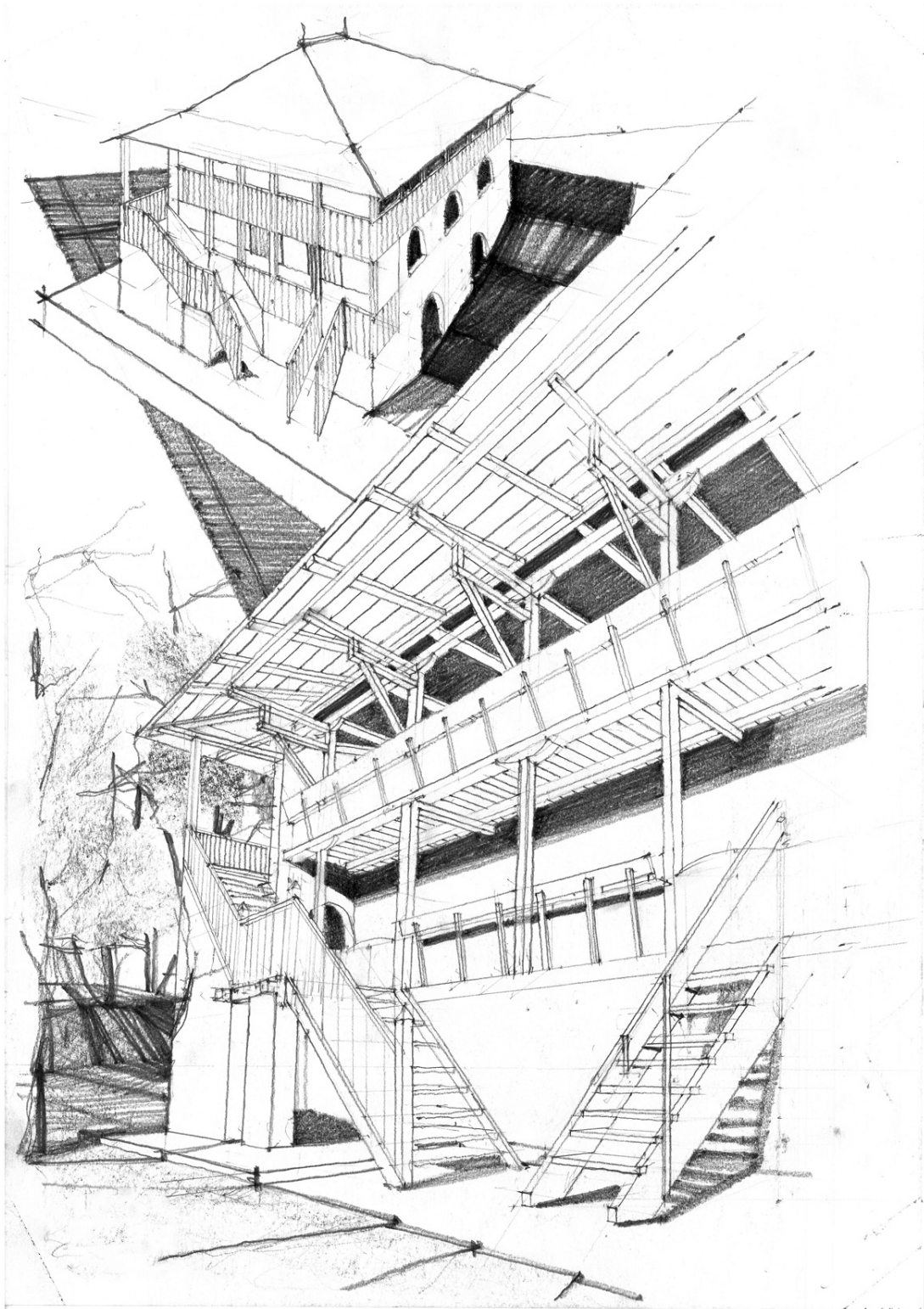


# Romanian architectural identity and Neo-Romanian architecture





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*The thesis is diving into the search for the Romanian identity in architecture and at the end of the 19th century. Did the New Style that emerged from it capture the spirit and adapt to the new times?*

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# I. Introduction

## I.1. Research topic

The Neo-Brancovenesc architectural style is the only national Romanian architectural style. It emerged contemporarily with other European national styles of the time at the end of the 19th century. Its foundations were laid by Ion N. Soculescu, Ion Mincu “the Maestro” and his group of younger followers. While the degree of influences on the style is contested, their origins are clear but varied, rich and complex ranging from Greek, Byzantine, Arab, Italian to even Turkish. Examples such as The Buffet, built in 1889, intended to be presented as the Romanian Pavillion at the Exposition Universelle showcases the strong national spirit and ambitions of the time after a 150-year-old break in the Romanian art narrative during the Phanariot period and foreign occupancy. (Trajanescu, 1916).

## I.2. Aims and Means

Unravelling the different timelines within the origins of the architectural style can be achieved by reverse engineering the historical gap of 150 years and remains of that period ranging from monasteries, royal palaces, and cule, boyar houses and deciphering their influences on the selected case studies. The structure of the essay is aiming to untangle the different origins of the “Romanian” architectural identity by dividing the text into three main chapters: firstly looking at the Religious monuments and heritage dating back from Roman times to the Stavropoleos Church In Bucharest; secondly, at the domestic architecture, describing the evolution from the traditional peasant home to the royal palaces of Constantin Brancoveanu, and lastly looking into the Neo-Romanian style, its praised founder Ion Mincu and the development of a National style.

The last chapter jumps over the 150-year gap in architectural and cultural development during the mid and late Phanariot period in Romania mentioned by Trajanescu. Similar to Neo-Romanian architecture, the chapter brings back elements from the first two chapters to strengthen the argument for the success of capturing the Romanian spirit at the end of the 20th century. Decorative elements are some of the more evident ways of analysing such influences, while literature and later reviews and critique provide a strong secondary source, for critically looking back over the success of Ion Mincu during the first half of the 20th century and the future years.

While the intention of capturing the spirit of Romanian art, and implicitly architecture was quite unanimously acclaimed, there were issues that had to be dealt with that might further help decipher the downfall of the style after the Second World War, besides the evident rise of the communist regime. One such rhetoric was posed by Trajanescu in his article titled “Romanian Style” in the journal *Arhitectura* in 1922: “How can we give the modern homes the proportion and character of the old houses?”

