

## CONVERSION OF MILITARY PROPERTY, ENGINEERS' BARRACKS IN NIŠ

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*Summary: The military complex, which was once constituted by the Engineers' Barracks and the Bubanjski heroji Barracks in Niš, no longer exists. The recent conversion of military into civil property inspired us to analyze the data presented here, as a temporary status before the complex is permanently converted. The architecture of the new millennium characterizing the office-residential district Novi Niš, which is being constructed, will replace the buildings of the former New Barracks, i.e. Bubanjski heroji Barracks. The future function of the Engineers' barracks which was later named after the hero Filip Kljajic has not been determined yet.*

*The historical record and architectonic analysis of the Engineers' Barracks presented here will help the future generations of researchers to understand the context of creation of the military complex at the foothill of Bubanj in Niš, his architectonic value, but also the circumstances of contemporary conversion of military property for civilian uses.*

**Keywords:** Niš, conversion of military property, Bubanj, Engineers; Barracks, Filip Kljajić Barracks, New Barracks, Bubanjski heroji Barracks, Danilo Vladislavljević, cultural property, revitalization

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The closing decades of the 19th century, which was a period of intense geopolitical insecurity was marked by significant political and social changes in Serbia. New schools were established, regular courts were introduced and agrarian reforms were conducted. [1] Proclamation of the Kingdom of Serbia in 1882 was followed by the necessity to increase security of the country. One of the reforms was related to securing of border regions, which included Niš in that period. It was necessary to create and deploy the necessary military apparatus, and accommodation of the permanent garrisons required construction of the barracks and adaptation of former Ottoman fortifications. The architectonic formation of these structures was usually subordinate to their function, and the autonomy of military complexes was provided using massive walls with small openings, guard boxes and embrasures. Improvement of military techniques allowed

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gradual abandonment of these typological characteristics and implementation of the architectonic styles which were present in the Western European cultures.

The military topography of Niš was urbanistically determined by two land complexes. In the Ottoman period, and after it, there was a fort on the left bank of the river Nišava, in whose immediate vicinity the Cavalry and Artillery barracks were erected. The military complex on the left bank of the Nišava was organized around the Turkish New Barracks at the foothill of the Bubanj hill.

## **2. HISTORY AND ARCHITECTONIC PROPERTIES OF THE MILITARY COMPLEX WHICH INCLUDED THE ENGINEERS' BARRACKS IN THE PERIOD AFTER 1878**

The Bubanj military complex was composed of two entities: The New barracks constructed in the last decades of the Ottoman reign and the Engineers' barracks, which was erected after the liberation, under the Serbian rule.

The New barracks is the least documented military structure among all the buildings that used to exist in Niš, so that data about it after the liberation from the Turks of 1878 are very scarce and rare. It is assumed that, after the Ottoman infrastructure was adapted, it was functioning at least until the end of the World War I, bearing the name of Knjaz (Prince) Mihailo. After the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was formed in 1918.god, it was renamed to the Barracks of the Sixteenth Infantry Regiment Car Nikolaj II Romanov whose headquarters were in Niš. After the WWI, the barracks were renovated, but it sustained considerable damage in the WWII. In the post-war period, the damage was repaired, and the exercise grounds in the barracks' courtyard was redesigned as functional training range.[2] It was then when its name was changed into Bubanjski heroji, which is the name it bore until 2011 when all 15 hectares of military property were sold. Presently, the New Niš project is being realized, which is construction of the housing district on this area.

Regarding the other part of the military complex at the foothill of the Bubanj hill, the Engineers' barracks, the great role in its architectonic design was played by the architect of the Military Ministry of the Kingdom of Serbia, Danilo Vladislavljević. Apart from the diploma of the architect from Munich and Aachen,[2] after returning to Serbia, Vldislavljević brought with him the direct influence of Academism, with which he became acquainted during his studies in Germany.

Like his contemporaries, he solved the problems of functional organization according to "the determined, accepted patterns, which are supremely reigned by the axis of symmetry, which determined positions of the main entrance, vestibule, monumental staircase, hall for ceremonies, ratios of their dimensions and decorative degree". [3]. The rational arrangement of the buildings he designed, and he remained remembered for the design of the Military Hospital on Vračar, Export Bank on Terazije square, and the Trade Bank in Knez Mihajlova street in Belgrade reflected in the eye-pleasing division of external composition masses.

