Dismantling the Ottoman Heritage? The Evolution of Bucharest in the Nineteenth Century

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Wallachia was part of the Ottoman Empire for nearly four centuries. Together with Moldova, the other Danubian principality, it maintained strong autonomy, as well as its own institutions, such as the position of *voivoda* (prince). The particular position of Wallachia in the Ottoman Empire is reflected by the peculiar aspect of Bucharest in the early nineteenth century. The Romanian scholars who studied the history of Bucharest, Ionescu-Gion and Pippidi, did not call it an Ottoman town. Maurice Cerasi, author of a very important study of Ottoman towns,[1] has another viewpoint, and actually locates Bucharest at the boundaries of the Ottoman area. This means that Bucharest is not frequently taken as an example of typical Ottoman towns, but is sometimes mentioned as sharing some features with them.

The evolution of Bucharest is one of the best instances of the ambiguous relationship existing between the Romanian lands and the Ottoman Empire. Moldova and Wallachia lacked the most evident expressions of Ottoman rule: there were no mosques, no Muslims, no *timar* system was implemented in these areas. But, on a less evident but deeper level, local culture and local society were rooted in the Ottoman way of life and displayed some of its main features: the absence of a centralized bureaucracy, the strong influence of the Greek commercial and bureaucratic elite of the Ottoman Empire, the *phanariote*s[2] and a productive system based on agriculture and linked to the Ottoman state through a monopoly on trade.

Bucharest was an example of this complex relationship: although it was not an Ottoman town, it shared many aspects with towns in the Ottoman area of influence. On the one hand, Bucharest had no mosques, *hammam*s or bazaars. On the other hand, to some extent, it possessed all the characteristics that Maurice Cerasi considers typical of Ottoman towns while maintaining some peculiarities. For Cerasi the main characteristics of the Ottoman town were the following criteria:

- Open towns, with no fixed boundaries between urban areas and the surrounding countryside.

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[1] Maurice Cerasi, *La città del Levante. Civiltà urbana e architettura sotto gli Ottomani nei secoli XVIII-XIX* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1988).

[2] In the eighteenth century, the Prince of Moldova and the Prince of Wallachia were no longer elected by the local aristocrats among the members of their families, but chosen by the Ottoman authorities among the *phanariote*s.

- The absence of a single city centre. Centrality is shattered: the mosque represents religious centrality; the political centre is located in the palace of the main political authority (sultan, governor etc.) and the commercial centre is the bazaar.
- Relationships with the surrounding area are developed along a few axes, sometimes only two. The roads going out of the town reflect no radial structure.
- The only open spaces are cemeteries, mausoleums and vegetable gardens.[3]

On the basis of Cerasi's work, it is possible to add to these features the division into *mahalla*s. *Mahalla*s were small quarters of the town which arose around a religious building and which were often inhabited by a homogeneous community of people belonging to the same ethnic, social or religious groups.[4]

Mention must also be made of the fact that the Ottoman system started to change in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result of the decline of the empire, the Sultans tried to centralize and rationalize power. This was also reflected in the town organization. An early reorganization was produced: a division into quarters, together with transformation of the *mahalla*s. Here, a civic council formed of the heads of the leading families flanked the religious authorities. This implies that a process of secularization of power[5] was taking place.

In any case, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bucharest had all the features Cerasi indicates as typical of the Ottoman town, although with some specificities.

First, Bucharest developed as a result of a gradual inclusion of villages. It had the same kind of houses as those in the country; there were even gardens in the centre of town. There were no walls, nor any kind of separation from the countryside.

Second, unlike the towns built in Western and Central Europe in the Middle Ages, even those in nearby Transylvania, there was no centre, like the Italian piazza, where the seats of religious, political and economic power were concentrated. Like the Ottoman towns, Bucharest was polycentric. There was a main cathedral, the seat of the Metropolitan, but also many churches, one in each *mahalla*. The *mahalla*s in Bucharest were actually transformations of the old *parohii* (parishes)[6] or were grown around synagogues (Jews were the main minority in Moldova and Wallachia and most of them lived in the cities). Actually most of the *mahalla*s developed around a religious centre or were characterized by the presence of inhabitants practicing the same craft. Bucharest was subdivided into about eighty *mahalla*s. The palace of the prince was the centre of political power, but

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[3] Cerasi, *La città del Levante*, 83.
[4] Ibid., 71.
[5] Ibid., 73.
[6] Cezara Mucenic, *Străzii, pieţe, case din vechiul Bucureşti* (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2004), 7.

was not permanent. Until the eighteenth century, it changed, corresponding to the palace of the *boyar* (the member of aristocracy), who was elected as *voivoda*. The commercial centre was the *piaţa* (market), but there were many of these in the town, often specializing in particular kinds of products. These markets were also to be found in other Ottoman towns. There were no bazaars, but something very similar to them: the *hanele*, 'places of permanent trade'[7] where local and foreign merchants could sell their goods and also find accommodation.

Third, Bucharest had been chosen as a seat by the *voivoda* of Wallachia before the Ottoman arrival, for two main reasons: its closeness to the boundary with Ottoman lands, in order to keep the threat of the Ottomans under control; and its location on the trade route leading from the Habsburg land of Transylvania to Istanbul/Constantinople. Consequently, the two main axes of communication were the northbound route towards the Habsburg Empire (Podul Mogoşoaiei) and the southbound one towards Istanbul (Podul Belicului).

There were few collective open spaces, as in the Ottoman towns. Beside markets and bazaars, the most important were cemeteries. There were no *hammam*s, but there were both baths in the abodes of the *boyar*s and public baths. The difference between public baths and *hammam*s was that baths in Bucharest were situated in monasteries, hospitals and in the *hanele*.[8]

Nevertheless, in some respects Bucharest was different from the other Balkan centres that were to become capitals of the Balkan national states.

In the first place, it had hosted the *voivoda* of the principality, before and after the establishment of Ottoman rule. Therefore it could be already considered a regional capital.

Second, it was already medium-sized. In the early nineteenth century it had thirty-five thousand inhabitants, which was not the case for cities such as Sofia, Athens or Belgrade.

