

THE SQUARE OF KING ALEXANDER THE UNIFIER IN NIŠ

Aleksandra Mirić¹

Milena Jovanović²

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Summary: *The basic morphological structure of the central city core of Niš was conditioned by the historical development of the city, the position of the originally built fortifications and urban structures and essential roads. The Square of King Alexander the Unifier went through multiple urban transformations characteristic for cities which, like Niš, continually evolved since the Roman Empire, until today. The square is dedicated to the memory of King Alexander I, who is remembered by declaring in 1918 the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into a single state. The subject of this paper is the perception of the Square of King Alexander, not only the value of its architectural elements of the reshaped urban environment, but also the relationship of their inextricable links which were created with the rest of architectural structures in the vicinity. Furthermore, we will discuss the conditions of creation of the square and the monument of King Alexander as it is one of the most famous town landmarks, which was not discussed enough in the professional literature until now.*

Keywords: *Niš, Arnaut market, the Square of Prince Mihailo, the Square of King Alexander, horseman, cultural monuments, urban regeneration*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the period of classical antiquity, Naissus was formed on a slightly elevated spot, where today are situated the remains of the medieval bastions and fortification walls. From the right side, the city would spread in the periods that followed, to the left side of the river Nišava, so that, with the erection of the mentioned fortress and the bridge on Nišava, further conditions of the urban development could be created.

The square which bears the name of King Alexander the Unifier, like the city of Niš itself, represents a layered city area on which life played out ever since the periods of the Turkish domination until today. It resides, like the Square of King Milan, in a place

¹ Aleksandra Mirić, M.Sc. in architecture and heritage, conservation expert, PhD student - researcher, l'Institut de recherche sur l'architecture antique- IRAA, Université Lyon 2, Lyon, France; Voždova 70a, 18000 Niš, Serbia, e – mail: aleksandramiric@yahoo.com

² Milena Jovanović engineer of architecture, PR Bureau for architecture and design MILIMARX, PhD student at Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture in Niš, Czar Dušan 6/33, Niš, Serbia, phone: +381 18 243 792, e – mail: mikacika79@gmail.com

where city's essential roads branch out, which permitted its growth and development with the evolution of the urban tissue surrounding it.

2. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE URBAN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SQUARE

The story of the public space on which now the Square of King Alexander the Unifier is situated begins in the first half of the 18th century, when this area, then wide grassland, was used for commercial trade. So called Arnaut market stretched in the south-western part of the city, outside of the fortification walls, not far from the city's main traffic intersection (Fig. 1a).

The Arnaut market later became the city's main market, surrounded by workshops, stores and one storey houses. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Arnaut market was a simple street, where, like two centuries earlier, smaller manufacturers presented their craft for sale.

The place in which the today's square is situated was a free area without trees, paved with cobblestones and with a drinking fountain in the middle [6].



Fig 1.a- The Arnaut market and main traffic directions on the Plan of Niš by Franz Winter from 1879, b- the Square of King Alexander the Unifier on the map of contemporary Niš
(taken on January 2014 from <https://maps.google.rs/>)

After the liberation from the Turks, and especially in the period after World Wars, the name of Arnaut market, as the function itself, was completely lost.

Although in the period that followed, the square often changed its name, the one thing left behind the Arnaut market, was the public space and the habit of citizens to gather there. Namely, in accordance with Winter's plan from 1879, the process of urban modernization of the former province began.

The mentioned public space carried the name of Prince Mihailo Obrenović, and when administrative services were moved from within the fortification onto the territory of the left river bank, it gained on its urban significance.

A testimony to that is the fact that in 1937, the Square of Prince Mihailo was one of the tram stations on a line that connected the main railroad station with Niška Banja, as its final destination [2].

With the placing of the King Alexander I the Unifier statue in 1939, the square got his name (Fig. 2a and 2b), but at the end of the World War II in 1946 the monument was removed and the square was called the Square of the Yugoslav People's Army, then the Square of the Yugoslavia Army, and finally in 2003, the Army Square.

In year 2004, the initiative was created for the re-installation of the monument and name was reverted back to the Square of the King Alexander the Unifier [6], who is remembered by declaring in 1918 the unification of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into a single state and who was killed in 1934 in Marseille.



