations of traditional principles of academism mark the building of State Archives as a genuine master-piece of the 20th century historicist architecture.

The majority of students of Belgrade University were living under poor conditions during the interwar period – altered, this situation could grant greater public support and enhance the popularity of the students’ benefactor. Though a students’ residence hall was not initially included in the University complex, such an object was highly needed. Furthermore, placing under the

⁸ Archives of Yugoslavia, collection of plans 449; Historical Archives of Belgrade: 2770 KJ 10.

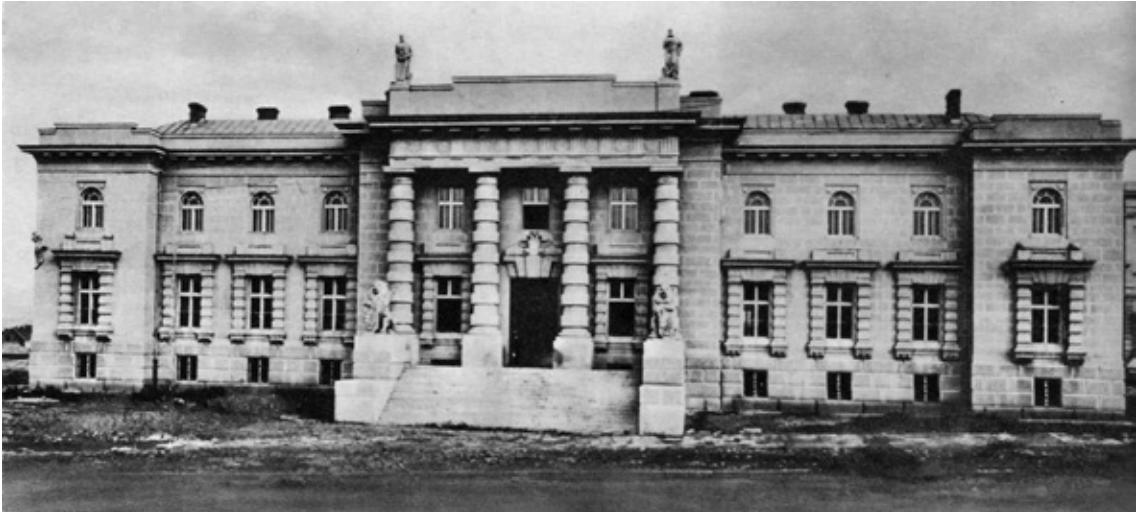


Fig. 5. State archives of Serbia (1925–1928), architect Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov

same roof young people from different parts of the Yugoslav Kingdom, a collective hall of residence could represent a significant tool in the creation of homogenous Yugoslav national identity. On the other hand, interpreted as one of the significant contributions of the ruling Karađorđević family, a gift to the Serbian people granted by King Peter the First, the establishment of the Serbian University was used in dynastic propaganda (JANKOVIĆ 1988: 209–240). Acting as the traditional patron of the University of Belgrade, on the St Sava Celebration in 1925, King Alexander the First made promise to the students of Belgrade University that he will provide them with a suitable hall of residence (ANONYM 1926c: 1). The King's promise was rapidly effectuated (TOŠEVA 1994: 302–307; ĐURĐEVIĆ 2002–2003: 171–181). With the assistance of his colleagues, Victor Loukovski (1884–1947) and Boz. Miladinović, Russian emigrant Grigory Kovalyevsky, the architect in charge of the urban planning of Belgrade, expeditiously made the designs for the students' dormitory, approved by the Construction Department of Belgrade municipality on 22nd of April, 1926.⁹ The construction started soon after and King Alexander the First laid the corner stone on 9th of May, 1926 (ANONYM 1926b: 5; 1926c: 1). Two years later, in 1928, Student Resident Hall of King Alexander the First was officially ceremoniously opened (ANONYM 1928a: 5; 1928b: 3).

The site plan signed by Kovalyevsky shows the placement of the student dormitory in the line of the main axis of the National library building, as the finishing accent of the recently altered architectural composition of Belgrade's "center of knowledge".¹⁰ The base of the object, consisting of basement, ground floor and three upper floors, is trapezoid with spacious central courtyard. The interior layout is, with smaller alterations, repeated from the basement to the third floor – capacious corridors are placed in the center of the building, lined on the both side

⁹ Historical Archives of Belgrade f 5-54-1626.

¹⁰ Historical Archives of Belgrade IAB f 5-54-1626.



