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OVERVIEW OF THE RUSSIAN EMIGRANT’S ARCHITECTURE OF PUBLIC BUILDINGS IN NIŠ AND THE SURROUNDING AREA (1918–1941)

ABSTRACT: Mass emigration of people from Russia played an essential role in defining an urban matrix and the architectural visual identity of the public buildings of Niš and the surrounding areas in the interwar period. Vast opuses of the prominent individuals, preserved buildings *in situ*, and expansive technical documentation in archives and personal bequests have enabled further research. By following academic and modernistic design principles, architects-emigrants assimilated into current building modules. The most distinguished among them were Aleksandar I. Medvedev (1900–1984) and Julijan Lj. Djupon (1871–1935).

KEYWORDS: architecture, public buildings, emigration, Niš, academism, modernism.

Following the conflict of dichotomous political orientations of the Red and White armies, which resulted in the October revolution, mass emigration of peoples from Russian territories ensued. A large percentage of those who found refuge in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) were highly educated architects and civil engineers. Niš’s interwar architecture had two major development courses. One was based on the design of established academic works, while the other inclined new architectural poetics – modernistic tendencies were incorporated into architectural practice. Russian emigrants have conceptually incorporated into said courses, thus playing an important role in regulating the urban matrix of Niš and its surrounding. Newly-founded postwar political and economic circumstances resulted in massive city expansions across the Kingdom. This, with the ongoing influx of population transformed Niš into an important administrative, political, economic, and artistic center. It is challenging to determine the exact number of emigrants, primarily due to lack of documentation and preserved archives, as well as the modesty of family heirlooms. Several emigrant architects responsible for the development of the modernist architectural language were not permanently settled in Niš.

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Transposing Aesthetics: from Academicism to Modernism

The transition from academic aesthetics to modernistic vocabulary is reflected through the difference between the architectural works of Julijan Ljudvigovič Djupon (Юлиан Людвигович Дюпон) and Aleksandar Ivanovič Medvedev (Александр Иванович Медведев). Julijan Ljudvigovič Djupon was born in Odessa in 1871, where he obtained his first artistic knowledge in the Grekov Odessa art school in the exterior class of the Architectural Department, which he attended from 1888 to 1894. Later on, after graduating in 1894, he enrolled in architectural studies at the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. During the year 1901, he acquired the title artist-architect. He transferred the obtained knowledge into realized works¹ for the following seventeen years. Under the pressure of the October Revolution, he emigrated to the Kingdom of SCS, permanently settling in Niš in 1918. Djupon's arrival to Niš was fruitful, which was confirmed by his numerous realized projects of public and private purpose. Later on, he became employed in the Technical Department of Niš's municipality (ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2013: 16–20). In 1924, Djupon designed the superstructure project for the Catholic community – it was not accepted although it was visually comparable to the existing object. Judging by the presented project documentation, Djupon intended to entirely rely on the existing situation (ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2013: 39).

The early XX century war destruction conditioned the need for forming Societies for humanitarian help. During 1914, lady Leila Paget initiated the foundation of the Serbian Relief Fond which resulted in building the Dormitory for war orphans. Miss Moe Florence hired Djupon to design the dormitory, therefore its building process dates in 1925 and 1926. The Dormitory (Fig. 1) is located in Kosovka devojka's Street No. 6. Over time, its primary purpose changed – today the building holds the function of a Dormitory for high school students. As a result, its interior design was adapted for temporary housing. Besides residential and communal rooms for dining and relaxation, part of the Dormitory's premises had undergone significant modifications to create an administrative space. The usage of contemporary postcards revealed that the mass ratio was not significantly altered during the adaptations. Djupon shaped the attic with mild reminiscences to a fortified building. During the next year – 1927 – he applied the mentioned motif in a moderately modified form in the construction of Čegar's monument (ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2013: 29–30).

Located near the village of Kamenica, the memorial tower on Čegar (Fig. 2) represents one of Djupon's most prominent works. It was ceremoniously unveiled on the 1st of June 1927, in the presence of King Aleksandar Karađorđević, Queen Marija, and other high officials, as one of the more imposing examples of realized interwar memorial complexes. In contrast to the established practice of erecting monuments dedicated to the fallen soldiers of Balkan during the Great War, Čegar's landmark is linked to the Serbian-Ottoman war, dedicated to the central figure of the uprising – Stevan Sindelić. The first memorial of the Čegar battle

¹ Julijan Djupon's Russian opus is still not fully enlightened. Svetlana Fomenko's research work contributed to the discovery of hitherto unknown Djupon's achievements.