### I.3. Literature review

*Architecture and national project : the Romanian national style* is one, if not the only book relating directly to the topic of Neo-Romanian architecture. A very insightful description of the process is actually cited by Alexander Oodobescu, in 1880 : “Study the remains – no matter how small – of the old artistic creations and use them as origins of a might art... don't miss any opportunity to use artistic elements found in the Romanian monuments left from the past, but transform change and embellish them”. (Odobescu, 1955, p.83) Romanian traditional and specific elements are defined as 18th-century Wallachian architecture and Moldavian architecture during the reign of Stephen the Great. Due to this mix, Romanian architecture was perceived as a “succession of isolated and independent moments”. Because of these events, the Orthodox faith symbolised resistance against Ottoman sovereignty. Examples of such architectural elements are the fortified kule analysed in *Cule : case boieresti fortificate din Romania* . The book is part of the Igloo magazine's collection on Romanian patrimony. It is a collection of the 18 remaining “cule” (Romanian fortified boyar villa) out of the dozens, out of which only half of them have a chance to be restored and maintained as cultural heritage.

One of the main influences in the National Style was the Wallachian architecture, directly translated as the Brancoveanu style, named after the ruler Constantin Brancoveanu (reigned 1688-1714). This creates the basis for the first generation of Romanian architects that studied at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in Paris, where they were sent after the proclamation of independence at the end of the 19th century. They studied abroad and preferred tendencies that “were in vogue”: promoted

ancient architecture, formal eclecticism, and “discovery” of medieval, vernacular and oriental architecture. In 1892 the Academy of Architecture in Bucharest was founded. Among the first certified architects were Ion Mincu, Ion N Soculescu, Alexandru Savulescu, George Sterian, Stefan Ciocarlan, who are considered as the founders of Neo-Romanian style. They are interested in vernacular and applied art, and wish to invent at decorative level with the need to create spaces that serve modern life, similar to the European phenomenon of national style movements in the first decade of the 20th century thoroughly analysed by Ákos Moravánszky in *Competing visions : aesthetic invention and social imagination in central european architecture, 1867-1918*. The importance of the perspective of analysing the Romanian style in the context of national movement on a larger scale, namely Central and Eastern Europe, is also pointed by Samuel Albert in his review of *Art and Design in Romania, 1866-1927: Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression* by Shona Kallestrup.

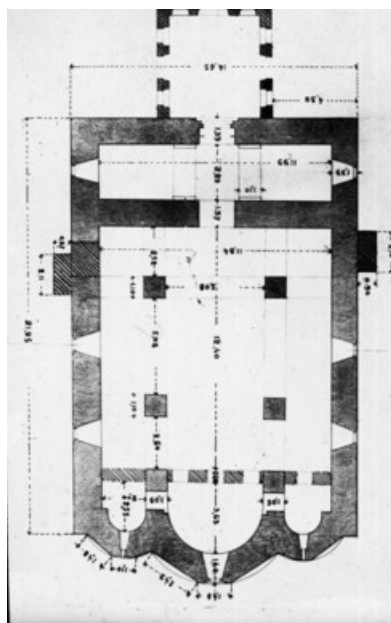
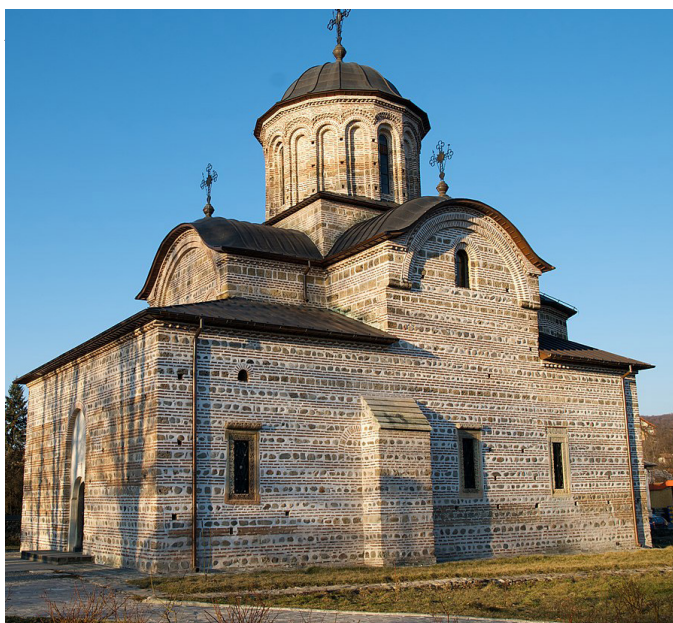
While the book continues to depict the peak of the architectural style in the period between the two World War, it seems to have simplified the explanation of its roots with the syntagm “succession of isolated and independent moments” (Stefanut, 2002). It does not depict the initial stages and the insights of the group of intellectuals previously mentioned. Nicolae Petruscu's bibliography titled *Ioan Mincu* complements the gaps in the everyday life of these characters and their decision process. However Stefanut's book is a clear monography of the Romanian national style and a good backbone to the different elements, more on a national scale, that determined the emergence of the style.

# II. Religious architecture

## II.1. Romanian ancient history

The sub-group of Thracians, ancient Greek name for the South-eastern Balkans' inhabitants, were mentioned by Herodotus to have lived in the territory of current Romania. After the Greeks' arrival from the Black Sea around 7th century BC the first cities emerge, namely Histria, Tomis and Callatis (now Istra, Constanta and Mangalia). Called Getae by the Greeks and Dacians by the Romans, the first kingdom on the territory of Romania emerges under the ruler Burebista in 70 B.C. In 106 A.D. Dacia becomes a Roman province for two centuries until the Roman troops abandon the territory due to Gothic barbarian tribes. The remaining population, mostly veterans, start a prolonged process of symbiosis with the Dacians which laid the foundations for the Latin background of the Romanian language. Due to the following six centuries of nomadic tribes invading the Daco-Romans and the further development of states surrounding Romania, it is considered a Latin island in a sea of Slavic neighbouring countries. Romania's linguistic roots in Latin are even to this day a surprising fact determining its unique characteristic as a nation and its inherited traditions and values.

