From Byzantine to Brâncovenesc: The Periodization of Romanian Art in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

3 From Byzantine to Brâncovenesc

The Periodization of Romanian Art in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

Cosmin Minea

Introduction

In studies of the historiography of Romanian art in the modern period, the nineteenth century is almost always ignored. The history of art history in Romania usually starts with writings from the early twentieth century, with attention focused mainly on the first major survey works.[1] However, some of the main concepts, periods and styles used to describe Romanian art had already become apparent in the second half of the nineteenth century, in the first decades after Romania was formed, through several brief studies, monographs and letters written in close relation to each other. Their authors were not exclusively based in Romania and the writings illustrate how art historical narratives, styles and artistic periods emerged out of transnational relations, beyond the borders of the new nation-state.

This chapter focuses on the early writings, restoration and artistic practices that established some main ideas and periods for the study of Romanian art. In this way it builds on the increased attention that has already been given in Central Europe to the period before the establishment of art history as an academic discipline.[2] The earliest writings on Romanian art and the restoration of monuments were underpinned by a desire to integrate Romania into the grand narrative of European art while arguing that the main characteristic of the local monuments is that they derive from and thus can be classified as Byzantine art. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, new concepts and artistic periods emerged that portrayed Romanian art as unique and valuable. Central to the increased emphasis on originality and ethnicity was the artistic heritage of the period of the Wallachian voivode (ruler) Constantin Brâncoveanu (ruled 1688–1714), which quickly became representative of Romanian art as a whole. The emphasis placed on the so-called Brâncovenesc style is a good illustration of how artistic periods are key to understanding the formation of modern national artistic canons.

Significantly, this chapter will not only analyse the writings and activities of Romanian architects and thinkers but also assess the contribution of foreign-based scholars and transnational ideas to definitions of Romanian art. For even if geographically at the periphery of the European continent, and politically squeezed between major Empires (Ottoman, Habsburg, Russian), Romania's artistic and political elite was perfectly and unambiguously connected to the Western intellectual world. A late nineteenth-century Romanian architect was more at ease in Paris among fellow artists from all over Europe than he was, say, in a small Romanian town. All the actors in this research were defined more by their Western education, common cultural values

and set of practices than by their Romanian citizenship. Therefore, the chapter aims to contribute to configuring a more *horizontal Europe*, a concept that describes how local elites in Central and Eastern Europe were less impacted by their geographical positioning or the colonial hierarchies of power dictated by Western Europe than has generally been acknowledged.[3]
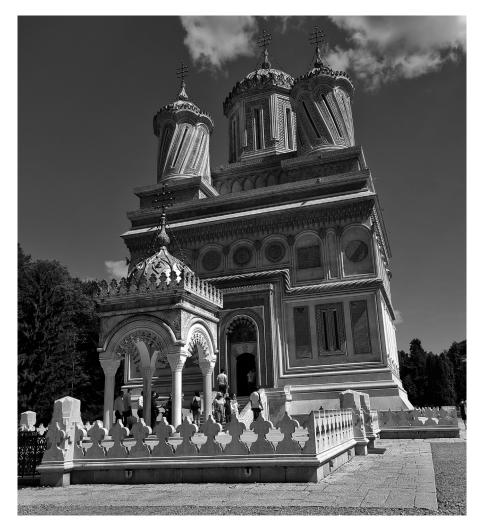
The Church of Curtea de Argeş and Early Writings on Historical Monuments in Romania

The earliest scholarly writing on a Romanian monument relates to the struggle between the main European powers for political and economic control over South-Eastern Europe. Before, the monuments had been described only in traveller accounts, in a purely visual and unsystematic way. During the brief Habsburg occupation of the two Romanian Principalities, Wallachia and Moldavia (1856–56), Austrian troops remarked on the distinctive architecture of the region and, in 1857, the German-speaking Transylvanian scholar Ludwig Reissenberger (1819–1895) was commissioned to study the church of the former monastery Curtea de Argeş in Wallachia (now an Episcopal cathedral) (Fig. 3.1).

The monument, built between 1512 and 1517 under the reign of Prince Neagoe Basarab (ruled 1482–1521), has a unique aspect, with some similarities to Russian Orthodox and Armenian churches (e.g. the Cathedral of St Demetrios in Vladimir or the Church of the Holy Cross in Akdamar), to other Romanian churches, as well as to Ottoman and Arab mosques.[4] In 1860, Reissenberger published a monograph about the Church of Curtea de Argeş in the main annual publication of the Habsburg Commission for the Study and Protection of Historical Monuments.[5] His study is evidence of the lingering Habsburg political interest in the two Romanian Principalities (whose status was still uncertain at the time), as well as of Habsburg attempts to tighten relations with the Orthodox population of the region in order to counter Russian influences.[6]

Reissenberger started the writing from an important assumption that would have a far-reaching impact on ideas and attitudes towards Romanian heritage. He described the architecture of Curtea de Argeş Church as 'Byzantine', a concept that was quickly taken up by Romanians to describe the heritage of *all* Romania. But what did 'Byzantine art' mean for a mid-nineteenth-century Habsburg scholar? Reissenberger defined it through mostly negative descriptors, such as 'oppressive', or characterized by 'sterile conventions' and a 'lack of creativity'.[7] The church was also seen ambivalently, as having 'ingenious' and 'charming' exterior decorations but an 'obscure' and 'frightening' interior.[8] Reissenberger's opinion of the Romanian monument seems to have been informed by the descriptions of Byzantine art in the first major (Western-centric) surveys of architecture, published just a few years before (he quoted, for example, from several works of the Prussian scholar Franz Kugler).[9] Therefore, the study was, on the one hand, a valuable scholarly work of architectural history and, on the other hand, a reflection of the stereotypical and mostly negative view in Central (and Western) Europe of Byzantine art.[10]

Reissenberger's study, which focused on the artistic aspect of the monument and included a detailed description of the church and its history, together with drawings and engravings, was a novelty for a time when art history was a nascent academic discipline (the first Chair of Art History in Vienna was established in 1852 and the

Figure 3.1 Church of Curtea de Argeş, 1515–17.