Fig. 1. J. Djupon, Dormitory for war orphans (1925–1926) in Kosovka devojka's street 6, Niš
(photo: Anđela Dukić)



Fig. 2. J. Djupon, Čegar memorial (1927), Kamenica (source: ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2013: 32)

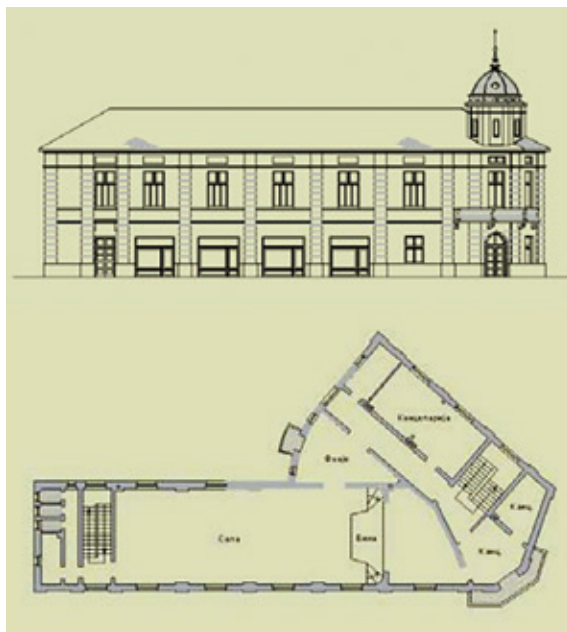


Fig. 3. J. Djupon, Teacher's dorm (1932) on the corner of Kralja Stefana Prvovenčanog and Ćirila i Metohija streets, Niš (with Bora Simović)
(source: ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2013: 37)

(1878) was a pyramid-shaped object made from granite (АНДРЕЈЕВИЋ 2001: 37). Therefore, the conclusion regarding Djupon's respect for the pyramidal structure and the previous monument's importance is drawn. The old monument is situated in the newer monument's niche, thus retaining its original position. The monument's visual identity clearly expresses the landmark's character and purpose via the usage of military attributes, such as two cannons placed to the tower's sides. An important component that illustrated a compound between utility and visual preservation is the usage of spoliae from previous parts of Niš's fortress called the Vinik gate (АНДРЕЈЕВИЋ 2001: 37–39). Symmetry, harmony, and ease characterize this building's composition (КАДИЈЕВИЋ 1998: 138). The tower's facade was composed of alternating brick and mortar, whereby the upper part was flanked by rosettas and reduced decorative fields similar to Medieval ones,

which were usually practiced in search of a national style. The shaping of the monument accentuates the research in the interwar period, however also bearing witness to Djupon's development and experimentation through the transposition of the presiding expression from an academic one, to a romanticist. Among other things, this paves the way for contemplating Djupon's national identity.

The year 1932 of Djupon's architectural practice was notable for the collaboration with architect Bora Simović on the construction of Teacher's dorm on an irregularly shaped parcel on the corner of Kralja Stefana Prvovenčanog's and Ćirila i Metodija's Streets (Fig. 3). Djupon has divided this longitudinal parcel into compact segments and has designed its facades by following the strict academic manner. He has flanked the corner with the striking vertical made of high double doors above which a shallow three-sided balcony decorated with columns was placed. The access to the balcony led through the double door, above which still stands the inscription "Učiteljski dom". A dome with a hexagonal base additionally highlighted the corner, whereby three of its sides have narrow windows, while the other three intersect with the roof. The usage of large-dimensioned windows additionally helped the building's luminance and ventilation. Despite the revitalizations and adaptations, Teacher's dorm is currently in a state of disrepair (ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2013: 38).

