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## ROMANIA'S PECULIAR WAY IN THE LANDSCAPES OF BUCHAREST, 1806–1906

### Abstract

Beginning with the middle of the nineteenth century, Bucharest was the hub of an emerging nation-state, finally turning into the capital city of a kingdom (in the century's last quarter). This advancement implied the necessity for the town to adapt to a new status and to represent Romania before the world. To this end, broad-based investment projects were necessary; in the first place, the city had to be bestowed with edifices of public institutions. The forms of these buildings, and the designs of grand boulevards, were primarily rooted in the fascination with Paris of the time of Prefect Haussmann. Foreigners' accounts of Bucharest testify to the image of a 'Little Paris' getting anchored at the time. However, the premises for this nickname are traceable in earlier period: an elitist snobbery about 'Parisian' salon life was taking shape in the early nineteenth century, whereas the incipient national ideas fell back on the French revolutionary tradition. The overwhelming French influence on the local elites finally raised increasing resistance as potentially damaging to the Romanian identity. This turn triggered certain political as well as architectural projects that were supposed to bring the country's modern life to its presumed roots or 'authentic' tradition.

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"I could understand nothing out of that": so writes a Polish reporter of her first contact with the Romanian capital city. She ponders how she could possibly encompass the chaos of impressions and explore the 'instinctive and illogical' Bucharest; so illogical that she would rather cognise it with the 'subconscious aspect of her nature'. Małgorzata Rejmer's book came across keen interest when it was published in 2013. This resulted in a number of public talks about the non-distant but still not too well-known country, its curious capital, and worrisome future. Such is the history of this land, as

described by Rejmer: the peculiar Balkan legends, conniving rulers, cruel regimes, the awe of earthquakes, bloody procedures of backstreet abortions, and packs of dogs ready to tear the passerby to pieces. Amidst the maze of the streets, a monster emerges: the House of the People. “I feel faint at the very thought of me going there.”<sup>1</sup> Years ago, I heard something very much like this from a Dutch woman approaching the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Science. Rejmer’s panorama of Bucharest is so ‘Dutch’, her perspective so European and civilised, as if there were no similarities between Romania and Poland. In fact, in ‘Dutch’ view, as perpetuated in hundreds of reports and accounts over the last two hundred years, the two lands were similar to one another more than to the ‘civilisation’ understood as the realities of the north-western part of the continent. Both were situated outside the borderline of an unadjectival ‘Europe’.

For a few years now, both have been integrated in a ‘Europe’ as a large political community and an even larger civilisation project. The ordinary citizen of Russia or Ukraine would say s/he is going ‘to Europe’ when setting off for Warsaw or Bucharest, although none of these capital cities is part of the idea of what is the best about Europe. A nineteenth-century Romanian boyar would refer to a ‘trip to Europe’ when describing a long journey to a high culture and comfortable life; a peregrination to Paris and Vienna. He would not find his own land to be ‘Europe’. The traveller was to see it for himself when it came to comparing the realities he knew with the Austrian villages and smoothly cobbled city streets. Neither the Wallachian boyar Dinicu Golescu, who set out to the West in 1826, nor the English officer Charles Colville Frankland, who compassed Wallachia a year later, would have said that they ‘have understood nothing’.<sup>2</sup> They were getting astonished or outraged, felt disgust or rapture, but always declared their understanding of the essence of things. This was founded upon a simple demarcation between barbarism and civilisation – as established by the Enlightenment elites and radiating as far as the distant lands situated on the floating perimeters of ‘Europe’. This radiation is said to have exerted a decisive impact on

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<sup>1</sup> Małgorzata Rejmer, *Bukareszt. Kurz i krew* (Wołowiec, 2013), 63.

<sup>2</sup> Dinu Golescu, *Însemnare a călătoriei mele, Constantin Radovici din Golești, făcută în anul 1824, 1825, 1826* (Bucharest, 1971), 45; George Potra, *Bucureștii văzuți de călători străini (secolele XVI–XIX)* (Bucharest, 1992), 140–1.

the aspirations of local elites. They were formed by an idea of the lot they could possibly share, with political rights granted (for boyars), houses provided (featuring a balcony, a parlour, some chairs), towns (cobblestoned streets, densely developed), clothes (French, also called German, style), and decent appearance (clean-shaven face). These phenomena, although known, were not perceived as dominant over the local 'old custom' in the eighteenth century yet. The cultural change that was about to occur brought about a gradual recognition by the elites of superiority of external models and their attempted adoption. The largest city in the Balkans became an astonishing arena of the show, in the course of which, amidst cosmopolitan imitations, an idea of Romanian nation was taking shape.

## I

Mail coach was the means of transport used in the first quarter of the nineteenth century by travellers from Western Europe to Bucharest. The journey was endless (taking a month if from Paris); east of Vienna, it would become difficult for the traveller to find a decent night's lodging, and he would find crossing the Carpathians quite burdensome. Resulting from a military defeat of Turkey (not the first one in a series), the trade in the Danube region, which earlier on was monopolised by supplies to Constantinople, was freed up in 1830. This change implied the launch of passenger waterway transport. Steamboat on the Danube became the basic means of reaching Wallachia, for the next fifty-or-so years. This reduced the travel time for travellers from Paris to a week, though the journey still implied the necessity to transfer from the trains to a ship, use horse-drawn carts to make one's way through the Iron Gate area, and then, at Giurgiu, to switch from a ship to a stagecoach, which would often get stuck in the mud on the terrible road to Bucharest. 1869 saw the opening of Romania's first railroad set along this seventy-kilometre-long way between the Danube and the capital. Fourteen years later, Bucharest was connected directly with the world by railway: it was then that the Orient Express was launched, which for the subsequent half-century was to be the most comfortable and most convenient travelling method.

Thus, within some fifty years, the transport distance between Paris and Bucharest was shortened from a month to sixty hours. The mental distance was cut even shorter, albeit not in line with the rail travel

laws. While the passenger would use roughly as much time getting either from Paris to Bucharest or the other way round, in the mental space Bucharest was close to Paris while Paris was still far away from Bucharest. Along the lines of this non-physical regularity, the typical traveller coming from Paris would, as a general rule, 'ride away' or 'depart' while the one departing from Bucharest would 'come closer', or 'approach'. 'Typical' – meaning a Frenchman or a Romanian, both of them bourgeois-looking, dressed similarly, and speaking French to each other in the train compartment. 'Europe', with Paris at her heart, was the frame of reference for both of them; Bucharest's European membership remained a controversial issue at the time, though. Hence, the value of 'departing' and 'approaching' could not be equipollent. The 'approaching' consisted in watching through the train's window of the accruing areas of brick houses, fields arranged into regular networks, small towns, whose densely developed landscape is crowned by the church tower, and a factory area ribbed with chimneystacks (a suburb of Budapest was the first such seen by the traveller). Characteristic of the 'departing' was the impression of incremental monotony of the landscape, burnt with the sunshine or covered up with snow; the lowering buildings in rural areas, which east of the Carpathians seemed to barely stick out of the ground; the views of gypsy encampments and settlements formed of clay and shrouded in aurous dust, amidst which naked children were running.

And this was not a 'Europe'. Sitting inside a comfortable car, the traveller would see it, as it were, within a photographic frame, although a horrible dust pouring into the compartment could bring him closer to the realities. When finally in Bucharest, a ride by hackneyed carriage driven by a weird-looking cabman, amidst shanties and muddy *maidans* separating the railway station from the downtown area also offered a strangeness experience. The Grand Hôtel Continental, or the Grand Hôtel du Boulevard, contained the newcomer again within the space of familiar comfort and luxuriousness: a French-speaking service team, good meals served at the restaurants, access to newspapers and telephone. As of 1900, there were forty-three hotels of category 1 or 2 available in the city. A Paris chief named Trompette, who prepared meals for Léon Gambetta himself, was employed at the Hugues hotel.<sup>3</sup> Stretching outside, visible through the vestibule

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<sup>3</sup> Ion Bulei, *România în secolele XIX–XX. Europenizarea* (Bucharest, 2011), 112.

windows, was a street surrounded by ornate façades which in the afternoons turned into a busy and merry *corso*. André Bellessort found in 1905 that nowhere else, save for Paris, had he ever come across the impression, triggered by crowd in the high street, that “life in itself is exquisite, going to one’s head”.<sup>4</sup>

In the same year, English journalist Harry de Windt came to the conclusion that he had to do with a luxurious city, full of ladies dressed like the most discriminating Parisian women (and no less frivolous), one to which sleeping in the night is odd; a city that outperforms St. Petersburg itself. He could even see automobiles in the boulevards, amidst the innumerable coaches and carriages. In the evenings, music resounded around the *cafés-chantants*. This has nothing to do with Sofia – as Windt, just back from there, opined.<sup>5</sup> This view was shared a year later by Ferdinand I of Saxe-Coburg: struck by the elegance and cleanness of Bucharest, the Bulgarian *knyaz*, later tsar, was enchanted by the splendour of the royal palace, which he juxtaposed against his own, modest residence.<sup>6</sup> This monarch, as well as Bellessort or Windt sojourned amidst crystal mirrors and showcases, soft armchairs and beautifully laid tables, treaded the carpets, or the smooth asphalt of the prestigious streets. They lived for a while in a space the Romanian elites wanted to create around themselves: a space separated from its context, resounding with the parlance and music unknown to the natives; a space that was arranged by comers from the West – the French and Swiss architects whose designs reflected the eclectic spirit of the Paris Beaux-Arts school; gardeners; decorators and artistic cabinetmakers; parquet layers; also, bookbinders adding gold-plated spines to French books arranged inside neo-Baroque bookcases.

