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## From Yalta to Thessaloniki — Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov (1864–1939), a Versatile Russian Architect

The name of Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov (1864–1939), the Russian architect of a prolific oeuvre and versatile artistic vision, stands out in the international historicist architectural production of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An academician of Saint-Petersburg Academy of Arts, an architect of Russian Imperial Court, the personal tutor of Romanov's princesses, Nikolai Petrovich made a great contribution to the urban planning of Yalta and influenced the visual identity of the southern Crimean scenery. Krasnov was employed as the state architect in the service of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after the First World War. He designed numerous objects across the Balkans — from Belgrade, the capital of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (since 1929 known as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), to the distant Greek Island of Vido<sup>1</sup>. Yet, in spite all of his professional and personal achievements, Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov has so far remained an almost obscure figure in the international history of architecture.

Why has one of the last imperial Russian architects been internationally marginalized over the time? Though he was hired by some of the most famous patrons of Imperial Russia, it is possible to list several reasons why the name of Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov did not echo throughout prewar Europe. Krasnov was the architect of humble origins. His production was intended for Crimea, which is very distant from cultural centers, such as Saint-Petersburg or Moscow. On peak of his career, he was appointed the architect of the Russian Imperial court and was accepted into Saint-Petersburg Academy of Arts. Krasnov received a number of awards and obviously was a well-known figure. Always immersed in his work, he held his distance from professional intrigues. Nowadays, we might learn more about Krasnov from his prolific work than from contemporary media. As a loyal monarchist and a man of taste, Nikolai Petrovich remained committed to the architectural principles of historicism. The October revolution, and the change of political circumstances in Yugoslavia after the Second World War deeply influenced ideological and esthetic beliefs of 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Therefore, after Krasnov's death, his name faded into oblivion.

With the latest ideological and political twists, as well as the strengthening of the postmodernist ideology, some Russian and Serbian researchers of architecture took higher interest in the life and works of Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov. Starting since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> cen-

<sup>1</sup> A small island near Corfu, Greece.

tury, the studies of the prolific opus of the versatile Russian academician of architecture have flourished. Furthermore, a public monument in memory of Krasnov, by the famous sculptor Sergei Nikitin, was erected in Yalta in August of 2015. However, in spite of recent efforts, the name of Krasnov has not received international recognition it deserves. This paper aims to draw attention to Krasnov's versatile architectural production and turbulent life. His biography is the subject of the first part of the paper, while his architectural legacy is discussed in the second part.

The life path of Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov is a turbulent story of a committed individual who succeeded to overcome numerous difficulties and rose from the modest hearth of a humble country house to gilded tables of aristocratic courts. He was born on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1864 in a small village of Honyatino [7, p. 334]. There is no much information regarding his childhood. His grandson, Vladimir Leonidovich Horvat, only remembered that *dedushka* had to walk long distances to school and lived with his mother in straitened conditions near Moscow [9, p. 21].

It is unknown, who was the first one to notice the aptitude of young Krasnov. He was enlisted in Moscow school of painting, sculpture and architecture at the age of twelve. His talent and hard work brought him his first public acknowledgement, when he was only nineteen. His first individual project of a theatre building earned him a Small Silver Medal and a scholarship at the Academy [8, p. 218]. Underlining the skillfulness of the young architect, his tutors enabled him to participate in a competition for the Big Silver Medal in the following year. Interesting enough, his project of a country house for the Grand Duke, the architectural type which would later bring him a wide professional recognition, was rejected, due to "the uncertainties regarding the overall concept". Presumably, this early failure was a valuable lesson for the ambitious young architect, who simply could not afford any professional defeats. Perhaps, that first competition was a turning point of his career. Since then, his works became notable for distinctive diverse concepts, multiple solutions and special attention for details. However, the Big Silver Medal would not elude him twice. At the age of twenty-one Krasnov earned the prestigious award that brought him the official title of an architect [14, p. 17].