The rapid modernization of Niš marked the third decade of the XX century which consequentially led to the erection of the emigrant-architects key works. The architecture of Niš and its surroundings had undergone numerous changes with affinities of the prominent Niš's politician, later Minister of Social Welfare and Prime Minister of the Royal Government, Dragiša Cvetković (1893–1969). Cvetković hired modern architects, such as Aleksandar I. Medvedev, for the construction of capital buildings in Niš and Niška Banja. Aleksandar Ivanovič Medvedev was born 12th of March 1900 in Melitopol. After the fall of the last Odessa's defense line, on whose front he participated, Medvedev was forced to emigrate under the Bolshevik's army onslaught (MILOVANOVIĆ 1996: 20), which prevented him from studying architecture at the Technical Faculty in Kharkiv. Instead of the original plan, he decided to study in Paris – that decision was changed after the urging of fellow citizens. He enrolled in studies at the Architectural Department of the Technical Faculty in Belgrade in 1922. During studies, he was given minor drawing commissions linked to the project bureaus such as *Kalorija* and *Neimar*. After graduation in 1929, he moved to Banja Luka with his wife Ksenija Belavenec Medvedev (1905–?) after the short work in the capital. Ultimately, he moved to Niš in 1935 per Djupon's invitation, thus paving the road to a successful career reflexed in a long and fruitful architectural work (МЕДВЕДЕВ 2012: 35).

Medvedev's first engagement in the public building's sphere was the hotel "Orient's" expansion in 1935, by Arandjel Mitić's order. It was located on the central city square, in

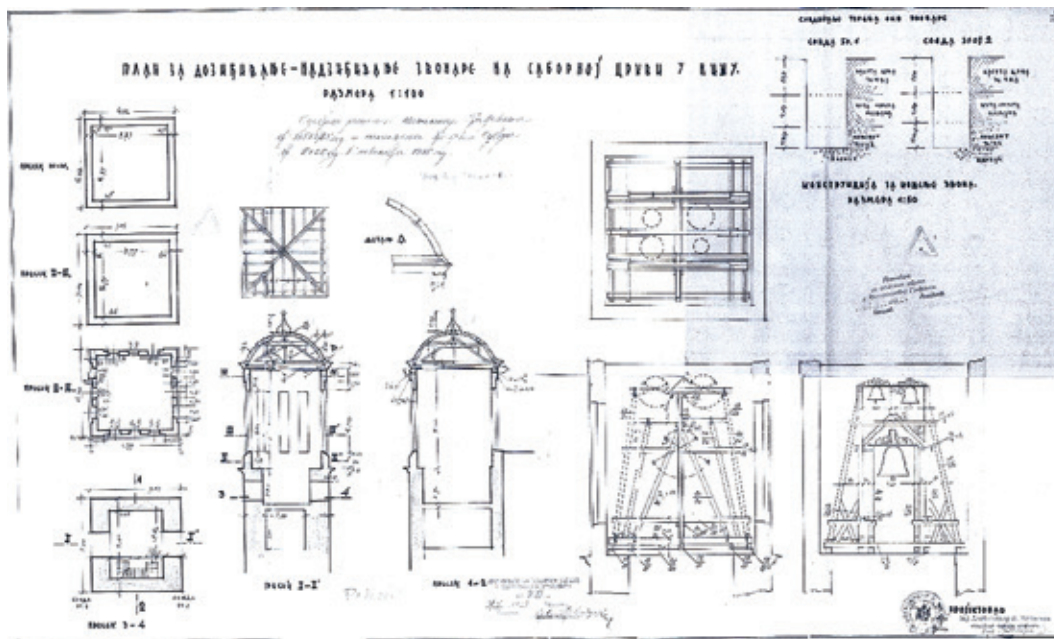


Fig. 4. A. I. Medvedev, Niš Cathedral (1935) in Prijezdina 7, Niš (Historical Archive of Niš, f-XIV-1935-166)

the former Dvorska Street (now 7. jula), and it was the most important hotel in Niš. It has been demolished due to the Square's reconstruction after the Second World War (МЕДВЕДЕВ 2012: 37). Almost simultaneously, Medvedev was hired for another upgrade project – the bell tower of the Niš Cathedral (Fig. 4). The cathedral church was concurrently the most significant sacral building and a memorial to the struggle for the Christian's religious rights under the Ottoman rule; therefore, the act of elevating such an imposing work could not go unnoticed. The Bishop of Niš invited Medvedev to a meeting with the Ban of the Moravian Banovina, on which he introduced him to Minister Dragiša Cvetković. This sequence of events led Medvedev to their further cooperation. The preserved commission minutes from 22th of May 1935 are a reliable testimony to the agreement and the necessity of rebuilding, therefore, the key points will be presented in the following theses:

The project of erecting the Cathedral does not exist ... the building was erected about 60 years ago ... The church community wants to build a bell tower containing five bells with a total weight of about four tons in 5-6 meters and in that way raise the bells themselves.²