The influences of the neighbouring Byzantine Empire can be observed in the complex Greek cross-in-square plan, originally from Constantinople, of the Princely Church of Saint Nicholas in Curtea de Arges, built in 1352. In the nave, four columns support the cupola. Four crossed semi-cylindrical vaults connect the four walls of the church. Three apses, circular on the interior and polygonal on the exterior, are enclosing the Eastern façade. On the outside, three of the four sides of the structural Greek cross unveil as semi-circular, while the Eastern one encloses with the central apse. The façade shows a sober pattern of brick and stone. The over 300 painted scenes on the internal walls resemble the Constantinopolitan monastery of Chora (Kariye Djami now). The construction of the church started under the ruler Basarab I and was finished by his son Nicolae Alexandru. It is one of the spiritually closest sanctuaries to the atmosphere of the 14th century Byzantium. (Văetisi, 2008)



(Left) **Fig. 1** Saint Nicholas Church in Curtea de Arges, source:Wikipedia

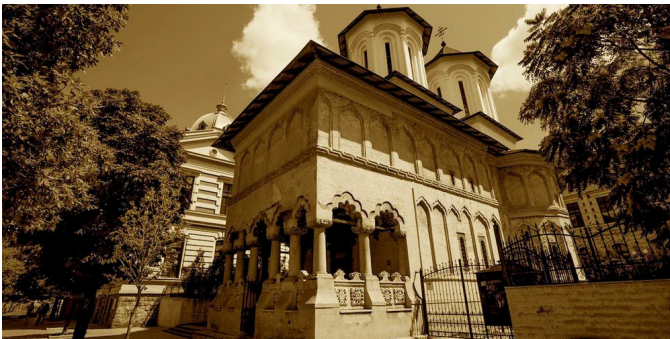
(Right) **Fig. 2** Saint Nicholas Church in Curtea de Arges, plan, source: Arhiva UAIUM

## II.2. Middle Ages and Phanariot period

Starting the 14th century three Medieval states formed the basis of the territorial ramification of current Romania namely Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia. The three principalities manage to resist the full sovereignty of the Ottoman empire rule by becoming tribute-payers, while Transylvania was later exposed to Western, Gothic influences, through barbaric tribes, Hungarian and later Austro-Hungarian Empire.

One of the rulers during the period of fighting the Ottoman Empire was Constantin Brancoveanu from Wallachia, who ruled from 1688 to 1714. His reign is of very high significance in the history of Romania specifically for his contributions to the cultural heritage. Throughout his quarter of a century reign, architecture continued its evolutionary track, without a specifically new concept in its development. Plan typologies and the old forms wear a new remarkably rich coat, forming a new style, namely the Branovenesc Style. (Ionescu, 192. Pp 176). Due to his love for art and convictions he invested his own fortune and that of the state to raise the foundations of numerous religious buildings,

*ktetories* ( Eastern Orthodox monasteries or church). The style has neo-byzantine roots and Italian Renaissance influences besides the natural evolution of the clerical architecture preceding it. It also set up one of the most influential styles that later Ion Mincu and his peers adopted and redeveloped at the end of the 19th century. Examples of such architecture can be found at the Hurezi Monastery and the Coltea Church in the centre of Bucharest. Elements such as rich Corinthian capitals with contorted flutes, full of ornaments, floral bases and handrails with animal or floral motifs mark the peak of its style and the new level of craftsmanship in Romania, specifically in the architectural realm. (Ionescu, 1937)



(Left top and bottom) **Fig. 3,4** Coltea church in the University Square in Bucharest. *Prdvor* simple details.

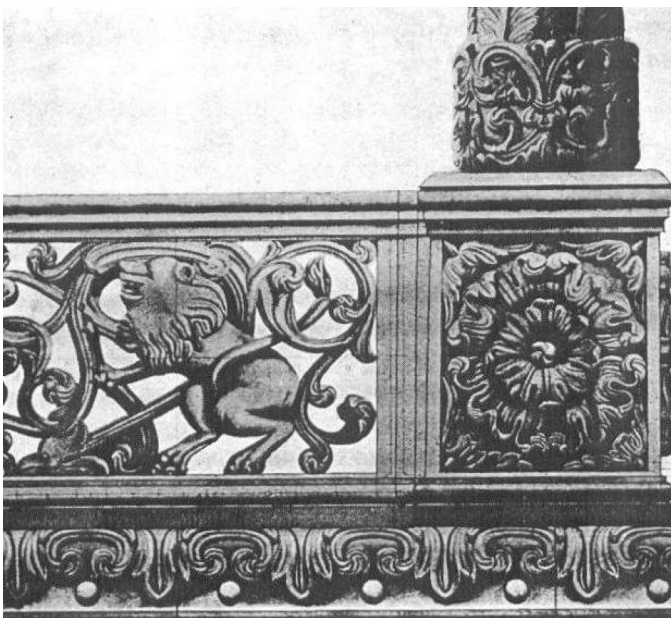
(Right) **Fig. 5** Hurezi monastery raised entrance of the boyar houses surrounding the church.

### II.3. Case study: Stavropoleos Monastery

The Brancoveanu style also covers the reign of the Greek Mavrocordat family, the first Phanariot rulers in Romania. One of the most acclaimed ktetories was the Vacaresti church, continuing his legacy, with the façade divided by a band of three woven Acanthus leaves interrupted by a set of pearls. Arguably more intriguing for the purpose of the paper would be to analyse the Stavropoleos Monastery in the city Center of Bucharest, built in 1724 and refurbished by Ion Mincu in 1913. It marks one of the last masterpieces of the Brancovenesc style, while the slow downfall of architecture looks forward to the 150-year void (Trajanescu, 1916), and a direct link to the Neo-Romanian/ Neo-Brancovenesc style through its restoration project started in 1897 by one of the leaders of the new architectural movement.

The Stavropoleos church was constructed as a simple chapel next to the Ioanichie Inn. The rectangular plan has one tower above the nave and only one apse on the Eastern side and without a *pridvor* (Romanian term for a usually exterior gallery space covered by a pillar-supported roof, located in front or around the building).

Its main particularities that defined the future influences are the pointed trilobed arches and the circular insets decorating the two registers of the façade characteristic of the Brancovenesc style. In 1730 the church was extended with side apses and the entrance gallery, *pridvor*. The band consisting of flowers and leaves divides the facade in two unequal parts and interrupts its linear path around the gallery to embrace the side arches. The supporting columns of the arches are marked by the twisted, decorated fern leaf flutes, their neo-Corinthian capitals and the detailed heavy base connected by the handrails on top of the pedestals ornamented by lions.



(Left) **Fig. 6** Stavropoleos church, columns base, hand-rail and pedestal decoration.