In 1887, he moved to Yalta [9, p. 27]. It remains unknown why exactly Krasnov moved to Crimea. Neither we know for what reason he was, at the age of twenty-three and without any relevant professional experience, appointed the Chief architect of Yalta. Probably, it was due to Krasnov's outstanding achievements at the Academy, or the fact that the former chief architect of Yalta N. A. Stakenschneider had decided to move to Saint-Petersburg<sup>2</sup>. However, Krasnov's relocation to Yalta and his surprisingly precocious career progression could be of completely different nature. It could be possible that during his studies Krasnov met his future wife, Anna Mikhailovna Farbstein, the daughter of a wealthy owner of shops and rental buildings in Yalta. They married in 1888, a year after he had been appointed the chief architect of Yalta.

Being enthusiastic, energetic and ambitious, Krasnov made good use of the broad potential of Yalta for his personal, social and professional affirmation. He moved in the imperial elite circles and made friendship with well-known Russian intellectuals, such as the academician Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov (1844–1925) or the famous writer Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

<sup>2</sup> Architect Nikolai Andreyevich Stakenschneider (1839–1902), son of the famous Imperial architect Andrei Ivanovich Stakenschneider (1802–1865).

(1860–1904). Fully responsible for resolving numerous problems of a rapidly developing resort town, Krasnov designed various significant public objects in Yalta [9, p. 47–65]. The quality of his works were noticed by his contemporaries, and brought him a number of awards on various occasions. In the year 1893, he was awarded with the Order of Saint Stanislaus of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree, and other medals followed soon after. Krasnov's unexpected decision to resign after twelve years of respectable, yet modestly paid public service marked a beginning of especially fruitful period of his professional career, especially after establishing his private architectural bureau [9, pp. 66–143]<sup>3</sup>. For nearly a decade he was designing lavish buildings for imperial elite and making good impression on the Royal family. In 1907, Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov, a son of a peasant, had a personal audience with Tsar Nikolai II Romanov (1868–1918). The reason behind the meeting was the crowning work of the artist's Crimean opus, the famous Livadia Royal palace. During the construction of the imperial estate in Livadia, Krasnov won the favor of the Romanov family, who regularly invited him for dinners and hired him as princesses' personal art tutor. Finally, Krasnov was appointed the Architect of the Imperial Court. He gained the title of the Court chancellor and was soon accepted into Saint-Petersburg Academy of Arts. Due to endurance, hard work and magnetic charisma, the peasant's son rose through the strict ranks of Russian hierarchy, gaining him a personal ennoblement. Since there is no evidence of any further significant architectural commissions, it could be assumed that his new responsibilities of a technical supervisor of construction and interior designing of the Imperial family real estate demanded Krasnov's full attention.

Being loyal monarchists, after the October Revolution in Russia, Krasnov and his family fled the country leaving everything behind. The perilous journey to Gallipoli and then further to the West, to Malta, was indeed an exhausting one for the family of the architect. Without any sufficient financial means, searching for a shelter from the Communist terror, Nikolai Petrovich, his wife Anna, daughters Olga and Vera, and grandson Vladimir shared the uncertain fate of hundred thousands of Russian "White" refugees.

By the end of the 1921, Russian emigrants in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia heard of difficulties Krasnov was struggling with on Malta [1, p. 879]. The Association of Russian engineers immediately took measures to arrange his relocation to Belgrade [15, p. 110]. In the Yugoslav Kingdom, as well as at the beginning of his professional career in Yalta, Nikolai Petrovich was employed as a state architect of a high rank, an inspector at the Ministry of Construction [5]. Immediately upon his arrival to Yugoslavia, Krasnov attracted attention of King Alexander I Karađorđević (1888–1934), and soon after the local elite followed in His Royal Majesty's steps [12, 16]. Following the dream of pan-Slavic unification, the Yugoslav monarch adopted an active Russophile policy [3; 6; 10]. His undisputable talent and rich professional experience, the prestigious title of the Russian Imperial architect and his membership in Saint-Petersburg Academy contributed to Krasnov's participation in the most important local architectural endeavors of the time. After the years of hardship, Krasnov once again found peace and financial independence, but kept his distance from excessive socializing in Belgrade. Instead he chose

<sup>3</sup> Krasnov's growing family was probably the most important reason for the choice to alter his career path — in 1900, Anna Mikhailovna gave birth to their youngest child, a son, named Mikhail, who would die from diphtheria at young age.

a quiet life with his family. After seventeen years of committed work in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia<sup>4</sup>, Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov died on 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1939. He was buried in Belgrade, in the Russian section of the New cemetery [11].