The minutes further state that the Commission checked the existing bell tower's condition, further concluding the absence of defects, which made it suitable for an upgrade. Mihailo Medvedev (1943) says that Cathedral's bell tower is successfully integrated into the existing building's architecture. As proof, he claims that it is difficult to notice its addition today, further stressing the constructive solution's quality. This part of the building was not damaged during the 2001 conflagration which confirms his statements (МЕДВЕДЕВ 2012: 49). In 1936, under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Policy and Public Health, Dragiša Cvetković began investing money into the development of the Labor Exchange institutions, thus hiring Medvedev to design facilities in Niš, Kruševac, and Bajina Bašta. This type of institution signified accepting an increasing number of newcomers from the countryside, who made up the new workforce and redirecting them to jobs in industrial and craft enterprises. Edifice Labor Exchange (Fig. 5) was built on the corner of Kej Kola srpskih sestara and Balkanska streets. The basement floor waterproofing system was a technological challenge due to its positioning near the Nišava River (МЕДВЕДЕВ 2012: 51). Although the building's part that prevails Balkanska Street is considerably larger than the one that continues through the Kej Kola srpskih sestara Street, one gets the impression that the facade component is an independent building with similar concepts. The entrance located on the corner was solved by interchanging masses which left the possibility of connecting a very indented vertical. According to the original idea, the vertical segment bore the inscription "Berza rada Niš". While designing the angle, Medvedev came into contact with expressionist forms enriched with elements of Art Deco (ИПОСЕН 2016: 628). Following the modernist facades, the only decoration that adorned Labor Exchange were the figural motifs at the entrance. The building was divided into men's and women's sections, with separate entrances. (МИЛОВАНОВИЋ 2020: 53–54). In the presence of Cvetković and high-ranking officials, Labor Exchange was

² Historical Archive of Niš, f-XIV-1935-165



Fig. 5. A. I. Medvedev, Labor Exchange building (1936) on the corner of Kej Kola srpskih sestara and Balkanska streets, Niš (source: PROSEN 2016: 628)

opened and consecrated on the 26th of December, 1937. In a longer speech, Cvetković referred to the issue of social security, emphasizing that material culture without social content is not culture at all. After the speech and greetings for the Karađorđević dynasty, a public kitchen was opened at noon for homeless and unemployed citizens.

In the same year, caterer Rade Aracki hired Medvedev to upgrade the Hotel “Athens”. Following the architectural identity of the building, Medvedev did not express himself in a modernist spirit. On the contrary, he used details such as a hidden pent-roof and accented parapets and window strings (КЕКОВИЋ, ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2006: 216).

Medvedev's most renowned building was Apprentice's Home, designed in 1939 in the Nikola Pašić Street 24. It was initiated by the Municipality of Niš and Dragiša Cvetković, and the continuation of its construction was postponed by the Second World War (МИЛОВАНОВИЋ 2020: 59). The construction of Apprentice's Home was discussed in the daily paper *Politika*. (АНОНИМ 1939: 17). Although it was planned to incorporate accommodation for workers and apprentices in the Home, after reviewing the project, the Niš Municipality decided to change the building's initial purpose. This redirected Medvedev to adapt to the



Fig. 6. A. I. Medvedev, Apprentice's Home (1939) in Nikols Pašić street 24, Niš (photo: Anđela Dukić)

needs of the city's government, which he did by changing the interior layout. The exterior design remained unchanged – it is assembled of flat and rounded surfaces with an outstanding clock at the top. The House's round shape leads some researchers to compare it with the works of architect Erich Mendelsohn (Ђурђевић 1999: 186), while others find a comparison to the anthological creations of Dragiša Brašovan, such as Danube Banovina in Novi Sad and Air-Force Headquarters in Zemun (Миловановић 1996: 144). The City People's Committee moved here postwar. Eventually, the space belonged to the Assembly of the Municipality of Niš, under whose ownership stayed until today (Миловановић 2020: 60). The object was restored on several occasions, concluding with the works during 2014.

Creations of underresearched architects

In addition to the mainstream consisting of Djupon and Medvedev, a significant contribution to the public building's architecture in Niš and its surrounding area was left by several other Russian emigrants. Their complete opuses have not been illuminated, however, newer research of periodicals brought crucial information to light. This group of architects consists of those who have lived in Niš and Belgrade.

The life of the younger generation emigrant-architect, Vselovod Aleksandrovič Tatarinov (Всеволод Александрович Татаринов) (1900–?), has not yet been thoroughly researched, therefore only a few of his works have been discovered and studied. Vselovod Aleksandrovič Tatarinov was born in 1900 in Russia, which he left shortly after the October revolution.