Photo: Author.

Commission for Historical Monuments in 1853). On the other side of the border in Romania, scholars overlooked the architecture of monuments because they did not perceive it as something significant.[11] In this context, Reissenberger's study, while not fulfilling its initial goal of supporting Habsburg regional policies, was used by the Romanian elite in their first-ever attempts to define a national identity based on the country's architectural heritage. The study was translated into Romanian in 1862 and published with a long introduction by the architect Dimitrie Berindei (or Berindeiu; 1831–1884), which corrected Reissenberger's negative view of Byzantium and tried to prove that Curtea de Argeş was not a unique monument, as the Austrian scholar had argued, but the expression of a Romanian artistic tradition.[12]

    Berindei's introduction constituted the very first attempt to write a historical narrative of Romanian art.[13] He started by describing a different Byzantium, one that led a

'civilizing mission' in the West because, according to him, the first Christian cathedrals in France, Germany or Italy were directly influenced by Byzantine art.[14] He was in effect using to his advantage studies – particularly from France – that argued for Byzantine influence on early Christian monuments in Europe, and in this way attempted to make Byzantium firmly part of European culture.[15]
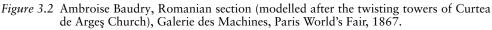
Once he had established that Byzantium, and consequently Curtea de Argeş, were part of the European art historical narrative, Berindei celebrated the monument as proof of the past existence of a rich architectural tradition in Romania. Key to his argument was the idea that Curtea de Argeş was merely the tip of the iceberg, as most of Romania's architectural heritage had been lost in the struggles to defend 'the religion and the civilization of Europe'.[16] The Christian theme of sacrifice for a noble cause would become a recurrent motif in Romanian historiography and was used in subsequent decades to explain the small size and number of monuments in Romania compared to Western Europe. As further proof of this allegedly lost heritage, Berindei pointed out that the triconch plan and general proportions of Curtea de Argeş could be found in several other Romanian monuments and thus could be considered defining elements of many other (now lost) monuments.[17]

The Byzantine Style in Romania: Restoration and Promotion of Historical Monuments

Reissenberger's study was used by the Romanian intellectual elite to promote Curtea de Argeş as a cultural symbol of the new state on the international stage, particularly at World's Fairs. Alexandru Odobescu (1834–1895), the main Romanian archaeologist of the time, ordered a translation of Reissenberger's study into French for the 1867 Exposition Universelle in Paris and displayed it like a national exhibit in the Romanian section, together with a scale model of the church (Figs. 3.2 and 3.3).[18] Curtea de Argeş was also used as a source of inspiration for Romanian pavilions at the Paris Expositions Universelles of 1889 and 1900. World's Fairs were important for fuelling the processes of national-identity creation. Perhaps even more significantly, they contributed to a certain way of looking at national heritage and identity as something that had to be carefully managed and displayed. Monuments were meant not to serve any practical purpose for the local communities they were part of but rather to forge a certain image of the nation for an international audience.

This representational role of historical monuments came fully to the fore in the first-ever campaign to restore architectural monuments in Romania. Reissenberger's criticism of Curtea de Argeş led the Romanian government to recommend the repainting of the church's interior in a Neo-Byzantine fashion (Fig. 3.4), and the renovation of the exterior.[19] Realized between 1875 and 1886, the works were overseen by André Lecomte du Noüy (1844–1914), a French architect who, following the directions of the Romanian Government, also partially reconstructed Trei Ierarhi (Three Hierarchs) Church in Iaşi, the former capital of Moldavia (1881–90), and demolished and then rebuilt the Metropolitan Church in Târgovişte (1885–95) (Fig. 3.5), the Church of St Demetrius in Craiova (1887–96) and the Princely Church of St Nicholas in Iaşi (1886–1904).[20] His 'restoration' processes effectively meant the design of new churches that manifestly displayed idealized Byzantine forms such as prominent cupolas, series of round arches, alternating layers of brick and stone, mosaics and bright colours. The historical monuments were therefore transformed into symbols of Byzantine art in Romania, hand-picked and presented almost in the fashion of exhibition

Figure 3.2 Ambroise Baudry, Romanian section (modelled after the twisting towers of Curtea de Argeş Church), Galerie des Machines, Paris World's Fair, 1867.

Source: Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Documentation, 'Boîte 48: Ambroise Baudry'. *Photo:* Author.

pavilions, isolated from their former urban and social fabric, disconnected from their role in the local communities, surrounded by new buildings and stripped of their original architecture. Despite its unsuitability for describing a diverse heritage, the 'ideal' Byzantine type continued to carry prestige into the twentieth century, when the most important cathedrals of Romania were also designed in an idealized 'Byzantine' style (see Chapter 4 by Timo Hagen).

Lecomte du Noüy was guided in his work by an idealized vision of what a Byzantine church *should* look like, namely as close as possible to the best-known models in the Western world: Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, St Mark's Basilica in Venice and churches in Ravenna.[21] Everything outside this narrow 'Byzantine' canon was generally discarded and Lecomte du Noüy criticized Romanian churches that did not look like 'typical' Byzantine monuments. He noted 'oriental negligence' in the construction techniques of Curtea de Argeş, as well as its 'narrow' interior.[22] He also criticized now revered monuments such as Trei Ierarhi Church and Voroneţ and Dragomirna Monasteries, the last being condemned for its 'decadent, heavy and pretentious style'.[23] A few decades earlier,

Figure 3.3 Ambroise Baudry, Romanian pavilion, Paris World's Fair, 1867.

