

Art

and

Politics

in the Modern Period



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
University of Zagreb

# Art and Politics in the Modern Period

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**Zagreb, 2019**



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## FOREIGN AND LOCAL ENTANGLEMENTS IN THE CREATION OF ROMANIAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IN THE LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

### *Abstract*

*This paper explains the emergence of a national architectural heritage in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Romania as a result of multiple transnational interactions between French, German-speaking and Romanian artists and scholars. It considers the first architectural study on a monument in Romania, written by the Habsburg scholar Ludwig Reissenberger, the Romanian pavilion at the 1867 Universal Exhibition designed by the French architect Ambroise Baudry and the restorations of historical monuments in Romania done by another French architect, André Lecomte du Noüy. The essay also ponders local reactions to all these works, by scholars such as Alexandru Odobescu and architects such as Dimitrie Berindei and George Sterian. It shows how Romanians were not passive receivers of European artistic norms or styles, but actively shaped and adapted foreign ideas and works to eventually develop new methods for the preservation and promotion of the Romanian architectural heritage.*

**Keywords:** architectural heritage, national Romanian architectural style, monument restoration, Byzantine architecture, Curtea de Argeş, national identity.

This study argues that the emergence of architectural heritage as an important pillar for the national ideology of the modern state of Romania is best seen as resulting from the multi-faceted relations between foreigners and local intellectuals, Central and Western European ideas and the local context of a new nation-state in the Balkans.<sup>2</sup> Numerous exchanges, inputs and reactions between Romania and Europe led to the restoration and promotion of the most important architectural monuments in Romania as “national” monuments and raised debates about Romanian cultural and artistic identity. Through the example of Romania and the creation of its architectural heritage, the study argues that all actors involved, local or foreign, had an essential role, and the whole process can only be understood by giving each actor equal weight. Therefore, it works towards destabilizing the center-periphery paradigm in modern European studies and goes beyond the nation-state as the main unit of analysis.

The prime example of a historical monument in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romania was the church of the former monastery of Curtea de Argeş, built at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains, in the former historical region of Wallachia (fig. 1). Built in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, this Orthodox monastery displays a unique mixture of Ottoman architectural motifs that captured the interest of both foreign intellectuals, who studied it, restored it and even reinterpreted it in exhibition pavilions, and of Romanians, who made it a symbol not only of the Romanian state but also of their fight to preserve “the nation”. Consequently, the essay will begin by discussing the first architectural study on a monument in Romania, a monograph on Curtea de Argeş, and local reactions towards it. It then examines how the church was displayed and interpreted by both local and foreign artists at 19<sup>th</sup>-century universal exhibitions before considering the important moment when it was restored by the French architect André Lecomte du Noüy. The Frenchman’s activity in Romania and the reactions towards his works, which eventually caused historical monuments to be seen as “national,” forms the last part of the paper.

<sup>1</sup> The research for this article has been generously funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and M4C Doctoral Training Partnership through a PhD scholarship at the University of Birmingham (2015–2019). The title of my PhD thesis is *A National Identity from Transnational Collaborations: Research, Restoration and the Use of Historical Monuments in Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romania*.

<sup>2</sup> The subject of this paper and its main arguments were first explored in Cosmin Minea, “The Monastery of Curtea de Argeş and Romanian Architectural Heritage in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” *sITA – studies in History and Theory of Architecture* 4 (2016), 181–201.



The early 20<sup>th</sup> century use of the Romanian architectural heritage to create a new “national” style has been the object of a number of recent studies.<sup>3</sup> There has also been significant research on the numerous parallels and similarities that characterized the architecture of the newly independent Balkan countries.<sup>4</sup> The prominence of the Romanian national architectural style, whose glory days extended from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1930s, has somehow overshadowed the actual sources of inspiration for it that, at the same time, formed its basis as a growing national architectural heritage. The present study is among the first attempts to look at how certain historical monuments were included in histories of Romanian architecture, were restored and thus given new shape and national meaning.

