

THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF THE CITY OF ROUSSE IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE LIBERATION AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR – A BENCHMARK IN THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING

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Abstract. In this paper the influence of the European architectural and engineering styles on the construction of some typical buildings of the city of Rousse is presented. In the period after the liberation eclectic style took place in the architecture of the town. First, we provide some retrospectives of the architectural development of Rousse. Then we show two typical examples – the building of the first Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Burov’s bank. The common feature of these buildings is that the facades to the streets were saturated with details that symbolized the importance and commercial prosperity of the company that managed the building. These two buildings have an impact on the appearance of the city of Rousse in the period between the Liberation and the Second World War.

Keywords: commercial building construction in Rousse, eclectic style, decoration, first Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce, Burov’s bank.

1. A BRIEF HISTORICAL-ARCHITECTURAL RETROSPECTIVE FOR THE PERIOD 1878–1944

From 1880 to 1893, the dominant styles in the architecture of Rousse were “Neoclassicism” and “Neo-Renaissance”. The facades are symmetrical or asymmetrical, one-story or two-story, with two edges or one middle risalite and a definite emphasis on the entrance, Figs 1 and 2. The ground floor is rusticated, and the corners of the facade and rhizalites are also emphasized with rustication. The parterre is opened by an arcade, by showcases or windows, an order arcade, an arcade on pilasters, on parts of a wall. There are arches of

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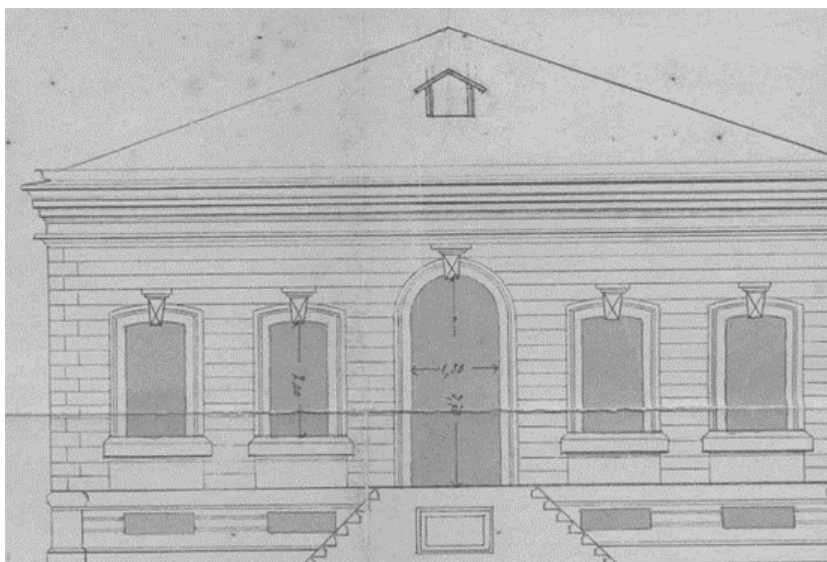


Fig. 1. Facade of a Rousse house built in the period 1880–1893, [1]

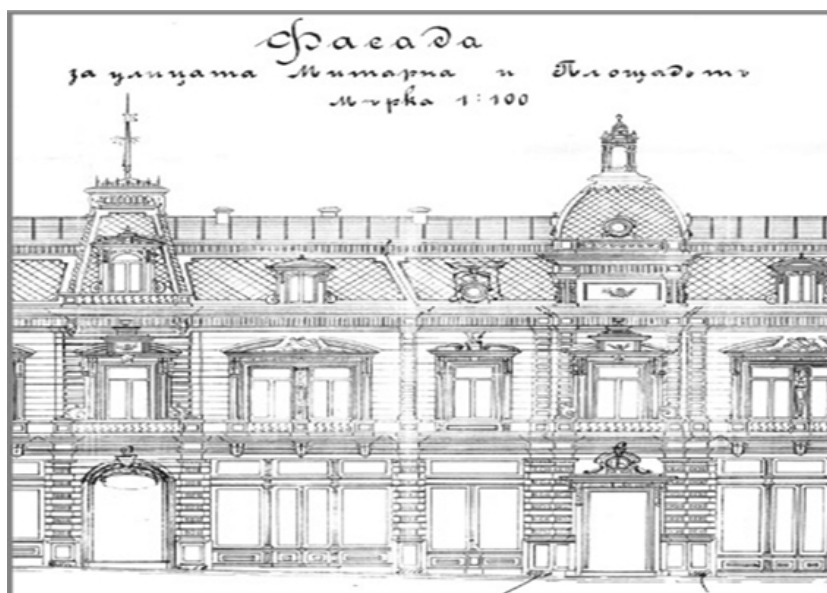


Fig. 2. Rouse, Martin's House, Plan of architect Nikgohos Bedrosyan, [2]