Third, Bucharest had no Muslims, unlike Athens, Belgrade or Sofia. Therefore, the local authorities did not have to deal with the dilemma of the properties of the Muslims or of the presence of a Muslim quarter in the town.

However, the most significant difference between Bucharest and the other Balkan capitals was that Bucharest began to change before Romania gained independence. The architectural and urbanistic process that transformed Bucharest into a Western-style capital took place in two phases. The first lasted from 1830, when the Organic Rules established the first political institutions in Bucharest, to 1862, when Bucharest was officially chosen as capital of the new Romanian state. It should be noted that the transformation undergone by Bucharest was very similar to that in the other Balkan capitals, although the cultural inspiration was not the same everywhere.

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[7] Ibid., 13.

[8] George Potra, *Din Bucureştii de ieri* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiintifică şi Enciclopedică, 1990), vol. 1, 265.

Preparing to be a capital: Bucharest between 1830 and 1862[9]

In 1829, the Treaty of Adrianople was signed. The Ottoman Empire had been defeated by the West European powers and by Russia. As a result, an independent Greek state was created, and the autonomy of the two principalities of Wallachia and Moldova was strengthened. The Treaty of Adrianople had significant political, economic and cultural consequences in the two Danubian principalities. Both of them were placed under a double Russian-Ottoman protectorate. On the one hand, Ottoman control over the territory was weakened; on the other, the local *boyar*s gained power. An Organic Rule, a kind of constitution, was promulgated for each principality, and determined that the prince was to be elected by an assembly of local *boyar*s and delegates of the towns, i.e., he was no longer to be chosen by the Ottoman authorities among the *phanariote*s.[10]

The Ottoman monopoly on trade came to an end and, as a result, contacts with the rest of Europe became more frequent and extensive, changing the local economy. Gradually, factories began to appear in the country. Most of them exploited raw materials and were financed by foreign capital. Local handicraft production also began to develop, although agriculture was still the main productive sector of the economy. Changes in agriculture did not involve the types of crops cultivated, but the countries to which they were exported. The Ottoman Empire remained an important trade partner, but the Habsburg Empire, Russia and England began to import wheat and animals from Romania as well, and their importance as trade partners grew during the nineteenth century.[11]

It is interesting to note that market orientation was opposite that of culture: Romania had no strong economic relations with France, whose production in agriculture was competitive with that of Romania, yet France became the model of reference for culture. This cultural orientation was the result of the development of academic studies of the origins of the Romanian people and their language. Studies of this kind had in fact been developed by the Transylvanian school at the end of the eighteenth century and emphasized the Latin origins of the Romanian people. But interest in French culture was also promoted by the Russian occupation. The Russian aristocracy, to which the officers of the Tsarist army belonged, used French as a common language. During the Russian occupation of Wallachia in 1806-1812 and again in 1829-1834, the local nobility came into contact with Russian officers, and French literature, dances and traditions began to circulate.

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[9] About this period see Emanuela Costantini, 'L'evoluzione di Bucarest tra il 1830 e il 1860', in *Città dei Balcani, città d'Europa*, ed. Armando Pitassio and Marco Dogo (Lecce: Argo, 2008), 239-265.

[10] For a history of Romania, see Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) [Romanian edition Keith Hitchins, *România 1866-1947* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994)]; Francesco Guida, *Romania* (Milan: Unicopli, 2009).

[11] Hitchins, *România*, 214-216.

Bucharest began to evolve against this background. The fact that its urbanization began before it became a capital city had some consequences. Unlike Athens, which was developing in the same period, or Belgrade and Sofia, the agent of change was neither a general urban plan nor the building of seats for the political institutions. Rather, it was the creation of municipal institutions which laid the basis for the transformation of Bucharest, since such institutions were the only central power capable of ruling the entire urban area.

The Organic Rule established a city council (*sfat oraşenesc*), formed of five members, elected by citizens required to have an income of more than ten thousand *lei* a year over the age of twenty-five. There was no mayor, but a president was chosen from among the members of the council. As the city council remained in office for only one year, its actions were limited by the impossibility of governing for a long period.[12] This institution, resembling the traditional Venetian rule, was in any case very modern in concept in England where elective municipalities were only introduced in 1836.[13]

The city council's most important tasks lay in the field of infrastructure. The changes it brought did not involve the whole town: interventions first affected the centre, and only later were extended to the periphery, but the fact that they resulted from the decisions of an administrative body was the sign that a qualitative change had been made.

To begin with, the creation of a city council involved defining the area of its competence, and the city limit was fixed at 19,228 metres. This was the first time the territory of the town had been delimited and separated from that of the countryside. The separation was not only symbolic: ten points of access to the town were established, and checkpoints to regulate entry were set up.[14]

The ten roads formed a wheel with ten spokes: the urban structure gradually began to change.

Four of the roads were more important than the others. One was along the commercial axis towards Transylvania (Podul Mogoşoaiei), one led to the ports on the Danube and the Ottoman lands (Podul Belicului), one towards the Russian lands of Bessarabia (Podul Târgul de Afară) and the western one towards the town of Craiova (Podul Calicilor).[15]

These four principal roads also became boundaries dividing the urban area into four sections and a central precinct. This division was established in 1831, taking as an example the already existing distinction into five city quarters of the eighteenth century. The Ottoman authorities had already distinguished five

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[12] Ioan C. Filitti, *Principatele române de la 1832 la 1834. Ocupaţia rusească şi Regulamentul Organic* (Bucharest: Institut de Arte Grafice Bucovina, 1934), 120.

[13] Leonardo Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (Rome-Bari: Editori Laterza, 1997), 60.

[14] Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria Bucureştilor. Din cele mai vechi timpuri pîna în zilele noastre* (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatura, 1966), 100.

[15] Ibid., 57-59.

sections of the town in order to define the areas of competence of the *agia*, the local police. This demonstrated that, even within the empire, something was changing and that a process of bureaucratic rationalization was beginning. In the new division of Bucharest, each quarter was identified by a colour. The centre was red, and the four surrounding zones were green (west), blue (south), black (east) and yellow (north).[16]

This new division into quarters meant that Bucharest lost its Ottoman urban plan: now there was a centre and the *mahalla*s were spread among the five zones. The main reason that the constitution of a centre changed the Ottoman structure was that the centre started to play a political role. The few existing political institutions were concentrated in it and one road (Podul Mogoşoaiei) was chosen as the main axis of the town. The prince's residence (Curtea Veche) lay in the centre, as were the archives, like the first building of the culture – the Grand Theatre of Bucharest, built between 1847 and 1852.