When Romania became independent in 1859, architectural monuments were seen simply as homes for more important artefacts or *lieux de mémoire* for important rulers and historical periods. Their architecture was not given any particular importance. The first trip throughout Romania, in 1860, organized to study its artistic heritage was symptomatic of this tendency. The instructions from the Romanian government were to look for “archaeological, archival and bibliographic treasures” and, indeed, the assembled teams only documented funerary inscriptions, old manuscripts and various old liturgical objects found in the monasteries.<sup>5</sup> On the rare occasion when a monument was reproduced in a watercolor by Henri Trenk, the architectural features of the monastery are not distinguishable and the main subject seems to be the romantic landscape, suitable as a backdrop for legends or stories (fig. 2).

A change in perspective on the value of architecture first occurred abroad and was due to a German-speaking, Habsburg scholar. In the same year when the survey of artefacts in Romania was organized, a comprehensive study dedicated almost exclusively to the architecture of the church of Curtea de Argeș appeared in Vienna. Ludwig Reissenberger, a native of Hermanstadt (today Sibiu), published “Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche bei Kurtea d’Argyisch in der Walachei” (The Church of the Episcopal Monastery from Curtea de Argeș in Wallachia) in the 4<sup>th</sup> volume of the *Jahrbuch der Kaiserl. Königl. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale* (Yearbook of the Central Commission for the

Fig. 1. Episcopal Church from Curtea de Argeș in 1869, from Amedeo Preziosi, *Biserica Episcopală din Curtea de Argeș*, 1869, Wikimedia Commons, accessed on January 8, 2017, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Preziosi\\_-\\_Biserica\\_Episcopal%C4%83\\_din\\_Curtea\\_de\\_Arge%C5%9F.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Preziosi_-_Biserica_Episcopal%C4%83_din_Curtea_de_Arge%C5%9F.jpg)

Fig. 2. Henri Trenk, *Curtea de Argeș*, 1860, watercolour, from *Mărturii. Frescele Mănăstirii Argeșului*, eds. Oliviu Boldura, Emanuela Cernea et al. (Bucharest: 2012), 172.

<sup>3</sup> Carmen Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une nation à travers l'architecture 1881 - 1945* [The National Romanian Style. Constructing a Nation through Architecture 1881–1945] (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes; Simetria, 2004); Shona Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania, 1866–1927, Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Ada Haidu, “The Search for National Architectural Styles in Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria during the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the First Decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans. Volume Four: Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-)Representations*, eds. Roumen Daskalov et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 394–439; Carmen Popescu, “Un patrimoine de l’identité: l’architecture à l’écoute des nationalismes” [Heritage of Identity: Architecture Responsive to Nationalism], *Études balkaniques*, no. 12 (2005), 135–171.

<sup>5</sup> Aurel Sarcedoțianu, *Cercetări istorice și pitorești prin mănăstirile noastre acum optzeci de ani* [Picturesque and Historical Research in Our Monasteries Eighty Years Ago] (Bucharest: Editura Fundatiei Culturale Mihail Kogalniceanu, 1941), 2.



Study and Protection of Historical Monuments).<sup>6</sup> The commission in Vienna did not normally study monuments outside the Habsburg Empire, but made an exception because the monastery was noticed during Austria's brief one-and-a-half year rule of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, from June 1854 to December 1856.<sup>7</sup> The imperial administration in Vienna took a great deal of interest in studying the peculiar architecture of its Eastern and Southeastern borderlands, such as the majority Orthodox provinces of Galicia, Bukovina, and the Serbian Vojvodina (Voivodeship), all under Habsburg rule at the time. Thus, it is likely, as Hartmuth has suggested, that Austrian intellectuals considered Wallachia to be a possible future possession of the Habsburg Empire, and hoped to prepare the grounds for its absorption by spreading information about it.<sup>8</sup> While the Habsburgs never acquired Wallachia, the architectural study proved to be very significant for the Romanians.

Ludwig Reissenberger produced an art historical study that fit the standards of the time. He described the monastery and its surrounding buildings in detail, drew the plan, recorded its elevation and published accurate illustrations of many of its architectural details, in a method that paralleled those of the natural sciences and that would be highly appreciated in Romania. The work was translated two years later into Romanian by the architect Dimitrie Berindei, who also added his own study on Romanian architecture, the first one in the country. Later, for the Universal Exhibition of 1867 in Paris, the work received a French translation ordered by the Romanian Government and was displayed in the Romanian pavilion, almost like a national exhibit. Furthermore, Reissenberger's study remained the main reference work for studies on Curtea de Argeş and Romanian architecture well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even influencing the way the church was restored, as we will see.