Source: Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Documentation, 'Boîte 48: Ambroise Baudry'. *Photo:* Author.

but in the same vein, the French architect Abel Blouet contrasted Orthodox monuments in Greece (which he termed '*églises grecques*') with the far more prestigious '*temples helléniques*' or Classical monuments.[24] Similarly, the British traveller Robert Curzon characterized Orthodox monuments from the same region as 'small' or 'confusing'.[25]

   The category 'Byzantine' was, however, not only a quasi-colonial concept used to assert Western cultural superiority, but equally a powerful cultural concept for the Romanians. It was a way to have 'their' monuments recognized internationally and be considered 'European'; it also provided an important escape from uneasy discussions about periodization or art historical chronologies. Byzantine art, which today is recognized as the product of a long-lived empire with several artistic periods, was understood in nineteenth-century Europe in a very schematic way (as stated previously), without the nuances given by chronological periodization. But the lack of recognized

Figure 3.4 Émile Frédéric Nicolle, Charles Paul Renouard et al., frescoes inside the Church of
     Curtea de Argeş, 1881–86.

Photo: Author.

artistic periods was an advantage because in this way monuments far apart in time and
space could be unified as constituting a coherent corpus of buildings that belonged to
the Byzantine 'style' and could also be presented as 'Romanian'. Therefore, precisely
because it lacked periodization, the concept of Byzantine art was used as a binding
agent to unify monuments built in different political contexts from the fourteenth to
the eighteenth century, and present them as part of the same heritage of Romania (as
seen at World's Fairs or in the writings of Berindei).

Figure 3.5 Metropolitan Church, Târgovişte, sixteenth century, shown after the late nineteenth-century restoration.

Credit: Fusion-of-horizons. https://www.flickr.com/photos/fusion_of_horizons/40553971822/

A further reason why the Romanian Government not only condoned but even recommended to Lecomte du Noüy many of the modifications to the historical monuments was a lack of belief in the value of Romania's own architectural heritage. As a result of their Western education and close contact with the most important artistic centres of Europe, Romanian intellectuals internalized the need to compare Romania's monuments with Western architecture, believing that the former were inferior. When he held the first-ever course in art history at the University of Bucharest, Alexandru Odobescu barely mentioned Byzantine or Orthodox art, referring only twice to artworks from Romania in 350 pages of lectures, and allocating the rest of the space to Western art and art scholarship.[26] Odobescu's counterpart, the painter Paul Verussi (1847–1886), Professor of Art History at the School of Fine Arts in Iaşi, complained that 'we don't have any national art' and decried 'the lack of a glorious past of the Romanian people'.[27] While some criticized Romania's heritage, others were involved in the demolition of old buildings, such as the tallest construction in nineteenth-century Bucharest, the belltower of the former Colţei Monastery, which was taken down because 'it does not represent any national memory and it does not have any architectonic value'.[28] This led in practice to a long tradition of embellishing or modernizing monuments through restoration that extended into the twentieth century and is still felt today in the way Romanian society often neglects original aspects of the local heritage in favour of the adoption of things 'Western' or 'modern'.

Revolt Against the Restorations, and Establishment of the First Artistic Periods in Romanian Art History

The modification and demolition of Romania's architectural heritage was not unanimously accepted, and provided the justification for the definition of the first original artistic periods in Romanian art. In 1888, the year Colței Tower was pulled down, several writers and artists published protest letters and even founded a journal to oppose the demolition.[29] Among them was a group of architects who had recently returned from studies in Paris. They included some of the best-known names in the modern history of Romania: Ion Mincu (1852–1912), Grigore Cerchez (1850–1927), Ion Socolescu (1856–1924), George Sterian (1860–1936), Nicolae Gabrielescu (1854–1926) and Ştefan Ciocârlan (1856–1937). They soon focused their dissatisfaction on the restorations of Lecomte du Noüy, reproaching the architect for his 'carelessness' about the country's past and for 'erasing the memory of great figures'.[30] With a patriotism bordering on xenophobia, they accused him of being unable to work on things 'relevant to the history of the country' because he was a foreigner.[31]

Their criticism was characterized by a much more emotional engagement with monuments, seen as an integral part of their personal identity and as vivid traces of 'the glorious deeds of the past' and of 'the struggles of our parents'.[32] Writing about them was important not only to form an image for the country but also to serve as a guide for future generations and artistic developments.[33] As will be discussed in the next part of this chapter, these passionate criticisms and ideas about national identity paved the way for Gabrielescu and Sterian to develop new innovative artistic periods and concepts to define a chronology for Romanian art.[34] In this case, nationalism, while more often providing a basis for exclusionary ideas about ethnic identity, was used by the local Romanian architects for their emancipation and specifically to have a voice and work towards defining their identity. Indeed, the explosion of nationalist feelings between 1888 and 1890 provided liberation from the Western architectural canon and a start for the historiography of Romanian art.

But how could one define a 'Romanian architecture' based on common features and a coherent chronological development when much of the country's heritage was similar to, and shared a history with, the heritage of its neighbours? Gabrielescu and Sterian tackled these issues via innovative theories that aimed to integrate all artistic production from the territory of Romania into an ethno-national framework. Gabrielescu argued that monuments in Wallachia were similar to those in other Balkan regions because the artists involved shared the same ethnic background. He named them 'Macedo-Romanians from Pindus, descendants of the Roman colonists'.[35] Macedo-Romanians, also called Aromanians or Vlachs, are in fact an ethnic group native to the Balkan peninsula, mostly Northern Greece, Albania and Macedonia, whose dialect is also a Romance language like Romanian.[36] Their identity has remained different from the Romanian one up to the present day. Nevertheless, Gabrielescu argued for a common ethnic background with the Romanians; it was this shared ethnicity, he believed, that explained the building of similar monuments.