Yet, his most important work, and the true architectonic refreshment in the town where the town planning directions were only being laid, remained the edifice of the Engineers' Barracks in Niš. Construction of the barracks commenced on 10th of June 1899 when

the founding stone was laid in the presence of king Aleksandar Obrenović and his father Milan.[4] (Fig. 1)

The bulk of the building is constituted by vertically dominant three floors-high middle block, and two wings having two floors above the ground floor which are placed symmetrically to the central entrance. The playfulness on the entire composition was achieved by the difference in heights of the middle block and other sections of the building, but also by the introduction of octagonal niches at the corners of the entry façade. Horizontality is emphasized by the plinth of stone blocks and the sequence of rhythmically arranged four-wing windows with arches at the ground and first floor levels. At the second floor, they are replaced by groups of two windows having more discreet, shallow arches. The relief medallions constructed in façade mortar were preserved above all the windows on the first floor. (Fig. 2 and 3)

General composition is characterized by the balanced forms which have stylized characteristics of Romanesque architecture. The elegance of decorative elements on the façade and the refined profiling singled out this building from the numerous robust barracks of the time. Yet, carefully designed corner towers and toothed finish of the attic stand as symbols of military architecture.

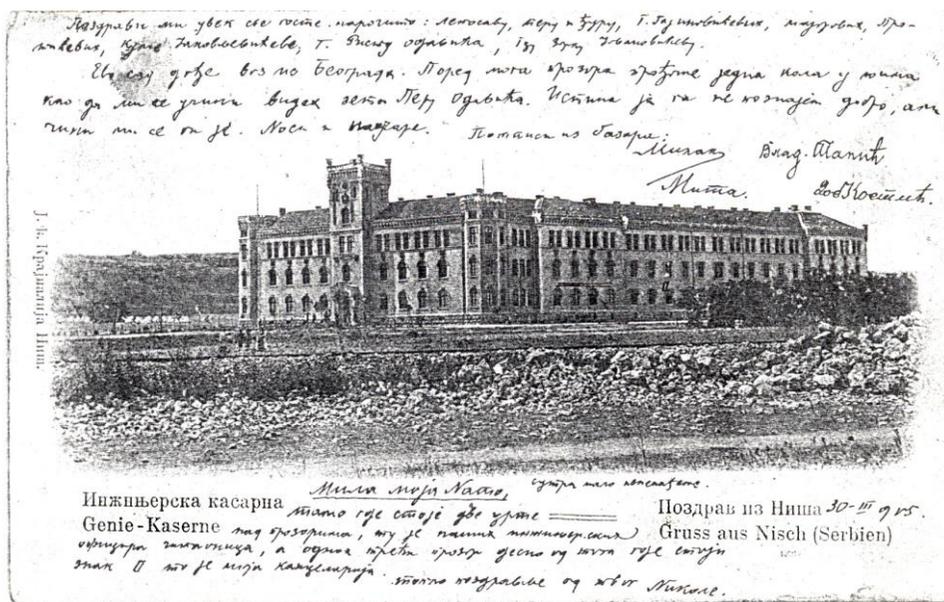


Fig.1, Engineers' Barracks in Niš, beginning of the 20th century, old postcard

The name and the function of this building changed in the later periods. In the WWI, after significant Serbian victories on Cer and Kolubara, over 20 000 Austro-Hungarian soldiers were interned in Nis in December 1914. The captured officers were accommodated in the Engineers' barracks, which was the most beautiful military building in the town at the time. The building was also used for incarceration of the

officers singled out from the group of prisoners of war placed in the Fort at the beginning of 1915 [5]. During the war years, until the Bulgarian occupation of Niš, in October 1915, the barracks, even though in poor sanitary conditions, without water supply and sewage infrastructure, was used as a Reserve military hospital.[6] It housed several hundred beds for the patients as evidenced by a number of written accounts of various people who stayed in Niš at the time as medical workers, humanitarians, diplomats and military representatives.[7] After WWI the barracks were renamed to Kralja (King) Aleksandra barracks, and it housed the First pioneer regiment. However, poor sanitary conditions made its functioning difficult, as it was during the WWI.[8] During the WWII, the barracks, as well as other military structures was used for accommodation of occupation troops which were deployed in Niš. After the liberation of the town, it was renamed to Filip Kljajić, after the Serbian hero of WWII. In all times, the denizens of Niš called this building the 365 days barracks, because of the popular legend that the architect dedicated a window for each day in a year. Irrespective of the name, this architectonic testimony of the time when esthetic identity of Niš was formed, is preserved in its original state and pronounced a cultural property in 1983.[9] The only alterations, conducted between wars, did not affect the autonomy of the original form. The significant town planning intervention is related to the building of fence around the complex and construction of an entry gate with two symmetrically arranged guard houses, which are similar to the style of the central building block.