Fig. 7. V. Tatarinov, Banovina Theater (1937–1939) in Sindelić's square 12, Niš (photo: Anđela Dukić)

The first reliable information about his life and education are tied to his attendance and graduation (1925) in The Department of Architecture in Zagreb's Technical school (МИЛОВАНОВИЋ 2020: 32). The index created by Georgij Jeremejev (Георгий Еремеев) concerning Russian architects in Yugoslavia does not mention his full address either (КАДИЈЕВИЋ 2018: 315). Despite historiographically being known as an architect, he was also a clerk in the Technical department of Moravska banovina, which represented a setback for his architectural practice. As a clerk, he did not have a license for designing private-owned buildings – that kind of engagement required possession of an architectural bureau. Newer research has brought upon that he has designed buildings despite the restriction. Based on a lawsuit from 1939, it is known that Tatarinov's projects were signed by Dragoljub Milićević (МИЛОВАНОВИЋ 2020: 33).

Banovina Theater on Sindelić's square represents Tatarinov's momentous work (Fig. 7). The project was completed in March of 1937, while construction began on the 27th of June 1937, with a ceremonial cornerstone placing. Theater's constructions lasted for the next two years. The state's interest in strengthening the infrastructure was confirmed by donating municipal land for the project implementation (АНДРЕЈЕВИЋ 2001: 218). Banovina Theater's building is a combination of modernist tendencies and traditional legacy which's noticeable on the facade – the front part is flanked by refined forms in the upper segment and massive pillars in the lower one.

Another attributed project was Trade Academy's building (Fig. 8). The daily newspaper wrote about its consecration in 1940. (КАДИЈЕВИЋ 1998: 142). The irregularly shaped plot's

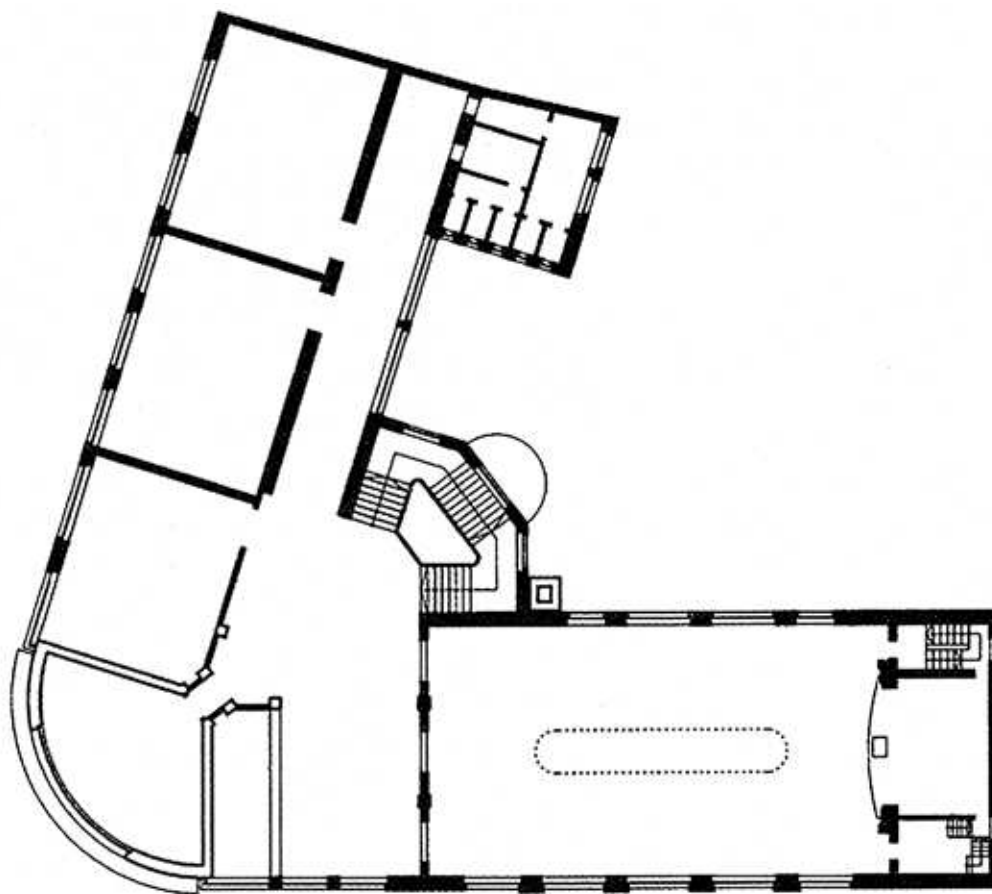


Fig. 8. V. Tatarinov, Trade Academy (1940) in Jeronimova 18, Niš (source: ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2006: 189)