If, according to Gabrielescu, ethnic Romanians were spread out beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, so too was Romanian culture. He argued that the cultural patronage of Romanian voivodes at the Orthodox Monasteries on Mount Athos was proof of the cultural dominance of Romania in the region. He referred to a 'major role in the policy of the East' for sixteenth-century Romanian voivodes, even if his only evidence was a series of donations by the Romanian voivodes related to pan-Orthodox

relations across the Balkans.[37] Nevertheless, Gabrielescu's brief remark regarding the cultural relations between the Romanian Principalities and Mount Athos became a major theme for Romanian historians in the following decades.[38]

A further mandatory characteristic of any national art was a chronological history that implied changes and evolution – and was therefore based on artistic *periods*. To this end, Gabrielescu briefly sketched a set of artistic periods configured according to princely reign. His periodization is particularly significant because he outlined for the first time some main periods in Romanian art history and laid the chronological skeleton for subsequent writings which developed his arguments more fully. He started with a historical note about ancient Dacia, the Roman period, barbarian invasions and the Byzantine Empire, in order to explain the lack of significant material remains from before the fourteenth century, but also as an argument that the population on these lands survived from ancient times.

He then identified common architectural features of monuments built during the reign of specific princes in both Romanian Principalities. In Moldavia, Gabrielescu defined the period of Stephen the Great (ruled 1457–1504) as characterized by churches with a common triconch plan, similar proportions and exterior polychrome decoration.[39] He noted the other significant artistic period in Moldavia as that of Vasile Lupu (ruled 1634–53), whose monuments, chiefly Trei Ierarhi, were defined by decorations and system of arches that were 'rather Arab and Persian' and were introduced via Russia.[40] In Wallachia, Gabrielescu identified the 'Byzantine period' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, followed by the reign of Matei Basarab (1632–54) 'who continued the Greco-Roman architecture of the thirteenth century', the latter being considered a time when the 'Romanian element' flourished.[41] Finally, he highlighted the period of 'Venetian influences' in Wallachia, from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century, characterized by original decorative motifs, as seen not only in architecture but also in religious objects and fabrics.[42]

His brief survey was in fact a *tour de force* that defined in a few pages a basic periodization framework for the entire history of Romanian art, from antiquity to early modern times. He defined for the first time several unique artistic periods in Romanian architecture (and pre-modern art more generally), outlining their most significant architectural characteristics and representative monuments. Gabrielescu saw these monuments as 'Romanian' and used the idea of foreign 'influence' to consolidate the notion of national art. Indeed, 'influence' assumes the existence of at least two clearly defined entities and therefore the existence of a Romanian artistic *core* that was moulded and changed but did not disappear over the centuries.

The Rise of the Brâncovenesc Period and the Emergence of the 'Romanian' Style

The most influential artistic period defined by Gabrielescu was that of 'Venetian influences'. This covered the monuments built in Wallachia during and shortly after the rule of Constantin Brâncoveanu. Its spectacular heritage, consisting of monuments with rich stone carvings, exterior paintings and valuable frescoes (highlights include Hurezi Monastery, Mogoşoaia Palace and the former Văcăreşti Monastery), was in subsequent decades promoted as the quintessential 'Romanian' heritage of the past, and became known as the Brâncovenesc style.[43]

The period signalled the first break with the historical narrative, marking an important step for Romanian art historiography as a self-standing discipline with the potential

to inform ideas about national identity. This is because, at the time of Gabrielescu's treatise, the reign of Brâncoveanu was generally unappreciated by historians. It was seen as politically unremarkable and was considered to have ushered in a period of foreign princes directly appointed by the Ottoman Empire. Alexandru Odobescu, for example, considered Brâncoveanu 'a pale and wobbly figure who tragically foresaw the humiliation that for a century would choke the poor Romanian people'.[44] For Gabrielescu, however, the period was highly significant because of its artistic achievements.

One of the best illustrations of the difference in attitude between scholars who cherished the Brâncovenesc period and those who generally regarded it as lacking in value was the brief debate around the restoration of the small Stavropoleos Church in Bucharest (Fig. 3.6). The monument was built in 1724, so after Brâncoveanu's reign, but considered nevertheless to be one of the most representative examples of Brâncovenesc art. A heated debate took place in 1904 between the architect Ion Mincu and Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaş (1872–1952), the first Romanian with a doctorate in art history (awarded in Munich in 1896) and long-time director of the Museum of National Art in Bucharest (see Shona Kallestrup's chapter in this book).

Tzigara-Samurcaş contended that Stavropoleos lacked historical and artistic value because of its recent construction date, little-known founder and small dimensions, concluding that it was 'far from being representative of the true, pure Byzantine style'.[45] Mincu responded with a defence not only of the church but also of an entire new direction for Romanian art that he saw in need of emancipation from the label 'Byzantine'. He noted:

> [B]ecause it is not made in 'pure Byzantine style', the church represents for us a very precious 'archetype'. From the pure Byzantine style, evolved what I call the

Figure 3.6 Stavropoleos Church, Bucharest, 1724, as restored by Ion Mincu in 1904–7.

Credit: Fusion-of-horizons. https://www.flickr.com/photos/fusion_of_horizons/30097770888

'Romanian style'. . . . The monument is a guiding and inspirational source for our future generations of artists.[46]

Mincu's words can be read as a birth certificate for the idea of Romanian art, a notion liberated from the Western concept of 'Byzantine' and based on new and original artistic periods.

Sterian further developed the characteristics of the Brâncovenesc period. He wrote an extensive study of various decorative motifs and architectural fragments from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Wallachian monuments and compared them to those seen in much older monuments in Venice. He compared the tenth-century St Mark's Basilica to the fourteenth-century Princely Church in Curtea de Argeş, judging both to be in the 'pure Byzantine style'.[47] He believed that the thirteenth-century Fondaco dei Turchi Palace on the Grand Canal (Fig. 3.7) and the former monastery of Curtea de Argeş (Fig. 3.8) both represented the Arab influences on Byzantine art. He compared the Doge's Palace to the Moldavian churches founded by Stephen the Great as proof of the influence of the Gothic style. He also compared sculpted Venetian capitals with examples from Wallachian monasteries, and even argued for similarities between the garments worn by the princely boyars and those of the doges and other figures in the paintings of Giovanni Bellini.[48] The reference to garments by both Sterian and Gabrielescu in their discussions of Brâncovenesc architecture was not uncommon in Europe at the time and reflected the influential argument of Gottfried Semper (1803–1879) that architecture had been born from the design of the textiles that clad prehistoric shelters, just as architecture is the 'dressing' for a building (his so-called *Bekleidungsprinzip*).[49]

Figure 3.7 Fondaco dei Turchi, Venice, thirteenth century.
Credit: Tony Hisgett. https://www.flickr.com/photos/hisgett/7232517578/

Figure 3.8 Church of Curtea de Argeş, 1515–17: detail of the southern façade.
Photo: Author.