Fig. 2.a- “The Square of Prince Mihailo” and b- The Square of King Alexander as seen in the pre-war postcards (taken on January 2014 from <http://www.skyscrapercity.com>)

The urban form of the square, the closest to the one we know today, was created in the period of the dynamic growth of the city after World War II.

The function of this public surface was a park, a memorial site, a circular crossroad and a bus stop space, but it also had a significant role in the traffic regulation in the densely populated urban core, especially the neighbourhood Kičevo that is situated west from the square and the neighbourhood Marger which spreads from its east end.

Around the square, several streets start, from the north Princess Ljubica and Sokolska street, from the east the Square of Pavle Stojković and Nikole Pašić, from the south Jug Bogdan street and Toplička street, while from the west side starts Jovan Ristić street (Fig. 2b).

In its final shape, the square is a public area with vegetation and the appropriate walking paths. In the main walking axis that is stretching in from the east to the west is a monument, as the most prominent feature of the square.

Alongside the monument to King Alexander, there are 5 more memorials, among whom are the Graves of the allied soldiers who had died during the battle for the liberation of Niš in 1944, the monument of the war hero Ratko Jović, as well as the memorial bust to the writer Duško Radović.

3. THE MONUMENT TO KING ALEXANDER THE UNIFIER AS A DISTINCTIVE CITY LANDMARK³

After the death of King Alexander Karadjordjević, the need was born for a landmark to be placed in the centre of Niš. The BANSKO board of the Moravian Banate opened a contest for “the erection of the monument for the late knight king Alexander I the Unifier”. Among the many authors, Anton Augustinčić answered this contest. The creative solution of young Radeta Stanković was especially noted, as he was the most prominent sculptor between the two World Wars, born at the beginning of the 20th century in Vienna, in a family with a long academic tradition, and schooled at the Royal Academy of Arts in Zagreb [5]. Although Radeta never won the first prize, the board decided that his solution of the horseman figure of the king should be realized. The whole procedure of the opening of the contest, choosing the best creative solutions and the making of the sculpture, was extremely fast, so that it was inaugurated in 1939. The realized idea of Radeta Stanković represents a typical achievement of this very prolific sculptor. The statue of King Alexander was compact figure of impressionistic shapes, created under the influence of Michelangelo, Rodin and Meštrović. The monument was revealed and sanctified on the king’s birthday on December 4/17.1939 [4]. It is interesting to note that the inauguration was attended by Radeta’s father, Radenko Stanković [4], one of the founders of cardiology in Serbia, a senator, and then a royal deputy in the period from 1934. to 1941. [3]. Unfortunately, the monument did not stay long in its intended place. In 1946, the monument was removed and melted down. From the original design, only two reliefs on the sides of the pedestal remain, and they can be currently found in the depots of local cultural institutions. Also, several working models remain, like the head of the horse and technical documentation of the author, which belongs to his widow, Natalija Stanković (Fig. 3a and 3b).

During the ‘90s, city fathers of Niš started an initiative for revitalization of the park, and in the place of the former statue of Radeta Stanković, a statue reconstruction was planned. They invited Oto Jovan Logo, one of our most acknowledged contemporary sculptors, who demanded that he be allowed freedom in regards to the original solution. As the demand was contradictory to the position of the legal copyright owner, Oto Logo withdrew his participation in this project. The next initiative bore fruit. In the middle of 2000, another contest was created in which, considering the legal issues surrounding copyright and the poor quality of the technical documentation of the first author, the reconstruction was cancelled and full creative freedom was given to applicants. After three months, 8 creative solutions came to Niš. The best solution was by a sculptor Zoran Ivanović from Belgrade, born in 1967, who graduated and got his magisterial degree on a topic “Horseman sculpture as a memorial sculpture” at the Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade. This solution, next to others, was displayed at an exhibition in Niš Fortress (Fig. 3c). The new solution with which the author won the competition had