Most importantly, Reissenberger stated that Curtea de Argeş is in the Byzantine style, a connection that would thereafter be at the forefront of any discussion of Romanian architectural heritage. But he also painted a bleak picture of this same Byzantine style, stating that it is a backward style whose history stopped in the age of Emperor Justinian, when Hagia Sofia and the churches of Ravenna were built.<sup>9</sup> Thus, he depicted Curtea de Argeş as a "curious example" and an attempt to give life to the Byzantine style, which, since the rule of Justinian, "fell more and more quickly into stiff convention, an empty formalism and a pure mechanism, devoid of any creative energy and scrupulously committed to the primitive tradition."<sup>10</sup> This reflected a widely held negative opinion of Byzantine architecture in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, espoused by important scholars such as Rudolf Eitelberger, Franz Jugler and the popular Austrian journal *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* (General Building Newspaper), all quoted by Reissenberger in his study.<sup>11</sup> Up until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Byzantium signified a whole range of negative stereotypes related to the notion of The Orient among scholars in Europe.<sup>12</sup> Many of the intellectuals who wrote about Byzantine art had never been in the core regions of the former Byzantine Empire, which were at the time under the Ottoman rule, but had only seen the famous examples from Italy, in Ravenna, Venice or Sicily.<sup>13</sup> Thus, their image of Byzantine architecture was a somewhat standardized one, as it was for Reissenberger, who often compared Curtea de Argeş unfavorably with the more well-known Byzantine churches. On this basis, he extensively criticized the interior of the church, which he saw as "deprived of variety," in an "obscure half-light," and without "the grandiose effect produced in the former Byzantine churches by the cupolas imitating the celestial dome."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Ludwig Reissenberger, "Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche bei Kurtea d'Argyisch in der Walachei" [The Church of the Episcopal Monastery from Curtea de Argeş in Wallachia], *Jahrbuch der Kaiserl. Königl. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale* 4 (1860): 175–224.

<sup>7</sup>Maximilian Hartmuth, "Vienna and the Art Historical Discovery of the Balkans," in *Orientalismen in Ostmitteleuropa: Diskurse, Akteure und Disziplinen*, eds. Robert Born and Sarah Lemmen (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 105–118.

<sup>8</sup>Hartmuth asks if the study of Reissenberger was not the case of "Knowing Before Possessing?," see Hartmuth, "Vienna and the Art Historical Discovery," 109.

<sup>9</sup>Reissenberger, "Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche," 177.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., my translation.

<sup>11</sup>Minea, "The Monastery of Curtea de Argeş," 187.

<sup>12</sup>J. B. Bullen, *Byzantium Rediscovered* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003), 9.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>14</sup>Reissenberger, "Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche," 181, my translation.

Nevertheless, his work became immediately popular inside Romania, where it provided both a model for scientific study in art history and the revelation and proof that architecture can be singled out as a worthy object of study.

So far, one can notice a rather straightforward case of Europeanisation, a direct application of Western European views and norms to a monument in Romania, attitudes that are then internalized by the local population. However, this is only half of the story. Although Romanian artists and scholars took Reissenberger's work as a model in architectural studies, they simultaneously contradicted him, adding nuance to and transforming his opinions. In doing so, they were stimulated to write their own histories of architecture in which they openly opposed Central or Western European views.