The significance of Sterian's in-depth comparison between the architectural monuments of Romania and Venice extended beyond the realm of the visual arts. Romania and Venice were presented as two regions whose similar artistic heritage could be explained by their common Latin ethnic background. Sterian noted that both 'Romanian and Venetian architecture emerged from their common Latin roots and kept a predominant Byzantine character throughout their development'.[50] The connection

with Venice, and the definition of the Brâncovenesc style, indicated that the artistic heritage of Romania was not just the result of historical developments (and therefore merely subordinate to historical studies) but could itself shed light on bigger historical and cultural debates, such as the idea of the Latin origins of the Romanian people.

Sterian further exploited the Venetian connection by publishing drawings of Venetian trefoil arches, the most prominent architectural feature common to both Romanian and Venetian monuments.[51] Such arches, as well as open balconies and rich sculpted façades likewise similar to those seen in Venice, featured prominently in several designs by the architect Ion Socolescu, Director of both the first School of Architecture in Bucharest and of the first architectural journal in Romania – for example, the Ionescu-Gion House in Bucharest (1889) and the Museum of Folk Art (former City Hall) in Constanța (1895).[52] All these architectural motifs were also emphatically used by another leading Romanian architect, Ion Mincu, whose three contemporary buildings in Bucharest – the Lahovari House (1886), Central School for Girls (1890) (Fig. 3.9) and Bufetul Restaurant (1892) – are the main reason why he is considered the creator of the modern Neo-Romanian architectural style.[53] Indeed, all the motifs used by Mincu and inspired by Brâncovenesc (and Venetian) architecture, such as trefoil arches, coloured ceramics and a first-floor balcony, would become archetypes for the Neo-Romanian style in subsequent decades.

The emphasis placed on particular artistic periods as highly significant for national identity was not of course a phenomenon confined to Romania. Moreover, in late nineteenth-century Europe, there were many different attempts to revive historical periods characterized by rich, flourishing architecture. Examples include nineteenth-century Ottoman Revival architecture;[54] the use of Neo-Baroque motifs to express Austrian and later Czech identity;[55] the use of French Rococo motifs by Art Nouveau

Figure 3.9 Ion Mincu, Central School for Girls, Bucharest, 1890.
Credit: cdnh. https://www.flickr.com/photos/claudiunh/6198232717

artists in France who saw it as 'their' national heritage;[56] and Queen Anne Revival architecture in England.[57] Whether coincidence or the result of still little-understood circulations of ideas in the early modern period, some of the styles on which these revivals were based – such as the English Queen Anne and the Central European Baroque – flourished around 1700 and thus were roughly contemporary with the Brâncovenesc style. Therefore, the notion of a 'national style' as representative of the ethnic identity of a whole country, and the emphasis placed on certain artistic periods as markers of unique national identities, were phenomena present throughout nineteenth-century Europe, from the British Isles to the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

Art history in Romania emerged via a patchwork of short studies, reactions, intellectual exchanges and artistic practices. The first writings, restorations and promotion of architectural monuments supported an idealized view of what Romanian heritage should be, namely that it should conform to Western ideas about Byzantine architecture. But, as the second part of this chapter has indicated, the last decade of the nineteenth century brought new writings and works that attempted to overcome the label 'Byzantine' and identify unique periods and styles underpinning a chronological narrative for Romanian art. These key late nineteenth-century writings defined a number of major new periods and styles connected to the artistic patronage of native rulers. Above all, they centred on the Brâncovenesc period, whose heritage also become the major source of inspiration for the Neo-Romanian architectural style.

Concepts such as the Brâncovenesc or Stephen the Great periods became core to any narrative about Romanian heritage over the next decades. They were employed in writings about 'national' art that were in turn used to justify ethnic-based nationalism and ideas about ethnic purity. At the same time, the newly emerged artistic periods were a way to identify a common identity for a diverse heritage, give a voice to Romanian artists and create the framework for new, original architectural designs. Not least, the Brâncovenesc period became the spearhead of Romanian art history's efforts to prove its autonomy as a discipline, beyond the historical narrative but with the potential to bring new arguments about the genesis and identity of the Romanians.

This dual nature of nationalism, at once underpinning exclusionary narratives and having an emancipatory potential for states or communities, is at the core of many debates today. The appeal of nationalism, often seen as a comforting retreat in the face of advancing globalization and of technology-driven societies, demonstrates that many, if not most, still feel more at ease among ideas about 'the nation'. This brief history of how some key national art historical periods and concepts emerged in late nineteenth-century Romania gives contextual background to the enduring popularity of national art historical narratives in the country and the persistence of nationalism more broadly.

Beyond the national framework, the art historiography in Romania and many other countries finds itself with limited conceptual tools. For obvious political and economic reasons, the idea that Romania's architectural heritage should somehow be analysed as part of a grand 'European' narrative is largely uncontested. Indeed, Romanian art historiography (as well as historical studies in general) still oscillates between the European and the national framework. A more innovative and appropriate framework that identifies relations and similarities between the artistic production of Romania and that of other countries is yet to be thoroughly defined. Similarly, the complex network

of transregional artistic exchange, and the overlapping, entangled or opposing nature of monuments and artists' careers in the wider Orthodox and Islamic worlds, are yet to form the basis of grand art historical narratives.