There was nothing awkward in all that. A typical large European city drew inspiration from Paris or Vienna, routing the boulevards, styling the façades of public edifices, launching a tramway network. Yet, the case of Bucharest seemed unexpectedly or overly expressive – to the extent making it unfitting in terms of European categories.

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<sup>4</sup> André Bellessort, *La Roumanie contemporaine* (Paris, 1905), 37–8.

<sup>5</sup> Harry de Windt, *Through Savage Europe, Being the Narrative of a Journey (Undertaken as Special Correspondent of the Westminster Gazette) Throughout the Balkan States and European Russia* (London, 1907), 249–54.

<sup>6</sup> Bulei, *Români*, 79.

“You enter a parlour, and you will feel as you were in Paris. The most elegant furniture, the most en-vogue dressings, in really good taste; elaborate conversations in the language of our [i.e. French – B.B.’s note] most refined circles, glittering chandeliers, flowers embellishing the consolettes, melodies wafting out of the rosewood surfaces of the grand pianos”, etc. Going out to the street, however, you will find “the Orient of your dreams”, Ulysse de Martillac wrote in 1869.<sup>7</sup> It was a decade earlier that German diplomat Richard Kunisch compared Bucharest to Algiers; a little later, Belgian politician Léon Verhaeghe found that the small central quarter “has an indefinable colonial ambience to it. New houses there cost not less than in Paris”. And, he found Bucharest, again, as resembling the towns of Algeria, where the French buildings stood out against the ‘indigenous housing developments’.<sup>8</sup> In 1878 Joseph Reinach, a comer from Paris, named the city’s central fragment a ‘European quarter’; he did not think high of its quality, though. The more the local customs tried to imitate French models, the more provincial they seemed to him, smelling of ‘subprefecture’.<sup>9</sup> If they smelled at all – for the French were apt to repeating in Bucharest the saying ‘Les fleurs sans odeur, les femmes sans pudeur, les hommes sans honneur’ (‘flowers without smell, women without modesty, and men without honour’), which was also in use in Algeria.<sup>10</sup>

There was obviously nothing that could be tantamount to flowers, women and men of Paris. If, however, the French subprefecture was a godforsaken backwater, then the distant Algerian or Romanian *petit Paris* must have been something much worse as it disclosed the trend of bungling imitation as well as a ‘barbarian’ character of the local context. Seized by the French in 1830 and redeveloped

<sup>7</sup> Simona Vărzaru (ed.), *Prin Țările Române. Călători străâni din secolul al XIX-lea* (Bucharest, 1984), 144–5.

<sup>8</sup> David D. Hamlin, “‘Wo sind wir?’ Orientalism, Gender and War in the German Encounter with Romania’, *German History*, 4 (2010), 425 (I am indebted to Ms. Katarzyna Chimiak for drawing my attention to this article); Potra, *Bucureștii*, 209; Leon Verhaeghe, *Voyage en Orient, 1862–1863* (Paris, 1865), 21–2.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Reinach, *Voyage en Orient*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1879), 120.

<sup>10</sup> Algeria tended to be described thus: “ses hommes étaient sans honneur, ses fleurs sans odeur, ses fruits sans saveur et ses femmes sans pudeur; le dicton était peut-être sévère, mais il n’était pas injuste”; A. Villacroze, *Vingt ans en Algérie, ou tribulations d’un colon racontées par lui-même* (Paris, 1875), 8.

into a 'European-style' city, Algiers was, in a strict sense, the central hub of a colony, whilst Bucharest was, after all, the capital city of an emancipating principality and, afterwards, kingdom. The vision of Bucharest's quasi-colonial character originated, nevertheless, not only in the minds of French observers but no less in the native literature and historiography. The historian Neagu Djuvara writes of a 'colonisation without a coloniser'<sup>11</sup>, one that had been brought about by the vernacular boyar elites who spontaneously recognised Frenchness as a substance of Europeaness, regarding their own country as a backward periphery which could only be raised by exposing it to the light of civilisation and subjecting it to the care of its 'elder sister'. Imitation of the customs and mores, laws and institutions, architectural and literary styles was an impulse relational to the reactions of other East-European elites, the Russian elite in the first place. In the case of Moldavia and Wallachia, however – the countries without political independence until the middle of the nineteenth century – it was more than that: namely, the key element in the nation-forming process. The process accelerated consumedly since a united principality – the *Principatele Unite* – emerged, resulting from a rather surprising coincidence of circumstances, and not much later on gave rise to what has ever since been called Romania: the country plotted in the European maps of the second half of the nineteenth century, which gained recognition thanks to its participation in World Exhibitions. Romania first joined such event in 1867, displaying its flagships and showcases in Paris – as an autonomous exhibitor, having ignored the Grand Vizier's invitation to join the Turkish Pavilion.<sup>12</sup> Symptomatically, the Romanian sector was designed by the Paris (subsequently, Cairo) architect Ambroise Baudry, who styled a fancy pavilion inspired by the Orthodox churches in Curtea de Argeş, the former capital of the *hospodars*, and in Bucharest, referring to

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<sup>11</sup> Neagu Djuvara, *Le pays roumain entre Orient et Occident. Les principautés danubiennes au début du XIX siècle* (Paris, 1989). I have used the Romanian translation: *Între Orient și Occident. Țările române la începutul epocii moderne (1800–1848)*, trans. Maria Carpov (Bucharest, 2009), 336.

<sup>12</sup> The principalities exhibited their products as part of the Turkish Pavilion in the London exhibition of 1851; in 1862, they had no representation, resulting from the conflict with the organisers over affording them a separate space outside the Turkish display. Subsequently, Romania was exhibited in Paris (in 1867, 1878, and 1889), Vienna (1873), Brussels (1897), and so forth.



the picturesque nature of the old local architecture. The Romanian exhibition's curators saw it as an usual opportunity for Romania to "manifest its true character to Europe".<sup>13</sup> The manifestation was intermediated by a Frenchman, and the audience was cosmopolitan. The 'real character' was a construction devised for the Western visitor: to find its way to the Bucharest elite's minds, it first had to reflect itself in the eyes of the West.

Romania ever since showed to France its astonishing face of 'younger sister', whom some arrogant Frenchmen considered, all the same, to be a bew powdered of *une femme sans pudeur*. In Bucharest, this brought out resentments connate, to an extent, with the colonial ones. These were demonstrated by an episode that occurred in 1900. The arbitration tribunal formed in Bucharest under French pressure, as it was due (instead of a competent court in Romania) to settle a French enterprise's case, aroused discontentment. The company in question had failed to deliver its contract for construction of a port in Constanța. The crowd gathered inside the courtroom and in front of the court building, scowled when the French barrister took the floor. (The lawyer was, accidentally, Raymond Poincaré, who later became the President of the Republic.) Annoyed with the noise, he interposed, "Nous sommes aux portes de l'Orient ou tout est pris à la légère!" ("We are at the gate of the Orient, where all is treated lightly!"). This statement aroused indignation, especially as monsieur Poincaré refused to apologise. 'Fashoda!', the audience shouted, alluding to the incident which disclosed France's colonial ambitions with regard to eastern Africa.<sup>14</sup> Besides, Poincaré's dictum became a lasting element of the Romanian intelligentsia's perception of their own country.

The same year, 1900, saw Romania made an appearance at the Paris World Exhibition. Like some years earlier, the country's national pavilion was created by a Frenchman: this time, Jean-Camille Formigé, a valued Paris-based architect. He made a study travel across Moldavia and Wallachia, sketching old buildings and using this experience to make a pavilion coped with domes resembling those of Orthodox churches – in all, reminiscent of the local sixteenth-/seventeenth-century architecture. But this was no more enough to win acclaim in

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<sup>13</sup> Carmen Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une Nation à travers l'architecture* (Rennes, 2004), 40–1.

<sup>14</sup> Bulei, *Români*, 38.



Bucharest. The hiring of a foreigner for the job was criticised. Some pointed to an offence of patriotic feelings, or unworthy presentation of the country in that 'great competition of the nations'<sup>15</sup>. Romania had already then its own, native architects. True, they were educated in Paris, or in Vienna, and their understanding of the precepts of 'national style' were no different than Formigé's – but they were true-Romanian-born architects. And it was their task to 'show' their country to Europe, and to extract the sonority of the local culture being characteristic of Romanian spirituality and to attune it to the demands of the modern time. The 'elder sister' could remain the signpost, or the guideline, which Romania ought not to slavishly follow, forgetting its own language, tradition and morals – even though these called for a reform. The century's turn saw mobilisation in Romania of ideological and political movements referring to the vernacular substratum – the land and the folk, and to the eastern sources of national identity. Nicolae Iorga, an extremely enterprising historian and politician, launched a *Sămănătorul* ('The Sower') movement, which emphasised the importance of the peasant question, the folk-based specificity of the nation, and the Byzantine tradition. In March 1906, Iorga held a public protest action against staging theatrical plays in French – in front of Bucharest's National Theatre, one of the symbols of the nineteenth-century 'Europeanisation' of the city.<sup>16</sup>

## II

A hundred years earlier, in December 1806, Russian troops led by General Ivan Michelson entered Bucharest. Waging war at the time with Turkey and involved in a game with France, Russia began its six-year-long occupation of Wallachia and Moldavia, and annexed Bessarabia for good. The soldiers occupying Bucharest could see an extensive conglomerate of one-storey housing quarters with meandering and muddy streets. "In the period of the year-1806 war, the mud in Poland appalled the Frenchmen. Napoleon himself said that he

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<sup>15</sup> Popescu, *Le style national*, 133–5.