Fig. 6. Students' Dormitory of King Alexander the First (1926–1928), architect Grigory Pavlovich Kovalyevsky

with numerous rooms. Basement of the object was reserved for the capacious dining room of 330m², kitchen, heating department, eight rooms for students and a lavatory with fourteen showers. The ground floor was shaped monumentally, with lavishly decorated vestibule, several offices, the Director's apartment, one waiting and one conference room and fifty rooms for students. Adding to total of 249 students' rooms, 62 decent sized rooms of 12m² each were placed along the corridors of first, second and third floor. As is the case with other University buildings, symmetrically shaped interior spaces of the Student Residence Hall building are methodically articulated under the strict influence of academism.

Monumentally shaped facades of the edifice, eclectic synthesis of neo-baroque, neo-classical and Russian Empire styles, are divided into three differently decorated horizontal levels – consisting of basement and ground floor, the first one is modeled in imitation of ashlar; the second horizontal zone, covering the first and the second floor, is adorned with colossal Ionic pilasters; finally, above the second cornice, rises the third level fenestrated with small rectangular windows (Fig. 6). Opening the dining room to the gardens and the view of the University Center, principal façade of the building faces the city's periphery (DJURDJEVIĆ, KADIJEVIĆ 2001:

142). The focal point of the main front is a shallow risalit, in accordance with the rest of the exterior architecture, divided into three levels. The lowest level is shaped in the manner of three-arched closed portico, topped by a spacious terrace with colossal Ionic pilasters. Decorative composition of the Avant-corps is accentuated by a large arched opening with an archivolt, a recognizable element of the Russian Empire style. In contrast to other buildings of the University complex, though monumental and shaped under the influence of academism, the Student Residence Hall is of lighter, less imposing character. Though part of a significant complex of state buildings intertwined with numerous symbolical, social and political layers, the students' dormitory is, first of all, a residential object. Respecting the object's primary purpose, the architects created a suitable piece of architecture – monumental yet serene and, above all, functional.

CONCLUSION

Architectural shaping of Belgrade University Center represents one of the most ambitious interwar architectural endeavors in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians. Eloquently conveying the state's order, a civilization's creed, its ruling institutions and classes, monumental buildings erected during an enthusiastic attempt to construct academic haven, a center of scholarship and knowledge, on the Racecourse location in the 1920s, represent complex architectural structures, an interesting subject matter of intertwined meanings worthy of scholars' attention and researches. Imposing, monumental forms of University Library, Technical faculty, State archives of Serbia and Students Residence Hall till the present day mark the ambiances of Belgrade's city core. Mostly discussed within researches primarily focused on other subject matters, Serbian University architecture should be thoroughly studied within architectural historiography. In order to thoroughly study numerous aspects of layered University architecture future researchers should not disregard its social and historical contexts, discussing its urban, political, and cultural aspects. The complex character of this neglected architectural type which supports state educational politics, would, without a doubt, produce prolific research outcomes of far-reaching significance for Serbian historiography.

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АРХИТЕКТОНСКО ФОРМИРАЊЕ БЕОГРАДСКОГ УНИВЕРЗИТЕТСКОГ ЦЕНТРА (1921–1931)

Резиме

Архитектонско формирање Београдског универзитетског центра један је од најамбициознијих међуратних подухвата у Краљевини СХС/Југославији. Елоквентно преносећи државни поредак, ставове цивилизације, њених институција и владајуће класе, монументалне грађевине подигнуте током ентузијастичног покушаја конструкције академског уточишта, центра науке и знања, на локацији Тркалишта током 1920-их, представљају комплексне архитектонске структуре, тему достојну пажње стручне јавности. Често помињана у истраживањима примарно усмереним ка другим темама, архитектура универзитетских зграда није засебно изучавана у токовима српске архитектонске историографије. Са циљем да се подстакну будућа подробнија истраживања поменуте проблематике, овај рад говори о архитектонском формирању београдског Универзитетског центра током треће деценије XX века. Како би се илустровала комплексна природа визуелне манифестације архитектуре Универзитетског центра, најпре су концизно представљени историјат и савремена рецепција Београдског универзитета. Други део рада посвећен је питању Универзитетског центра у односу на токове урбанистичког промишљања и формирања Београда. Коначно, у фокусу последњег сегмента постављене су четири грађевине подигнуте двадесетих година XX века на Тркалишту – Универзитетска библиотека, Технички факултет, Државна архива и Студентски дом – чије импозантне, репрезентативне форме до данашњих дана доминирају потезом Булевара краља Александра од Београдске улице до парка Ђирила и Методија.

Кључне речи: Универзитет у Београду, Универзитетски центар у Београду, архитектура академизма, међуратни период, Универзитетска библиотека, Технички факултет, Државни архив Србије, Студентски дом краља Александра Првог.

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