Therefore, it was not by chance that most of the construction work – housing and public services buildings – in this period was concentrated in the central red area.

Although the city council issued many regulations about the way in which houses were to be built, it did not have sufficient powers to impose the destruction of already existing ones. Hence the new regulations only applied to new buildings.

As regards positions, the aim of the council was to change the aspect of the roads from a complicated plot of narrow winding streets into a tidy web. The 1832 regulation prescribed that people wanting to build new houses had to ask the city council for permission and were obliged to concede part of the land on which the houses were built to the city council itself. This portion of land was to be used to straighten out the actual path taken by the road, and road width was set at twelve metres.[17] Some of the old blind alleys were opened up[18] and new houses were to be built at least seven metres from the embankment of the Dâmboviţa,[19] the river flowing through the city centre.[18] These rules also had consequences for the urban structure, since they aimed at ensuring that houses did not close the streets off and that no building work could be undertaken on the banks of the river.

However, the citizens did not always follow these rules, so that a control commission for buildings was established and a city architect was appointed (see below). Many of these architects, such as the Austrian Heinrich Feiser, gave many directions for reorientation and widening of the roads. The city council also applied binding rules: for instance, it fixed compliance deadlines for owners, and

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[16] Florian Georgescu, 'Aspecte privînd împarţirea administrativă şi evoluţia demografică din Bucureştii anilor 1831-1848', *Muzeul municipiului Bucureşti-Materiale de istorie şi muzeografie*, vol. 3, 54.

[17] Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti, Bucharest, Fond 00083, Dosar 68/1839. See also Potra, *Din Bucureştii de ieri*, vol. 1, 230.

[18] Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti, Bucharest, Fond 00083, Dosar 11/1835.

[19] Filitti, *Principatele române*, 126-127.

threatened to demolish any houses whose builders had not respected the rules.[20] Once again, as the problem was the absence of authority to enforce these rules, the ensuing effects were limited.

As regards materials, a rule dating back to 1832 established exactly how new houses were to be built. Another rule was promulgated in 1836 about the materials to be used for roofing and sources of heating,[21] since stoves were considered to be the main cause of fires – very common in Bucharest. The results of these first rules were few, so that many disputes arose between the local administration and house owners. Things changed partly after the great fire of 1847, which affected much of the city centre, destroying 686 houses, 1,142 shops, ten inns and twelve churches. After this tragedy, the city council decided to promote new rules to prevent further catastrophes. The city area was divided into three concentric zones. The first was the actual centre, where only solid buildings of one or two storeys could be erected. They had to be roofed in sheet metal or proper roofing tiles, balconies had to have a basic structure of iron, and the walls had to be in masonry. The second zone was that immediately surrounding the centre, where it was forbidden to build forges or furnaces, or to locate warehouses for storing alcoholic drinks, except in the case of inns. In this second area, it was possible to use wood for houses, but they had to have masonry roofs. The last zone was on the outskirts, where it was still possible to build wooden houses and enclosures. [22]

These construction regulations distinguished the city houses, at least those in the centre, from ones in the country. There, the most frequently used materials continued to be wood, straw and dry mud. In this fashion, another element was added to the separation between the two areas, two ways of life and two societies.

Aesthetic rules were introduced as well as structural criteria, with the aim of making the new houses as similar to each other as possible. In 1835, a commission for the embellishment of the town was created, its goal being to guarantee a general harmony among the buildings, especially in the centre of the town.[23] Something similar was created in the following years in Belgrade, where rules were imposed about façades and windows.[24] Although it did not yet involve an architectural style, this effort demonstrates a high regard for aesthetic criteria. The direction followed by the commission depended on its members. Most of them were architects coming from outside Romania. There were indeed no architects in Wallachia, there being no schools for them, and they therefore came from other states, such as France and the Habsburg Empire.

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[20] Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti, Bucharest, Fond 00083, Dosar 1/1835, file 4.

[21] Cezara Mucenic, *Bucureşti: un veac de arhitectura civilă: secolul al 19.lea* (Bucharest: Silex, 1997), 12.

[22] Georgescu, 'Aspecte privînd împarţirea', 55-56; Mucenic, *Bucureşti*, 13.

[23] Mucenic, *Bucureşti*, 8.

[24] Katarina Mitrović, 'Europeizzazione e identità: cultura visiva e vita quotidiana a Belgrado nel XIX secolo', in Pitassio and Dogo, *Città dei Balcani*, 122.

Like the commission, city architects also operated in Bucharest. Again, the majority of them came from outside. There is no statistical survey regarding Bucharest's city architects, but most of them probably came from the Habsburg Empire. A smaller proportion came from France, but their presence was in any case considerable. One of the most important was Xavier Villacrosse, who worked in the town between 1842 and 1850. He planned and carried out many projects and worked particularly on rationalizing the urban structure.

The presence of foreign architects deeply influenced the style of the new buildings, even the private ones, many of which followed the Neoclassical or the eclectic style, as was happening elsewhere in Europe. Bucharest's high society became more and more Western-oriented and wanted to show this also in its houses. *Boyar*s asked for French, Italian or Austrian architects to build their residences, and the ornamental details recalled Vienna and Paris more and more. These changes were mostly evident in the residential area of the centre, such as Podul Mogoşoaiei, enriched by some of the most beautiful *boyar* houses of the town.[25]

The only public buildings of this period were not for political use, but housed cultural institutions.

Culture was a field in which it was easier to operate, since it did not imply any direct political consequences. But it was also the structural expression of the influences of the Western culture on the local one. Operas and plays began to be performed in small theatres or even in open spaces, such as parks. Foreign theatrical companies were often invited and they became increasingly popular – to the extent that the *voivoda* and the municipal authorities decided to build a venue for them in the city centre. This theatre was not planned by a French architect but by an Austrian one, the Viennese Anton Heft. The model was the Teatro della Scala, in Milan. The style of Bucharest's theatre was Neoclassical, which perfectly corresponded to current trends in the rest of Western Europe, and at the same time reflects the influence of the German school.

