PAUL GOTTEREAU - A FRENCH CULTURAL MODEL TO THE ROMANIAN ARCHITECTURE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract:

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Romania`s cultural and architectural background was facing one of the most significant transformations in its history until today, being clearly influenced by the French model.

Perhaps the best known French architect who worked in Romania at the time was Paul Gottereau, his work still being representative today when referring to some of the most characteristic Modern Era architecture in our country. He created a vast public and residential architecture, responding to both the private needs of the aristocracy, as to the ones of the Royal Crown in the new Kingdom of Romania. This paper tries to portrait the lost image of the architect through some of his most important works, at the same time as presenting several unknown aspects concerning his biography.

Keywords:

Paul Gottereau, architecture, nineteenth century, French model, cultural heritage.

The development of Romanian architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century remains an important research topic. Against the backdrop of a strong influence of Western culture, the Romanian city, and especially Bucharest as its capital city, was facing during this period with the greatest transformation in its history until today. "If in the fields of literature and philosophy, the French cultural supremacy is competed by a strong German influence, and if the first Romanian painters studied in Munich and not in Paris, the architecture, instead, is clearly dominated by

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the French model."[1] Before the adoption of the first coherent Bucharest building regulation in 1878, the transformation and upgrading of the old medieval urban structures occurred gradually as a result of the new urban regulations, partiallyinspired by Western law. Only later it tooka more accelerated course with the great urban Hausmannian type operations. In Bucharest and, moreover, in many European cities, the direct influence of large-scale interventions due to Baron Haussmann, the prefect of Paris, is manifested in the design and implementation of the whole boulevards system and in building a coherent architectural framework, in a French eclectic style[2].

At a more individual level, things were, particularly, possible because of the academic environment of the time. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a huge wave of Romanians, mostly appertaining to the higher society, left to Paris for their studies in the most prestigious school of architecture of that time, École des Beaux-Arts. Also, the Romanian State, taking over onthe Western model, follows to achieve major public projects in the capital, organizing therefore different international architectural competitions. As a result, foreign architects, many of French origin, propose building designs or came to work in Romania. Some of them settled here designing, in addition to these public buildings, an impressive residential architecture, mostly for the Romanian aristocracy.

In the last century, a lot has been written on the subject, generally presenting a large view on the phenomenon. In reference, works such as *Arhitectura pe teritoriul României de-a lungul veacurilor*written by Grigore Ionescu or*Istoria Bucureştilor: din cele mai vechi timpuri până în zilele noastre*by Constantin Giurescu, and in various articles published about the French influence in our country, are mentioned only the main architects who contributed to the delivery of an eclectic French style to Romanian architecture and their most notable achievements. However, in addition to several reference papers, these architects remain unknown to the literature, most of their projects not being uncovered and investigated, much less published.

[1] Mihaela Criticos, Ana Maria Zahariade, "Influences française dans l'architecture roumaine moderne (1800-1945) ", in : *La mémoire des murs. L'ésprit français dans l'architecture de Roumanie* (sous la direction de Iulian Capsali), Bucharest, Institutul Cultural Român, 2006, p. 162.
[2] Nicolae Lascu, *Legislaţie şi dezvoltare urbană – Bucureşti 1831-1952*, PhD thesis, Bucharest, „Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, 1997.

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Perhaps the best known French architect who worked in Romania in the second half of the nineteenth century is Paul Gottereau, his buildings still being representative today when referring to some of the most characteristic Modern Era architecture in our country. He created a vast public and residential architecture, responding both to the private needs of the aristocracy, as to the ones of the Royal Crown of Romania. This paper tries to portrait the lost image of the architect through some of his most important works, at the same time as presenting several unknown aspects of his biography.



Figure 1 - Paul Gottereau
Source: Louis Blanc Album, Romanian Academy Library

Paul Gottereau was born in Perpignan, France, on 29 March 1843, as the son of Alfred Gottereau and Marie Pauline Gottereau (born Perrin). He came from a family of artists, especially from his mother side. One of his best known relatives was his uncle, Émile César Victor Perrin, a painter and an art critic, for many years in charge of the Paris Opera as its General

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Administrator, a service for which he was decorated with the Commander rank in the French Legion of Honor[3].

Considering his artistic background, but probably most influenced by his father, himself an engineer and an architect, Paul Gottereau decided following a career in architecture. Therefore, in 1864, he was admitted in the second grade of the most prestigious school of architectureof the time in France, École des Beaux-Arts. In the pages of the publication *Les architectes de l' École élèves the Beaux-Arts*, containing the names of all those who have studied at the Beaux-Arts from 1793-1907, we find the following concerning Paul Gottereau:

> *„GOTTEREAUAlfred-Jules-Paul, né 1843 Perpignan, prom. 1864, élève Paccard, méd. E. U. 1889, o I. 1898 Ç. Trav. : Crédit foncier. Agric., Palais "Dacia Romana», salles palais Royal, Ecole franc. Mon. Francais morts Dobrudja, Caisse dépots et Consign., agrand. Palais royal, bibliothèque Université, palais Cotroceni prince héritier. Arch. À Bucharest, Strada Combia, 7. "*[4]

