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GOTTEREAU: ONE NAME – TWO ARCHITECTS

Contributions to the Study of Romanian Architecture in the Nineteenth Century

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SUMMARY

The development of Romanian architecture in the second half of the 19th 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 the French model.” 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, partially inspired by Western law. Only later it took a 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.

At a more individual level, things were, particularly, possible because of the academic environment of the time. In the late 19th century and early 20th 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 on the Western model, follows to achieve major public projects in all its big cities, 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 Bucureștilor: 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.

Perhaps the best known French architect name who worked in Romania in the second half of the 19th century and the subject of this paper is Gottereau. This name is usually attributed to some of the most representative public architecture in Romania at the end of the 19th century.

The first name is very rare in bibliography, and when it occurs, it is either Paul, or Alfred or Jules. In the most relevant Romanian references - *București, Un veac de arhitectură civilă, Secolul al XIX-lea* by Cezara Mucenic and *Dicționar universal al arhitecților* written by Paul Constantin - there is only one architect name to whom we find architectural works assigned in Romania between 1873-1900, Paul. Also, the publication *Les architectes élèves de l'École de Beaux-Arts*, containing the names of all those who have studied at the Beaux-Arts between 1793-1907, presents a single architect Gottereau under the first name of Alfred-Jules-Paul, born in 1843 at Perpignan in France and part of the 1864 class. The information found here, which will be also used by the Romanian literature, creates the first confusion surrounding the name and the architecture signed Gottereau and represents the starting point of this paper. Following multiple inconsistencies found in various publications and also following the first investigations into the Romanian archives, results that in fact we are certainly confronted with the work of two architects, father and son, without knowing exactly which one is assigned to one or the other.

Through this study we propose to further the investigation, aiming at establishing the existence of the two and exposing the work of one and the other, adding to their list of known works others found in various publications and archives, both from Romania and from France. To this end, through the research of primary sources such as archive materials (family, private and technical funds, plans) and through a historical and critic research in terms of the architecture of each building individually, we will analyze the work of the two, considering the following directions: determining the characteristics for each work of the two; how can ones work be appreciated as posed to the other; how do they fit into the trends of the French architecture of the time, but also in the contemporary Romanian context. An important aspect of this paper is to determine the biographical elements, as well as the academic course of the two architects.

The first of the two, Alfred Gottereau, was born in the early part of the 19th century, in Rouen, France. With his wife, Marie Pauline Gottereau, born Perrin, he has two sons, Georges and Paul Gottereau. We do not know where Alfred Gottereau studied nor what led to his formation in the field of engineering. Although he carried out or collaborated in designing several architectural projects, his main profession was that of civil engineering. This is also the way he is often presented in various references, except for those few cases where he is referenced under the title of engineer-architect, this being also the name we have chosen to use in this paper. His chosen field created favorable circumstances for undertaking numerous trips and frequent changes of residence, both in France and in other countries, especially Spain, Italy and Romania. An important chapter in the life and work of Alfred Gottereau, otherwise most important for the present research, is the period spent by him in Romania. After he arrives in Romania in 1867, he is directly involved in the initiative to introduce gas lighting to the streets of Bucharest. He remained here between five and ten 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".

Alfred's Gottereau youngest son, Paul Gottereau, is probably the best known French architect that worked in Romania in the second half of the 19th century, 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. Paul Gottereau was born in Perpignan, France, on 29 March 1843. In 1864 he was admitted in the second grade of the most prestigious school of architecture of the time in France, *École des Beaux-Arts*, which courses he frequents until the beginning of 1866. Probably following his father steps, already in Romania at the time, Paul Gottereau arrives Bucharest a few years later, the first evidence of him here dating from 1873. As proved by his own work of over thirty years here, Romania was the country where he found a home and he built a brilliant career and a name for the Romanian people to remember and pronounce so often nowadays, when passing by Bucharest's oldest streets. 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 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 in Bucharest, built on Calea Victoriei, on the same site where a previous building having the same destination, but much smaller, existed. 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, Cotroceni Palace and "Carol I" Central University Library. 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. 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 19th 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, Lahovari, Marghiloman, Văcărescu and Carp families, in Bucharest or on their country retreat sites. 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. 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 and also, by the decree given on 31 December 1897, Paul Gottereau was named “Chevalier” of the French Legion of Honor. 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 their great contribution to the Romanian architecture in 19th century and most importantly for leaving us with such an amazing legacy, a legacy that nowadays is considered part of our national cultural heritage, Alfred and Paul Gottereau stay remembered today us one of the greatest architects our country had. This paper attempts to portray the lost image of the Gottereau engineer-architect couple, revealing unknown aspects of the biography of the two, at the same time making a general presentation of some of their most important works.