<sup>16</sup> Kazimierz Jurczak, 'Między akceptacją a odrzuceniem. Kultura rumuńska wobec Wschodu i Zachodu', in Tadeusz Dubicki (ed.), *Współcześni historycy polscy o Rumunii* (Torun, 2009), 351–2; Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest and New York, 2001), 60; Bulei, *Românii*, 33.

encountered ‘the fifth natural element’ in Poland. What would the French have said, then had they crossed Moldavia and Wallachia?”, Russian diplomat Alexander Ribeaupierre wrote.<sup>17</sup> And, what would the Russians have said? There was enough of mud and marsh, wooden settlements, and apparently desert steppes in their own land. The Bucharest of the period was, in turn, compared by some visitors to Moscow, as they found it almost as large and classed both in the set of ‘Oriental’ cities.<sup>18</sup> Characteristic of them were, apparently, a beautiful panorama and a poor interior; no spatial regulations, apart from merchants and craftspeople of various nationalities and regions spontaneously tending to gather in separate areas of the town. Yet, a major difference was that Bucharest has no Kremlin-like structure, which would have made its layout clearer. Likewise, Bucharest lacked a ‘civilised’ point of reference, a counterpart of Petersburg for Russia. Petersburgian, that is, ‘French’ customs were instilled in the occupied city by the Russian army officers, many of whom were of French or German descent. They spoke French, wore their uniforms, and asked the local boyars’ daughters for a waltz or polka. They set up clubs which were willingly frequented by the boyars’ sons.

One eyewitness wrote that the young ladies in Iași became eminently dexterous in the new dances, although they ‘could barely walk’ the moment the Russian troops entered. There were very few phenomena at that time in Iași or in Bucharest that would correspond with the French (or, Petersburgian) notion of accepted principles of morality, along with those of city, architecture, street, men’s attire, uniform, club, and café. All seemed ‘Oriental’ there – save, perhaps, for the Viennese coaches owned by boyars. But these were used not in a Viennese way at all, speeding with unnameable noise along the *pods* (a *pod* meant a ‘road’ or ‘bridge’) laid with large oak logs. A butt was made up in the midst of the street, upon which logs were tiered to isolate the wheels from the wetland ground. No other type of hardened surface were known in Bucharest. The logs would bounce when struck by horses’ hooves, expelling cascades of dirty water.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Cernovodeanu and Daniela Bușă (eds.), *Călători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, n.s., vol. 2 (Bucharest, 2005), 144.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Daniel Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, vol. 8 (London, 1818), 270; Ileana Cazan, ‘Voyageurs russes dans l’espace roumain. Interférences culturelles et modernité, 1800–1829’, *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire*, 1–2 (2008), 104.

In such conditions, only those of the lowest class walked on foot, eluding the vehicles. No wonder the boyar elite 'could barely walk'. The numbers (and quality) of the carriages amazed the outlanders, particularly when contrasted with the wooden shanties and adobe- or mud-huts of which the chaotic quarters called, in the Turkish way, *mahala* (*mahalale* in plural) seemed to be composed<sup>19</sup>.

These quarters were pullulating and gemmating since the Middle Ages, numbering over ninety by the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Each developed around its own central hub, usually an Orthodox church or monastery, as a parish community. Such *mahalale* accreted by coincidence or were separated one from another by wasteland areas, forming a spontaneous roughly circle-shaped, 10-km radius, urban structure with. Impressed by this expansiveness, visitors were prone to overestimate Bucharest's population; some would assess it at a hundred thousand, thus supplying statistics for generations of Romanian historians who were minded to quote possibly highest figures, emphasising the rank of the Wallachian capital.<sup>21</sup> A Nestor of Romanian historiography recently referred to the 100,000 level, stressing that Buda and Pest taken together were smaller.<sup>22</sup> A population that large would rank Bucharest amongst the large European cites, of which the most significant ones – Amsterdam, Vienna, and Petersburg – had at the turn of the nineteenth century more than 200,000 inhabitants each. The two behemoth cities: London, with its one-million population, and Paris, housing half a million, were beyond the comparative scale. In its most vivid years, the Great *Seym* period (around 1790), Warsaw had possibly up to 120,000 residents.<sup>23</sup> In fact, Bucharest could have been home to some 40,000 – which, in regional terms, gave it an incomparable significance anyway<sup>24</sup>. It was

<sup>19</sup> See Adrian Majuru, *Bucureștii mahalalelor sau periferia ca mod de existență* (Bucharest, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria Bucureștilor* (Bucharest, 2009<sup>3</sup>), 232.

<sup>21</sup> This trend is remarked by Simion Câlția in his study *Așezări urbane sau rurale? Orașele din Țările Române de la sfârșitul secolului al 17-lea la începutul secolului al 19-lea* (Bucharest, 2011), 109–15.

<sup>22</sup> Dan Berindei, 'Bucarest – le petit Paris', *Revue roumaine d'histoire*, nos. 1–2 (2011), 3–12.

<sup>23</sup> Jerzy Wojtowicz, *Miasto europejskie w epoce Oświecenia i Rewolucji Francuskiej* (Warsaw, 1972), 134–46.

<sup>24</sup> According to a 1810 Orthodox-Church census, there were 32,185 Orthodox believers living in Bucharest, the population totalling 42,000 at most. A decade

the largest urban hub on the Vienna to Constantinople route, and it played a part in the rivalry of powers. Yet, it was still perceived as an Oriental settlement by incomers from the Western civilisation circle (which they simply deemed ‘the civilisation’). There was not a trace of embankment, toll-gates or toll-houses, no town-hall, or other public edifices; no dense buildings arranged into frontages, no street names, or house numbering. In a word, a comer from the West (or, from Petersburg) would see in Bucharest no traits of urbanity as it was known to him (or her), and would be prone to find the town as a ‘large village’. Moscow was referred to in similar terms. Urban hubs of the southern and eastern Europe had been described in a like manner for centuries. On the one hand, they were ‘not’ towns or cities – like Sofia, a town without a stockade, featuring low houses made of wood or clay. On the other hand, cities like Beograd were attractive with their throbbing trade and abundant merchandise.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the images of mediocrity and splendour blended in the accounts, often veiled in nostalgia for the unknowable, faraway and coruscating Orient – or, conversely: marked with a hard-headed ironic distance.

Bucharest submitted to narrative of this sort, inscribed in an underspecified and transitional space – betwixt the West and the East, in a region which was not yet called ‘the Balkans’; in a socio-cultural space that was still to be named ‘Romania’.<sup>26</sup> The future capital city of what was to become Romania had emerged in the Middle Ages, at the time when the villages expanded into a *târg* – that is, a rather considerable mercantile and artisanal aggregation. There was no act of settling. ‘Bucharests’ (the plural remained in use until end 19<sup>th</sup> century) had no layout or market square. The life was set in the high street and at the bazaar; the public clustered at small (Orthodox) churches. Among the spontaneously accreting quarters, a small fortress comprising the

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later, Athens had some 10,000 dwellers; Belgrade in 1846 had a population of less than 20,000 (cf. Ștefan Ionescu, *Vucureștii în vremea fanarioșilor* (Cluj, 1974), 9–10).

<sup>25</sup> Николай Тодоров, *Балканският град XV–XIX век. Социално-икономическо и демографско развитие* (Sofia, 1972), 33–4.

<sup>26</sup> The description ‘Balkan peninsula’ was first used by German geographer Zeune in 1809, who borrowed the name from the Bulgarian mountain range Balkan. The name ‘Romania’ appeared seven years later, in Daniel Philippidis’s (Dmitrie Daniil Philippide’s) *Γεωγραφικόν της Ρουμανίας* [Geographical Account of Romania], published in Leipzig. The names in use before then were Dacia or Romanian Land.

*hospodar's* seat appeared in the fourteen century. This accelerated the development of *mahalale*, endowed with irregular-shaped trading squares (*maidans*) and meandering streets, named with the Slavic word *uliță*. In the early modern period (which, curiously enough, is locally called *epoca veche* – the 'old epoch'), Bucharest was a cluster of merchants and artisans of varied origin: Greeks and Armenians, Jews and Germans. Those most affluent built for themselves stone houses around the *hospodar's* residence. The city's elite was, however, formed of the clergy and the boyars, in whom (gradually restricted) political rights were vested. Dependent people gathered at the boyars' courts; those included artisans, peasants brought along to tend to houses and gardens, and Romany people: those formed the lowest grade and, as the *robi* (thrall), were traded 'like horses'.<sup>27</sup> Rambling, wooden and earthen sprawl surrounded boyar houses, forming insular, indiscernible structures. Similar developments emerged around the various monasteries. Unnameable poverty adjoined the greatest luxury: hence, visitors from the West used described Bucharest with phrases they normally used when referring to 'Oriental cities'.