The first scholar to do so was Dimitrie Berindei, who introduced the Romanian translation of Reissenberger's work with his own study, titled "A Quick Glance at Byzantine Architecture". This brief essay was almost entirely directed against Reissenberger's description of Byzantine art and architecture.<sup>15</sup> He argued that the German-speaking scholar was wrong on two main points. First, in his claim that the Byzantine is not European; and, secondly, in his contention that Curtea de Argeş is a single, unique monument. Instead, Berindei related the Byzantine with the Roman Empire, with Christianity and with the Romanesque churches in the Rhine Valley, Aachen, and Perigueux.<sup>16</sup> He thus emphasized the European origins and connections of the Byzantine style, in opposition to Reissenberger's view of the Byzantine aesthetic as Eastern or Oriental. In this way, Berindei also argued that Romanian culture was European and not Oriental, a key point to make for an intellectual who was striving to overcome the Ottoman cultural legacy of his country. Secondly, Berindei found prototypes for Curtea de Argeş, not in the architectural features or decorations that are indeed highly original, but in the triconch plan of the church, which is shared with the majority of Wallachian and Moldavian churches, thus showing that Curtea de Argeş was part of a wider artistic and architectural trend in Romania.<sup>17</sup> Berindei tried to develop the first history of architecture in Romania, with the monastery of Curtea de Argeş at its core. Architecture appears in his study not just as a passive object, but as an expression of what he names the national objectives – in other words, he held that architecture had the potential to support the national narrative.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar way, the 1867 French translation of Ludwig Reissenberger's work was not presented entirely by itself, but was accompanied by two other Romanian works. The historian Alexandru Odobescu translated Dimitrie Berindei's study into French and added his own study on Romanian artefacts found throughout the country.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Reissenberger's study was contextualized by two other Romanian ones, that placed Curtea de Argeş within the broader artistic production in Romania. In this way, the monument was presented as an example of "Romanian" art and not as a singular exception.

Curtea de Argeş was also one of the sources of inspiration for the national pavilion at the 1867 Paris Universal Exhibition, designed by the French architect Ambroise Baudry (fig. 3). The pavilion, which was also inspired by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century monastery of Stavropoleos in Bucharest, has been considered by today's scholars as the first example of a national Romanian architectural style.<sup>20</sup> One could also consider it as an illustration of European ideas being brought in a direct way, by a foreign architect, into the Romanian context. The creation of styles by reinterpreting architecture from the past can be seen as an "invented tradition", a

<sup>15</sup> Dimitrie Berindei, "Răpidă ochire asupra Arhitecturii Bizantine" [A Quick Glance at Byzantine Architecture], *Revista Română, pentru științe, litere și arte*, no. 2 (1862): 822–868.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 831.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 844.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Alexandru Odobescu, *Notice sur les antiquités de la Roumanie* [Notes on the Antiquities of Romania] (Paris: A. Franck, 1868), 55–68.

<sup>20</sup> Marie Laure Crosnier Leconte, "Du savoir archeologique à la reconstruction de fantaisie: Ambroise Baudry à Troesmis et à l'Exposition universelle de 1867 à Paris" [From Archaeological Knowledge to Reconstruction of Fantasy: Ambroise Baudry at Troesmis and at the 1867 Universal Exposition in Paris], in *Genius loci: national et régional en architecture; entre histoire et pratique = national and regional in architecture; between history and practice*, eds. Carmen Popescu and Ioana Teodorescu (Bucharest: Simetria, 2002), 127; Carmen Popescu, *Le style national roumain*, 40–43.



Fig. 3. Romanian pavilion, Paris, 1866, from the photographic album *Exposition universelle 1867 Paris, Documentation de la conservation*, Orsay Museum, Paris.

Fig. 4. Romanian pavilion, Paris, 1900, from *Le Petit Journal*, October 14, 1900, 325.

Western European concept that was exported and applied to other parts of the world, often by Europeans.<sup>21</sup> The architecture at universal exhibitions was also a perfect example of this, as pavilions and other displays, meant to represent the specificities of each country, were made by Western architects.<sup>22</sup> This was the case with Romania's pavilion, designed by Baudry. Yet again, this is not the whole story. The Frenchman might have been the architect of the pavilion, but the sources of inspiration for his work were not determined by him, but by Romanians. In fact, it is not sure that he even saw the historical monuments on which he modelled his own work. He only came to Romania the year before the exhibition with an archeological mission, when he met Alexandru Odobescu.<sup>23</sup> Then, for the Universal Exhibition, Odobescu sent to Baudry drawings and photographs of Curtea de Argeș and the Stavropoleos monastery. So even if the architect was French, Romanians were behind the entire exhibition display, including the sources for the national pavilion. The pavilion, which is seen as the first example of a "Romanian national style," was actually the product of both Romanian and foreign decisions, negotiations and mutual influences. There was no one actor and no single, defined process.