(Right) **Fig. 7** Stavropoleos church, entrance *pridvor*, trilobed arches in the lower part, dividing floral band, circular insets of saints in the upper part

After being declined the project of the Capital's town hall, Ion Mincu got commissioned the restoration of the Stavropoleos Church. His point of view on restoration was inspired by his visit to Milan, specifically San Ambroggio. His restoration point of view was to complement with detailed elements the old church by delicately replacing its broken parts. Due to the lack of knowledge of the workers, Mincu had to personally supervise on site the project. In order to maintain the old look, a lot of supervised work was required by the painter on the frieze band with medallions of Saints. Besides the restoration project of the church he was also commissioned to design a museum next to it. His proposal included a two-story building, a tower and a covered walkway surrounding the courtyard. The only element connecting the museum to the church were the trefoil arches of the courtyard, ornamented with multi-coloured ceramic and supported by the stone column. The entire project shows a lot of influences ranging from Orthodox monuments to Catholic monasteries from Italy and Spain ( Baldescu, 2002). While defending his proposal he depicts his analogy of

Roman architecture derived from Greek architecture and the Stavropoleos Church morphed from a Byzantine church. "(I admire the altered Byzantine style of Stavropoleos) Precisely because it is not made in 'pure Byzantine style the church represents for us a very precious 'archetype.' From the pure Byzantine style, it evolved into the heterogenous style, as named by Mr. Samurcas, and that I call 'Romanian style.' (Mincu, 1904)



(Left) **Fig. 8** Stavropoleos church before tower addition and Mincu intervention.

(Right) **Fig. 9** Stavropoleos church after restoration by Mincu and again in

# III. Domestic architecture

## III.1. Peasant home

Out of all the structures raised on the Romanian territory the earliest and most numerous are the dwelling houses. Early forms of this were the temporary huts built by shepherds wandering with their herds that later became permanent dwellings in the mountains. The traditional plan of these houses was usually a simple square or rectangle with up to three rooms, arranged linearly, with the long side facing South. In comparison to other two-storey, traditional homes, crowded together, such as the Macedonian or other Mediterranean countries, the Romanian home only had one storey situated in the middle of a large courtyard, contained by a fence and a simple stable, a stall, a storage shed or a *sopron* (timber shelter for tools, fodder or livestock). Usually the most ornamented element in the traditional home ensemble was the entrance gate, demonstrating a high level of craftsmanship, and a shingle roof, one small door for people and one large arched door. The foundation was a layer of thick stones laid directly on the ground. A frame of timber beam would be laid over the rudimentary thick stone wall supporting a set of timber stakes.

The space between the stakes is filled with woven wicker coated with a layer of plaster consisting of yellow soil, dirt, and manure, sprayed with lime and water. Along the house runs a raised deck called *prispa* (later evolving in *pridvor*). Due to the soil conditions, the traditional houses in Muntenia (Greater Wallachia, located in the South of Romania between the Carpathian Mountains in the North, the river Danube in the South and the river Olt or Oltenia, lesser Wallachia, in the West) had a higher stone foundations and the *pridvor*, entrance gallery started shaping a small balcony, that later becomes a key architectural features embraced by Ion Mincu ( see comparing Figures below). Under the staircase leading to the balcony lies the entrance to the cellar. The plan of the house later evolved into two rooms divided by the access chamber, one for guests and one for the inhabitants. The guest one is the exhibition space where all household art pieces are stored. Right at the back of the entrance chamber lies the fireplace. The chimney ends in the four-pitched wood shingle roof where most foods were stored over the winter to get smoked. (Ionescu, 1937)



(Left) **Fig. 10** Bufetul dela Sosea, Ion Mincu

(Right) **Fig. 11** Peasant home in Calimanesti

### III.2. Fortified house, cula

The peasant homes naturally evolved into semi-noble dwellings, a new type of dwelling, adapted from the Mediterranean typology. The semi-noble home in Muntenia (old greater Wallachia) was built out of brick and timber, over two floors. The ground floor is at earth level and usually represents the cellar, while in some cases it used to also be inhabited. The first floor consists of three, four or sometimes even more rooms, representing the liveable space in the house. The balcony, similar to the peasant homes, is accessed using a wooden staircase supported by ornamented timber columns. Its variation from Oltenia (lesser Wallachia) had a closer connection to the fortified Mediterranean structures, known as *cula*, which arrived in Romania from Dalmatia, through Serbia. (Iorga, 1968)

The term "*cula*" has its roots in the Persian 'qulla', meaning 'mountain, peak', later entered the Turkish language as 'kule', meaning 'tower, and further spread in the Balkans. It was a manifestation of merging the need for dwelling with the need for protection against the Ottoman Empire. Even though the term had the same meaning in both the attackers' and defenders' language, it also had a secondary meaning in Romanian, namely that of the royal palaces' tower, where the treasury was stored. The origin of the tower, as a watchpoint for defence, lies in Mesopotamia and further expanded throughout the Orient and Greece. Having experienced adaptation to also include dwelling it spread throughout the Byzantine Commonwealth. (Zamora, 2006). Due to longer, more direct, and active Ottoman sovereignty, the typology of the kule took the shape of a fortified tower rather than the Romanian evolved traditional home. Such examples of fortified kule can be found in Bulgaria, in Vrata, laid over three

no exterior detailing, thick stone walls, with firing holes. Other such exemplars are the fortified dwellings in Kratovo, Macedonia, Mani in Greece, or Gore in Albania. The latter took the shape of a two-storey high tower with two main rooms per level divided by a central corridor, reassembling the advanced-traditional Romanian homes' plans described in the previous.

In Romania, the required defence was mostly limited to the social level, hence parts of the defensive characteristics of the typology were developed into decorative elements, such as the ornamented arches. The emergence of the kule in Romania can only clearly be dated to the 18th century, yet elements and appearances of traditional homes such as the raised ground floors and the cellars had developed previously in the same areas. The plan of a cula is typically square, with one ground floor, the cellar, the first floor, three or four rooms, same as the semi-noble house. The window opening in the first are large and the last floor has two rooms and a large balcony supported by the thick masonry walls. The peasant fireplace is now replaced by the wall-inserted stove, ornamented by pantiles, defining it as a luxurious piece of furniture.

#### III.3. Case study: Cula Cartianu

The semi-noble cula typology slowly loses the form and shape of the fortified structure and develops an aesthetic and a character that could be defined as “national”. Cula Cartianu is a notable example still standing today allowing us to get a glimpse into the timeline of discovering the Romanian architectural identity. The ground floor is slightly sunk in, containing two vaulted cellar rooms with separate entrances. The walls are made from river boulders and stone up to 1.2 meter high, where the masonry wall continues the structure. The square-shaped plan contains a repeated interior three-room form on both first and second floor surrounded by masonry on first, respectively timber on second, gallery. What is quite unique to the Cula Cartianu is the ornamented timber gallery at the top, pridvor, and the contrast it creates with the whitewash walls, shaping the foundations of a national identity.