Beyond aesthetic transformations, which were only limited to some parts of the town and to certain types of dwellings, the most noticeable changes which took place in the three decades between 1830 and 1862 were in the infrastructures and the public services. This was the sphere in which the city council wielded more power, and where Westernization coincided with modernization. The distance separating the Ottoman Empire from the most modern construction techniques is evidenced by the fact that, in the infrastructural field, not only specialists but also machinery had to be imported.

There were four main areas of intervention: roads, water, a drainage system and lightening.

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[25] Radu Popa, *Mogoşoaia. Palatul şi Muzeul de Artă Brîncovenească* (Bucharest: Editura Merdidiane, 1962); G. Cruţescu, *Podul Mogoşoaiei, povestea unei străzii* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1987).

As regards roads, apart from works on tracks, maintenance work was also carried out. In the period of the Ottoman indirect subjugation, roads were merely layers of hard topsoil, with water allowed to flow along the centre of the road. The city council ordered roads to be paved and dykes and pavements for pedestrians to be built.

The first roads to be paved were the four main routes of communication, after which came the roads leading to the ten points of access to the town. Work always started from the city centre and went outwards towards the periphery. Paving work was initially paid for by private citizens. In 1834, a special office was created, stipulating how the actual road surface was to be made in order to have a stable, homogeneous road surface. The companies answering the call for tenders were obliged to provide insurances by anticipating 10 percent of the contract value to the city council. Advertisements were published in the official gazette, the *Monitorul Oficial*. As regards materials used, river stones were first used, before a Belgian engineer, Vladimir Blaremberg, proposed cubes of granite and the creation of pavements for pedestrians. This project was not completely achieved, since it was very difficult to find the right kind of stone in Wallachia.[26] Western technology was used to set the stones in place: a compressor was ordered from Germany. Ditches were also dug at each side of the roads.

The presence of large quantities of water and the risks of flooding were two of the main problems of Bucharest. The town was located in a very damp area; the Dâmboviţa was a quite a large river, and breaches were as frequent as earthquakes. Proper control of the hydraulic water system, in order to ensure the hygiene in the town, was so important that one chapter of the Organic Rule was devoted to it.[27] Embankments were built along the Dâmboviţa and the maximum width of the river was set at twenty metres. Many waterlogged areas were reclaimed, and the tributaries of the Dâmboviţa were drained or turned into underground canals.[28]

Despite the fact that there was an abundance of water, another of Bucharest's problems was the supply of drinkable water. Two engineers coming from the Habsburg Empire, Johan Freiwald and Ernest Meyer, were appointed to prepare a plan to provide the city with drinking water,[29] and they completed it in 1843. Another new plan was developed by the French engineer Jean Baptiste Marsillon in 1847.[30] His project was only partially carried out, due to the municipality's shortage of money.[31]

Hygiene also had to be ensured by means of other regulations, such as those concerning how waste was to be treated. At first, citizens were obliged to bring

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[26] Potra, *Din Bucureştii de ieri*, vol. 1, 230.
[27] Giurescu, *Istoria Bucureştilor*, 22.
[28] Filitti, *Principatele române*, 126.
[29] Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti, Bucharest, Fond 00083, Dosar 19/1837.
[30] Ibid., Dosar 47-48/1847.
[31] Potra, *Din Bucureştii de ieri*, vol. 1, 234.

their household waste to special areas; then a tax was imposed on them and a collecting service was organized.[32] A service for rounding up and collecting stray dogs was also established. Other regulations pertained to the sale of food in different areas of the town and the building of cemeteries just outside the limits of the town.[33]

Eventually, Bucharest was one of the first towns in Europe to have a public lightening service. The Organic Rule stipulated the creation of a lightening system, which was set up in the 1830s in the central area.[34] The system became more and more sophisticated and illuminated areas increased in number; in 1856 petroleum lamps were introduced.[35]

In the thirty years between the beginning of the Organic Rule and the recognition of Bucharest as official capital of Romania, a desire for de-Ottomanization was already felt, although a political authority autonomous and strong enough to change the appearance of the town to a noticeable extent did not exist. The most evident results of the trend of de-Ottomanization were not in the initiatives of the city council but in the construction of the Grand Theatre, the new *boyar* abodes, and the opening of cafés and cultural initiatives all over Bucharest. But the initiatives of the city council were etched in a deeper fashion on Ottoman Bucharest: creating a break with the urban plan of the past, identifying a city centre, straightening the roads, establishing new regulations for building houses, supplying public services, and building offices for the cultural institutions. The result was a change in the entire aspect of the town, which was in line with the processes of rationalization which Western cities were undergoing during the same period, and which was the background for Bucharest's transformation into a capital.

The capital of a new national state

In 1857, the Congress of Paris was convened to set the terms for peace after the end of the Crimean War. The West European powers, siding with the Ottoman Empire, had won the war and defeated Russia. The peace conditions included abolition of the Russian protectorate of Moldova and Wallachia. The Ottoman Empire was too weak to reassert its control over the principalities, with the result that extensive autonomy was granted to Moldova and Wallachia. The link with the Ottoman Empire became merely formal. The two principalities were to remain separate, but the leaders of the two states avoided this imposition by electing the same prince, the Moldovan *boyar* Alexandru Ioan Cuza, in 1859. Two years later, the European powers recognized the existence of a single Principality of Romania.

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[32] Primăria Municipiului Bucureşti, Bucharest, Fond 00083, Dosar 28/1835.
[33] Ibid., Dosar 2/1835.
[34] Potra, *Din Bucureştii de ieri*, vol. 1, 256.
[35] Ibid., 261.

The new state needed a capital city, and a town had to be chosen.

This was the same choice which had been made by Greece and Serbia, and which in the following years Bulgaria was also to make. But, unlike these states, the Principality of Romania arose as a result of the union of two already existing principalities. Thus, there were already two cities which had hosted political institutions, although very different from the modern ones, those of the prince/ *voivoda*. They were Iaşi and Bucharest.