Interestingly, this was not the only instance of national Romanian pavilion at an exhibition that was inspired by the monastery of Curtea de Argeș and built by a foreign architect. At the Parisian Universal Exhibition of 1900, Romania's pavilion, again inspired by Curtea de Argeș among other monuments, was designed by the French architect Jean Camille Formigé (fig. 4). Formigé, unlike Baudry thirty-three years earlier, went to Romania to see the monuments himself. But once there, he was guided and taken to what were to be the sources for the pavilion by two Romanian architects, specialists in Romanian heritage who acted as his advisors.<sup>24</sup> Back in Paris, Formigé's plans were supervised, approved, and signed off by other Romanian architects.

<sup>21</sup> I quote here the famous catch-phrase of Eric Hobsbawm in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> See an extensive discussion on the foreign architects that built pavilions for the Balkan countries and how this helped the development of "national" styles in Cosmin Minea, "A National Image in Front of the World: The Balkan Country's Architecture at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889," in *Ephemeral Architecture in Central-Eastern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Miklós Szécheley (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015), 91–107.

<sup>23</sup> Alexandru Odobescu, *Opere complete* [Complete Works], vol. 2 (Bucharest: Minerva, 1906), 319.

<sup>24</sup> Dimitrie C. Ollănescu, *Raport general asupra participării României la Expoziția universală din Paris (1900)* [General Report of the Romanian Participation at the Paris Universal Exhibition (1900)] (Bucharest: Socecu, 1901), 55.



Fig. 5. Interior furnishing of Curtea de Argeș. Photograph by Cosmin Minea.

Perhaps the most important event in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century history of Romanian historical monuments, however, were the restorations carried out by the French architect André Lecomte du Noüy. He was first commissioned in 1875 by the Romanian government to restore the monastery of Curtea de Argeș, a commission that he would finish in 1886.<sup>25</sup> Afterwards, he began to work on other monuments throughout Romania. He was the pupil of the world-renowned restorer of historical monuments, Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, and was also a follower of Viollet-le-Duc's famous stylistic restorations, in which old monuments were heavily modified to be given an ideal shape. He worked in similar manner at Curtea de Argeș. He demolished the old surrounding buildings of the monastery, added some architectural motifs, polished the stones on the facade and completely remade the interior of the church with new frescoes and new furniture (fig. 5). Besides the methods of Viollet-le-Duc, it can be argued that he was also influenced by the work of Reissenberger, and thus his restorations appear as a result of multiple foreign influences that were applied to modify old monuments in Romania and to create a Romanian national architectural heritage. For example, some of the critiques made by Reissenberger seem to have corresponded with du Noüy's restoration. Above all, du Noüy found the interior of the church dark and "decorated with pale sketches," where "one is feeling more oppressed than free..."<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, he remade the whole interior by employing French painters for the frescoes and workshops from Vienna and Paris for the interior furnishings. The artists worked in a neo-Byzantine style clearly informed by Western European fashion, but also considered appropriate for an Orthodox state.

Everyone seemed happy with the restoration. For its re-consecration in 1886, a large crowd gathered and listened to one of the first public speeches that detailed the importance of historical monuments for the whole Romanian "nation". It was delivered by King Carol himself, who, despite being from a Prussian dynasty, explained the importance of historical monuments for the country: "The people who take care of their monuments are developing themselves, as everywhere the monuments are the living story of the history, the mirror

<sup>25</sup> Lecomte du Noüy's restorations have been touched upon in Carmen Popescu, "André Lecomte Du Nouÿ (1844–1914) et La Restauration Des Monuments Historiques En Roumanie" [André Lecomte Du Nouÿ (1844–1914) and the Restoration of Historical Monuments in Romania], *Bulletin de La Société de l'histoire de l'art français*, 1998 (1999): 287–308; Popescu, *Le style national roumain*, 68–77; Horia Moldovan, "Arhitectura bisercii lui Neagoe Basarab" [The Architecture of the Church of Neagoe Basarab], in *Mărturie. Frescele Mănăstirii Argeșului* [Evidences. Frescoes from the Argeș Monastery], eds. Oliviu Boldura et al. (Bucaresti: Muzeul Național de Artă al României, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Reissenberger, "Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche," 181, my translation.



