

Virginia Haret – The First Woman Architect in the World

Maria Bostenaru Dan^{1,2}

¹Urban and Landscape Design Department, “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, Romania

²Marie Curie Fellows Association, Bruxelles, Belgium

Correspondence: Maria Bostenaru Dan, Urban and Landscape Design Department, “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest 010014, Romania. Tel: 40-213-077-180. E-mail:maria.bostenaru@iaim.ro

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Abstract

A case investigated in detail was of the architect Virginia Haret, the first woman architect in the world. After obtaining a diploma in Bucharest, it spent a period of residence in Italy, where she worked with architects and archaeologists of the time. The influence of neo-classical architecture of the Italian Novecento remains not seen in the works of architect, maybe just in the Povernei Street extension, now demolished. In the early years she had built in Neo-Romanian style, moving then to Modernism.

Keywords: interwar, Romania, housing, gender, urban trace

1. Introduction

In 1976 r. Ing. Prof. Radu Sp. Haret was writing an article in the *Arhitectura* magazine, in the rubric „Our Predecessors” about that who was not only the first woman architect in Romania, but also in the world. We try in this contribution to see what changed in the past 35 years in the interpretation from then.

For the begin, we will summarize some bibliographic data taken from that article, the IAWA database and the dictionary of Paul Constantin (1986), data which we completed. Virginia Haret was born on the 21st of June 1894, being the nephew after the brother of the painter Ioan Andreescu. She inherited his talent, attending parallelly the School of Architecture and that of Beux Arts, making painting exhibitions and her collection of stamps is currently in the possession of the library of the Romanian Academy. She attended the „Superior School of Architecture” in Bucharest (name under which it run between 1897 and 1932), that time already state school, lead by the civil engineer and mathematician Ermil Pangratti, who was director 1904-1931, and graduated with very good in 1919, after which she continued her studies in Italy. She married in 1928 the son of the scientist Spiru Haret, Spiru Haret-Gold, civil engineer, and they had a son. She worked at the Technical Service of the Ministry of Education, for which reason she did numerous and important projects for schools, in Bucharest (Șincai and Cantemir Lyceum) as well as in the country (Bârlad, Focșani). Side by side with buildings of large dimensions, she also designed houses for one or two persons. The mobility did not stop at the studies in Italy, she being present also at numerous congresses of architecture in Rome, Paris, Moscow, Bruxelles She died on the 6th of May 1962, next year being the 50th commemoration of her death, which was the motivation for this article.

In the past 35 years new ways to save information online appeared. At the University of Virginia, United States, there is a database about the woman architects in the world (<http://spec.lib.vt.edu/IAWA/>). Following a donation of Irene Patrușiu the database contains also the woman architects from Romania, also Virginia Andreescu-Haret, Henrietta Delavrancea-Gibory and Maria Cotescu, but currently the possibility to update the information does not work.

2. The Monument Protected Buildings

Many of Virginia Haret-s buildings are now protected as monuments: the Block Tinerimea Română (LMI code B-II-m-B-18891) (Figure 1), Cantemir Lyceum (LMI code B-II-m-B-18552) (Figure 2), Șincai Lyceum (LMI code B-II-m-B-19754) (Figure 3), the block of the Society „Cheap Housing” on the street Hristo Botev corner with Piața Rosetti (LMI code B-II-m-B-18184) (Figure 4), but also the casino in Govora, known afterwards as Cinema Parc (LMI code VL-II-m-B-09645) (Figure 5). Out of these only the Cantemir Lyceum was foreseen

with a plate in the recent project (2010) to mark the monuments in Bucharest, plate which commemorates Virginia Haret, the first woman architect in the world, as author of the building. If in the first cases the legislative protection and conferring the status of monument are effective, in case of the casino in Govora, not finished by Virginia Haret following the start of the war, the town hall designed an extension with the title “Dance center” (<http://www.primaria-baile-govora.ro>) and in the building site conditions photographing to see the current state of the building is prohibited. Currently on the site are available the renderings, priorly also the plans were available.