semicircular corner evokes the illusion of strict symmetry. A strong entrance party, positioned at the corner, spreads into two side tracts. The change in the window's rhythm ratio can be seen in the right part – it begins with the horizontal sharp intersections of the accentuated verticals. The mast on the corner above the door appeared as an indispensable benchmark of modernism, while the upper segment remained shortened for the inscription “Državna trgovačka akademija”. There is a claim that the year of the design was 1937 (КЕКОВИЋ, ЧЕМЕРИКИЋ 2006: 188), which is not possible, considering that the excerpts were often extended.

Civil engineer Aleksandar Slastenko (Александр Сластенко) is another underresearched Russian emigrant. He was born on the 27th of July 1897, in Pavlovsk. He graduated in 1924 from the Civil Engineering Department of the Technical Faculty in Belgrade. The lack of data in the literature was partially compensated by finding two articles in the daily newspaper

Pravda. Both sources are based on reporting on the construction of the Niš water supply system, mentioning that Slastenکو was the head of the Department for water supply and sewerage of the city of Niš. It is not known when the project was made, but it is stated that the construction officially began in 1936. Works were completed a year later as part of the ceremony of liberation from the Turks (МИЛОВАНОВИЋ 2020: 42). By realizing the construction of the water supply system, Slastenکو solved one of the biggest city's infrastructural problems.

Aleksandar Gercenovic (Александр Герценович) belonged to a group of architects who built in Niš during the interwar period. There are currently insufficient data that enable the reconstruction of his architectural opus. The only published reviews of his work can be found in the works of Borislav Andrejević, who ranked him among the older emigrants who fled to the Kingdom after the October Revolution, while Milorad Vojinović claims that he added the floor of today's Niš's University building in 1925. Vojinović further states that Gercenovic designed the entire tract of the same building between 1930 and 1934 and that the person which approved the project was the architect Nikolaj Petrović Krasnov (Николай Петрович Краснов).³

Conclusion

A wide range of works by Russian architects-emigrants permanently influenced the change of Niš's interwar visual identity. Thanks to their higher education in important centers such as Belgrade and Zagreb, the architects were able to acquire extraordinary prior knowledge, which they consistently applied in their later works. It can be concluded that the external influences to which they had to be exposed led to their professional development, which resulted in comparing their works with the ones from their greatest contemporaries or predecessors. Openness to modernist ideas enabled their freedom of expression, which resulted in the existence of key works of Niš modernism. Modernism in Niš was at its peak thanks to the public buildings of the presented architects. The general review of the above speaks in favor of the fact that emigrants from Russia played a crucial role in the development of Niš and its surroundings, leaving behind objects of exceptional value whose significance is unquestionable.

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³ All the above information is the result of unpublished research by Professor Dr. Aleksandar Kadijević.

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Historical Archive of Niš

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ПРЕГЛЕД АРХИТЕКТУРЕ ЈАВНИХ ОБЈЕКАТА ЕМИГРАНАТА
ИЗ РУСИЈЕ У НИШУ И ОКОЛИНИ (1918–1941)

Резиме

Рад је настао као резултат истраживања архитектуре јавних објеката емиграната са простора Русије у Нишу и околини. Масовна емиграција људи са простора Русије одиграла је једну од кључних улога у дефинисању урбанистичке матрице и архитектонског визуелног идентитета јавних објеката Ниша и околине у међуратном периоду. Богати опуси истакнутих појединаца, сачувани објекти *in situ*, обимна техничка документација у архивама и персоналним заоставштинама, као и сачувана периодика, омогућили су отворен приступ даљим истраживањима утемељеним на егзактним чињеницама.

Пратећи академистичке и модернистичке принципе пројектовања, архитекте емигранти асимиловали су се у актуелне градитељске токове, при чему се као доминантне личности издвајају Александар И. Медведев (1900–1984) и Јулијан Љ. Дјупон (1871–1935). Широком дијапазоном остварених дела, чији је значај неупитне вредности, одиграли су круцијалну улогу у развоју међуратног Ниша.

Кључне речи: архитектура, јавни објекти, Ниш, академизам, модернизам.