various shapes: semi-circular, segmental, elliptical, complex, combined or flat and always highlighted with a stone. Vertically, the facades are dissected by pilasters, in rare cases they do not correspond to the transverse walls of the distribution. These pilasters – simple, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, composite, single or double, fluted or smooth, or combined and decorated with plastic ornaments (garlands, shells, stone carving) usually rusticated in the parterre, become more complicated in the floor. Windows on the first floor are usually rectangular, vertical, but for public buildings they are also vaulted. They are single, double or triple, with a profiled stone frame or “aedicula” type, with pilasters or half-columns, crowned with a horizontal cornice on consoles or pediments of all types: semicircular, segmental, triangular, interrupted, spiral, rocker. The facades also have a horizontal division. A molded mezzanine cornice, often complemented by the common window row, divides the two-story facade. The greatest attention has been paid to the architectural layout of the main cornice. It is built of stone, profiled, complemented from below by dentils, consoles or modillions combining them. Above the main cornice, attics, balustrades, pediments are used.

The roof has its aesthetic impact. The most common roofs are mansard roofs, covered with flake or sheet metal, they create the finish of the voluminous architectural construction. The tin moldings are also decorated. The silhouette of the buildings, which is animated by towers, turrets and gables, is diversified by the skylights. They are formed with a spiral frame, arched or not, surmounted by segments or triangular pediments. This silhouette is also complemented by the decorative spires, iron bars along the ridge and sculptural decoration.

In the architectural decoration of a large part of the buildings, there is also sculpture – reliefs of seated figures next to vases on the tympanums, busts, medallions, sculptural or relief compositions of cupid figurines, standing figures in antique or modern clothing, placed in niches or freely on a cornice or on the Attica, bas-reliefs of symbols. Thus, in the architecture of Rouse in the style of “neoclassicism” and later with eclectic features, a unity between architecture and sculpture was realized.

The construction of the buildings is massive, Fig. 3. The load-bearing elements are the walls, built of bricks, reinforced with stone in the foundations and the basement. Almost all buildings have winter houses. The warehouses of the Rouse merchants were located there. The clear height of the basement is 2.70–3.00 m, for the ground floor with shops – 4.50–5.00 m, on the first floor – 3.50–4.00 m. The outer walls of the basement are 75 cm thick, on the ground floor – 60 cm, on the first floor – 45 cm. The floor construction is massive

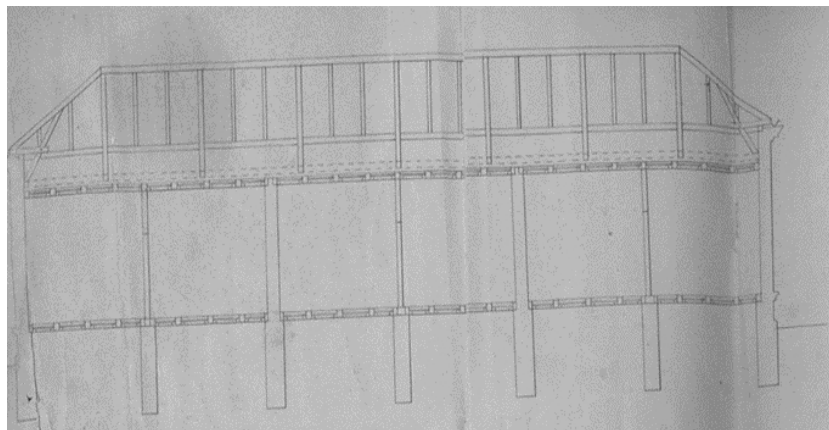


Fig. 3. Plan-diagram of the building of the Rouse Metropolia, [3]

for the ground floor and the first floor – a Prussian vault on concrete and reinforced concrete beams. The bearing distance is overcome either with load-bearing walls or with prefabricated cast iron columns. The thickness of the floor construction between the ground floor and the first floor varies around 35 cm. The under-roof space and that of the towers are usually unused and there are no partition walls. The attic floor is of joists, the roof structure is wooden, and the roof is mansard covered with sheet metal or plain, covered with tiles and in some cases with sheet metal. The yard space is well decided only for the free-standing buildings. Usually, all kinds of buildings are built in the plots, which fill the free yard area.

