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## AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MONUMENTS IN BANJA LUKA

### **ABSTRACT**

The paper deals with the establishment and architecture of Austro-Hungarian monuments erected in Banja Luka in the period 1878-1918. The monuments were erected on the orders of the military administration, based on the reputation and tradition earlier seen throughout the former Habsburg Monarchy. The paper shows three monuments, only one of which is preserved, but in a state requiring significant interventions. The paper first presents the general historical framework, then the construction of the monuments, while the final discussion questions the relationship of contemporary society to these monuments and emphasizes the importance of inheriting the historical layers of architecture and the problem of the neglect of Austro-Hungarian heritage of military background in our country.

**Keywords:** *Banja Luka, Austro-Hungary, 1878–1918, monument, architecture*

## AУСТРО-УГАРСКИ СПОМЕНИЦИ У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ

### **РЕЗИМЕ**

Рад се бави настанком и архитектуром аустро-угарских споменика подигнутих у Бањој Луци у времену 1878–1918. године. Споменици су подизани по налозима војних власти, а по угледу и традицији раније виђеној широм бивше Хабзбуршке монархије. Рад приказује три споменика, од којих је само један сачуван, али у стању које захтијева озбиљне интервенције. У раду се прво приказује општи историјски оквир, потом-настанак споменика, док се у закључној дискусији разматра однос савременог друштва према овим споменицима и акценат даје на значај баштињења историјских слојева архитектуре и проблематици запостављања аустро-угарског наслеђа војне позадине код нас.

**Кључне ријечи:** *Бања Лука, Аустро-Угарска, 1878–1918, споменик, архитектура*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of the monuments erected by the foreign military administration, not only in the case of Austro-Hungarian occupation in Bosnia and Herzegovina but elsewhere in general, cannot be understood without overviews at least basic settings that led to such events which in the end were marked by specific monuments.

Without pretensions to simplify one of the decisive periods in the Balkans' history – XIX century, the century when the Ottoman Empire lost its power over this region, and many other interlinked events, here will be pointed out only the Treaty of Berlin, reached during the Congress of Berlin, happening between June 13<sup>th</sup> and July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1878. It was actually the revision of the Treaty of San Stefano from March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1878, where the Russian and Ottoman Empire were the signatories. [1:45]



Figure 1. Anton von Werner, Congress of Berlin (1881): Final meeting at the Reich Chancellery on 13 July 1878, Bismarck between Gyula Andrásy and Pyotr Shuvalov, on the left Alajos Károlyi, Alexander Gorchakov (seated) and Benjamin Disraeli [2]

According to the Treaty, precisely article 25, Vilayet of Bosnia which in its extent corresponds to contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Sanjak of Novi Pazar, today region in Serbia, remained in Ottoman territory and under its formal sovereignty, but the Austro-Hungarian Empire got the permission to control the areas. Article 25 stated: *“The provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be occupied and administered by Austria-Hungary”* and continued *“... Austria-Hungary reserves the right to maintain garrisons and to have military and trading roads over the whole area of that portion” (the Sanjak of Novibazar) “of the ancient Vilayet of Bosnia.”* [3:22-23]

The occupation started just a week after the meeting in Berlin. Among others, the fiercest combat around Banja Luka was on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1878. Chain of fights in Bosnia lasted until November 15<sup>th</sup>, 1878, when King Franz Joseph I officially proclaimed the end of the occupation procedure. [4: 43-54, 188-190]

Even though only formal, the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire over Bosnia was ended in 1908, when the Austro-Hungarian Empire proclaimed annexation of the territory.



Figure 2. Cover of the French periodical *Le Petit Journal* on the Bosnian Crisis: Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria declares independence and is proclaimed Tsar, and the Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph annexes Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid looks on [5]

## 2. OCCUPATION FIGHTS IN BANJA LUKA

The Austro-Hungarian Army (*kaiserlich und königliche Armee ger.*) which was set off to occupy Vilayet of Bosnia, arrived in Stara Gradiška, the border between Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empire at the time, on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1878. At that place, Count Lacy's 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment (*k. und k. Infanterieregiments Graf von Lacy Nr. 22*) merged with vice-marshal Wilhelm's, the Duke of Wuttemberg's, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, and Archduke Leopold's 43<sup>rd</sup> Regiment. [6]