The choice was not easy: Iaşi was a large cultural centre. It hosted the first University of Romania, established in 1860; in addition, the first prince of Romania, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, was a Moldovan, and Iaşi was near the boundary with the Russian land of Bessarabia, long joined to Moldova in a single principality and potentially an objective for irredentist local efforts. In this respect, Iaşi was what Sofia would have been for Bulgaria: a decentralized capital overlooking irredentist lands, in the first case Moldova, and in the second Macedonia. But the Romanian political leaders also had another more attractive objective for their irredentist desires: Transylvania, where the idea of a Romanian identity had first been elaborated. Bucharest was better located than Iaşi as far as trade was concerned, and was larger and more populated. Hence, in the end, it was preferred over Iaşi. The decision was taken in 1862.

From 1862 onwards, the transformations Bucharest had undergone in the previous period continued, and became stronger and more evident. The reason is now quite obvious: there was local political rule, with the will and the means to change the aspect of the capital. In addition, a dedicated budget was established for renewal of the town.[36] The work of the municipal authorities continued, but it was no longer the major agent in the process of transforming the town. It was the central power, which concentrated its best efforts on the capital.

Bucharest was to become the seat of the new institutions and the best example of what Romania wanted to be (and not what Romania actually was). Therefore, political power transferred its image of Romanian culture to Bucharest and made it a mirror of that city. But what kind of image was it? The new Romanian leaders were *boyar*s, they had studied abroad, mostly in France. They had been influenced by the Transylvanian school, basing the Romanian language on Latin, and they wanted to show the distinctiveness of Romania with regard to the surrounding Slavic states. This implied rejecting everything which had linked Romania to the previous Ottoman rule as rapidly as possible. And this also implied creating a link with Western Europe, showing that Romanian culture had always been European in nature. This was rather similar to what had happened in Athens, where Greek leaders recalled the Classical Age to demonstrate that Greek culture lay at the

[36] Fréderic Damè, *Bucureştiul în 1906* (Bucharest: Editura Paralela, 2007), 75.

roots of European culture.[37] The difference was that in the case of Bucharest there was not the rediscovery of antiquity, as in the case of Athens. It was the contemporary Romanian culture which was considered already a European one, and, therefore, there was no need to rediscover the past. In any case the result was, in both cases, the adoption of the Neoclassical, which was nothing more than the style which had been *en vogue* in Western Europe since the end of the eighteenth century. It had a historical value for Greeks because it evoked ancient Greece, and for Romanians because it evoked ancient Rome. In any case, the appearance of Bucharest was to be a demonstration of Romanian Latinity. The natural model for the capital was obviously Paris. France shared Latin culture with Romania, France had been where most of the local political leaders had been educated and, last but not least, it had been the country most fervently promoting Romanian autonomy at the Congress of Paris.

This French-oriented attitude did not change even after Alexandru Ioan Cuza was replaced by a German prince, Karl of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, in 1866. Karl took the name of Carol and became the first king of Romania in 1881. Indeed, adoption of the French pattern was not something peculiar to Romania. Emilijan Josimović, the town planning designer of Belgrade in 1867, had studied in Paris and was influenced by Haussmann's plans carried out in the years 1851-1873.[38] Athens was somewhat different: German architects or local architects educated in Germany worked there, so they also used patterns from Central Europe.[39]

The local political authorities wanted to make Bucharest a Western-style capital, and they did. In 1862, it had a population of about 120,000 – that is, it was relatively large. This was not the case for Sofia (20,000 inhabitants),[40] Belgrade (7,000)[41] or Athens (10,000).[42] The interventions carried out by the political authorities covered many aspects: infrastructures, urban planning and the building of offices for political institutions.

The first two fields were a continuation of the work carried out in the first half of the century. As regards infrastructures, large-scale new work was carried out along the Dâmboviţa. Buildings too close to the river were demolished, together with any bridges supported on piles in the water. They were replaced by single-span bridges on the banks, examples being those under construction in the same

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[37] Christina Agriantoni, 'L'antichità come modernità. La trasformazione di Atene in città capitale', in Pitassio and Dogo, *Città dei Balcani*, 53.

[38] Ljiljana Blagojević, 'La regolazione urbana di Belgrado nel 1867: traccia contro cancellazione', in Pitassio and Dogo, *Città dei Balcani*, 165.

[39] Agriantoni, 'L'antichità', 54.

[40] In 1881. See Armando Pitassio, 'Sofia e I suoi architetti', in Pitassio and Dogo, *Città dei Balcani*, 184.

[41] According to a census of 1834. The census is therefore of the period when Serbia became a principality. See Milan Ristović, *Belgrado, una capitale sul confine ('Ah, ma avreste dovuto vederla al tempo dei turchi')*, in Pitassio and Dogo, *Città dei Balcani*, 93.

[42] This was the population of Athens in the 1830s, when it was chosen as capital after Greek independence. See Agriantoni, 'L'antichità', 55

period in London.[43] The river's route was simplified and straightened, according to plans of the Romanian engineer Grigore Cherchez. As a result, the length of the river was reduced from 189 to 110 kilometres.[44]

The old illumination system became more and more sophisticated, and used gas oil instead of petroleum. There were many calls for tenders for this work, since enterprises winning tenders frequently became insolvent. In 1882, the lighting system was adapted to electricity, and two power plants were built to supply energy.

However, the main changes involved the transportation system. Transport by coach increased, and a contract was signed between the municipal authorities and the English engineer Henry Hubert for the construction of iron tracks, so that horse-drawn coaches could be eliminated. After the two power plants had been built, electric trams also started to circulate in the town. The first tram connected the eastern sector to the western one and started running in 1894.[45]

Railways definitely changed the way in which Romanian people travelled and profoundly affected the layout of Bucharest. The first railway connected Bucharest with Giurgiu, a port on the Danube on the way south (Bulgaria, Greece and the Ottoman Empire), but it also reached the Black Sea.[46] In the 1870s, a ring of railway lines was made around the town, and the main railway station, Gara de Nord, came into being. Bucharest was the first place in which a railway appeared in Romania, and it was linked to international lines even before a national network had been created: the line to Giurgiu, for instance, was not designed for internal transport but to reach the southern markets.[47] This showed the will of all the people to connect the capital to the main trade routes and to other countries, which was considered more important than connecting it to the rest of Romania.