The entrance exam involved testing (written and oral) in mathematics, descriptive geometry, history[5], sk etch and architecture. As a student of Alexis Paccard, an old pensioner of the French Academy in Rome, he participated in different courses and competitions presented in the curriculum. Paul Gottereau school transcript show us he obtained results atthe four construction subjects - stone, wood, metal and general constructions. [6]Certainly, the pleasure and ease to study construction, considered the hardest material in the second grade, was due to the influence that his father, himself an engineer by training, has had on the young Paul. These projects involved a series of drawings in which students presented how the building was structurally designed with attention to the detailingof stone, wood and metal, and with mathematical calculations to demonstrate the building wood stand. Even though he also enrolled in various

[3]A.N.F. (French National Archives), "Base de données Léonore: dossiers de titulaires de la Légion d'honneur, 1800-1976", Dossier " Émile César Victor Perrin".

[4] Penanrun, David de, Roux et Delaire, *1793-1907 Les Architectes Élèves de l'École des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, Librairie de la Construction Moderne, 1907, p. 279.

[5] The history testing is included as subject for the entrance exam exactly in the year 1864, the year Paul Gottereau was admitted.

[6] A.N.F. (French National Archives), "École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts" Collection, Dossier AJ52/367.

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architectural contests at school during the year 1865, his transcript doesn`t show him obtaining any results.

The last record of him at the Beaux-Arts is in the beginning of 1866, the young student never getting beyond the second class. However, not graduating wasn`t a problem at the time, since "in the nineteenth century they [Beaux-Arts students] had a higher status than that of many architects, for if a former student could rightfully call himself an architect and an *ancien élève de l'École des Beaux-Arts*, probably the latter title meant more"[7]. Unfortunately we don't have any record of him between 1866 and 1873[8]. He probably left school because, as many other Beaux-Arts students did, he decided to take a fulltime job as an architect.



Figure 2 - Central University Library, Bucharest

[7] Arthur Drexler, *The Architecture of the École Beaux-Arts*. London, Secker and Warburg, 1977, p. 85.

[8] 1873 is the year when he cosigns with his father the project for the Metropole Hotel on Calea Mogoșoaiei (ancient name of nowadays Calea Victoriei), as far as we know this being his first project in Romania.

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We know for sure that this is what he did later on, after he came to Romania, a country where he has spent more than 30 years and he loved it, if not more, at least the same as his native France, as he declared in an interview given to the*Printre Hotare, a* Romanian magazine, in 1909. Just as he was influenced by his father in following an architecture career, probably his father was also the reason for his coming to Romania. Alfred Gottereau, after traveling to many European cities, especially in France, Spain and Italy, contributing to their gas alimentation as an entrepreneur and engineer, arrived in Romania in 1867[9], with the same purpose. He remained here for at least five years, a period in which he helped build the Bucharest Gas Plant on the Filaret Hill, „being in turn a mason, a locksmith, a mechanic and an architect"[10]. Therefore, following his father steps to Romania, Paul Gottereau arrived in our country, a country where he will find a home, he will build a brilliant career and a name for the Romanian people to remember and pronounce so often nowadays, when passing by the city oldest streets.



Figure 3 - Demostene Cuculi House, Bucharest

[9] Ulysse De Marsillac, *Bucureștiul în veacul al XIX-lea*, Bucharest, Ed. Meridiane, 1999, pp. 291-295. Edition translated after Ulysse De Marsillac, *Guide du Voyageur à Bucarest*, Bucharest, Imprimerie de la Cour (Ouvriers Associés), 1877.
[10] Ibid.

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The public building projects are the most representative for the work that Paul Gottereau has done in Romania during the years, many of which are still preserved. His approach to designing large scale of public buildings, mostly in a neoclassical architectural language, is not surprisingly given his distinguished education at *École des Beaux-Arts*. One of his best known projects is that for the CEC Bank[11] in Bucharest, build on Calea Victoriei, on the same site where a previous building having the same destination, but much smaller, existed. [12] Still, his important place on the Romanian architectural stage is strongly related with the projects he was commissioned to do by King Carol I himself: The Royal Palace on Calea Victoriei[13], Cotroceni Palace and "Carol I" Central University Library[14]. Besides these major building projects, he took part in designing other different public buildings, such as for the Financial Society of Romania, the French Circle or for the Romanian Bank. His relation with the public and academically stage of the French architecture was never interrupted, given his constantly contact he had with it. In 1889 he was part of the team that organized the Romanian participation at the Universal Exhibition in Paris, the same exhibition for which he was offered a bronze medal for the works he exposed there, consisting in the spectacular interiors he had designed earlier for the Royal Palace in Bucharest. [15]

In addition to the public building projects over the years, Paul Gottereau also designed a great number of private houses projects, built either in an urban or a rural environment. Commissioned mostly by nobility families, these houses reflected, in such an obvious way, the Romanian society openness to the modern world, and especially, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the following of a much loved model, the French one. To mention only a few of them, but certainly not the only ones of a great architectural value, we have to state here the houses he designed for the Cantacuzino, Lahovary, Marghiloman, Văcărescu, Carp families, in Bucharest or on their country retreat sites.