Notes

1 See, for example, Țoca, *Art Historical Discourse*. The first survey works are Iorga and Balș, *Histoire de l'art roumain*; Oprescu, *L'Art roumain*; Oprescu, *Pictura românească*; Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale*.
2 Karge, 'Die Entfaltung'; Karge, 'Projecting the Future'.
3 Piotrowski used the term 'horizontal history' to signal his attempt at destabilizing geographical hierarchies in the case of European avant-garde art. See Piotrowski, 'Toward a Horizontal History', 49–58.
4 See Minea, 'The Episcopal Church'.
5 Reissenberger, 'Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche bei Kurtea d'Argyisch'. More details in Minea, 'The Monastery'.
6 Hartmuth, 'Vienna', 109; Rampley, *The Vienna School*, 170–71.
7 Reissenberger, 'Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche bei Kurtea d'Argyisch', 177–81.
8 Ibid.
9 Fergusson, *The Illustrated Handbook*; Lübke, *Geschichte*; Kugler, *Geschichte*.
10 On the negative image of Byzantine art and culture in Central Europe, see also Chapters 2 and 4 in this volume. See also Kunińska, 'On the Borderline', 20–23.
11 See Hajdu, 'În Căutarea patrimoniului'.
12 Berindei, 'Răpide ochire'.
13 Minea, 'Foreign and Local Entanglements', 296.
14 Berindei, 'Răpide ochire', 831–32.
15 An early article popularizing the Byzantine influences in Romanesque architecture was Vitet, 'L'église de Saint-Cunibert'. In the first list of historical monuments in France, published in 1836, the initial section comprised over 30 monuments classified as in 'Byzantine or Romanesque style': Laborde, *Monuments of France*. More details in J. B. Bullen, *Byzantium*, 56–58.
16 Berindei, 'Răpide ochire', 823.
17 Ibid., 843.
18 Reissenberger, *L'église*. For more details, see Popescu, *Le Style National Roumain*, 40–43.
19 Minea, 'The Monastery', 197.
20 Popescu, 'André Lecomte du Nouÿ'; Moldovan, 'Arhitectura bisericii lui Neagoe Basarab'.
21 Equally in France, England or Germany, discussions about Byzantium related mostly to these two monuments. See Nayrolles, *L'invention de l'art roman*, 249, 297; Hajdu, 'The Search', 402.
22 Lecomte du Noüy, 'Letter'.
23 Lecomte du Noüy, 'Sketchbook'.
24 Magouliotis, 'French Architects', 1034.
25 Karydis, 'Discovering the Byzantine Art of Building', 180.
26 Odobescu, *Cursu de archeologia*; republished in Odobescu, *Opere*.
27 Verussi, 'Despre arta națională', 148, 151. See also a brief note in Popescu, 'Digging Out the Past', 202–3.
28 Opinion of the institution responsible for the administration of hospitals in Bucharest (Eforia Spitalelor Civice): Samurcaș, 'Turnul', 96.
29 Avramescu, 'Footnote 95', 173.
30 Gabrielescu, *Memoriu*, 49, 57.
31 Gabrielescu, *Privire generală asupra monumentelor naționale*, 19; Ciocârlan, 'Restaurarile', 25.
32 Ciocârlan, 'Clădirile vechi', 13.
33 Ibid., 5.
34 Gabrielescu, *Privire generală*; Sterian, *Despre restaurarea monumentelor istorice*, 4–6. Two of the only instances where their writings are analysed are in the recent studies: Popescu, 'Digging Out the Past', 203–5; Hajdu, 'The Search'.

35 Gabrielescu, *Privire generală*, 13.
36 See Sorescu, 'Inventing a Prosthetic Bourgeoisie'.
37 Gabrielescu, *Privire generală*, 13.
38 See Iorga, *Portretele domnilor noștri*; Iorga, 'Două opere'.
39 Gabrielescu, *Privire generală*, 14–15.
40 Ibid., 15–16.
41 Ibid., 16.
42 Ibid., 17.
43 The first mention of the term 'Brâncovenesc style' is made in Drăghiceanu, 'Curțile domnești Brâncovenești', 101, 110. See also Lepădatu, 'Mănăstirea Hurezii', 60, 63, 69, 70. The prolific historian Nicolae Iorga also mentions the 'Brâncovenesc period' (*epoca brâncovenească*) in his early writings: Iorga, *Viața și domnia lui Constantin-Vodă Brîncoveanu*, 50, 78, 169.
44 Odobescu, 'Ateneul', 336.
45 Samurcaș, 'Stavropoleos', 260–61.
46 Mincu, 'Cronică Artistică', 282–84.
47 The Princely or Courtly Church of Curtea de Argeș (Biserica Domnească din Curtea de Argeș) is a Greek-cross plan church finished in 1352, not to be confused with the sixteenth-century former monastery in the same town that was the focus of most attention in the nineteenth century (see the first section of this chapter).
48 Sterian, *Despre restaurarea*, 7–10. See also Sterian, 'Cele mai însemnate proporțiuni de colône și forme de arcuri a loggielor', 106–8.
49 Houze, 'The Textile as Structural Framework', 295; Prokopovych, 'Semperian Trajectories', 103–4.
50 Sterian, *Despre restaurarea*, 6–7.
51 Sterian, 'Cele mai însemnate'.
52 Popescu, *Le Style National Roumain*, 64–68.
53 Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania*, 76; Popescu, *Le Style National Roumain*, 51–54.
54 Ersoy, *Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary*, 151–52. See also Ersoy, 'Architecture and the Search for Ottoman Origins', 117–40.
55 Rampley, *The Vienna School*, 96–108, esp. 106–7.
56 Silverman, *Art Nouveau,* 142–59; Greenhalgh, 'Alternative Histories', 41.
57 Muthesius, 'Periodisation According to Authenticity', 281–82.