After the creation of the Principality of Romania, the road pattern was further simplified. Two main axes were chosen: North-South and East-West. The first was Podul Mogoşoaiei, whose function had been already enhanced over the previous thirty years. It continued northwards along a road, the şoseaua Kiseleff, the construction of which began in 1865. Bulevard Catargiu was the continuation of Podul Mogoşoaiei towards the south. The main East-Westbound roads were bulevard Academiei, bulevard Elisabeta and bulevard Carol, all built in 1880. Other new roads were built in the same period, linking the city centre to public spaces or cultural buildings, such as parks, squares and theatres.

The models for these roads were the wide French boulevards; some of the new roads in Bucharest recalled them also in name. The second part of the

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[43] Benevolo, *Storia*, 26.

[44] Mucenic, *Bucureşti*, 8.

[45] Potra, *Din Bucureştii de ieri*, vol. 1, 422-429.

[46] Giuseppe Cinà, *Bucarest dal villaggio alla metropoli. Identità urbana e nuove tendenze* (Milan: Unicopli, 2005), 42.

[47] A national railway system was actually only built in the 1890s.

nineteenth century was actually the period of the reorganization of Paris by Prefect Haussmann. His aim was to create a regular plan for the town, with open spaces and better opportunities of controlling public order. In Paris, this project could be carried out by destroying the old part of the town, the most ancient. In Bucharest, there was no need. When necessary, municipal and political authorities imposed the compulsory demolition of buildings. Public interests were considered more important than private ones. For this reason, in 1864 a law was promulgated to dispossess the owners of properties located in places which were considered of public utility.[48] This law was followed by another one in 1879, concerning house construction, the maximum height of buildings and their distance from roads and rivers.[49] However, demolition did not involve whole quarters, as in the case of Paris. Some of the most important parks, such as Cişmigiu, were created in reclaimed damp areas. Others were made in areas where churches existed – not a particular problem in a state whose leadership wanted to separate politics and religion. For example, the church of San Sava was demolished, and replaced by a park containing the statues of famous personalities of Romanian culture.[50]

The creation of open spaces also represented a break with the past. As already mentioned, Ottoman towns had few open spaces. Ottoman Bucharest had shared this characteristic.

The most beautiful open areas which were created in the nineteenth century were probably parks. In the capital city, their function was that of open spaces where local society could gather, where theatrical companies could put on shows and musicians could play, often in open-air restaurants. This was also a frequent occurrence in the other capitals of the new Balkan states. To create parks, garden designers were called from other countries. Most of them came from the Habsburg Empire, since they were well-known all over Europe as the best designers of parks. This was the case for Wilhelm Friedrich Carl Meyer, who planned the park of Cişmigiu. There were also some Frenchmen, such as Édouard Redont, who planned Carol's park in the Filaret area, and German experts, such as Friedrich Rebhuhn, who modified the garden of Cişmigiu.

Another type of open space which was not found in Ottoman towns was the piazzas. Squares started to be created at the same time as public institutions, since their open space emphasized the features of the buildings themselves. For example, a square was created in front of the Grand Theatre, which was renamed the National Theatre.

The name changes of many places and roads were another meaningful aspect of the period after autonomy. This process was strengthened after Romania became independent, in 1878. Apart from the National Theatre, another case was that of

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[48] Mucenic, *Bucureşti*, 10.
[49] George Costescu, *Bucureştiul vechiului Regat* (Bucharest: Capitel, 2005), 50.
[50] Potra, *Din Bucureştii de ieri*, vol. 1, 304, n. 13.

Podul Mogoşoaiei, renamed calea Victoriei ("the street of Victory") in honour of Romania's victory, with Russia, in the Russian-Ottoman war of 1877-1878, which paved the way to full independence. The allusion to the nation and to the most important historical events leading to independence shows the importance given to history as the foundation of national identity. Actually, in my opinion, it merely shows that the political leaders knew that national consciousness was not solid enough: they tried to create it, at least in the capital.

Architecture: From Neoclassicism to neo-Romanian

Architecture was perhaps the best expression of the aspect which the Romanian leaders wished to give to their nation. While in the previous period only a general orientation could be found in private houses, now architecture was the result of a political choice. The young Romanian architect Dimitrie Berindei wrote in *Revista română* in 1860 that art was the best expression of national identity.[51]

The interest which political power had in architecture was evident in the creation of a commission of four experts for the recovery of the artistic heritage in 1860. It did not last long, because of the difficulty in finding funds for it, but it did lead artists and patrons towards the arts. Its main result was the creation of a catalogue of lithography of the main masterpieces of Romanian art, compiled by the historian Odobescu and the collector Pappasoglu.[52] A new commission was established in 1892, whose task was to catalogue, study and restore the country's artistic heritage.[53]

Another occasion for demonstrating the importance of arts as a means to reaffirm Romanian identity was the Universal Exhibition held in Paris in 1867. Prince Cuza had scornfully refused joint participation with the Ottoman Empire when the exhibition was in preparation. The exhibition was a showcase for Romania: many Western visitors showed interest in the Romanian stand and the catalogue sold out.[54]

The turning point for architecture was 1878, when Romania achieved full independence from the Ottoman Empire.

Before 1878, the state was still consolidating its power. Architectural works were one of the best ways of showing the will to Westernize Romania and keep it as far as possible from the Ottoman heritage and rule, but there were no schools or institutes for training architects in Romania. Therefore, the majority of works were carried out by architects from abroad and a small number of Romanian architects educated outside their native country. From 1862 onwards, many architects went

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[51] Carmen Popescu, *Le style national roumaine. Construire une Nation à travers l'architecture 1881-1895* (Rennes/Bucharest: Presses Universitaires de Rennes/Simetria, 2004), 43.

[52] Ibid., 35.

[53] Cinà, *Bucarest dal villaggio alla metropoli*, 52.