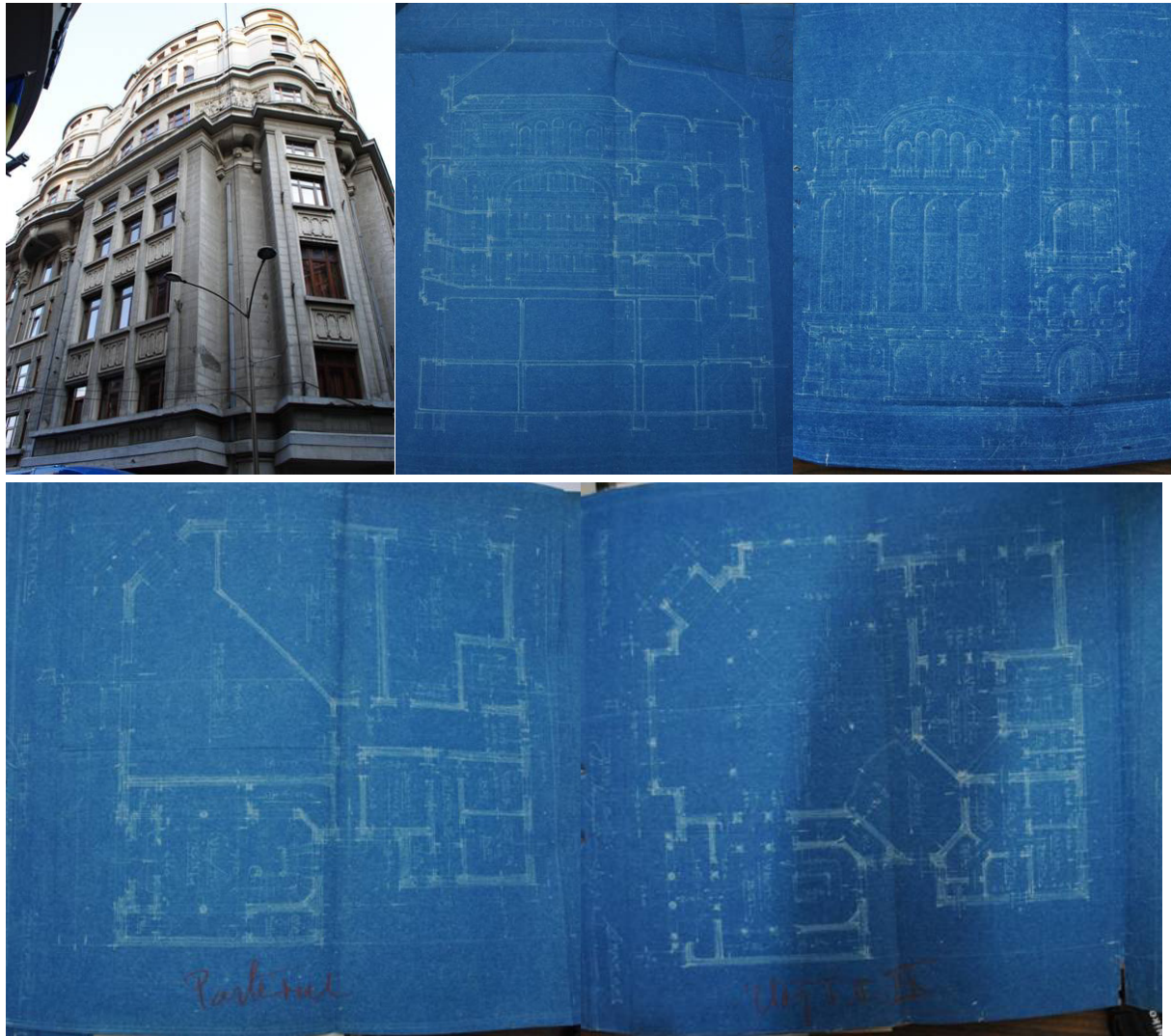


Figure 1. Palace Tinerimea Română, Bdul Schitu Măgureanu (1924-27). Photo (M. Bostenaru, 2011)
Tinerimea Romana (Romanian Youth) palace: section façade drawing from the National Archives of Romania, Bucharest section. Plans of the ground floor and upper floor, from the National Archives of Romania, Bucharest section

3. Demolitions, Reinforced Concrete and Paternity of Buildings

An even more acute situation is the recent demolition of the extension to the house Rosetti-Solești on Poverneistreet, in May 2011, considered to be an annex of the building with increased height, first after the projects of Virginia Haret in 1928, then after the war. This complex was protected as a monument (LMI code B-II-m-B-19465) (Figure 6), but currently is not included in the list anymore. Instead of the demolished villa the raising of an office tower is foreseen. According to the historic plans from 1911 (<http://silviacolfescu.blogspot.com/2011/05/casele-adrian-si-rosetti-solesti-pe.html>) we came to the conclusion that the demolished part is exactly the extension designed by Virginia Haret in 1928. The intervention of great sensibility of Virginia Haret had lead

to a harmonic complex of the construction from the 19th century with its extension and raised height, and it was at the same time one of the few interventions on existing site from the interwar time. In Slovenia, architect Jozef Plecnik operated such restoration interventions in that time, but it is a rare example. Today such interventions are the most spread in Western Europe. It demonstrates us once again that today the small size buildings are more endangered by demolition following speculation that those of large size by Vrancea earthquakes because of their resonance with the vibration period. Even the red dot was introduced as an argument for such demolitions, more than half of the buildings so classified being of low height (Lungu, 2009). But the block of the society “Cheap Housing” presents diagonal damages at the masonry elements, typical for the seismic ones.