The skyline of Bucharest – nor those of Wallachia and Moldavia – was not marked by minarets, though both Principalities had been dependent on Turkey since the late fifteenth/early sixteenth century, paying the Ottomans a tribute. Until early in the eighteenth century, the local Orthodox boyar and clergy elite elected rulers for themselves and participated in the reign through the council (*sfatul*; since the 16<sup>th</sup> c., the Turkish name of *divan* was in use). Subsequently, the rulers became assigned by the Porte, which increased the Principalities' encumbrances and restricted their freedoms. The Phanariote Greeks from Constantinople ensured the throne for themselves ever since: the families of Mavrocordat, Racoviță, Ghica, Moruzi, Ipsilanti, Șuțu, and Hangerliu endowed the Principalities with rulers more or less eminent – or, as Romanian historiographers of a later date saw it, more or less rapacious, as they maintained a severe fiscal regime which was necessary to discharge the obligations toward – and which added wealth to their court; the court, in turn, made up the unique character of Bucharest. The *hospodar's* court imitated the tradition of the sultan's court, and turned Bucharest into a hub of Greek culture which transferred the

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<sup>27</sup> Ionescu, *Bucureștii*, 25; Adam Neale, *Travels through Some Parts of Germany, Poland, Moldavia and Turkey* (London, 1818), 159.

Byzantine heritage into the local context. In mid-eighteenth century, the Greek language was displacing Old Church Slavonic in the liturgical observance. Greek was moreover the language of the elites, paving the way to high culture – and remaining the tongue of regional commerce.<sup>28</sup>

“Constantinople was their Paris”, nineteenth-century historian Pompiliu Eliade wrote of the Phanariote boyar elites.<sup>29</sup> Both the sharp colours of the attire and the size of the fur calpac or beard were among the symbols of the status. The ‘German’ outfit was an attribute of the opponents of the Porte, and no imitation of it was possible.<sup>30</sup> Western influence developed under the surface of the ‘Oriental’ life, though. *Hospodars* endeavoured to introduce reforms that served mainly to increase the income, whilst also reflecting elements of the state’s West-oriented concepts. French, Italian and Latin were lectured at the Orthodox St. Sava Academy. French *gouverneurs* (tutors) and French books were imported to *hospodar* courts, which were imitated by the significant boyars. Teachers of Turkish (*hogeas*) enjoyed more revered a position than French preceptors; yet, it was French, the language and culture, that was an element of a convention related to the system of power, authority, and prestige. The elites acquired, to a degree, the Enlightenment thought. The French revolutionary ideas were disseminated illegally in Greek translations, which corresponded with hidden anti-Turkish sentiments.<sup>31</sup> It was the emancipatory strivings of the Greeks that influenced, still in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Wallachian elites’ mindset and mentality. In the late eighteenth century, they still seemed inwrought in the Greek-Byzantine symbolic and social order; those elites were incomparably less aware

<sup>28</sup> Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule* (Seattle and London, 1977), 113–41.

<sup>29</sup> Pompiliu Eliade, *De l’influence française sur l’esprit public en Roumanie. Les origines. Étude sur l’état de la société roumaine à l’époque des règnes phanariotes* (1898). I have used the Romanian translation: *Influența franceză asupra spiritului public în România. Originile. Studiu asupra stării societății românești în vremea domniilor fanariote*, trans. Aurelia Dumitrașcu (Bucharest, 2006), 48.

<sup>30</sup> Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, ‘Constructing a New Identity. Romanian Aristocrats Between Oriental Heritage and Western Prestige (1780–1866)’, in *eadem* (ed.), *From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress. Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition in the Balkans (XVIIth–XXth Centuries)* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011), 108; *eadem*, *Mode et luxe aux Portes de l’Orient. Tradition et modernité dans la société roumaine des XVIII et XIX siècles* (Boecillo, [2011]), 8, 19.

<sup>31</sup> Eliade, *Influența*, 115–39, 161–6.

of their peculiar purposes (whatever these might have been) than their Wallachian peers living under Habsburg rule in Transylvania. The establishment of the Uniate Church in the early eighteenth century, and the increasing resource of Wallachians educated in Rome, Vienna, Pest, or Cracow, were of enormous relevance in this respect. In the middle of the century, the so-called Transylvanian school became emerging, which gave the grounds for the Romanians-to-be to become historically self-determined as heirs to the Roman culture. In 1791, the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* – a manifesto of the Wallachian political endeavours, inspired by French civic ideas, was compiled in Transylvania. These endeavours reverberated as far as the eastern side of the Carpathians curve, although the local conditions – pre-eminently, a complete reduction of political rights of the boyar estate – did not foster their manifestation. Assuming, in most cases, an external form, such manifestation could have primarily occurred under the conditions of an occupation that would put the existing social-and-political system on hold.

This was exactly the case during the Russian occupation of 1806–12: the reforms were launched then which indelibly shaped the local institutional system. Police authorities were established, Bucharest was divided into five areas symbolically labelled with colours (the principle remained in force until present).<sup>32</sup> A census was carried out, real properties were inventoried. These ‘Europeanising’ actions consisted in introducing a rational order in a reality described as ‘barbarian’, free of any public institutions, with functions distributed in a feudal fashion. The occupiers perceived in a similar way the boyars’ beards, big head-gears, and the raiment deriving its tradition from the Persian apparel. Conforming to what the new authorities expected and, most probably, expressing their implicit inspirations and strains, young boyars donned a ‘European’ costume in those years. This aroused tensions, as the generation of their fathers considered it a stamp of ‘pagan’ customs. After the Russians left, such trends were repressed, albeit mostly with respect to men: women’s dress bore no political significance.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bucharest was earlier divided into five districts (*plase*), which were subsequently given their respective ‘colours’ (*culori, vâpsele*) – i.e.: Red, Yellow, Black, Blue, and Green. The division by colours, abolished under the communist regime, was reinstated in the 1990s.

<sup>33</sup> Cazán, ‘Voyageurs’, 97–106; Giurescu, *Istoria*, 238.



Hence, one could meet in the Bucharest society women dressed after the model of Greek ladies of Constantinople (as Auguste de Lagarde saw it in the 1820s) along many such who had taken over the Parisian or Viennese fashion models, “competing as to taste and coquetry with smartly dressed women of our capital cities”.<sup>34</sup> This feature emphasised a transitional position of the land that was predominantly considered ‘Oriental’, while it astonished with its aspects of “the lifestyle of northern nations”, as a traveller put it in as early as 1802. On his way from Turkey, he could see a ‘genuine bed’ in a house near Bucharest; he was much impressed, though the settlement was mean and the bed served, rather, as a *divan*: he saw a man sitting on it cross-legged, smoking a long pipe.<sup>35</sup> Again, in 1826, a British officer going from Turkey found himself ‘in Furingistan’, a ‘country of surprises’. Another one wrote that Bucharest, full of beautiful equipages, unveiled its ‘European and Christian’ facet, as opposed to ‘empty and sad’ Turkish towns.<sup>36</sup>

Golescu described in those years his contemporary time as an epoch of ‘awakening’ and seeking for new models. This was attested by his trip to the West, whose description he published in the vernacular. Nations ought to learn one from the other, wrote he, whilst the Wallachians have to learn really much – be it from the Transylvanian Saxons who erect brick houses, never walk shoeless, and teach their kids how to read. In Austria, hospitals, schools and theatres were particularly impressive. On visiting these sites, Golescu was not let into a Viennese mental institution, as he was told his ‘Turkish attire’ could ill-impact the inmates; otherwise, he never encountered disrespect, which was part of the lesson he learned: in Vienna, only madmen were afraid of strangeness, while the enlightened were free from prejudice. This was stated by the comer from a country where the attire was an extremely significant token of social distinction. He would also note that the modest gowns worn by Viennese ladies marked wealth, whereas pompous dress creations of ‘our ones’ hid their indebtednesses. Another pointed lesson was the common politeness,

<sup>34</sup> Alexandre de Lagarde, *Voyage de Moscou à Vienne, par Kiow, Odessa, Constantinople, Bucharest et Hermanstadt ou lettres adressées à Jules Griffiths* (Paris, 1824), 324.

<sup>35</sup> Clarke, *Travels*, 252.