Fig. 6. Saint Dimitry's Church before the restoration by André Lecomte du Noüy, from Wikipedia, accessed on January 8, 2017, [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fișier:Craiova\\_-\\_Biserica\\_Sf\\_Dumitru01.jpg](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fișier:Craiova_-_Biserica_Sf_Dumitru01.jpg) / Saint Dimitry's Church after the restoration. Photograph from 2008, Credits Mvelam, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d0/Craiova\\_-\\_Biserica\\_Sf\\_Dumitru.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d0/Craiova_-_Biserica_Sf_Dumitru.jpg).

of its past and the cherished symbols for future generations ... A nation that respects its forefathers' monuments and mostly those of the Christian piety and faith, has a secured and bold future."<sup>27</sup>

Lecomte du Noüy modified many more historical monuments through his restorations. In 1889, in the southwestern city of Craiova, he demolished and rebuilt the 17<sup>th</sup>-century church of Saint Dmitry, again in a neo-Byzantine style corresponding with the European fashion of the time (fig. 6). An even more dramatic transformation was suffered in the same year by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Metropolitan Church from the former Wallachian Capital of Târgoviște (fig. 7). A peculiar looking construction with no less than eight towers was replaced by a similar neo-Byzantine edifice. The two historical monuments were built anew, in total disregard for the former local architectural idiom but closely following the principles of Viollet-le-Duc and the European-wide vision of Byzantine art that we noticed in the interior of Curtea de Argeș. Its main characteristics, found in such neo-Byzantine constructions as the Marseilles Cathedral, the chapel of the Matzleinsdorf Cemetery in Vienna and the central market hall in Sofia are the Greek-cross plan, round arches, the prominence of cupolas, and alternating layers of white stone and red bricks.<sup>28</sup>

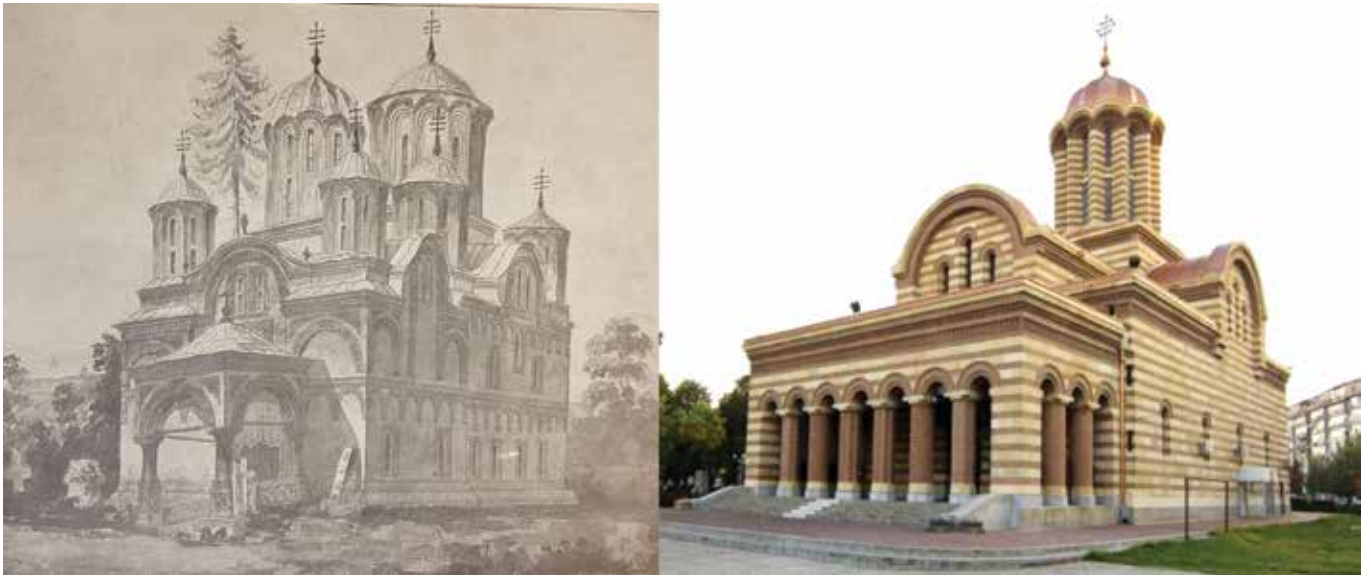
The neo-Byzantine architecture created by Lecomte du Noüy to represent Romania can be considered as a parallel to colonial architectural styles, such as the neo-Moorish style created by the Habsburg administration in Bosnia or the Indo-Saracenic style created in British India.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the newly independent countries from the Balkans, including Romania, were seen as quasi-colonies of Western Europe and "self-colonizing" cultures.<sup>30</sup> But at the same time, the Romanian case shows that the Western imports were also monitored and actively shaped by local intellectuals. André Lecomte du Noüy's activity was carefully supervised and contested by Romanian artists and statesman. The Frenchman had to give reports justifying his work and defending it in the face of growing criticism, which eventually ended his career in Romania and paved the way for a new generation of architects, new restoration methods and, finally, a new national architectural heritage and national