The house belonged to the Cartianu family, (Funetan 2011). As the families’ archives show, the structure dates back to 1760. The timber extension on the second floor was added in 1821. Enache Cartianu, the son of Ceausu Cartianu the builder of the house, was shot by one of his cousins in 1875. One of his eight children, Nicolae Cartianu remained at the mansion while the rest spread all over the world. He was a political figure that had brought people such as King Carol the Second of Romania or Stefan and Cella Dellavrancea to the residence. He is the spirit of the house. In 1975 the Communist Party pressured the family into selling the property which evicted the family. Until the Revolution in 1989 only one attempt at restoring the house was unsuccessfully made.

A restoration process took place between 1997 and 2004, which attempted to recreate as faithfully to the original as it could. It now hosts an Ethnography and Folklore Museum of Gorj, one of the 41 administrative territories of Romania.

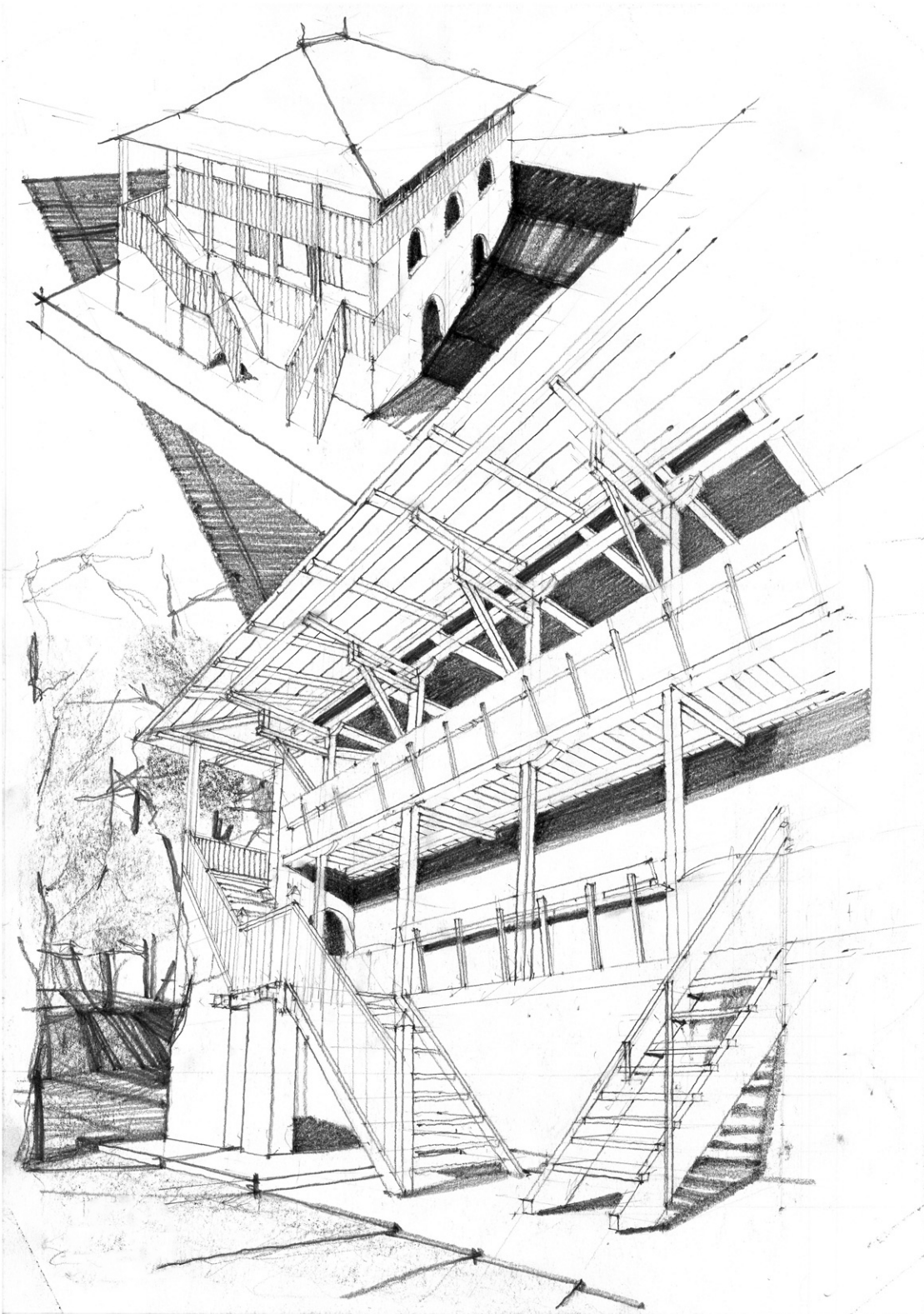


Fig. 12 Cula Cartianu composition drawing by author

### III.4. Royal houses, Mogosoiaia palace

The noble typology evolved further into the royal houses, which like their previous model were part of a larger architectural ensemble called a Royal Court. The royal houses were usually built along the Court's wall even up to the times of Constantin Brancoveanu. Besides the Turkish influences of rulers such as Ghica, Rosetti or Cantacuzino, a new wave of French influences arrived from Ludovic XVI. This new lifestyle demanded larger and richer courts. Because of this the old noble and royal homes do not fit the new requirements and starting with Constantin Cantacuzino and later C. Brancoveanu, they build new Royal houses and courts, fitting the Occidental term of "palace" rather than "home".

The Brancoveanu House in Mogosoiaia built in 1702, next to Bucharest, is a remarkable example still standing today. It located in the centre of a lake-side courtyard, has a rectangular plan and three floors: basement, ground floor or rez-de-chausse, and a first floor. The last floor is where the apartments of the Prince and the Princess are located. They can only be reached by

an external staircase attached to the North façade leading to a square shaped *foisor* ( covered balcony, an arbour, similar to the raised entrances of the Hurezi monastery or larger peasant homes). The *foisor* leads to a long rectangular corridor with the two apartments, one on each side, similar to the simple two-room peasant home plan. The south façade is split in half by the *loggia* wall, marked by five trefoil arches supported by six Corinthian columns, with twisted flutes and ornamented capitals. The *loggia*, outside covered room inspired by Venetian buildings, is flanked by two balconies, each supported by one brick round arch. On the ground floor the rooms are mainly aimed to serve the courtiers. The basement takes most of the central part of the building and is divided into four rooms, each covered by a cupola, and separated by one central pillar. The exterior finish of the palace is exposed brick, except for the arches, columns and handrails which are made out of stone.