<sup>36</sup> *Călători străâni*, vol. 2, 156 (James Edward Alexander’s account); ‘Journey from Constantinople to Vienna’, *The Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature* (London, 1828), vol. 19, 19.

having nothing to do with obsequiousness: the less a Wallachian boyar spotted a bow of a lower-class man, the lower the latter bowed, down to prostrating himself before a high-ranking lord. Golescu became the most thoughtful about the affluent Austrian or Bavarian countryside, which he contrasted with the familiar images of peasant humiliation. And, he was impressed by the 'good order' he found prevalent in the cities – with streets crossing at right angles and smooth-surfaced pavements and cobblestones.<sup>37</sup>

There could be no greater contrast to Bucharest. Indications of the local elites' proclivity towards Western culture were multiplying. The city had a theatre, called the *teatru de societate*, producing, in Greek, plays inspired by classic drama – along with a Viennese troupe staging Western plays.<sup>38</sup> The French language rivalled with Greek. Restaurants or clubs equipped with chairs and tables appeared alongside traditional cafés. Princely decrees recommended that the houses be no more endowed with the Turkish-style *çıkma* (bay window) but with balconies instead, as these “embellish and beautify the town the way one can see it in Europe's largest and most beauteous cities”.<sup>39</sup>

The Turkish supremacy was abating. Although Tudor Vladimirescu's 1821 revolt, coupled with the operations of the Greek underground organisation Filiki Eteria, set up in Odessa under Russia's patronage, was bloodily subdued. Five years later, though, Russia coerced the awarding of the divans of both Principalities with the right to elect the *hospodar* for a seven-year term-of-office. A sort of Russian-Turkish condominium emerged, transforming into Russia's protectorate; this development was sealed by the peace treaty of Adrianopol (1829), which abolished Turkey's monopoly of imports from the Danubian lands and relaxed the restrictions on navigation on the Danube. Steamboats and steamships appeared, whose importance to Bucharest's international relations proved so high. Above all, Wallachia was subjected to a Russian occupation and administration for several years.

The committees appointed by the Russian authorities worked out, in 1830, the Organic Statutes, which was a sort of Wallachian and Moldavian constitutions. As Kazimierz Jurczak has put it, the Statutes

<sup>37</sup> Golescu, *Însemnare, passim*.

<sup>38</sup> Giurescu, *Istoria*, 240–1.

<sup>39</sup> Popescu, *Le style national*, 33.

was an attempt to “replace the previous law-and-order, dominated as it was by Oriental despotic practices, arbitrary and unpredictable, by solutions rooted in a European absolutism”. This consisted in “the authority and leadership of the state coming in lieu of a personified authority, whereas the new institution’s responsibility for the subjects was acknowledged and a bureaucratic apparatus subordinated to the ruler appointed, to operate in the name of the state institution and on behalf of it. The creation of an ersatz parliamentarism, bestowing the *hospodar* only with the executive, bringing into being a central administration situated in seven ministries, separating the judiciary from it, and establishment of protection forces were no doubt the forms of modernisation.”<sup>40</sup> Added to the Organic Statutes was a *Prescript for curing, beautifying and maintenance of order in the city of Bucharest*, providing for establishment of a city council and a municipal guard, exact marking on the city’s frontier, numbering of the houses, drainage of the swamps and marshes, organising the trade, creation of public walking sites and a lightning system, construction of a theatre, appointment of the municipal architect, and paving of straight-line streets.<sup>41</sup>

A ‘regulatory’ period thus opened for some twenty-five years, which is deemed to have factually marked the outset of a ‘Europeanisation’. The Russian authority imposed the trend, in parallel with the repressive measures they applied in the Kingdom of Poland after the 1830–1 Insurrection was suppressed, thus reinforcing the picture of Russian despotism. When a citadel was rising up in Warsaw – a dreary symbol of alien violence – Bucharest witnessed the setting of a grand promenade planted with trees – that “beautiful gift the city was offered by the Russians”, as the historian Șerban Cantacuzino put it.<sup>42</sup> The almost three-kilometre-long route, which immediately became frequented by the city’s elite as a local *corso*, was named after the Russian head of the Principalities’ administration (in 1829–34), Pavel Kiselev (Russian spelling: Ки́селёв; French: Kiseleff). Kiselev came to be known as the one who proactively fulfilled and implemented

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<sup>40</sup> Kazimierz Jurczak, *Dylematy zmiany. Pisarze rumuńscy XIX wieku wobec ideologii zachowawczej. Studium przypadku* (Cracow, 2011), 54–5.

<sup>41</sup> Giurescu, *Istoria*, 265–6.

<sup>42</sup> Șerban Cantacuzino, ‘Două orașe distincte’, *Secolul 20. Revista de sinteză*, 4–6 (1997), 33.

the *Prescript*, thus making a lasting impression in the locals' memory. The avenue, *Șoseaua Kiseleff*, has never had its name altered. The planting around it of a sizeable public park was commenced in 1832. Although the little young trees could initially offer no shadow, whilst a 'flat marshy countryside' spread around the area (1837), the large and long road was getting filled with luxury coaches and carriages.<sup>43</sup> At that time, Austrian geographer Ami Boué wrote that while bazaars in Turkish towns are the venues of social life, there are no public spaces like promenades or parks; to his mind, in the Turkish environment, man always shifts around with a purpose in mind, rather than for mere pleasure. The fact that Bucharest was furnished with a public park and a walking route was to be constitutive of a 'more European' character of Wallachia. "In a word", Boué wrote, "Bucharest is Turkey's small Paris".<sup>44</sup>

The label was thus emerging which in the subsequent decades was used in describing the aspirations of Wallachian elites. In the 1830s, Miklós Barabás, a Hungarian painter, then on his visit to Bucharest, mockingly described the local elite's sticking to the Russian uniform, a growing snobbery about the art of making French conversation and the parlour lifestyle. While the ladies had got to like the Parisian models earlier on, their husbands started shaving their beards and wearing frockcoats.<sup>45</sup> Some ostentatious acts were recorded. In August 1830, *Curierul Românesc* (the first permanent Romanian-language daily, set up in 1829) reported that Grigore Filipescu, a boyar, "in order to testify to the age we live in, and to his own civilised sentiments that denied superstition, had his beard shaven on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of this current month, and he abandoned the apparels he had been wearing hitherto, in order to clothe himself in an attire of the civilised Europe".<sup>46</sup> A period of intense imitation of Western models began: especially among the younger boyars, they were considered ranking higher than their fathers' way of life. This triggered tensions, not only intergenerational ones. The rejection of the beard, the calpac and the embroidered garments whose shapes and colours signalled the rank

<sup>43</sup> Anatole de Démidoff, *Voyage dans la Russie méridionale et la Crimée par la Hongrie, la Valachie et la Moldavie, exécuté en 1837* (Paris, 1840), 117–8.

<sup>44</sup> Ami Boué, *La Turquie d'Europe, ou observations sur la géographie [etc.]* (Paris, 1840), 327–8.

<sup>45</sup> Potra, *Bucureștii*, 144–5.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted after Vintilă-Ghițulescu, 'Mode', 74.

in the boyar hierarchy, obliterated the individual's social position. A young boyar wearing a frockcoat and a wide tie looked, if one may say so, like a German merchant. The pressure to 'Europeanise' was overpowering already then, though. In 1834 *hospodar* Alexandru Ghica quit his Oriental attire and ceased offering his hand to be kissed.<sup>47</sup>

In the forties decade, the 'old attire' was usually worn at a Bucharest salon only by the eldest representative of the family. The salon, or parlour, quickly imitated the patterns known from the trips to the West that became part of the experience of prominent boyars' sons. Not infrequently lavishly furnished, to make a suitable impression, it increasingly contrasted with a muddy street stretching outside the house. But the urban space began slowly changing as well. The emergence of local government and budget implied opportunities for planned investment projects. Paving stones began being laid, which a comer from France considered an indication of appearance of a bourgeoisie.<sup>48</sup> Bucharest before then had been a 'despotic' city, controlled by the boyar elite that would not think about walking down the streets. Walking remained, in fact, a rather tough exercise over the subsequent dozens of years, and was rarely practised by the elite (construction of pedestrian pavements was first contracted in 1871); since the thirties, however, strolling spaces were arranged: first, parks, and then, Parisian-style covered passageways, related to the type of developments that were completely new to the country.

Foreigners – certified architects and engineers – had to become the indispensable actors in the modernisation process. The park landscape along *Șoseaua Kiseleff* was designed by Meyer, the Viennese landscape architect who also authored the elegant Cișmigiu park in the city centre's morass area (1846). Villacrosse, a Catalan designer, had the redevelopment of the *hospodar's* palace to his credit. Hartl, a German, designed a showy neo-classicist hospital; another Viennese named Heft made a fashionable Grand Theatre – *Teatrul cel Mare* (1852). 1859 saw the inauguration of the glass-roofed *Pasajul Român*, a work of Frederic Bossel. The city's first boulevard, inspired by Parisian designs, was drawn at that time as well. Adopted patterns were the fundamental trait of that transition. Borrowings were commonplace in Europe, but Bucharest made a unique impression. Until

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<sup>47</sup> Bulei, *Români*, 41.

<sup>48</sup> *Prin Țările Române*, 60–1.

mid-nineteenth century, buildings taller than two storeys, arranged into tight frontages set along streets, were unknown to this city. The emergence of a city of this sort, coming into sight as an isle of 'civilisation' amidst a sea of *mahalale*, had to do with a general cultural reorientation, brought about by narrow elites who made use of young institutions as instruments of their own, and their country's evolution toward a 'Europe'.