After 1893, the Rouse municipality adopted and approved regulations for the construction of private buildings on the central city streets, and more precisely for their facades. According to this regulation, the facades of all buildings on the main and secondary streets must "...be richly decorated with plastic stone decoration" [4]. On February 11, 1894, the Municipal Council adopted a new regulation, according to which "... taking into account the fact that the city of Rouse is one of the first-rate cities in the principality, DECIDED: In the future, no one should be allowed to build single-story buildings in the streets "Mitnicheska", "Alexandrovska", "Tutrakansko shose" and "Knyazheska", [5]. At that time, two companies supplied the builders with all kinds of stone decorative plastics and elements characteristic of the eclecticism of Western Europe – Carlo Francesconi and Georgi Petrescu, [6]. Later, the company "P. Gavalas – L. Liritis and Sije, the first sculpture studio for marble products and busts" arises, which initially made delivery of parts from sev-

eral Viennese factories and from the factory of Georgi Petrescu in Bucharest. From 1897 it also started its own production activity, [6]. From then until the end of the First World War, the norms and concepts characteristic of the European (Viennese) neo-baroque, rococo and eclecticism were applied in the architecture of the city of Rousse. The parks and gardens that took shape during this period were also baroque. The strongest influence in the architecture of Rousse at the end of the 19th century was the Viennese school and the “modern” (Secession) style, which is mainly manifested in the ornament of unfolded spirals, rosettes, plant branches and motifs of the picturesque world. The characteristic silhouette of the building is the mansard roof with a tower with trapezoidal walls, but there are also pointed towers, original dome-shaped coverings, simple roofs, attics.

The two-story and one-story residential buildings have facades decorated with stone, plaster or stucco ornaments and sculptures, balconies and stairs with stone or iron openwork railings (the metal decorative elements were mostly made in the Wagner factory in Vienna). An example of a rambling house with a massive stone staircase in front of the main entrance is the Simeon house, built in 1895 by architect Nikgohos Bedrosyan, today the seat of the Catholic Diocese of Nikopol.

The houses on Alexandrovska street are characteristic with their eclectic image and stone-plastic facade decoration. The roofs of the buildings are of galvanized zinc or copper sheet, finished with turrets, weathervanes, lightning rods and stone parapets. Almost every building has an attic. The pediments and windows of the mansard floors are decorated with stone sculptures (depicting coats of arms or other symbols), laurel wreaths, mascarons and statues with corresponding symbolic meaning.

The stone and plaster statues, mascarons, busts and sculptures stuck to the facades of the buildings have a certain symbolic meaning depending on the owners and the purpose of the respective building. For example, in the case of residential and commercial objects, statues, busts and mascarons of Mercury, Venus and muses were placed on the facade, between the windows and the roof, symbolizing trade and financial success, [6].

Usually, the decoration of the interior consists of mural or plaster ornaments. It was also applied in the spaces of the passage and also in the stairwell. The formal staircase is made of stone, mosaic or is made of wood. The railing is made of cast iron or iron, with openwork decoration (the metal details were most often made by the Wagner company in Vienna according to a catalog), as well as wooden with turned shapes or cut figures. The staircase was two-legged or spiral, and at its beginning there were sometimes decorative elements – a

vase or a statue. The mural decoration of frescoes and ornaments, made by hand, was applied to the staircase lobby and especially in the reception hall and living rooms. The exterior architecture of the residential and commercial buildings is particularly lavish. Every merchant wanted to stand out from his neighbor and this prompted him to build richly decorated facades. Shop windows are rectangular or arched. Most often, the ground floor is rusticated, arranged in an orderly arcade.

2. EXAMPLES OF THE INFLUENCE OF EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING PRACTICES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF ROUSSE

The most characteristic aspect of Rousse's town planning after the Liberation remains its ensemble appearance. Compact development (where buildings are glued together) was applied to all the main streets and sometimes to achieve the effect of this development, facades of the type of theater set (buildings with lavish facade decoration only on the street side) were built – for example, the Martin house and the house of Yosif Dynelov. In the architectural ensembles under construction on Aleksandrovska, Kniazhevsksa, Slavyanska streets, the residential architecture does not differ from that of the shops, manufactories, factories and warehouses. All facades are equally richly decorated with pilasters, balconies, cornices, ornaments or sculptural decoration. Regarding the colorful impact of the external architecture, it is known that the buildings were painted in gray to imitate a completely stone facade, there are also those with brick cladding. Against this background, the architectural forms and ornaments of white Rousse limestone stood out. The facades of the buildings are decorated with oriels, balconies with balustrades or metalwork, columns, pilasters, arches, sculptural figures, busts, monograms and coats of arms.