(Left) **Fig. 13** Mogosoiaia Palace South facade, loggia and two balconies on first floor



(Right) **Fig. 14** Mogosoiaia Palace North facade staircase

# IV. Ion Mincu and the New Style

## IV.1. Ion Mincu

In order to get a better assessment on the process of founding the new National Style it would be useful to get a glimpse into the life of one of the main founders, Ion Mincu, also the name of the University of Urbanism and Planning in Bucharest. Ion Mincu graduated as an engineer in Romania and continued his studies as an architect in France. His work in the Beaux-Arts School was praised by his peers.

In the summer of 1883, Ioan Campineanu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, went to visit Paris and attended the final exhibition within the school of Architecture. While looking at the work of Ion Mincu, without knowing it, Campineanu was approached by the dean of the school, who praised the project of Mincu. Once he arrived in Romania, the Foreign Affairs Minister immediately sent out a scholarship for Ion Mincu to further his architectonic horizons through a trip. On his trip he was strongly inspired by Toledo and Sevilla in Spain, Doge Palace in Venice and Amalfi Italy, Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and Greece.

His friend and colleague Petrascu wrote a personal memorial, bibliography of his time with Ion Mincu, same title which provides insight on his character, his thought process, his company and personal affairs. In his bibliography he tells stories of Ion Mincu and his friends and their routines. Once Mincu was back in Romania, he used to go out twice a day together with his friends, some architects, engineers, others artist such as his nephew Dului Zamfirescu. They were all aged around 25 to 30 years old, dressing formal, like Ion Mincu with black hats and ties, some more bohemian and original. Ion Mincu is described by Petrascu as a tall, slick, brown curly hair, green-blue eyes,

thick brown beard, similar to “head of Christ with some features and severity of Michel Angelo”. He praised his spiritual dignity and defined him with a strong moral self-control, and an imperturbable pride.

While working on the Lahovary house, his first commission, Mincu discussed with his friend Petrascu the concept of national identity. The project was a small addition to a low residential building. The houses of the area and of the times all looked the same, without any particular style. His unique idea was to add a covered veranda, eaves, a colourful ceramic frieze, and wooden columns. He would start from an element such as a balustrade, pillar frieze or rosette and then explain why it would be hard to implement it from historical monuments into the present. For example, he criticized the 1.5m thick walls of the old houses and churches that do not provide enough light, do not comply anymore with modern life and are too expensive. However, he acknowledged the environmental arguments for thick walls in the Romanian climate. New typologies of buildings: universities, townhalls, palaces were monumental as opposed to the small ones of older times. These, he argued, should be changed, reshaped and evolved in the new spirit and then adapted to brick, timber and lime.

During his commission to redesign the Ioanid Park in Bucharest Ion Mincu went on a trip for inspiration: firstly he stopped at Curtea de Arges, where he was unhappy with the renovation project that was obstructing the looks of the original church. While visiting monasteries, such as Hurezi and Cozia, he was more fascinated by the particularities of the natural environment that were endemic to the hills, forests and mountains of Romania.

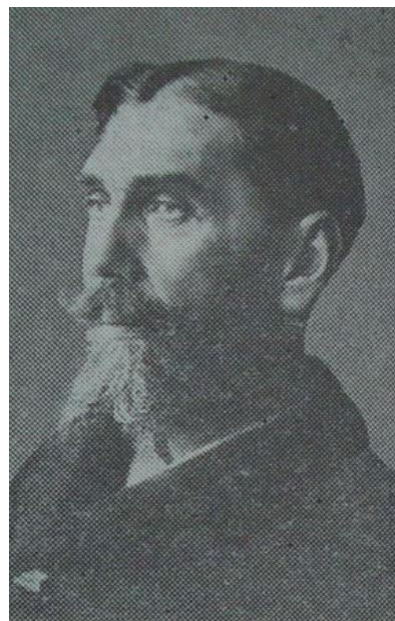
#### IV. Ion Mincu and the New Style

Details of Cozia Monastery's door frame and the interior Byzantine paintings drew Mincu's attention. His main impressions of the small timber columns of fortified house of Cula Maldarestilor, the Horezu Monastery's furniture of Brancoveanu led Mincu to immediately start his 100 house development in the Ioanid Park back in Bucharest, called the "Romanian fortresses". He was adapting the Royal courts of Moldavia and parts of the fortified kule to a unique style. Unfortunately the project never got realised due to conflicts between the bank and the Ioanid family.

In 1913 when his illness got more serious, a group of admirers and students decided to celebrate Ion Mincu with a manifestation of admiration and a banquet at the hotel Boulevard. Even though it was quite difficult for him to join, he assisted dressed with a tailcoat, got up and gave a thanking speech. While explaining his work he said: " I am not a man with disillusion about my own work and I never was one. My work was small and simple: I saw in this country (Romania), spread with old beautiful things, a church, a house, a roof, a door,

a rosette, a frame, which had something original that I hadn't seen anywhere else. By collecting bits from here and there, I told myself this could start a style in our country. You approve. I happy and thank you for giving me today the reward of the work of my thoughts. I am as you see moved and thankful." (Petrascu, 1928)

Even though he is widely considered by most books, critiques and piers, the founder of the National Style this occurred after his carrier had partially ended, and mostly after he had passed away in 1912. The *Analelel arhitecturii*, the first Romanian journal in Romania, established in 1890, did not include any of his projects and he was also not related to or involved with the 1906 Exhibition. The 1906 exhibition is one of the first public celebration of the architectural identity of Romania. (Popescu, 2001) He was praised strongly in his final years, due to his personal illness and friends and mentees, Ion Trajanescu and Ion Soculescu continued writing about him years to come. "Mincu was to the artistical revival of our times what Michel-Angelo was for the Italian artistic revival "(Trajanescu 1922).