Due to unexpectedly high resistance of the local population, not only in Banja Luka but in whole Bosnia and Herzegovina, the occupation did not go with ease. Austro-Hungarian regiments, consisting of mainly Serbian and Croatian population living in Krajina (Military Frontier – *Militärgrenze ger.*), Austro-Hungarian border zone towards the Ottoman Empire, were seriously challenged by the locals, even though they were not officially organized as the army troops. Fierce fights with the local population in Banja Luka lasted between August 1<sup>st</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, while fights elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina lasted until January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1879. [6]

### 3. AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MONUMENTS

There are not many historians or historians of architecture that dealt with the issue of the Austro-Hungarian monuments in Banja Luka, which in combination with rather obscure research sources make the task even more challenging.

However, the existence of three monuments in Banja Luka has been recorded: two of them had memorial character and were devoted to the soldiers fell during the occupation battles, while the third one was produced as one unit in the serial installation of monumental knights used for fundraising during WWI.

#### 3.1. MONUMENT DEVOTED TO AUSTRIAN SOLDIERS FALLEN IN 1878 - *MILITÄR MONUMENT 1878*

Monument is located between modern-day Bulevar vojvode Petra Bojovića and Ulica Olimpijskih pobjednika, which once corresponded to *Exercierplatz*, in the vicinity of former Military hospital complex – modern-day Park Mladen Stojanović, and Military campus Vrbas, which is today University of Banja Luka campus.



Figure 3. Monument devoted to Austrian soldiers fallen in 1878. Unknown date, photograph most probably taken before WWI [1:181]

Monument was erected in 1878 in memory of the fallen soldiers engaged in the occupation of Banja Luka and severe fights between August 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, 1878. This fight, however, stays under the shadow for official research. In archival records of the *K. u. K. Armee*, only the journal of Lacy's Regiment exists. The fight itself, its course and names of the soldiers are described, but nothing afterwards that could refer to the erection of the monument.

All knowledge about the construction of this and some other monuments relies on the journal of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Regiments in which is stated that the last fight in Bosnia was fought on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1879, far after official occupation end, and the construction of the monument started afterwards. The same journal states the other two monuments were erected in Jajce and

Rogelj, and April and August 1880, respectively. That is the year when this monument in Banja Luka appeared first in the newspaper articles. [7]



Figure 4. Monument devoted to Austrian soldiers fallen in 1878. Postcard issued in 1904 [1:181]

Carefully selected location of the monument in the *Rudolf-Weiler Park*, at that time green area with parks and distinctive forests surrounding a number of military buildings gives a brief insight into the importance of the monument itself to the military authorities. Even though such fact is not recorded in the historical documents, analyzing the repetition of this monument in photos and archival records, and the non-existence of anything similar elsewhere in Banja Luka, it can be concluded that this monument was the central monument erected for fallen soldiers in the occupation fights.



Figure 5. Monument devoted to Austrian soldiers fallen in 1878. Postcard issued in 1910. [1:181]

The monument was built of tuff stone in the total area of approximately 38m<sup>2</sup> and a height of 7.22m. It consists of two parts: the pedestal and the obelisk. The square-based pedestal of a total 117cm in height holds quite a stocky obelisk with a total height of 545cm, of which pyramidal crown was 40cm high. The obelisk itself is made out of 28 irregular layers of stone laid in cement, while inner space is presumably made out of concrete. On the western side of the monument, there was a stone plaque with the inscription devoted to the fallen soldiers

and another smaller plaque located on the top-most part of the pedestal with unknown inscription.

Neither the monument nor its surrounding have been cleaned and maintained for decades, which resulted in absolute deterioration with significant constructive and aesthetical damages. Both pedestal and the obelisk are in the state of self-destruction with strongly enrooted trees and bushes growing out from the missing beds and perpend. Moreover, the plaques are removed and their exact inscriptions remain unknown.



Figure 6. Memorial plaque donated by the ÖSK to the City of Banja Luka in 2010 [8:31]

The organization of the Austrian Black Cross - *Österreichischen Schwarzen Kreuzes (ÖSK)*, which takes care of Austro-Hungarian military heritage, has donated in 2010 a stone plaque devoted to be reinserted to the monument after its reconstruction, which obviously did not take place by now.