Bibliography

Avramescu, Tiberiu. 'Footnote 95' (footnote written by Avramescu). In *Bucureștii de altădată, 1885–1888*, edited by Constantin Bacalbașa, vol. 3, 173. Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014.

Berindeiu, Dimitrie. 'Răpide ochire asupra Architecturei Bizantine'. *Revista Română pentru sciințe, littere și arte* 2 (1862): 822–45.

Bullen, J. B. *Byzantium Rediscovered*. London: Phaidon Press, 2003.

Ciocârlan, Ștefan. 'Clădirile vechi'. *Analele arhitecturei*, no. 1 (1890): 13–15.

Ciocârlan, Ștefan. 'Restaurările'. *Analele arhitecturei,* no. 2 (February 1890): 25.

Drăghiceanu, Virgil. 'Curțile domnești Brâncovenești: 1. Doicești'. *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*, July–September 1909: 100–10.

Ersoy, Ahmet. 'Architecture and the Search for Ottoman Origins in the Tanzimat Period'. *Muqarnas* 24 (2007): 117–40. https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993_02401008.

Ersoy, Ahmet A. *Architecture and the Late Ottoman Historical Imaginary: Reconfiguring the Architectural Past in a Modernizing Empire*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.

Fergusson, James. *The Illustrated Handbook of Architecture: Being a Concise and Popular Account of the Different Styles of Architecture Prevailing in All Ages and Countries*. London: John Murray, 1855.

Gabrielescu, Nicolae. *Privire generală asupra monumentelor naționale și mijlocul de a împiedeca distrugerea lor*. Iași: Tipografia Națională, 1889.

Gabrielescu, Nicolae. *Memoriu pentru luminarea publicului in afacerea restaurărilor de monumente istorice*. Iași: Petru C. Popovici, 1890.

Greenhalgh, Paul. 'Alternative Histories'. In *Art Nouveau 1890–1914*, edited by Paul Greenhalgh, 36–53. London: V&A Publications, 2000.

Hajdu, Ada. 'În Căutarea patrimoniului: Excursiile patriotice şi arhitectura naţională românească în secolul al xix-lea'. In *Călători şi călătorii: A privi, a descoperi*, edited by Bogdan Cristina and Marin Barutcieff Silvia, vol. 1, 149–68. Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, 2016.

Hajdu, Ada. 'The Search for National Architectural Styles in Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to World War I'. In *Entangled Histories of the Balkans: Concepts, Approaches, and (Self-)Representations*, vol. 4, edited by Roumen Daskalov et al., 394–439. Leiden: Brill, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004337824.

Hartmuth, Maximilian. 'Vienna and the Art Historical "Discovery" of the Balkans'. In *Orientalismen in Ostmitteleuropa: Diskurse, Akteure und Disziplinen vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, edited by Robert Born and Sarah Lemmen, 105–18. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014. https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839426975.

Houze, Rebecca. 'The Textile as Structural Framework: Gottfried Semper's *Bekleidungsprinzip* and the Case of Vienna 1900'. *TEXTILE* 4, no. 3 (1 November 2006): 292–311. https://doi.org/10.2752/147597506778691486.

Iorga, Nicolae. *Viaţa şi domnia lui Constantin-Vodă Brîncoveanu*. Vălenii de Munte: Atelierele de Tipografie şi Legătorie de cărţi 'Neamul Românesc', 1914.

Iorga, Nicolae. *Portretele domnilor noştri la Muntele Athos*. Bucharest: Cultural Naţională, 1928.

Iorga, Nicolae. 'Două opere de arta româneşti din secolui al XVI-lea la Muntele Athos'. *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*, no. 26 (1933): 27–31.

Iorga, Nicolae, and Gheorghe Balş. *Histoire de l'art roumain ancien*. Paris: Boccard, 1922.

Kallestrup, Shona. *Art and Design in Romania 1866–1927: Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression*. Boulder, CO: Eastern European Monographs/Columbia University Press, 2006.

Karge, Henrik. 'Die Entfaltung der wissenschaftlichen Kunstgeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert: Biografische und konzeptgeschichtliche Ansätze der Erforschung'. *Kunstgeschichte*, no. 9 (2009). https://www.kunstgeschichte-ejournal.net/17/.

Karge, Henrik. 'Projecting the Future in German Art Historiography of the Nineteenth Century: Franz Kugler, Karl Schnaase, and Gottfried Semper'. *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 9 (2013): 1–26.

Karydis, Nikolaos. 'Discovering the Byzantine Art of Building: Lectures at the RIBA, the Royal Academy and the London Architectural Society, 1843–58'. *Architectural History* 63 (2020): 171–90.

Kugler, Franz. *Geschichte der Baukunst*. 5 vols. Stuttgart: Ebner & Seubert, 1856–73.

Kunińska, Magdalena. 'On the Borderline. Marian Sokołowski's Attitude toward Byzantine and Ruthenian Art'. In *From Ausgleich to the Holocaust: Ukrainian and Jewish Artists of Lemberg/Lwów/Lviv*, edited by Sergey R. Kravtsov, Ilia Rodov, and Małgorzata Stolarska-Fronia, 13–32. Rostock: Grünberg, 2019.

Laborde, Alexandre de. *Monuments of France*. Paris: P. Didot l'aîné, 1836.

Lecomte du Noüy, André. 'Letter to Viollet-le-Duc'. Viollet-le-Duc Fonds, Box Roumanie, no. 36, 2320–30, Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris, 9 March 1876, 99–100.

Lecomte du Noüy, André. 'Sketchbook', AD 1 308, 309, Cabinetul de Stampe, Biblioteca Academiei Române, Bucharest, n.d.

Lepădatu, Alexandru. 'Mănăstirea Hurezii: Note istorice'. *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*, April–June 1908: 53–72.

Lethaby, William, and Harold Swainson. *The Church of Sancta Sophia, Constantinople: A Study of Byzantine Building*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1894.

Lübke, Wilhelm. *Geschichte der Architektur von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*. Leipzig: Emil Graul, 1855. https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.29616.