[11] The CEC Bank or Casa de Economii și Consemnațiuni, as known in Romania.
[12] The first building for the CEC Bank was also designed by Paul Gottereau in collaboration with his father, Alfred Gottereau.
[13] The original building designed by Paul Gottereau was destroyed in a fire in 1926.
[14] Ancient Palace of "Carol I" University Foundation.
[15] George Bibescu, *1889 Exposition Universelle. La Roumanie – avant, pendant, après*, Paris, Imprimerie typographique J. Kugelmann, 1890, p. 175.

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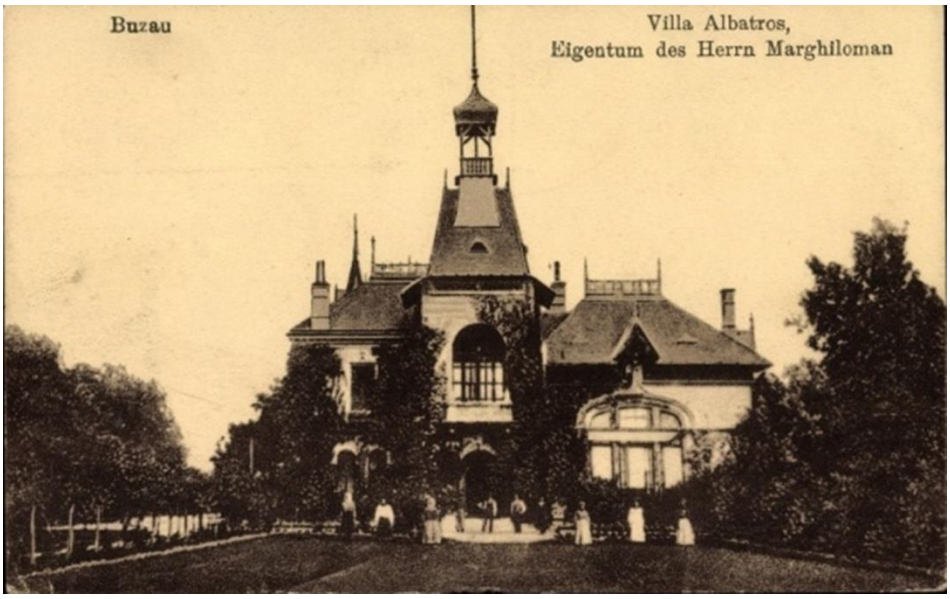


Figure 4 - Marghiloman Manor, Buzău
Source: www. delcampe. net

We found very interesting and most of all very representative an interview Paul Gottereau gave for the Romanian magazine *Printre Hotare* in 1909 regarding his work, but most of all highlighting his contribution to the Romanian architectural development in the second half of the nineteenth century. His legacy is so important, not only for the magnificent buildings he left behind and which nowadays represent a great part of our national cultural heritage, but especially because he was one of the architects that have experienced the first needs and pressures of his job in our country. With his care and perseverance, different crafts in the construction field had developed greatly after him starting working here. He found these trades into the most primitive state: locksmiths and blacksmiths, carpenters and joiners, tinsmiths, glass and stone cutters, sculptors did not exists properly, so for all the objects with a more artistic appearance, which depended on these trades, architects were forced to address foreign countries, often having to wait for several months for the orders arrival. Slowly, through the advice given on the materials and models, Paul Gottereau managed to convince a lot of small merchants and craftsmen to soar in industrial enterprises which, given the growing needs of the country, could not fail. Due to the trend introduced by him at the time, a great number of new establishments were able to produce all the necessary in the construction field. Gottereau contributed greatly to the prosperity and development of

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industrial establishments, such as the following: B. Gaiser, Weigel, Haug, August Zwoelfer, Storck, Schmiedigen, Oscar Spaethe, Lemaitre, Teirich, etc.[16]

His more than 30 year work in our country was recognized during his lifetime, by both the Romanian and the French State. Thus, in 1881 he was offered the Crown of Romania Order in the Officer rang[17] and also, by the decree given on 31 December 1897, Paul Gottereau was named "Chevalier" of the French Legion of Honor. [18] Towards the end of the 1910's, he had moved back to France, where he lived with his family until his death in 1924.

For his great contribution to the Romanian architecture in the nineteenth century and most importantly for leaving us with such an amazing legacy, a legacy that nowadays is considered part of our national cultural heritage, Paul Gottereau stays remembered today us one of our greatest architects.

Acknowledgement

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[17]*Monitorul Oficial*, no. 100, 16 August 1881.

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