The main street Alexandrovska was built up with many remarkable buildings in an impressive ensemble. Together with several cross streets and secondary square spaces, each of which has a distinct individual presence, they define the character of the city's typical atmosphere. The two-story residential and commercial buildings with a floor height of four to five meters, the aligned intermediate cornices, the diverse but stylistically uniform mansard roofs and the impressive corner accents – towers and rhizalites, are distinguished by their correct proportions and tight detail. The rich sculptural plastic, the lavish stone and stucco ornaments, the precision in the execution of the roof cornices, the window frames, etc. are an example of the application

of European architectural styles (from the 19th century) in the city of Rousse.

“It (Aleksandrovska Street – author’s note) was formed towards the end of the 18th century and has a pronounced city-shaping and commercial significance. Until the second half of the 19th century, the streets did not have a specific role in the administrative organization of the city. With the arrival of the ambitious Valia Midhad Pasha in Ruschuk, the naming of every street and the numbering of houses and shops was introduced. The old name of the street is Jami-i Jedit after the mosque that existed until the beginning of the 20th century (on the site of today’s round fountain in the center). In the eastern direction, it continues as a road outside the Ottoman fortress wall, which ran along today’s Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd. During the construction of the first railway station (1866), the crooked, dusty and in places swampy street became open, wide, paved with flagstones, with pavements and gas lanterns, and there was a diversion to the railway station itself”, [6].

Below we shall present two typical examples of the architectural styles of commercial buildings in the period under consideration.

The building of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (today the “Luben Karavelov” Regional Library)

The regional library “L. Karavelov” is housed in the building built in 1911 for Bulgaria’s first Chamber of Commerce and Industry according to a project by the architect who graduated in Paris in 1893, architect Nikola Lazarov (1872–1942), Fig. 4.

The building is distinguished by a central cylindrical volume, located at the very corner of two perpendicularly intersecting streets, on the ground floor where the main entrance is located. The entrance is enriched with Ionic half-columns and highlighted by a massive balustrade balcony, and the cornice forms an arch under which a clock is mounted. On both sides of this central volume, parallel to the two streets, there are two side and elongated volumes. The facades of all three volumes are decorated with typical for the projects of architect Nikola Lazarov’s baroque forms and rich decoration with laurel leaves, pearls, rosettes and balustrades. The interior is dominated by plaster decoration designed by the architect. The staircase is stone, curved, with an openwork iron railing, with the coat of arms of the trade. The ceiling of the lobby is decorated with a plaster round rosette with acanthus leaves. The main entrance door is iron and double-winged, shaped with “a metal rosette with two wreaths of oak leaves and acorns, and wings of Mercury – a symbol of commerce”, [6]. The building of the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and



Fig. 4. Rousse, The building of regional library “Lyuben Karavelov”, Photo

Industry is a typical example of eclecticism (mixing of styles; most often the architects of eclectic buildings seek originality in the expression of their ideas), often applied in the work of Nikola Lazarov, Fig. 5.

Burov’s bank building

In 1912, the famous banker Ivan Burov ordered the construction of an administrative building on the central street in Rousse for the needs of his bank, Fig. 6. The designer was the Hungarian architect Janovich, who in 1908 also designed Burov’s residence. This architect preferred the Art Nouveau style. What was new here was that the building was built in Baroque style with Art Nouveau decorations. The main facade has a pronounced vertical division and is composed of two elements that are not connected by architectural detail to each other: a slightly protruding rhizalite with gable (pediment) and a bay window with a tower. The silhouette of the building is highly agitated, on the one hand, with the complex pediment and on the other, with the bulbous dome of the tower. The rhizalite is narrow with one axis. The large rectangular window on the ground floor is bounded by a stone molded frame and had an iron grille decorated with plant elements, [7]. Its author was the construction manager, Engineer Gero Gero, who had a preference for iron details. It was removed during a renovation, after which a two-level confectionery shop was