### 3.2. MONUMENT "THE KNIGHT IN STEEL" - *WEHRMANN IN EISEN*

This monument was located on the square in front of the *Banja Luka Stadt Bahnhof*. Square, just like today, headed the *Kaiserstraße* and sat next to "Bosna" hotel. Today, location corresponds to the *Trg srpskih heroja* – Square of the Serbian Heroes. A very interesting story lies behind this monument's erection. It was placed on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1915, at the square on *Kaiserstraße*, in front of the *Banja Luka Stadt Bahnhof* in order to be used as a place for fundraising for Great War financing. [1:183]

Design and function were rather innovative and interesting. Wooden statue of the Medieval knight, painted in silver colour, was placed on a stone pedestal. It was a local population that was the target group to buy steel nails, which had been sold aside, at a rather high price. Everyone who bought the nail could have hammered it personally onto the statue and the funds arisen in such way were further transferred to finance battles of the Austro-Hungarian Army in WWI.

This initiative was established all over the former Austro-Hungarian and German Empire during WWI. Originally named *Wehrmann in Eisen* – literal translation "The Knight in Steel" was first erected in Vienna on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1915 and another famous example was 12m high statue of Paul von Hindenburg adjacent to the Victory Column in Berlin. Some knights, for instance, the one installed originally on *Schwarzenbergplatz* in Vienna, had a purpose to raise funds for orphans and widows of the soldiers fighting in WWI.



Figure 7. Close-up view of the "Wehrmann im Eisen" in Vienna, showing the nails

The monument in Banja Luka was designed as a Classic Revival tent-shaped canopy, probably 3 to 3.50m high, with the wooden knight *installation* inside. It was placed on a stone-made pedestal with lateral staircases. Later on, in 1918 the statue was removed, but the outer structure was kept until 1928. [1:185]



Figure 8. Knight in Steel; close up view. Photograph was taken probably during the opening ceremony on 18 August 1915 [9]



For sure, these are the only monuments that existed in Banja Luka.

In the preserved archival photographs, another monument, with similar design and proportions like the preserved one, but with rather smaller dimensions, can be seen. Unfortunately, it can be only guessed where it was located, because building references on the photos are not visible and all available maps do not show it as well. Some assumptions lead to places like Roman Catholic Graveyard Saint Mark, northern from *Kaiserstraße*, or the courtyard of the Tobacco factory as the possible site of this, later obviously, demolished monument. [1:182]



Figure 9. Another monument devoted to Austrian soldiers, unpreserved and unknown location [9]

#### 4. AFTERMATH

The historical discourse after WWI resulted in heavy, sometimes total, destruction of the Austro-Hungarian military memorial legacy in countries where they held the title of the occupying force. Such was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only buildings that could serve for utility purposes or some public functions were preserved, sometimes reconstructed right after the war, and put into regular use.

In such a vigorous atmosphere, not only built legacy was endangered, but also a huge number of national minorities, namely most of the German-speaking settlers arrived in the late XIX century, who either got expelled or left their homes on their own along with the Austro-Hungarian army. At the time, it was perfectly understandable, in the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, that monuments erected in memory to fallen soldiers, who once came to occupy the country, should be demolished.

The Knight in Steel and the small monument mentioned here were demolished. The monument erected just after the occupation was preserved, probably because it stood inside the military campus, far away from the public eyes. It is unknown when its maintenance was stopped, but detailed inspection shows that very few, or almost none of the repair works were undertaken in the recent period.

The reputation of the Austrian legacy in the Balkans has ultimately reached the rock-bottom stage during and after WWII. The political background, general historical image, and overall atmosphere absolutely justify the rage among the locals towards the foreign element, and that was for sure the most expressively visible in Bosnia and Herzegovina that stood under the foreign rule the longest period, in comparison to other former Yugoslav countries.

So, is the only preserved monument in Banja Luka important?

“People see what they want to see and what people want to see never has anything to do with the truth.” Roberto Bolaño



Figure 10. Present-day state of the monument devoted to the fallen soldiers from 1878

Earlier mentioned journals of the regiments that were involved in the campaigns in Bosnia and Herzegovina reveal more than just military strategy. They reveal the actual names of the soldiers that were sent to fights under the blue Austro-Hungarian uniforms. One can easily see that those were compatriots to the local population, once separated as a result of imperial pretensions of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empire. Specifically, in Lacy’s journal, obviously, the names of the Slavic soldiers take up the vast majority.