*Fig. 2*



*Fig. 3, Filip Kljajić nowadays, Photo: A. Miric, 2015.*

### 3. ENGINEERS' BARRACKS NOWADAYS

Nowadays, there are ten structures within the perimeter of the Filip Kljajić barracks, which occupies an area of three hectares. They served various purposes, and their total area exceeds 9 000 square meters. According to an agreement with the Serbian Army, the building came into the purview of the City of Nis in 2011. The necessity for careful husbanding of this cultural monument was neglected due to an endless discussion of the political decision makers about the what the complex would be converted to: whether it would accommodate high schools, Revenue administration, cultural institutions of the city or a Military Museum. As a result it fell into a state of disrepair and dilapidation.

### 4. CONCLUSION

The military complex at the foothill of Bubanj does not exist any longer. However, it is important to study it, not only to complete the chronological reconstruction of the urban development of the city, but also to understand the culture of the everyday life since the Ottoman times until the present days.

The Bubanj military complex was composed of two entities: the original Ottoman New barracks as well as the Engineers' barracks which were constructed afterwards, under the Serbian rule. It was built outside of the town, in an attempt to accommodate the troops

and prevent the conflicts which could arise from mixing of soldiers and civilians. The New barracks at the foothill of Bubanj changed its function, it housed the Turkish and then Serbian soldiers. The Engineers' Barracks which were built along the New Barracks, is a building of an exquisite esthetic value, conceived by the architect Danilo Vladisavljević. This edifice is a touching testimony of peacetime, but also wartime events which befell Niš, it was used as barracks, reserve wartime hospital but also as a temporary accommodation for captured officers in WWI.

It is the recent conversion of military into civil property which inspired us to analyze the data presented here, as a temporary status before the complex is permanently converted. The architecture of the new millennium characterizing the office-residential district Novi Niš, which is being constructed, will replace the buildings of the former New Barracks, i.e. Bubanjski heroji Barracks. The future function of the Engineers' barracks which was later named after the hero Filip Kljajic has not been determined yet. It is true that establishment of a Military Museum would duly observe the architectonic autonomy and historical context of the building. However, it should be noted that the wide public or professional debate about this idea has never been conducted, nor a necessary feasibility study. The mentioned procedure would contribute to finding the best conversion design, but also to popularization of a very significant cultural monument which must be accepted by the citizens of Niš as a part of their cultural identity. The way in which this cultural property will be valorized in practice is extremely important, since it will remain as a message to future generations as what an important value to us and our contemporaries was.

Also, the historical record and architectonic analysis presented here, of the complex of which very few architectonic traces remained, will help the future generations of researchers to understand the military-strategic importance of the city in the historical span which was considered. Yet, in order to make the story about the military complex at the foothill of Bubanj a part of the culture and general historical knowledge of the citizens of Niš, it is necessary, after the conversion of the land for civil use, to provide access to significant documents which would testify to the development of the barracks but also part of the town used by the Army.

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### ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЈА ВОЈНОГ ЗЕМЉИШТА У ЦИВИЛНЕ НАМЕНЕ, ИНЖЕЊЕРИЈСКА КАСАРНА У НИШУ

**Резиме:** Војни комплекс под Бубњем више не постоји. Ипак, његово изучавање је значајно не само да би се употпунила хронолошка реконструкција урбаног развоја града, већ и да би се разумела култура свакодневног живота од османског периода до данашњих дана.

Недавна конверзија војног у цивилно земљиште нас је подстакла да анализирамо овде приказане податке, као својеврсни пресек стања пре него што комплекс заувек промени намену. Новомиленијумска архитектура пословно- стамбеног кварта Нови Ниш, који је у изградњи, замениће зграде некадашње Нове касарне, односно касарне Бубањски хероји. Будућа намена Инжењерске касарне која је касније понела име хероја Филипа Кљајића, још увек није одређена.

Овде представљена историјска белешка и архитектонска анализа Инжењерске касарне, помоћи ће генерацијама истраживача да разумеју контекст настајања комплекса, његову архитектонску вредност, али и околности савремене трансформације војног земљишта у цивилне намене.

**Кључне речи:** Ниш, конверзија војног земљишта, Бубањ, Инжењерска касарна, Данио Владисављевић, Филип Кљајић, Бубањски хероји, културно добро, ревитализација