The prolific production of an impressive width and the artistic value of Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov significantly marked the style of historicism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture. Ten years of comprehensive education at Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture as well as his rich practical experience perfected Krasnov's functional and, above all, highly rhetoric architecture. Profoundly comprehending the complex aspects of architecture as an important constituent of the everyday human experience which simultaneously reflects and influences ideological, political and psycho-social characters of a specific historical moment, Krasnov mastered the concept of architectural type. His versatile work is a genuine contribution to all significant functional types of contemporary architectural production.

Hired by private patrons and employed in public service — firstly as the Chief city architect of Yalta and later as an inspector at the Ministry of Construction of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia — Nikolai Petrovich influenced architectural shaping of wide European spaces. With monumental public palaces and administrative edifices of carefully designed forms which eloquently expressed power and influence of the institutions operating behind their walls, Krasnov significantly contributed to the international architectural style of historicism (State archives of Serbia, Belgrade; Banovina Palace, Cetinje). His functional, thoughtfully developed urban designs (general urban plan for Yalta; Užice Park, Serbia) and individual objects (Male boarding school of Emperors Alexander the Third Romanov, Yalta; Women gymnasium, Yalta; Manege theatre, Belgrade; tolls at Prahovo and Đevđelija) improved and enriched various aspects of the everyday life of Russian and Yugoslav citizens. Krasnov shaped the pylons of the King Alexander Bridge, significant object that, for the first time in its history, connected Belgrade with the left bank of the river Sava, the historical border between Serbia and Austria-Hungary [2; 4]. Being an academician of architecture, he designed numerous sacral edifices (the church of Male boarding school, Yalta; Njegoš's chapel, Lovcen Mountain; military church Ružica next to Belgrade fortress) and later on marked the production of memorial architecture in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (monuments in Vlasotince and Grbavča; memorial chapels at Greek islands Vido and Zeitenlik). Respecting initial concepts, which he later used as an inspiration and masterfully incorporated into his own vision, Krasnov participated in reconstructions, building alterations and extension works (Bakhchysarai palace, Crimea; State Council of the Kindom of Yugoslavia). An impeccable taste and personal flamboyant aesthetic vision played a significant role in Krasnov's numerous exquisite interior designs (interior design of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, Yalta; the Royal Palace in Dedinje, Belgrade; The National Assembly building, Belgrade). Apart from the public service, throughout the years, Nikolai Petrovich created lavish residential architectural production, shaping Crimean sceneries in the service of Imperial elite and enriching public spaces of Belgrade with several fine buildings (Livadia palace, Crimea; Dyulber palace, Crimea; residential building at 9 Prince Mikhail Street, Belgrade).

<sup>4</sup> Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov kept himself rather busy during his employment in Yugoslav Ministry of Construction. The last paycheck he personally collected only few weeks before his death suggests that he remained in active public service until the end (Archives of Yugoslavia MG KJ 62 f. 1425).

In addition to his wide typological palette, and in search of inspiration in previous epochs, Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov skillfully combined different historical styles of architecture. Krasnov's extensive oeuvre could be classified into three main categories. Firstly, his most exquisite architectural pieces with refined, well-balanced facades were created by adeptly fusing Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Baroque and Neo-Classical elements (Livadia palace, Crimea; casino and spa Suuk-su, Crimea; Ministry of wood and ore, Belgrade). Furthermore, inspired by medieval architectural shapes, Krasnov designed powerful, imposing edifices. Intertwining Romanticist conceptions of Gothic, Romanesque and Byzantine historic morphology, he fabricated picturesque eclectic architecture. Later, in Yugoslavia, applying Serbian-Byzantine motives, he made a significant contribution to Serbian national architecture of the interwar period (Koreis palace for Prince Felix Yusupov, Crimea; the Catholic Church on Pushkin Boulevard, Yalta; memorial chapel, Vido Island). Finally, combining intensive, intricate forms and vivid ornaments of Oriental origin, Krasnov created lavish architectural compositions worthy of its prestigious patrons, members of Russian and Yugoslav elite (Dyulber palace, Crimea; villa Simeiz, Crimea; interior design of Royal Palace, Belgrade).