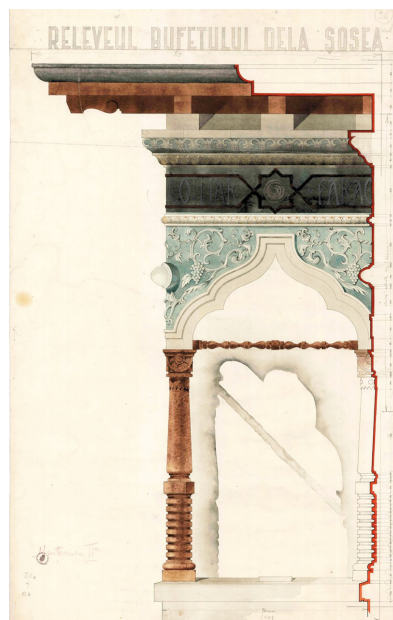
(Left) **Fig. 15** Lahovay House, Ion Mincu's first comission

(Right) **Fig. 16** Ion Mincu's portrait

## IV.2. Case study: The Buffay at the street

In 1887, Grigore Manu recommended Ion Mincu to the Ministry of Domains and commissioned to work on a Romanian tavern (term in Romanian: *cârciumă*), which would ultimately be exposed the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. These exhibitions were usually an amazing catalyst for finding national identities around the world. Mincu was quite relieved to having total freedom in defining to Romanian Style through different motifs. This was his second commission since his return to Romania, where he would accentuate a Romanian traditional architecture. The elements were very similar to the peasant home, with two storeys, a side staircase leading to the pridvor. The arched door under the staircase led exactly like the old homes to the cellar. Under the pantile roof's eaves, he designed a band made out of green faience, symbolising white vine branches on a field. The timber beams supporting the roof structure rested on the wall of the building, where receded blind windows had imprinted red and white grapes. The ceramic freeze reminded of the Stavropoulos Monastery which he also later refurbished. (Minea, 2022). On the band he commemorated

Romanian vineyards (Cotnari amongst them still relevant and produces commercially), impressing not only through visual stimuli, but also historical and ethnical evocations. The font he used for these, became an original mixture of clarity of the Latin alphabet and the lines and shapes of the Cyrillic one. His references were mostly reminding of building from the times of the reign of Constantin Brancoveanu, which were highly praised. His decoration was rational and driven by artistic interest in the architectural identity, rather than just emotional (Sterner, 1982), not diving as deep as the revival of French Rococo or Baroque architecture of the times. Due to the extra costs the final plans led to, the Pavilion was not built for the Expo Universelle, but thanks to Petre Carp, it would get commissioned in Bucharest next instead of the old Ministry. Twenty years after building it, Ion Mincu mentioned that he would change the central line of the roof.



(Left top) **Fig. 17** Bufetul de la Sosea by Ion Mincu today

(Right) **Fig. 18** Bufetul de la Sosea sectional drawings showing the various motifs Ion Mincu designed

### IV.3. 1906 Exhibition and Jubilee

While Mincu is considered by many as the father of Neo-Romanian architecture, his projects never reached the scale and government acceptance that consecrated the style in the Romanian territory. The 1906 forty-year Jubilee for the King Carol I raised the style to the level of an official architectural language defining the national identity.

Firstly, the factors leading to the 1906, uncover partially the involvement of the Royal family and independent literary and artistic groups in the development of the style. One initial influence was the five-year struggle of the Society of Architects to gain an independent architectural school, led by members of the society, such as Mincu, as the teachers. Their success in 1897 led to the development of the architectural department in the Bucharest School of Fine Arts. Seven years later, in 1904, it evolved into an autonomous title, as the Advanced School of Architecture. Another group with an important impact was the members of the *Ileana*, magazine and artistic society. Supporters of *Ileana*, such as Leo Bachelin, the King's librarian, pushed for a new decorative style inspired by Orthodox paintings called "neo-Byzantine". (Bachelin, 1898).

The Artistic Youth, another artistic society, did also include a pioneer member, Baltazar Apcar that represented an isolated case. His implication peaked in 1908 through his article called "Towards a Romanian Style". In his text he argued for vernacular inspired artistic motifs that could enhance the modern decoration, such as the rooster, usually found on peasant objects. "This is how a national motif can live through a decoration with the standards of modern art, while enabling a decoration to be a Romanian style." (Baltazar, 1908).

Secondly, the two architects, Victor Stefanescu and Stefan Burcus, commissioned to design the Jubilee Exhibition in Bucharest were amongst the first to engage with Neo-Romanian architecture at such a large and public scale. Stefan Burcus studied at the Society of Romanian Architects and finished his studies in Paris at *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, after the first closed in 1897. He later taught in the same Romanian school for 28 years. Victor Stefanescu was a first-generation graduate of that school. "Even though the leadership of the studio were architects that studied abroad, the unanimity of the assisting staff, architects and draftsmen were the core of our school, the spiritual sons of Mincu. That is why his influence was so strongly felt even though he did not personally participate in this achievement of Romanian art" (Ceganeanu, 1941). The Jubilee was celebrating both 40 years of reign of King Carol I and eight centuries since the end of the Daco-Roman wars, when the Emperor Trajan finally conquered the Dacians and started the process of colonisation. This dichotomous celebration was simultaneously marking the end of the Ottoman suzerainty and the start of the Roman one. The Roman comparison was powerfully associating the Roman Emperor to the Hohenzollern, the Royal family of King Carol, and strengthening the Latin roots of the Romanian history and heritage. The opening ceremony clearly referenced this by theatrically parading costumed Dacians, Romanian rulers and Roman armies in a pseudo-Roman arena. As opposed to previous representations of Romania on a European scale, the aim of this exhibition was trying less to integrate Romania in the modern European context, but emphasis on the intrinsic artistic value and identity of the Romanian nation.

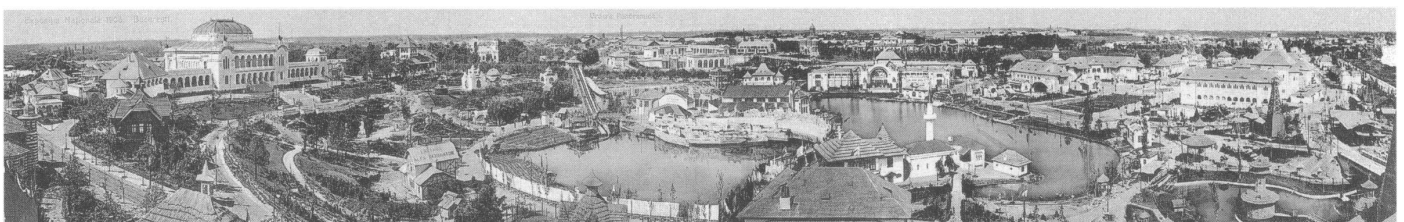
The access was framed by a monumental Neo-Romanian gate that initiated the visitor on a grand North-South axis across the Filaret Hill in Bucharest (now redeveloped into the Carol Monument Park). At the end of the axis on the hill roamed the grand Palace of Arts. None of Ion Mincu's project ever reached such grandeur exposure, size and dramatism as this project's location. As opposed to Mincu's "discreet surface play of decorative detail, the palace boldly exploited the visual contrasts of light and shade provided by two stories of galleries, long arcades and Brancoveanu arches and sturdy corner towers reminiscent of fortified boyar manor houses or cule" (Kallestrup, 2002). od Brancoveanu arches and sturdy corner towers reminiscent of fortified boyar manor houses or cule" ( Kallestrup, 2002). The project was a symbiosis of the grandeur of Beaux-Arts and the national elements. Its title and location, Palace of Arts on top of the hill, symbolised the proclamation of a new modern, culture-oriented, bourgeois, independent age of national identity.

