

Horia Moldovan, JOHANN SCHLATTER: CULTURĂ OCCIDENTALĂ ȘI ARHITECTURĂ ROMÂNEASCĂ (1831-1866), București 2013, Ed. Simetria, 260 pages, 326 illustrations, ISBN 978-973-1872-26-1

In 1843, while Filip Oliva, “*digger in marble stone and plaster*” was producing and selling “*monuments, crosses, garden vessels, wells for keeping cold water, natural lions carved in marble and a lady’s figure carved in marble, called ‘Venera’, as well as another figure called ‘the Water God’*”, Johann Schlatter was signing an alignment plan in his capacity of architect of the city of Ploiești. The first decades of the 19th century had already significantly altered the structures and fashions of Wallachia. The Kiseleff administration had come to an end. Prince Bibescu had started his reign and the important public works which are due to him. Newly arrived in the principality, the Swiss architect was 35 years old; he had been educated in Central Europe (probably in Munich) and had then worked under the guidance of his professor, Friedrich von Gärtner, architect of the Bavaria Court, for building the royal palace in Athens (1836-1840).

Horia Moldovan addresses, in this work published in Bucharest in 2013, the period of the Organic Regulations and the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, three and a half decades when the Romanian Principalities transfigured, becoming part of the European modernity. The figure of architect Johann Schlatter – a traveller in Wallachia in 1833, active here between 1842 and 1865, when he passed away – is present throughout the whole period, as subject and at the same time pretext of Horia Moldovan’s research. Johann Schlatter occupied administrative positions: employee of the Architecture Department of the Ministry of Interior, from where he is transferred in 1845 to the Department of Religion, in the position of “monastic architect”, which he keeps for two decades.

The first part of the paper reviews the “sources” of Schlatter’s architecture, enabling an introduction to the shaping context of the German architecture at the end of the 1820s, when the *Rundbogenstil* principles offered a pragmatic solution for expressing the ideals of the age. The second part of the paper presents the Swiss architect in the context of Wallachia, with the author describing in detail a large number of aspects related to the architectural practice. Following a historical and bibliographical introduction to the subject, Horia Moldovan describes the beginnings of architecture education, the organisation of construction works and hence of architectural practice, the administration of towns, the preparation of topographical surveys, town building regulations, the special case of the new Danube towns, public and religious buildings (including the model designs for “council houses”, sub-prefectures, schools or churches).

All these aspects are presented from the point of view of their relationship with legislative and

administrative changes, mentioning the persons involved in the reform (including engineers and architects) and giving – based on a very robust literature and archive research – some examples of significant importance for the history of architecture, most of them not studied previously. The architectural contribution of the project authors is shown in its cultural context, which is of particular interest – their relationship with the project initiator, the sources used, the composition principles, the symbolic implications as well as the relationship – difficult to identify – with the “tradition”, as this can be understood in the reference period of the research.¹

The description of Johann Schlatter’s activity – site reviews, architecture projects or building details, his correspondence to the benefit of the administration, together with a private practice of his profession – is again revealing for the various ways to practice this profession in that period. Along the presentation Horia Moldovan concentrates upon the development or construction of some representative buildings in Bucharest: Golescu palace on the Podul Mogoșoaiei avenue, turned into a princely court (with Johann Schlatter also participating in its refurbishment), Brâncoveanu palace near the Metropolitan Church, Cotroceni palace, Bibescu palace at Băneasa (designed by Schlatter but not finished), the National Theatre or the Academy Palace.

One of the most interesting chapters of the work is the one regarding church architecture: we owe to Horia Moldovan a detailed presentation of the intervention works upon a large number of important churches in Bucharest undertaken in that period; the need to transform these churches was mainly a result of the earthquakes and fires in the first half of the 19th century, rather than of the cultural choices of the project initiators. The author interprets historical data, discovers unknown elements in archives, discusses the architectural composition and form, studies influences and similarities, makes hypotheses, mentions issues which require further research for clarification. For the Săririndar Monastery, he publishes a survey of 1868, he describes and documents the interventions of Gaetano Burelly of 1869; for St. Demetrius Church behind the Post he reviews the work of master Josef Weltz and notices the recurrent use of classicist “decorative patterns” at religious buildings in the 1830s and even more during the following decades; he describes the interventions of Villacrosse at St. George New church and – in another style register – the project of the same Villacrosse, together with Lipizer, at St. Spyridon New church; he also publishes the spectacular project of Johann Schlatter to rebuild the Râmnic Episcopate subsidiary

¹ See, for instance, the discussion on the first theological schools (pp. 50-51).