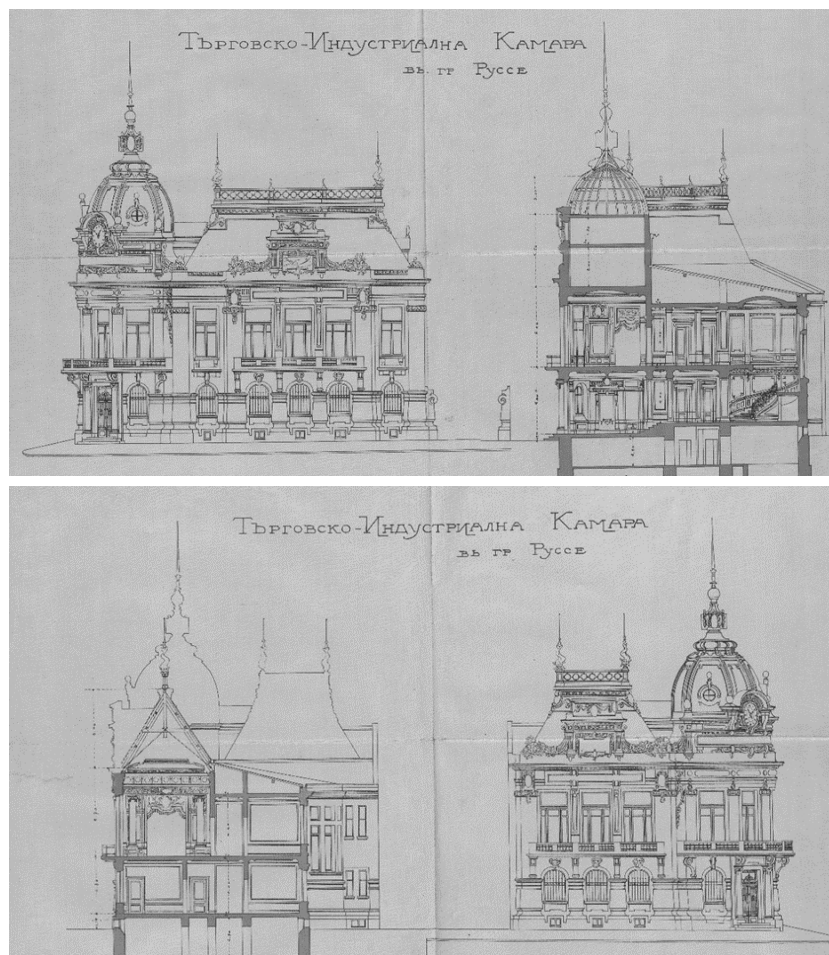


Fig. 5. Sketch of the library – front and side view with the sections, [8]

opened here, [9]. The first floor has a pair of arched windows and a segmental arched balcony door joined by a semicircular arch on imposts (note a. stone slabs). In the center of the arch is attached a female mascarón, complemented by garlands and ribbons that decorate the tympanum, Fig. 6, [7].

The bank building, together with the neighboring building of the Papa Manoli brothers complement each other and form a single architectural ensemble. We assume that arch. Janovich made sure that the decorative elements on the facade of the bank complemented the facade decoration of the previous building of Papa Manoli. On the ground floor was the bank hall, which has now been converted into a shop. For many years, the building was used by the



Fig. 6. Rousse, Burov's Bank, Photo

Pension Department, the “Old Pear” diner was located on the ground floor, and now it is the “Opium” bar, [9].

3. CONCLUSION

In the period from 1880 to the end of the First World War, several bank buildings, an insurance company building and the building of the first Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bulgaria were built in the city of Rousse. In their architecture, elements of Neoclassicism, Neo-Baroque (Viennese), Eclectic and Secession styles can be found. Most often, statues and stucco decorative elements of muses, winged Hermes, Mercury or some other god from ancient Greek and ancient Roman mythology were placed on the facade, which was supposed to emphasize strength and financial prosperity, combined with laurel wreaths and garlands. In the two examples examined, namely the building of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the building of the Burov's bank, the facades to the streets were saturated with details that symbolized the importance and commercial prosperity of the company that managed the building. In addition, the architecture of the bank buildings, as well as the

buildings of the insurance companies and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry had an impact on the historical development of building construction in the city of Rousse after 1878. They were the model that the architects working in the city during the period from the Liberation to the end of the First World War used in the design of the residential and residential-commercial buildings and other facilities.

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