[54] Popescu, *Le style national roumaine*, 40.

to Romania to work for political institutions or private owners. Most of those operating for the political power were French – an exception in post-Ottoman states. Elsewhere, architects from the Habsburg Empire and Germany were prevalent. In Sofia approximately 64 percent of the architects came from the Habsburg Empire; Habsburg architects were also prevalent in Belgrade and German architects were indeed the majority in Greece.[55] But architects influenced by foreign cultures also operated in the core of the Ottoman Empire. Alexandre Vallaury, projecting many important buildings in Istanbul, had studied at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. Raimondo D'Aronco, designing part of the Topkapi palace of Abdul Hamid II,[56] was born in the Habsburg Empire and had studied in Turin and Venice.

On the one hand, the French influence in Romania was the result of the claimed connection between the Romanian and French cultures which dated back several decades. On the other hand, it was also due to the fact that France was in the forefront in architecture.[57]

Among the foreign architects, one of the most important was the Frenchman Paul Gottereau. He created the project for the offices of the most important political institution: the Royal Palace of Cotroceni in 1888. The palace was built on the site of an old church, giving its name to the area. The *boyar* Cantacuzino had already built a palace there in the seventeenth century, which had already been the residence of princes. Gottereau demolished the old palace and built a new one, but he did preserve the church. Therefore, in one sense, the new building recalled the palaces of Prague, Vienna and Budapest, but its style constituted a direct link with French buildings, such as the Opéra in Paris. The palace recalled the eclectic style and aimed at showing the magnificence of the Romanian royal family[58] through the use of columns, sumptuous staircases and the abundant use of marble.

Gottereau also planned other important projects, like that of the building of the Mutual Savings Bank. He also designed the palace of the Fundaţia Regală Carol I, which was one of the cultural institutions directly financed by King Carol, who held culture in high esteem.

As regards economic institutions, two other French architects, Albert Galleron and Cassien Bernard, designed the building for the National Bank.[59]

French architects were also prevalent in designing cultural buildings. The Faculty of Medicine was hosted in an elegant building, designed to the project of a French architect, Louis Blanc. Another prestigious palace was the Ateneul

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[55] Pitassio, 'Sofia', 194; Ljiljana Blagojević, 'La regolazione urbana di Belgrado nel 1867: traccia contro cancellazione', in Pitassio and Dogo, *Città dei Balcani*, 163; Agriantoni, 'L'antichità', 53.

[56] Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (London: Penguin, 1997), 340.

[57] Benevolo, *Storia*, 19-20.

[58] Simina Stan, 'Palatul Regal de la Cotroceni', *Jurnalul.ro*, 11 July 2009, http://casa.jurnalul.ro/stire-cladiri-de-patrimoniu/palatul-regal-de-la-cotroceni-514291.html.

[59] Mucenic, *Bucureşti*, 40.

Román, recalling the Panthéon in Paris, designed by Albert Galleron.

The number of Romanian architects began to increase in this period. Many of them came from the school for civil engineering in Bucharest, the overwhelming majority of whom decided to go to Paris to receive an architectural education at the École des Beaux Arts. Once again, it was not the same in neighbouring countries: about 40 percent of Bulgarian architects studied in Germany, 27 percent in Belgium, 12 percent in Switzerland, 12 percent in Austria and only 3 percent in France.[60] Romanian architects could usually count on grants provided by the government, which wanted to create a group of local architects.

It was not by chance that the first important building planned by a Romanian architect was the university. As in the previous period, culture played a very important role. Cultural institutions were the means by which the political class spread their conception of Romanian identity in Romanian society. The university represented the highest level of education and its building had to be suitable for this role. The architect of the main building of the University of Bucharest was Alexandru Orăscu. He was an exception in the Romanian panorama, since he had not studied in France, like most of his colleagues, but in Germany, in Munich and Berlin, graduating in Berlin in 1847; he had then been the assistant of the architect of the town Xavier Villacrosse. Orăscu's education did not affect the style of the buildings he designed, which was more or less the same as that of the other buildings of the same period in Bucharest. And it was more or less the same style that architects were creating in other capital cities in the Balkans. Where they came from made no difference. Czech architects operating in Sofia often used the same style as French ones in Bucharest. It was not a matter of nationality but of architectural trends which were spreading throughout Europe. The 'Europeanization' of the governments of the new states meant the adoption of these trends and homogenization of the aspects of the new cities.

Two main styles were used during this period by both foreign and local architects: Neoclassicism and Neogothic.[61] Neoclassicism recalled the classical age. It had already been used in the first half of the nineteenth century and followed the general trend which had been developing in Western Europe since the end of the previous century. Neoclassicism was a rational, tidy style, developing in the period of the triumph of Positivism.

Things had started to change in the last three decades of the century. The Neogothic style was a rediscovery of the Middle Ages, characterized by lancet arches and high, slender buildings, and richer in decorations than the Neoclassical style. It sometimes led to exaggerations, such as the application of richly ornamented decorations. If the Neoclassical style could represent a link with

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[60] Pitassio, 'Sofia', 200.

[61] Grigore Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii româneşti, din cele mai vechi timpuri pâna la 1900* (Bucharest: Capitel, 1937), 395.

Latinity which the Romanians saw in the roots of their language and history, this was not the case for the Neogothic. Wallachia and Moldova had not passed through any Middle Ages in the sense given to the term in Western Europe. No castles, monasteries or churches in the Gothic style could be found in their territory. Strangely enough, the adoption of the Neogothic brought the two principalities on the Danube closer to Transylvania. But this was not the main reason that the Neogothic was adopted. It was again purely an explicit link to an architectural trend developing in another country – that is, France, where it was being used more and more by local architects such as Viollet Le Duc. The Neogothic was not exclusively adopted by French architects but also by Romanian ones, of whom one, Nicolae Socolescu, designed many palaces in this style.

In the last two decades of the century, after independence, the time was ripe for a local style. This had been sought by Alexandru Orăscu as long ago as 1851, but, only after formal independence from the Ottoman Empire was the elaboration of such a style possible. This may be explained in two ways. First, this was the period when local centres of education in architecture were created. Second, independence meant that no more links with the Ottoman past existed. The first consequence was that distinction from the Ottoman was no longer a priority; the second was that the reflection of Romanian identity was no longer necessarily linked to the West.