A thorough design process, well-balanced architectural composition, highly rhetoric facades and careful harmony between an object and its surroundings are the most distinctive traits of Krasnov's oeuvre. Precise notes and instructions he committedly wrote on his drawings suggest that Krasnov was focused on every detail having in mind its role in the overall design and construction process. Krasnov's devotion to functional architectural structures of layered compositions with perfectly balanced elements was reflected in his elaborate designs. The artistic quality of his architectural compositions and characteristic decorative filigree treatment of facades were, doubtlessly, influenced by Krasnov's talent for painting, reflected in his numerous aquarelles and sketches. Finally, possessing an impeccable sense of visual, Krasnov always respected the surroundings of the building, accentuating and incorporating their qualities into his architectural compositions.

Charismatic personality of keen sense of his clientele's needs and wishes, Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov was extremely popular amongst his contemporaries, enjoying the favor of both Imperial Romanov and Royal Karadorđević families. Shaped by the unpredictable life path — raised in a modest, patriarchal environment; professionally and socially matured in contact with the Imperial elite; hardened by life losses and trials of exile — Krasnov possessed a deep insight into human nature, a certain comprehension of a soul, which granted his architecture immortality [13]. Being the court architect of the Russian Empire and later of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, as well as in service of prestigious individual patrons, Krasnov actively influenced the shape of European public spaces. From Russia to Greece, Krasnov's distinguishing architecture contributed to the construction of the visual identities of *vedute* and *paysages* throughout the south Eastern Europe. Deeply understanding complex nature of architecture, Krasnov created timeless architectural pieces, admired by public till the present day. One of the last architects of Russian Imperial court, the academician of Saint-Petersburg Academy of Arts, he made a significant contribution to the Russian, Serbian, and European cultural heritage. Apparently, Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov's artistic oeuvre has an undying value and deserves to become internationally recognizable.

**Title.** From Yalta to Thessaloniki — Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov (1864–1939), a Versatile Russian Architect.

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**Abstract.** Being the court architect in the service of the Russian Empire and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and receiving commissions from the rich and the powerful, Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov actively influenced shaping of European public spaces. From Crimea to Greece, Krasnov's distinguishing architecture contributed to the construction of visual identities throughout the south Eastern Europe. Academician at Saint-Petersburg Academy of Arts, he was one of the last architects of the Russian Imperial Court and the personal tutor of the Romanov princesses. Apparently, Krasnov's artistic legacy has a significant value and deserves an international recognition. This paper draws attention both to his versatile architectural production and a turbulent life path. It presents the results of the author's recent research. As the first paper on this architect, published in English, the article is aimed at the international popularization of Krasnov's heritage.

**Keywords:** Nikolai Petrovich Krasnov; architect of Russian Imperial Court; Crimea; architecture of Yalta; the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; interwar period; historicist architecture.

**Название статьи.** От Ялты до Салоник: Разностороннее творчество архитектора Н. П. Краснова (1864–1939).

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**Аннотация.** Придворный архитектор в Российской империи и позже в Королевстве Югославия, получавший заказы и от влиятельных частных лиц, Николай Петрович Краснов (1864–1939) оказал большое влияние на формирование архитектурного облика Европы. Его выразительные здания внесли свою лепту в конструирование визуальной идентичности Юго-Восточной Европы от Крыма до Греции. Академик Санкт-Петербургской императорской академии художеств, один из последних архитекторов императорского двора, наставник дочерей Николая II, обретший после революции прибежище в Сербии, Краснов заслуживает международного признания. Настоящая статья, представляющая результаты последних исследований, освещает как его многогранное архитектурное наследие, так и драматичный жизненный путь. Будучи первым трудом о Краснове на английском, она имеет целью распространение знаний о его творчестве за пределами России и Сербии, где он широко известен.

**Ключевые слова:** Николай Петрович Краснов; архитектор российского императорского двора; Крым; архитектура Ялты; Королевство Югославия; период между Первой и Второй мировыми войнами; архитектура историзма.

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