This evolution came across various obstacles, some of them political. While tsarist officers appeared as agents of 'Europeanisation', Russia hindered the pro-Western political evolution of the local elites. Wallachia and Moldavia formed a nexus of Russia's dominance in the Balkans. Like in the case of the Congress Kingdom of Poland before the 1830–1 Insurrection, the dominant did not respect the liberal laws. A Frenchman settled in Bucharest remarked that "the same things as earlier on in Warsaw, and in Poland" were happening there – leading to resistance offered to the Russian influence in the 1840s.<sup>49</sup> The emerging Romanian nationalism would not fit within the frame of the Russian-Turkish condominium. It developed in Transylvania, under Austrian rule, gaining character thanks to the studies undertaken in Western countries by comers from the Danubian countries. Wallachian and Moldavian political organisations established by students coming from wealthy boyar families (Rosetti, Ghica, Kogălniceanu) and related to French elites, including through Masonic lodges, operated in Paris. This young elite, shaping their ideas based on Western Romanticist philosophical thought, were cosmopolitan but no less were they focused on the 'awakening' of Romanian nation as a political community. This would have only been possible through: "bringing Europe to the shores of the Danube".<sup>50</sup>

A large action was undertaken in 1848, as Bucharest joined the revolutionary occurrences initiated in February in Paris, spreading and expanding to Vienna, Berlin, Prague, Milan, Venice, and Pest. Wallachia remained conquered for a few weeks by a revolutionary government before this temporary body was ousted by the Turkish

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<sup>49</sup> Daniela Buşă (ed.), *Călători străini...*, n.s., vol. 4 (Bucharest, 2007), 362 (the quoted words are by Jean Alexandre Vaillant, who ran a French school in Bucharest). See Barbara Jelavich, *Russia and the Formation of the Romanian National State, 1821–1878* (Cambridge, 1984).

<sup>50</sup> Bulei, *Românii*, 46.

and Russian troops. These developments proved to be of enormous relevance to the formation of a political awareness; they even perhaps marked “the beginning of the modern Romanian civilization”.<sup>51</sup> The Turkish-Russian convention of 1849 corroborated the condominium principle; however, the subsequent decade, owing to unforeseeable circumstances, witnessed the looming of a political entity called the United Principalities (1859), out of which Romania was soon to emerge. The way to those critical events led through a gradual occidentalisation of the elite (the *hospodars* of the 1850s were educated in Paris), a decay of the Russian-Turkish collaboration, the Crimean War, and the subsequent occupations of Bucharest. Apart from the distress and various annoyances, the Russian and the Austrian occupation have bestowed the land with telegraphic lines and accurate maps, and have intensified the pulse of urban life. It was then that accounts came from the proud local elites, convinced that their city had turned into a *micul Paris*. Bucharest was full of officers, formal receptions, and performances. A Belgian publicist named Squarr, who spent a month there in the winter of 1853/4, juxtaposed these convictions with the buildings, which he found, merely, primitive: “Should you say this to a dweller of Bucharest, he would be positive to reply that ‘Erecting beauteous houses would be useless owing to the frequent earthquakes, reappearing every ten years; were it not for this circumstance’, he would add, ‘we would have built our houses better than those in Paris, or in London’. Romanians have a strong pretension for pre-eminence over the nations of the West, and they found it their greatest glory to say to you, whenever you seem to be intrigued with their cities: ‘You do not have *that* in Paris!’”<sup>52</sup> This is quite an essential remark showing the emergence of a Romanian nationalism, characteristic of which is a persistent complex with respect to a ‘Europe’.

It was this particular trait that the destiny of what had been the condominium was dependent on, with France having the decisive say. Russia’s setback in the Crimean War enabled Napoleon III to outline

<sup>51</sup> Ovidiu Caraiani, ‘National Identity and Political Legitimacy in Modern Romania’, in Michaela Czobor-Lupp, J. Stefan Lupp (eds.), *Moral, Legal and Political Values in Romanian Culture* (Washington, 2002), 110.

<sup>52</sup> Daniela Bușă (ed.), *Călători străini...*, n.s., vol. 6 (Bucharest, 2010), 362; Gheorghe Parusi, *Cronologia Bucureștilor, 20 septembrie 1459 – 31 decembrie 1989* (Bucharest, 2007), 255–6 (an 1855 Austrian officer’s account).



a new political map of the lower Danube region. Overcoming the resistance from Austria, England and Turkey for a rather long time, he would use nationality-related arguments, continually prompted to him by Romanian activists in Paris. They made use of the situation to expand the autonomy gained by the Principalities at the Paris conference in 1858, and to establish a personal union embodied by the *hospodar* Alexandru Ioan Cuza, who was elected by the assemblies of both Principalities. The *Principatele Unite* were established, under the Turkish authority, which was only formal. In 1861–2, the unity of the state, then unofficially named Romania, became recognised (following long-drawn French and Romanian endeavours) by the European capitals. A parliament was eventually established in Bucharest, thus making the city a real capital, no more sharing the position of a major political centre with Iași. The metropolitan status meant an obligation, inscribing the city in the constellation where Paris, London and Vienna were gleaming. The brag recently resorted to: ‘You do not have *that* in Paris!’ now became pointless; the Romanian hub would rather be expected to have what Paris already had.

And this still remained far away. A traveller from France who reached Bucharest in 1860, spotted an “enormous, casually developed settlement without a regulation, no water-supply system, no trace of any, be it the simplest, appliances one comes across in our small towns”. At the same time, the interiors of boyar houses appeared pretty luxurious, filled with carpets from Aubusson or Smyrna, Viennese or Parisian pieces of furniture, Chinese or French porcelain. Guests were received there with pomp and circumstance and, if their stomachs could bear the atrocities of the local cuisine, one could get affected by the illusion that Paris was very near. Leaving the premises was a striking sensation: except for two rather tightly built-up streets, the houses were dispersed. Some ghastly shanties appeared next to villas whose style resembled Arabic or, more frequently, Italian architecture.<sup>53</sup> A sightseer would not take into account the scale of the changes in that external world; he would, instead, assess the situation he encountered basing on his own notions of urbanness and on the contrast that struck him in the internal/external relation, which was still so shocking for a Westerner in Bucharest. Western metropolises

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<sup>53</sup> Georges Le Cler, *La Moldo-Valachie ce qu'elle a été, ce qu'elle est, ce qu'elle pourrait être* (Paris, 1866), 28–31.

had over several last decades spared no effort, following London's example, to obliterate the elementary contradistinction between the house's interior and the street world. The march of civilisation embraced spaces thitherto subjected to unpredictable elements: roads were hardened, pedestrian pavements were laid with smooth flagstones – thus isolating the inhabitant from the ground, turning him or her into a passerby who would never more be afraid of slushy surfaces, decomposition phenomena, and offensive odours. All that was experienced by the visitor to Bucharest streets, to a degree way beyond one's conception; initially a passerby, he would therefore join the parlour life, taken from one distant residence to another, placed within the frame where vogues, styles and concepts adopted from France stood out.

The pro-French option was thus, in various sense, an internal, elitist option, isolated from a broader context but seeking for outward ways – to the city street and, in a patriarchal fashion, to the nation, which was to be educated according to the new principia. The rapprochement with the 'elder sister' was to awaken the Romanians from a many-hundred-years dream, make them part of history, so that they could spring up in it as an antique tribe drawing from the Roman tradition. Yet, the nation had to transform its almost entire life, beginning with the language (which was subject to a re-Romanisation). The Cyrillic alphabet was eventually rejected in 1860. A tension which was to mark the entire modern history of Romanians was coming into view: the radicalism of continuity – with references made to the most remote past, and seeking amidst its vague traces a clear image of the nation's own culture – coincided with the radicalism of rupture – meaning, starting the history anew. The radicalism of continuity began its transformation into an autochthonous programme and an extreme nationalism, while the radicalism of rupture was, since the beginning, associated with a rush for imitation.

Hence, the ruler – the *domnul* – turned into a *principe*; the Bucharestian inn, *han*, was refashioned into *otel*; the dusty *uliță* was to be replaced by a paved and cobbled *stradă*. *Maidan*, urban crossroads, was supposed to convert into *piață*. City quarter, *mahala*, appeared to be a primitive flange when viewed from the new downtown area; thus, almost the entire city consisted of a periphery whereas the 'European quarter' merely formed a small point. An extensive diffusion of models followed, however, in the domestic and social life. Conversations were carried on, with interlocutors willingly switching

into French. People were altering their surnames to make them sound more 'Western' – very much in the manner Polish noblemen, portrayed in Stanisław Trembecki's plays, did a hundred years earlier.

As of 1863, there were some 900 'Moldo-Wallachians' staying in Paris, of whom 400 studied at tertiary schools and 500 attended *lycées*. Hundreds of affluent families travelled to Western capital cities and spa resorts. An English observer remarked that the times when his compatriots "imagined a Hospodar to be a sort of savage chief, dressed in sheep's-skin", were well past. "The Moldo-Wallachians are amongst the greatest ramblers of our time"; one permanently comes across some of them, finding them "to be usually people of much external polish, of luxurious habits and profuse expenditure, speaking French fluently, and (although often with a bad accent and a deficiency of refinement) almost as their native tongue, and anxious to elevate their race and country in the eyes of foreigners, who, they well know, are little acquainted with and apt to depreciate them."<sup>54</sup> A backwardness complex (*înapoiere*), the conviction that the native country was still in its childhood, was getting consolidated. This sense of inferiority was to a significant degree compensated by the belief that 'the aliens' were to blame – above all, the Phanariotes, who had taken away from Trajan's descendants the opportunity to appropriately bring land under the plough. "Had not the wars, fires, floods, earthquakes, the Turks, Tatars, Hungarians, Russians, Austrians, and, particularly, evil dukes, not attacked Bucharest hundreds of times ... this capital town would have no reason whatsoever to envy Vienna, or Berlin"<sup>55</sup>: such was the opinion of the liberal politician Ion Ghica. Bucharest did not want to stand on a par with Balkan towns: its elite had Western cities' edifices, boulevards, parks, and factory chimneystacks in sight.