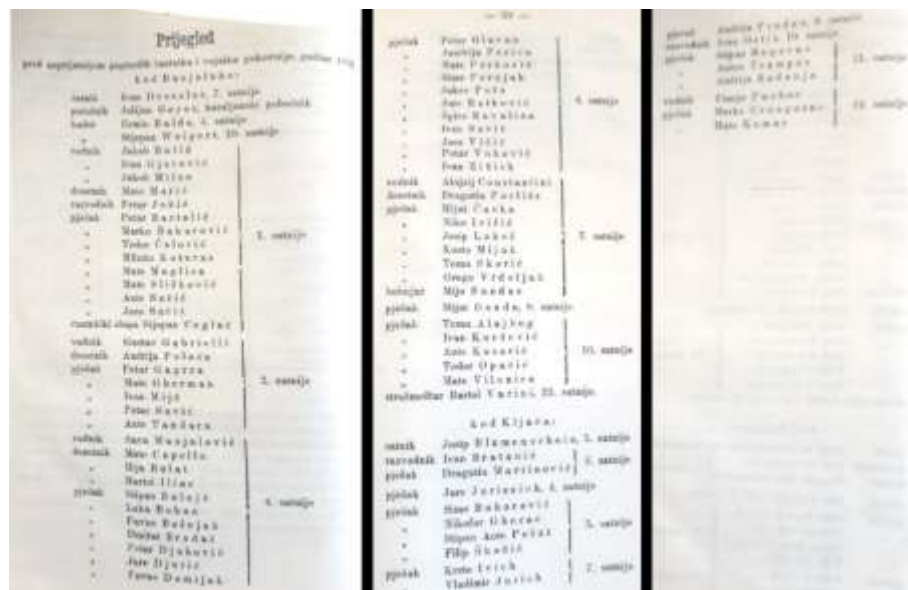


Figure 11. Fallen soldiers of Lacy’s 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, facsimile copy of the journal pages [6]

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is clear that policies on the state level steer the attitude towards the comprehension of specific ideas among the wider population. It is, however, incomprehensible how the population, even in the XXI century with widespread technology and a lot of resources, lives in the shadow of its own illiteracy.

Society justifies the neglect of this specific monument in Banja Luka because it was built in memory of foreign Austro-Hungarian soldiers. This paper showed the facts which undoubtedly testify that this monument is actually a monument devoted to the ex-pats, heroically serving another country. If we go back in time a couple of centuries, the same image was with Turkish Devshirme that resulted in thousands of local boys taken to the Ottoman army, and again brought back to fight against their own people. It took a couple of centuries to understand this historical event and properly pay tribute to those soldiers. Now, some of the bright examples play a significant role in the image of the local medieval historical discourse.

This unfortunate monument, an architectural memorial to yet another fight taking place in misfortunate Balkans, is obviously its own victim: first of all, because it belongs to the foreign and former regime, and second of all because its site is one of the most attractive construction lots in Banja Luka. Market, investors, and fierce combat for the construction land made the wider public understand this monument as a simple pile of stone devoted to the occupiers, systematically forming deeply enrooted image that it is not worth preserving.

This paper obviously seeks the way to raise the importance of the research of each and every layer of our history, not for the research purposes, but to properly understand ourselves and our own legacy. Formally, the only surviving monument presented here is proposed to be moved elsewhere within the surrounding spatial context. The actual state of the structure on the site is devastated, and surrounding groundworks significantly deteriorate foundations, with the most certain self-demolition even prior to the reconstruction to the other site. What worries the most is the attitude of the local community that very rarely raises questions about the status of this monument.

The architecture itself is not original, and that is not the main focus in understanding the importance of its monumental background and its preservation, but the actual devotion to the preservation of our own legacy through built architecture, which often stays the only material evidence of the heritage of the certain population. The idea of the architecture for sure lies in its historical value and memorial capacity, as it very well translates events and social status of a certain period in contemporary context. By erasing, neglecting and devastating architecture, no matter who built it, we obviously make a fake image of our own history, thus preventing our ancestors to receive a proper and true image of their predecessors.

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