<sup>27</sup> "Serbarea de la Curtea de Argeș" [The Celebration from Curtea de Argeș], in *Vointa Nationala*, October 14, 1886, 1, my translation.

<sup>28</sup> Viollet-le-Duc, the former mentor of Lecomte du Noüy accepted and promoted the view that the cupola is a Byzantine architectural element. See Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, "Cupole" [Dome], in *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle, 1854-1868*, vol. 4 (1854), 363.

<sup>29</sup> Hartmuth sees the "neo-styles" as succeeding the import of European styles and preceding the formation of local regional or national styles. Maximilian Hartmuth, "K.(u.) k. colonial? Contextualizing Architecture and Urbanism in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1878-1918," in *Wechse Wirkungen. Austria-Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Western Balkans, 1878-1918*, eds. Clemens Ruthner et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 159.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Kiossv, "The self-colonizing metaphor," *Atlas of Transformation*, 2008, accessed May 1, 2018, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html>



architectural style. The first criticisms against du Noüy's restorations came by way of an official report, four years into his work at Curtea de Argeș. The most prominent artists of the country accused the Frenchman of making "undesirable innovations that modified the noble conception of the initial author."<sup>31</sup> What resulted was considered "a heavy style, that lacked harmony and lacked the gracious movement and the lightness of the Arab ornamentations, [that] are of a rare delicacy and of a small relief."<sup>32</sup> Du Noüy defended all of his decisions with extensive and mostly technical arguments and managed to convince the decision-makers from the Ministry, where he was highly regarded as a flawless professional, of the value of his restorations.

However, after he demolished and rebuilt the churches of Târgoviște and Craiova and modified two others in the city of Iași, criticism of his work grew much stronger. Several young Romanian architects became increasingly dissatisfied with du Noüy's methods and, in 1889, published several brochures and a newspaper in which they sharply criticized the French architect.<sup>33</sup> George Sterian, a young architect freshly returned from his studies at the Parisian *École des Beaux-Arts*, wrote that "A lot of architects allowed themselves unforgivable things, counting on these few lines [of le-Duc] written in good faith by an authorized scholar. Some architects perverted whole monuments under the pretext that the old construction was defective; they invoked the authority of Viollet-le-Duc to cover their ignorance and their bad faith."<sup>34</sup> Another architect even considered du Noüy as "an evil spirit, that for personal interest destroys and erases the most beautiful pages of the Romanian art."<sup>35</sup> They referred to the historical monuments in Romania with an emotional nationalistic language, radically different from previous utilitarian attitudes: "The national monuments are the living story of the history, the mirror of the past, only through them we can admire the genius of the people"; "We are obliged to continue the tradition, to augment the patrimony left by our ancestors."<sup>36</sup> They also reinterpreted and rewrote the rules for restoring historical monuments, correcting the ideas and methods of the Frenchman: "A res-

Fig. 7. Metropolitan church in Târgoviște before the restoration by André Lecomte du Noüy, from Nicolae Iorga and Gheorge Balș, *Historie de l'art roumain ancienne*, vol. 1–2 (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1922) / Metropolitan church in Târgoviște after the restoration. Photograph from 2012. Credits Gabi4id, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2d/Biserica\\_Inaltarea\\_Domnului\\_Targoviste.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2d/Biserica_Inaltarea_Domnului_Targoviste.jpg).

<sup>31</sup> *Restaurarea monumentelor istorice 1865–1890. Acte și Rapoarte Oficiale* [Restoration of Historical Monuments, 1865–1890. Official Acts and Reports] (Bucharest, 1890), 80.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 81, my translation.