Hence, 'things needed accelerating', as Nicolae Iorga (critically) put it. Things could, namely, be accelerated by the state, which would cast on the inherited reality a net of its institutions, supporting the development of railway network, elementary schools – tasked with improving the peasant masses' education – and, in

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<sup>54</sup> Bulei, *Români*, 25–6; 'From Pera to Bucharest', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. American Edition, vol. 44, 2 (1857), 205, 215.

<sup>55</sup> Frederic Damé, *Bucarest en 1906* (Paris, 1907); I have used a Romanian translation, i.e.: *Bucureștiul în 1906*, trans. Lucian Pricop and Sînziana Barangă (Pitești, 2007), 71.

the first place, introducing new notions and ideas. Romanians were meant to turn into a nation in the Western meaning of the word, which meant a state community. In the name of this community, the authoritarian ruler Cuza carried out a series of radical reforms, one after the other. Monastic riches were secularised; peasants were enfranchised; a local version of the Napoleonic Code was enacted. This provoked unceasing political tensions which eventually led to a crisis of authority. To re-stabilise it, a Prussian officer of aristocratic descent, Karl de Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, was called in, by intermediation of Napoleon III, and was made the ruling prince in 1866. A liberal Constitution, modelled after the Belgian one, was adopted: it established sovereignty of the nation, the separation of powers, and a parliamentary rule system, counterpoised by the irremovable hereditary monarch. It was with difficulty that the latter controlled the impulsive faction struggles between the liberals and the conservatives. Having arrived in Bucharest, Karl – now to rule as Carol I of Romania – is reported to have asked, right in front of the residence that was assigned for him, where actually the palace was. The residence was a former Golescu manor, bought out thirty years earlier and adapted for the needs of the *hospodars* – and these turned out to be different from the expectations of a German-bred prince. While the interior was rather sumptuous, the windows offered a view of a muddy *maidan* across which piglets were running. Elisabeth zu Wied had a no less disastrous first impression, as she arrived from Prussia in 1869 to join Carol as his consort. Some twenty-five years later she would recollect that no lady would set her foot on a Bucharest street when she first arrived there; now, at the century's end, ladies wearing Parisian gowns would walk down the pavements of Calea Victoriei, watching the shop windows and entering cafés to have an ice-cream there. Out of his window Carol, crowned as king in 1881, could see the neo-baroque edifice of the Royal Foundations and the neo-classicist Romanian Athenaeum, a palace of all the arts.<sup>56</sup> The city was intersected with boulevards; the construction of the first of them commenced in 1857, which tends to be emphasised as a proof that transformations occurred synchronously in Romania and in Western Europe. The subsequent fifty years saw the outline of a system of two rows of boulevards intersected at right angle (following the

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<sup>56</sup> Bulei, *Românii*, 69, 77.

Parisian *grande croisée* pattern – as at the Châtelet), a layout that made the formerly hardly decipherable *mahalale* spatially well-ordered. The law of expropriation in the name of public interest (in force since 1864), which also followed the French model, enabled such scope of intervention. Bogdan Andrei Fezi remarked that drafting straight boulevards became a ‘Bucharestian obsession’.<sup>57</sup>

Such was the dimension of the ‘acceleration of things’, brought about by a narrow elite, educated in the Western fashion. Two-thirds of the ministers in office between 1866 and 1916 had studies in France, or with French as the instruction language, to their credit. The king used French when talking to his German-speaking interlocutors as well! André Lecomte de Nouÿ, a Frenchman, renovated – or rather, stylised anew – the Orthodox churches in Iași, Craiova, and Târgoviște. A host of French architects designed the most prestigious edifices in Bucharest. The capital was in need of public buildings; after all, there operated the ministries, a sciences academy and a university, a national museum, and a central bank. These proliferating institutions could not any longer be contained in private houses where they were placed in Cuza’s time. Metropolitan aspirations would not be comprised within a one-storied town’s scale. The radicalism of modernisation strivings suggested visions of formidable buildings of a Parisian scale and taste, and dictated that Parisian architects be called in. Among them was Joseph Cassien-Bernard, co-designer of the Pont Alexandre III, also known for his later designs of Paris Metro station entrances. Together with his associate Albert Galleron (not as well known at home) he designed in Bucharest the National Bank edifice, topped with tremendous domes. Paul Gottereau, the royal architect, redeveloped Carol I’s palace into, finally, a monumental edifice, and embellished the capital city with the pompous buildings of the Royal Foundations (1895) and the public savings institution *Casa de Depuneri, Consemnațiuni și Economie* (later known as the ‘CEC [*Casa de Economii și Consemnațiuni*] Palace’; 1900). Maintained in the Beaux-Arts spirit, these projects referred to the French Baroque, with its characteristic tall roofs. Toward the century’s end, prestigious buildings and structures were designed also by Romanian architects, mostly educated in Paris – one of them being Alexandru

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<sup>57</sup> Bogdan Andrei Fezi, *Bucarest et l’influence française. Entre modèle et archétype urbain, 1831–1921* (Paris, 2005), 35.

Săvulescu, who created the aforementioned grandiose Central Post Office palace. All these edifices were of a size never before known to Bucharest. Their stone walls grew up amidst low merchant tenement houses and old boyar houses; their cupolas shaped the city's new landscape and skyline, whereas the silhouettes of the old and rather low Orthodox churches were losing in significance.

### III

The history of perception of Bucharest as a riven city where alien elements clash against familiar ones, probably dated back to the 1830s. The French writer Saint-Marc Girardin believed that the Romanian capital had absorbed external forms, rather than the “spirit and the specific substance”, of the Western civilisation.<sup>58</sup> Gradually, including under influence of German idealistic philosophy, the local elites were increasingly confident that there must exist some peculiar Romanian ‘substance’, which is endangered by the imitative impetus of ‘Europeanisation’. A modern political awareness was taking shape, marked by a deep division – as reflected in Bucharest’s landscapes, and problems. As is the case with any political, ethical or aesthetic option, also Romanian options were far from unambiguous: they appeared like spots featuring clear centres and fuzzy edges. Certain associated aspects of reference or inclination are, nonetheless, definitely ascribable to them. One such inclination has sometimes been called traditional, or autochthonic; its romantic, irrational, agrarian, or community-related elements tend to be identified. Another such trend has been described as modern or occidentalistic, one that displays rationalistic, civilisational, urban/municipal and civil/civic elements.<sup>59</sup> This division has, to an extent, surfaced in Romanian politics, when conservatives and liberals faced each other, all of them belonging to a narrow elite represented in the parliament. This elite seemed to rather consistently lead the nation along the road of modernisation. The division in question grew dramatic in the twentieth century, with new social forces entering the game.

The nineteenth-century resistance to modernisation seemingly consisted of two basic constituents. The spontaneous one was part

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<sup>58</sup> *Prin Țările Române*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Caraiani, ‘National Identity’, 116–7.

of the social life whose age-old symbol was the countryside boyar house called *kula* – the heart of the *moșie* or ‘domain’, which referred to a demesne or landed estate, ensuring a bond with the ancestors; a seclusion protecting against the world’s hustle-and-bustle. This was connected with disdain toward gainful work, and thus toward city as a mercantile cluster – an attitude typical of boyars. A town residence was attractive as an opportunity for contact with political life and with luxury; still, it was to resemble – as much as practicable – a court with numerous servants. It was a matter of cultural need of elitist exponents who strove for ‘Europeanisation’ of their homeland. Yet, this need internally obstructed the country, or maintained a dominant group awareness that made complete identification with the West practically unfeasible.

The other ingredient, much more distinct politically, was a conscious anti-occidentalism, reinforced by the conviction that modernisation is destructive to the social tissue. An ambivalent attitude toward city or metropolis, which was quite commonplace amongst the descendants of Wallachian boyars, was growing resolutely inimical. City/metropolis apparently intoxicated the nation with false ideas and built an institutional system that was found contrary, all in all, to the reflexes and old traditions of the commons. These convictions were nowise a Romanian product: they were, rather, a reception of post-Romanticist ideas of English and, especially, German origin. To an extent, the German intellectual option became an opposition to the French one, which had seemingly completely dominated the local political and ideological landscape.