³ This part of the paper represents a continuation of a research by A. Mirić, for the needs of her lectures, which she prepared for the National Library in Niš, that she held in 23.7.2013 in Niš. She contacted the author of the monument of King Alexander, Zoran Ivanović, sculptor, to whom she owns her sincere gratitude for all the information shared about the technical characteristics of the monument and the creative process itself.

a concept that differed from the original one. Although the wardrobe of the rider and the horse equipment were preserved, the facial expressions, and the movements, were authentic. Also, the direction of the monument was changed. As the former monument was a prominent piece of history, The Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Niš required that the original size of the monument must remain – 4.5m. The author of the monument created it in two phases: in the first, a model of 143cm was made so that later, it would be created three times bigger in proportions at the final height of 440cm. An interesting fact is that inside the sculpture there are 800 kilos of rods made out of stainless steel which give the monument its stability, and that explains how this statue, that has 30% and 40% of its weight out of its centre of mass, is standing upright. The final cast, prepared in the foundry Kuzman in Smederevo, heavy between 2.6 and 2.7 tons, was assembled from three parts. And only when it was put on its stand, it was discovered that the plinth was bigger than the pedestal. It was concluded that the original monument was a bit smaller than what was prescribed in the conditions of the contest, probably around 3.6m. The pedestal of the monument was around 7m high, coated with grey granite slabs, 16cm thick in all areas of the pedestal, some of which are a couple of hundreds of kilos heavy. In the pedestal there is an gravure “King Alexander Karadjordjević 1888-1934“. In accordance with the wishes of the sculptor Zoran towards the ideals of the classical standards of antique beauty, the sculpture of the horseman is in the golden ration in regards to the pedestal, and the movement is emphasized, especially with the dynamic figure of the horse.



Fig. 3.a- “The square and palace in the Army area”, b- a monument by sculptor R. Stanković (taken on January 2013 from <http://www.skyscrapercity.com>), c- a monument by sculptor Z. Ivanović (photo by A. Mirić 2013)

It is interesting that there is a different spatial orientation of the horseman and the horse. According to the author, in a stereotypical representation of a rider on a horse, a horseman is always a personification of a ruler, while the horse represents his subjects. In this case, the dichotomy between the rider and the horse is natural. The attitude of the author is that it represents the personification of political imperialistic interests, which were probably exaggerated because the king died by the hand of his political opponents. From the artistic point of view, the problem of the rampant horse hiding its rider is familiar. By doing this, the sculptor opened a front towards the face of the horseman.

The monument was revealed on December 7. 2004. on a 90th anniversary of the adoption of the historical Niš declaration of unification of Slav peoples in the Balkans and the goals of Serbia in the World War I.

4. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Although the monument to King Alexander I Karadjordjević was not an established cultural heritage, its value as a symbol of a city is extremely important. Recently, the city of Niš adopted an implementation of European standards for sustainable management of cultural monuments Qualicities [1], and the Square of King Alexander was recognized as one of the potential historical and tourist destinations. In accordance with the adopted strategy, measures for its protection should be taken into consideration, along with its presentation, popularization and informing citizens and visitors of its importance.

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ТРГ КРАЉА АЛЕКСАНДРА УЈЕДИНИТЕЉА У НИШУ

Резиме: Основна морфолошка структура централног градског језгра Ниша условљена је историјским развојем града, положајем првобитно изграђених фортификационих и урбаних структура и главних путних праваца. Трг Краља Александра је прошао кроз вишеструку урбану трансформацију карактеристичну за градове који су, попут Ниша еволуирали у континуитету постојања од римског доба до данас. Трг је данас посвећен сећању на Краља Александра И кога историја

памти по томе што је 1918. године прокламовао уједињење Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца у јединствену државу. Предмет овог рада је перцепција Трга Краља Александра, не само кроз вредновање архитектонских елемената вишеструко преобликоване урбане целине, већ и њихових међусобних односа у оквиру нераскидивих веза које остварују са осталим архитектонским структурама у окружењу. Такође, биће речи о условима настајања трга и самог споменика Краљу Александру као препознатљивом градском реперу, о коме је у стручној литератури до сада било веома мало речи.

Кључне речи: Ниш, Арнаут пазар, Трг кнеза Михаила, Трг Краља Александра, Јахач на коњу, споменици културе, урбана регенерација