This was also true in the political and cultural fields. The two last decades of the century were those during which the liberal approach ceased to be the dominant one, leaving space to those who believed that Romania had to find its roots in local tradition. And the local tradition was that of the villages and the prominence of agriculture in the economy. These were the strongholds of the intellectual activity of the members of the cultural society Junimea (Youth). Its leader, Titu Maiorescu, accused the liberal leaders of having imported foreign patterns with no roots into local society, calling them forms without content (*Forma fară fond*). The Conservative Party was established almost in the same period and its political programme shared the ideas of the Junimea group.[62]

The wish to view Romanian culture as original and specific, and not as a derivation of any other culture, was one of the reasons for the birth of a local style in architecture. This was the Neoromanian style, also called the National style. Now, the concept of *românism* (Romanian being) was no longer that of a Latin enclave in the Ottoman and Slavic Balkans; it aimed at being something else.

Neoromanian developed in three phases. The first began in 1888 and ended in 1906, the second lasted until 1918 and the third one ended in 1940. The main differences among the three phases were both in the style and in the artists involved.[63]

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[62] Hitchins, *România 1866-1947*, 109.

[63] Cinà, *Bucarest dal villaggio alla metropoli*, 60.

The first two periods involved Romanian architects educated abroad, whereas in the last period locally trained artists planned most of the buildings. In this paper, only the first period is examined.

The founder of Neoromanian was Ion Mincu, who graduated in engineering in Bucharest in 1875 and then moved to Paris, where he completed his studies at the École des Beaux Arts in 1894. When he returned to Romania, he decided to assemble a group of Romanian architects in order to create a national style. He realized that local schools were essential if this aim was to be fulfilled, and that is why he was one of the most deeply convinced promoters of the Society of Romanian Architects, established in 1891. The first achievement of the society was the creation of a school of architecture in Bucharest one year later. It was not financed by the state, but a few years later, in 1894, a University Institute of Architecture was established, in Neoromanian style, and quickly became a landmark for architects all over the country. The project was designed by Grigore Cherchez. Romanian architects also now had their own review, *Arhitectura*. Mincu taught at the Institute of Architecture from 1896 to 1909.[64]

Neoromanian style had a deep political significance, which was why it was more frequently used in public buildings than in private ones. The most notable example is the fact that the Royal Palace was modified to Neoromanian style by the Romanian architect Grigore Cherchez.[65] Foreign architects also used Neoromanian, meaning they were forced to adapt their style to the local trend, at least when they worked for political institutions.

The problem Neoomanian architects had to face was that it was hard to find an original Romanian tradition in architecture. The only true tradition in Romania was that of the extremely modest country houses made of wood and straw. But the Romanian architects did not choose these as models for their works. The only case of a building recalling the country houses was the restaurant Bufetul by Ion Mincu, built in Bucharest in 1892.[66]

Romanian architects preferred to use churches and the old *boyar* palaces as models, since these were the only stone buildings of the past centuries which remained standing. The only old buildings often quoted as models for the Neoromanian style were the church of Staveropoleus and the Brâncoveanu palace. Churches in particular recalled late medieval times, when the Romanian principalities were involved in the struggle against the Ottomans. In that era, this was considered the cradle of Romanian identity, as the Romanian people were still independent and free of any subjugation.

The churches of the past, however, as well as the *boyar* houses, were also the result of cultural influences from abroad. Wallachia and Moldova were Orthodox

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[64] Ibid., 57.
[65] Stan, 'Palatul Regal de la Cotroceni'.
[66] Popescu, *Le style national roumaine*, 57.

lands and their churches followed the style of the Orthodox churches in the region, the main example of which was that of Byzantine religious buildings. Romanian aristocracy was often mixed with *phanariote*s, who were often the intermediaries bringing to Romania their style of building palaces, which was often taken from Western Europe, where they had travelled and been educated. And this was also the style they used for their palaces in Istanbul.

Moreover, many elements of the Neoromanian style came from the Byzantine period. This was the case for the old churches, deriving from the Orthodox tradition of the area. But the influence of Byzantium had also been strong in the Ottoman lands and in the Ottoman art.[67] Moreover, builders from abroad often came to the Romanian lands and worked in the building of the churches, thus influencing the style of these. They often came from the Habsburg lands, especially north-east of Italy, so that the religious architecture of the area shared some elements with Central Europe.

Although the Neoromanian style aimed at breaking with the passive adoption of cultural trends from outside Romania, in some respects it followed the same path.

The rationalist Neoclassical style was also being abandoned in the same period in Europe, with Art Nouveau developing in its stead. Rediscovering curves, decorations and arches was characteristic of the art of Secession. And the attempt to use the patterns and elements of the past was also typical of other countries, such as Bulgaria, where a national style developed at the beginning of the twentieth century that involved rediscovering the Byzantine style.[68]

Conclusions

In the nineteenth century, Bucharest was the city where the Romanian elite attempted to express its own idea of Romanian identity. This elite was composed of political leaders, but its executors were architects. At first, they wished to create a modern city; then they tried to make one like a Western city, and eventually built a capital rooted in the local tradition.

The people's stance towards the Ottoman past was one of constant rejection. They wanted to show that Romania was different from the rest of the Balkans, that it was West European and that it was Christian. It is hard to say whether they succeeded or not. It is undeniable that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Bucharest looked very different from what it had been like a hundred years before. In this respect, the wishes of the Romanian leaders were satisfied.

However, Istanbul itself was changing at that time, and so was Paris. Therefore, rather than creating an original local style, the evolution of Bucharest

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[67] Cerasi, *La città del Levante*.

[68] Petar Jokimov, *Secesionăt i bălgarskata arkitektura* (Sofia: Arhitekturno Izdatelstvo, 2005); Pitassio, 'Sofia', in Pitassio and Dogo, *Città dei Balcani*, 207.

followed trends occurring all over the European continent and beyond.

And if the Romanian political leaders wanted to create a modern capital in order to demonstrate that their state was developed and modern, it must be said that changing the capital was not enough. Towns in Romania were like islands in a sea of backwardness. The society developing in the urban areas, an educated and nationally conscious society, was very different from that of the rest of the country, and this dissimilarity was evident at the time when the Neoclassical style was used. But it was even deeper when Neoromanian was used, since it was the result of an intellectual process and not of a rapprochement between town and countryside. It was this aspect of the Ottoman heritage which was harder to erase.

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