Titu Maiorescu, the most significant exponent of the ‘German option’, believed that an Oriental society, which was what he believed the Romanians to be, may only be deformed when affected by political practices of the ‘bonjourists’, that is, liberals infatuated with France. In the 1860s, Maiorescu minted a thesis, popular to this day among Romanian intellectuals, whereby there exist certain ‘forms without substance’: implanted institutions, laws, mores and morals that could find no breeding ground in Romania. He set up in Iași a club named *Junimea*, which turned into a seed-corn of the ‘Young Romania’ movement. A native of Transylvania, Maiorescu was a son of a Germanophile educated in Pest and Vienna; he studied law in Germany, and took once a bursary offer in Paris (1859). “He travelled there”, as K. Jurczak remarks, “full of prejudices toward



French culture and French people and toward their influence on the course of Wallachian-Moldovan affairs; his stay in Paris reinforced these prejudices. There is nothing he finds likeable about the French capital: neither the streets, ‘narrow and dark’, nor the apartments offering no amenities or conveniences, nor the customs of Parisians ‘living in the street and at cafés, nor the ‘barely existent’ family life, or the omnipresent ‘desire to gain.’<sup>60</sup> These are, let us note, the characteristics Bucharest was to absorb as its modernisation progressed. The comer from Romania only entered annotations in the voluminous book of critiques and accusations against Paris – a Moloch devouring the provinces, decadent and contrary to nature.<sup>61</sup> These annotations had a specificity to them, in that they commented on the hopes and illusions of the countrymen longing for their dreamed-of independence and civilisation. Meanwhile, “In those brothels lost in Paris, cynic place for sloth and shame, // You have waged your youth and fortunes as you played the ‘faro’ game, // With its wasted and cheap harlots and in orgies much obscene... // What the West has made you finish when was nothing to begin?”, Mihai Eminescu, a man of radical opinions, wrote.<sup>62</sup> This poet, considered Romania’s national bard, was a fierce publicist who fought against the liberal political elites. “Putting years artificially on a child, seeding rootless plants to have a garden within a matter of two hours, is not a progress: it is devastation, instead”<sup>63</sup>: thus he evaluated the way in which Romania was being built. Proper development was organic, he affirmed, in the spirit of German idealism (Eminescu studied in Vienna and Berlin). The direction that had been set for Romania by its Frenchified elite enabled the country’s ‘natural’ development, which was epitomised by bee swarm. The Romanian society resembled a hive, before the liberals started forming it according to alien laws and customs. Interestingly, Eminescu would not ascribe traits of naturalness to ants: an ‘anthill city’ symbolised, instead, a modern and deleterious

<sup>60</sup> Jurczak, *Dylematy*, 117.

<sup>61</sup> See Bernard Marchand, *Les ennemis de Paris. La haine de la grande ville des Lumières à nos jours* (Rennes, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> From *Epistle III (Scrisoarea a III-a; 1881)*, trans. Mircea Pella (orig.: *La Paris, in lupanare de cinismu si de lene, // Cu femeile pierdute si-n orgiile-i obscene, // Acolo v-ati pus averea, tineretele la ‘stos’... // Ce a scos din voi Apusul, cind nimic nu e de scos?*) [cf. [www.thersaa.org](http://www.thersaa.org)].

<sup>63</sup> Jurczak, *Dylematy*, 181.

order of things. The emergence of such a town in Romania meant that a “primitive nation was spoiled by the addictions of a foreign civilisation”. Primitivism, or the mediaeval ‘sound barbarism’, reflected a social and economic governance, manifesting itself in the fold craftsmanship, for that matter. The folk was to be characterised by moral purity, settledness, attachment to the land and landscape, raw forms of material culture and, primarily, antiquity, conservatism, and resistance to external influence.<sup>64</sup>

A mythology of this sort, rendering the need to resist the Western civilisation, had a substructure made of anti-bourgeois and nationalist ideologies imported from the West – along with the Russian *Narodnik* movement (Constantin Stere’s late-nineteenth-century popular movement, the *poporanism*, was modelled after the latter). Idealisation of the folk and seeking within it the sources of the most valuable ‘national features’ was an all-European trend: it was essential to the Young Poland’s ambience, and was reflected in the artistic quests of Ukrainian or Hungarian painters and architects. Such trend was of particular relevance in the regions where the bourgeoisie was fairly sparse and young, perceived as a migrant and ‘alien’ element. Bourgeoisie was moreover subjected to most severe criticism which, again, was inspired, to an extent, by the Western model, whilst partly ensuing from the observation of the native elite. Divested of tradition, this host of parvenus eager for gain, surrounding themselves with appearances: such was the portrayal by the writer Ion Luca Caragiale of the *nouveaux-riches* of those figures who made their fortunes though favouritism, in the aura of ambiguity and slander, cult of pleasures, and overwhelming importance of ‘well-connectedness’.<sup>65</sup> The scenery of the life of the Romanian bourgeoisie thus portrayed consisted of tasteless imitations of Parisian apartments, Viennese tenement houses, ‘wagon-style’ houses featuring facades with extravagantly baroque ornaments. *Le petit Paris* on the Dâmbovița, the Romanian *micul Paris*, seemed really small a thing, also in the moral sense; the opinions of domestic critics were close in this respect to the afore-quoted unsparing commentaries of certain French authors.

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<sup>64</sup> *Idem*, ‘Między akceptacją’, 340–61.

<sup>65</sup> See Ion Luca Caragiale, *Szczęściorz. Wybór szkiców*, trans. Adam Weinsberg (Warsaw, 1953).

If city was to become a mirror of the worthy tradition of the nation, it had to find a way to display its monuments. Bucharest had no Aquincum, Lutetia, or Vindobona, and so was not in a position to arouse respect by the antiquity of its heritage. Instead, it attempted to do so based on the grandeur of new public edifices; these, however, were remote from any vernacular models. A way to display Bucharest through adequately noble forms led through defining a 'national style' which could be applied to broad-based development plans, thus reducing the painful split between the past and the present. Such yearning was exhibited at the century's turn by various European countries and communities, particularly in the east of Europe.

The outset was low-keyed: in 1885, Ion Mincu, a Paris-educated architect, designed in Bucharest a villa for the aristocrat Iacob Lahovary. The gentlemen had met in France. Lahovary desired to have a house different from any other, but above all, a 'more Romanian' one. In quest for inspiration, Mincu embarked on field research (a venture significant for his time), studying the forms of old houses in Bucharest and thereabouts, using drawings and photographs. He eventually produced a house whose classical and symmetric layout did not quite resemble the boyar *kula* but, similarly to it, was founded upon a tall basement and with a porch embellished with an agee-arched motif referring to Oriental influence in Wallachian architecture. The colour adornments on the walls were similar in character. As years passed, Mincu became an authority in the so-called national architectural school, whose underlying assumption was to create a 'Romanian ambience' about the new buildings – originally, mostly residential buildings and later on, in the early twentieth century, prestigious public projects. This came as an attempt to oppose the influence of the French Beaux-Arts school, but Oriental references were en vogue in Paris in those years, and so the Romanian explorations did not have to imply a split from the West: on the contrary, they as if legitimised Western influence. Romanian architects, who were about to open their own tertiary school in the capital city, were no more the students of their Paris colleagues – and finally turned into their partners. Like their peers in Paris, they drew from the local heritage.

In its fullest form, which appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the 'neo-Romanian style' was characterised by rich, mostly neo-baroque, decorations that referred to the local receptions of Italian art. Wallachian, mainly eighteenth-century,

models were followed, along with – to a lesser extent – the so-called Moldavian gothic (15th c.), whose peculiar expression apparently ensued from a synthesis of Western (Transylvanian and Polish) and Eastern (Byzantine) influence in the architectural designs of Orthodox churches and monasteries. The first decade of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of tall slanting roofs, verandas leaning on carved columns, and massive arcades.

It was a *sui generis* synthesis of Romanian nineteenth-century explorations. They commenced under the star-sign of Greek endeavours for independence and Russian occupations that showed an opportunity for change, for breaking out from the previous frame of life, in which Danubian boyars had no political rights. The new frame was made of imitations of Western cultural forms, no doubt based on 'no substance' but attractive as the only imaginable opportunity for emancipation. Once marked off, they set the perspective for future. The easiest-mannered and polished group in the local society began distending this frame, in search of political activity opportunities and learning how to play the instruments of international circumstances and prosperities; this latter skill has remained important for Romanian elites. What they were after, though, was to ensure the development of a country that was outrageously distant from their civilisation-related aspirations, and incessantly determined their reflexes and attitudes. The elites sought for facts potentially confirming their country's 'well-settled' status in Europe, defining 'Europe' along the lines of the notions drawn from French or German literature. In parallel, they were in need to have the originality and peculiarity of the their background element confirmed.

The 1906 anniversary exhibition in Bucharest reconfirmed the importance of neo-Romanian style. The style was gaining official importance and accompanied the public projects – and, simply became trendy. And, it appeared sustainable, re-establishing its prominence in public procurement contracts over the subsequent twenty-five years, marking the capital's most impressive buildings. Grand edifices were erected, such as the extensive Public Officials Palace (by Nicolae Mihăescu, 1900), the Geological Institute (Victor Ștefănescu, commenced 1906), the National Museum (Nicolae Ghika Budești, since 1912), and the School of Architecture (Grigore Cerchez). All these buildings were designed by Romanian architects. Educated at the Parisian *École des Beaux-Arts*, they would not try to

build a 'small Paris' but rather, a great Bucharest. Soon after, the Greater Romania emerged, a result of the circumstances caused by the Great War. National aspirations escalated in the interwar period. In the 1920, the 'national style' was eventually given up, in favour of a showy Modernism and no less flagrant nationalistic slogans: the disruption was growing, in spite of the efforts of the increasingly authoritarian government, and contrary to the uniting ideas being explored. This spectacle was staged throughout the twentieth century, in ever-changing scene settings, leaving the newer and newer strata in Bucharest's physiognomy – too thin to cover up the former ones; too thick, though, to produce an intelligible whole.

*trans. Tristan Korecki*

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