The other various pavilions of: Bucharest Town Hall, Administration of State Monopolies, Justice, Royal, etc. spread across the vast park followed similar design principles adopting various national elements such as the cule, Orthodox churches and monasteris, and Brancovenian decoration. The only two pavilions standing out as contrasting to both the exhibition as a whole and to each other were the Austrian and Hungarian pavilion, highlighting the three different modern architectures. One of the highest criticisms of the exhibition besides the budget was the Conservative party influence on the exhibition and the lack of foreign visitor even though it reached out to the large public of Europe through articles and magazines.



**Fig. 19,20** (Left) Palace of Arts; (Right) Entrance gate and main axis with the Palace of Arts on the hill as a perspective focus point.

(Below) **Fig. 21** Birds-eye panoramic view of the 1906 Jubilee Exhibition



# V. Conclusion

The search for the National style in Romania could be summed as the quest of finding the Romanian spirit and essence. This would be reflected in most artistic domains from sculpture, Fredrick Stock on the Gheorghieff tomb, designed by Ion Mincu, to painting, Apcar Baltazar, art history, Henry Focillon and architecture, Mincu, Soculescu, Cerchez and their followers. Did the architectural movement, through the *Analele arhitecturii* magazine and the development of architectural education, concepts, and designs of Ion Mincu and Soculescu capture the Romanian essence?

On one hand, their interest in the aesthetic and historical values of old traditional elements is clearly visible in their influences. As the history of Romania was described as a sequence of isolated events rather than a continuous chronological series, these can be exemplified through the functionalities and typologies of buildings and structures at their respective times, religious, domestic and royal. The various titles: neo-Byzantine, neo-Brancovenian, neo-Romanian already depict the various origins of inspiration and roots of the style. The Latin origins, Orthodox belief and fight for independence were more a political agenda in the early 20th century in relation to architecture, as at the core of the Mincu's designs laid more in the palpable elements of Romanian life: vernacular and popular architecture, Romanian landscapes, and flora, Brancovenian art and cleric inspiration. Some critics argued that there is nothing original Romanian enough in the past to be genuine, while others have attempted to rediscover the traditions. They claimed that historians should "not look for the formal originalities of such tradition, but rather for discrete, subjective features" (Stefanut, 2009, p.113), that would differentiate them from any other nation's

architecture and art. Some of these features are the sobriety and simplicity of old Romanian architecture as opposed to the heavily ornamented Oriental, like Ottoman or Russian.

On the other hand, the new style had revived the life of the peasant and elevated it to the level of a mystical muse of the past and attempted to merge it with the modern life and its needs adding the prefix "neo" in its title (not used contemporary with its definition but mainly in art and architecture history terminology). One issue with the popular inspiration of the National Style was the discrepancy between the intellectual ambitions and perceptions and the realities of the peasant, rural life. It was conceived and developed by elite societies and groups of artists for the consumption of the highly educated population. Mincu's National Style was rooted in vernacular art, which later evolved into monumental architecture, but was mostly approached with superficial interventions, at a decorative level, such as wooden carved columns and friezes. The struggle of the interwar architects, such as Horia Creanga, and Henrieta Delavrancea was to fix the early 'mistakes' of their mentors, and initial struggles by merging the National style with the modern and functional. (Constantin, 2020; Delavrancea, 2009). Even though the Neo-Romanian is considered modern by its opposition to the French Eclecticism, it was slowly facing a losing battle against the Modernist movement in Romania, especially the large cities. Due to the rise of the reinforced concrete, new modern, more spacious, and economically productive spaces could be shaped. The critique of architects such as Trajanescu was that the modernist style, in its pursuit of originality and eccentricity, ignores the local climates,

due to its global style. He was also absolute about the aesthetical value of the Romanian national style and its superiority over the more rigid modern one. He criticized the local authorities for their lack of control over the aesthetics of the city and the “classical beauty”, which could have also been achieved through modern technique and materials. In the final paragraph of the essay *Romanian Architecture facing modernism* he calls out the architects to further explore the national style with new modern utilitarian needs and praises the capital city of Bucharest for its multiple private and public projects by the apprentices of Ion Mincu and their students. (Trajanescu, 1933).



(Left) **Fig. 22** Early 20th century illustration depicting the cotidian, bourgeois lifestyle of Bucharest, giving it the nickname of 'Petit Paris'. The restaurant 'Buffet' was built according to the Romanian Pavillion design for the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889.

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The book is mainly a collection of drawings, plans. It encompasses a variety of building methods and typologies of housing projects in Romania. The drawings are accompanied by quotes and photographs that take the reader on a journey of nostalgia, pleasure of rediscovery and acknowledgment of the subject's power to inspire and survive. The book includes also examples of Neoromanian and old Brancovenian style dwellings. It beautifully and chaotically, as the projects are not chronologically ordered due to the principle of having an open archive, depicts different architectural styles some of them contemporary from a variety of Romanian environments.

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Henrieta Delavrancea was one of the most pre-eminent female architects in Romania, having being amongst the first female admitted into the Superior School of Architecture in Bucharest. She was part of the founders of the Romanian Modernist movement in Romania alongside Horia Creanga, G.M. Cantacuzino and Octav Doicescu. The book presents a documented catalogue of the exhibition with the same name that took place in Balçik, Bulgaria during that decade. It consists of articles published within that exhibition and drawings for a variety of projects constructed during that period, such as Thea Pavilion of the Royal Palace (demolished), renovation project of the City Hall and a series of Villas: Cantuniari, Vilcovici.

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