Magouliotis, Nikos. 'French Architects and "Églises Grecques": The Discovery of Byzantine Architecture in Greece, 1820s – 1840s'. *The Journal of Architecture* 25, no. 8 (2020): 1028–54.

Mincu, Ion. 'Cronică Artistică – Stavropoleos (Răspuns d-Lui Tzigara-Samurcaş)'. *Epoca*, no. 83, 25 March 1904. In *Arhitectul Ion Mincu*, by Mihail Caffé, 282–84. Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1960.

Minea, Cosmin. 'The Monastery of Curtea de Argeş and Romanian Architectural Heritage in the Late 19th Century'. *Studies in History and Theory of Architecture*, no. 4 (2016): 181–201. https://sita.uauim.ro/4/a/48/.

Minea, Cosmin. 'Foreign and Local Entanglements in the Creation of Romanian Architectural Heritage in the Late 19th Century'. In *Art and Politics in the Modern Period*, edited by Dragan Damjanović, Lovorka Magaš Bilandžić, Željka Miklošević, and Jeremy F. Walton, 293–302. Zagreb: University of Zagreb, FF-press, 2019.

Minea, Cosmin. 'The Episcopal Church of the former Monastery of Curtea de Argeş'. *Mapping Eastern Europe*, 13 July 2021. https://mappingeasterneurope.princeton.edu/item/the-episcopal-church-of-the-former-monastery-of-cu.html.

Moldovan, Horia. 'Arhitectura bisericii lui Neagoe Basarab'. In *Mărturii: Frescele Mănăstirii Argeşului*, edited by Emanuela Cernea and Lucreţia Pătrăşcanu, 18–38. Bucharest: MNAR, 2013.

Muthesius, Stefan. 'Periodisation According to Authenticity, or Creating Vigorous Borderlines in Nineteenth-Century Architectural History'. *National Identities* 8, no. 3 (2006): 277–86.

Nayrolles, Jean. *L'invention de l'art roman à l'époque moderne (XVIIIe – XIXe siècles)*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005.

Odobescu, Alexandru. *Cursu de archeologia: Istoria archeologiei*. Bucharest: Socecu, 1877.

Odobescu, Alexandru. 'Ateneul Român şi clădirile antice cu dom circular' [1888]. In *Opere complete*, vol. 3, 336. Bucharest: Minerva, 1908.

Odobescu, Alexandru. *Opere complete: Istoria arheologiei*, vol. 4. Bucharest: Minerva, 1919.

Oprescu, George. *L'Art roumain de 1800 à nos jours*. Malmö: John Kroon, 1935.

Oprescu, George. *Pictura românească în secolul al XIX-lea*. Bucharest: Fundaţia pentru literatură şi artă 'Regele Carol II', 1937.

Piotrowski, Piotr. 'Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde'. In *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, edited by Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Ørum, and Hubert van den Berg, 49–58. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110217728.2.49.

Popescu, Carmen. 'André Lecomte du Nouÿ (1844–1914) et la restauration des monuments historiques en Roumanie'. *Bulletin de La Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français: Année 1998* (1999): 287–308.

Popescu, Carmen. *Le Style National Roumain: Construire une nation à travers l'architecture, 1881–1945*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004.

Popescu, Carmen. 'Digging Out the Past to Build Up the Future: Romanian Architecture in the Balkan Context 1859–1906'. In *Manufacturing Middle Ages: Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, edited by Gábor Klaniczay and Patrick J. Geary, 189–216. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Prokopovych, Markian. 'Semperian Trajectories: Architectural Development of Design Museums'. In *Liberalism, Nationalism and Design Reform in the Habsburg Empire: Museums of Design, Industry and the Applied Arts*, edited by Matthew Rampley, Markian Prokopovych, and Nóra Veszprémi, 91–124. New York: Routledge, 2020.

Rampley, Matthew. *The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship, 1847–1918*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013.

Reissenberger, Ludwig. 'Die bischöfliche Klosterkirche bei Kurtea d'Argyisch in der Walachei'. *Jahrbuch der Kaiserl. Königl. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale*, no. IV (1860): 175–224.

Reissenberger, Ludwig. *L'église du Monastère Épiscopal de Kurtea d'Argis en Valachie*. Vienna: Charles Gerold Fils, 1867.

Silverman, Debora L. *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992.

Sorescu, Andrei Dan. 'Inventing a Prosthetic Bourgeoisie: Romania and the Aromanians, 1848–1906'. *Nationalities Papers* (2021): 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2021.11.

Sterian, George. *Despre restaurarea monumentelor istorice in strainatate şi in Romania*. Iaşi: H. Goldner, 1889.

Sterian, George. 'Cele mai însemnate proporţiuni de colóne şi forme de arcuri a loggielor din palaturile Veneţiane din secolul XIII până la secolul XVI'. *Analele Arhitecturei*, no. 5 (1890): 106–8.

Ţoca, Vlad. *Art Historical Discourse in Romania, 1919–1947*. Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2011.

Tzigara-Samurcaş, Alexandru. 'Stavropoleos – Muzeu Naţional'. *Epoca*, 17 November (1903). In *Scrieri Despre Arta Românească*, 260–61. Bucharest: Meridiane, 1987.

Tzigara-Samurcaş, Alexandru. 'Turnul şi biserica Colţea'. In *Scrieri despre arta românească*, 95–101. Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1987.

Vătăşianu, Virgil. *Istoria artei feudale în Ţările Române*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1959.

Verussi, Petru. 'Despre arta naţională'. *Analele Arhiteturei*, no. 8 (1891): 144–52. First published in *Convorbiri literare*. Iaşi: Tipografia Naţională, 1875.

Vitet, Ludovic. 'L'église de Saint-Cunibert à Cologne: Mai 1830'. In *Études sur les Beaux-Arts: Essais d'archéologie et fragments littéraires*, vol. 2, 26–35. Paris: Comptoir des Imprimeurs-Unis, 1846.