<sup>33</sup> Some of the publications are Nicolae Gabrielescu, *Privire generală asupra Monumentelor Naționale și mijlocul de a împiedica distrugerea lor* [General View on the National Monuments and the Way to Prevent Their Destruction] (Iași, 1889); George Sterian, *Despre restaurarea monumentelor istorice în străinătate și în România* [On the Restoration of Historical Monuments Overseas and in Romania] (Iași, 1889); George Sterian, *Restaurations des monuments historique a l'étranger et en Roumanie* [Restoration of Historical Monuments in Romania and Abroad] (Bucharest, 1890). The journal *Analele Arhitecturii și ale Artelor cu care se leagă* [The Annals of Architecture and of the Arts It Relates to] appeared from January 1890 to December 1893.

<sup>34</sup> Sterian, *Despre restaurarea*, 35.

<sup>35</sup> Nicolae Gabrielescu, *Memoriu pentru luminarea publicului în afacerea restaurării de monumente istorice* [Memoir for the Enlightenment of the Public in the Affair of the Restoration of Historical Monuments] (Iași: Tipografia P. C. Popovici, 1890), 75.

<sup>36</sup> Gabrielescu, *Privire generală*, 5, my translation.

oration is permitted only when we have certain documents and if the evidence is missing to not do a total restoration but to limit ourselves to the partially possible restoration, and the rest to strengthen only, leaving these two works as visibly different from each other.”<sup>37</sup>

The actions of this younger group of architects were not limited to words – in subsequent years, they established a law and Commission for Historical Monuments, a Society of Architects and a School of Architecture. They also wrote histories of Romanian architecture, where for the first time Curtea de Argeş was not at the forefront. For them, the most important historical period for Romanian culture was the 17<sup>th</sup>-century rule of Prince Neagoe Basarab, seen as a period of synthesis between Byzantine and Western architecture, above all Venetian.<sup>38</sup> This architecture, promoted by the young Romanian architects, became the inspiration for a Romanian national style at around the same time. This style would prove hugely popular throughout the country and well into the interwar period. Therefore, even if the French architect du Noüy brought foreign ideas and concepts to bear on the restoration of several historical monuments, we can consider the response of the Romanians as overshadowing his activity. His restorations were and indeed still are very visible. But they were almost from the start criticized and ended up being totally dismissed as big mistakes. He did not have any disciples in Romania and eventually ended his career following the criticisms against him. Later, his legacy was shaped by his own critiques, and he has only recently been rehabilitated.<sup>39</sup>

Lecomte du Noüy was nevertheless influential. The reaction of local artists against him also marked the beginning of the study and documentation of historic architecture in Romania and of the creation of a new national architectural style. As in all of the cases outlined in this essay, he was criticised and contradicted, and his work was debated, disapproved of and eventually ignored in the country. The monastery of Curtea de Argeş shared this fate: after approximately 30 years of maintaining its status as nearly the only valuable historical monument in Romania, it gave way to other monuments and historical periods.

I have tried purposely in this paper not to offer any single model to describe the results of Western European relations with Romania or, indeed, with any of the newly independent states in the Balkans during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such encompassing explanatory models are often easily contradicted by specific examples. Instead, I based my argument on a series of principles that have at their core a focus on relations, reactions, debates, and transfers of all sorts. These interactions between external and local actors, transnational ideas and their relevance for local contexts could be a way to overcome studies centered on nation-states and may offer a more accurate image of nation-building processes.<sup>40</sup> In the case of the newly independent country of Romania, the multitude of interactions analyzed in this paper provided, above all, stimuli for the local context to develop in its own way. This is how Romania developed its unique and yet to be told discourse on architectural heritage, its own history of architecture and a national architectural style.

<sup>37</sup> Sterian, *Despre restaurarea*, 31, my translation.

<sup>38</sup> Sterian was the first to stress the importance of the Venetian influences. In Sterian, *Despre restaurarea*, 6–7.

<sup>39</sup> See Popescu, *Le style national roumain*, 68–77.

<sup>40</sup> I have counted on the ideas detailed in Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory*, no. 1 (2006): 30–50, and Philipp Ther, “Beyond the Nation: The Relational Basis of a Comparative History of Germany and Europe,” *Central European History*, no. 1 (2003): 45–73.