Figure 2. Lyceum Dimitrie Cantemir, Bdul Dacia 117 (1925-26). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 3. Liceum Gh. Sincai, Calea Serban Vodă 167 (1920-25, 24-28). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 4. Palace “Locuințe ieftine”, Piața Rosettico ÎN cu Bdul Hristo Botev. Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 5. Casino in Govora. Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011

Also demolished was the tower in reinforced concrete in the courtyard of the Medicine Faculty, an early building in reinforced concrete (1927) (Figure 7), which deserved all appreciation for the avangarde use of the material for such an industrial construction. The archive images remained us, of rare beauty, in the graphics of the 1920s, drawn with white lines on blue background, at the archives of the City Hall of Bucharest, Technical Services. In the same graphic are the documents regarding the creation of the site on which it was to be built the Romanian Youth Palace and its first project.

Another construction with early use of reinforced concrete, the paternity of which is discutabile, is the block of flats at the intersection between street Frumoasă and Calea Victoriei (Figure 8). Both Radu Haret (1976) and Paul Constantin (1986) attribute the building to Virginia Haret, but Raluca Bem (2000) tends to attribute it to Burcuș and Pangratti, arguing that Virginia Haret built in new-Romanian and Modernist style, but never eclectically, as this block is. The magazine *Casino* inside nr.10, in an article about “The Casino in Govora”. An unfinished architectural monument” it is mentioned, like in other sources on the internet, from which we cite that of the Romanian Cultural Institute (<http://www.icr.ro/praga/anul-arhitecturii/arhitecti-romani/iunie-anul-arhitecturii-virginia-andreescu-haret.html>) a “front of buildings on Calea Victoriei, among the first blocks in reinforced concrete”, which cannot be other but this block. The preoccupation for the new construction material is not a happenstance, given the cooperation between architecture and engineering she manifested. A study of the plan of this building reveals it to us as being classic for the time, with main and service stairs, with a distribution of the rooms in day time zone and night time zone separated by a central hall, the day time zone being the living and the dining. It is a modern division, different from that of the former century in which the rooms opened to a central hall and had interchanging functions.

4. The Villas

Other buildings, of smaller scale, by Virginia Haret, were renovated, some looking for tenants now. Sometimes this renovation is partial, and stops at several storeys of the multifamily construction, as it is the case for the house Haret in the boulevard Lascăr Catargiu (Figure 9). The project of the house from 1930, in Modernist style, doesn't present the same graphics in the archives, but beige heliographie copies. In the plans published in the magazine in 1976, in the use from the time of the Socialist Republic of Romania, the house contained a ground floor with day and night zones, with access to the service part and kitchen from the back, which included also a service stair, and two identical storeys with night and day zone, but which include offices, the day zone being reduced to dining-hall, without daylight. These plans differ from those in the archives, compared to which the dining was replaced by bedrooms in the upper stories. It seems that in the later history of the use of the house the second floor is property of another family, the existence of a kitchen and the depending zone at all levels making this possible. We observe in the plan infill walls and markings of nodes like columns, which lead us to the idea of a construction also out of reinforced concrete.



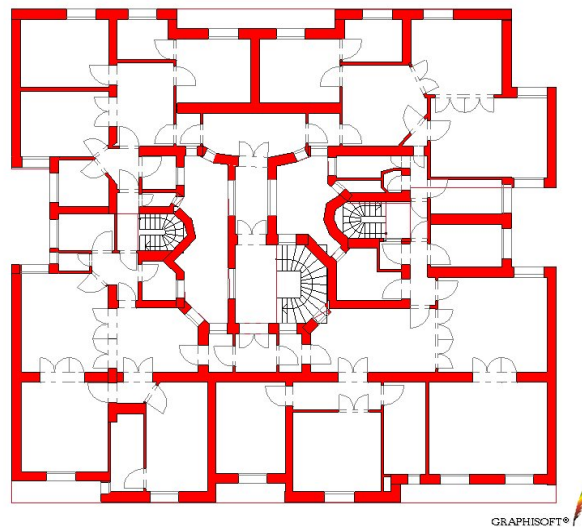
Figure 6. House Rosetti-Solesti, str. Povernei, extension (1928). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 7. Wassertower in the courtyard of the faculty of medicine. Archives of the Bucharest City Council, reproduced by permission



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Figure 8. Bloc of flats Calea Victoriei corner with Frumoasă street (1922). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 9. House Haret, Bdul Lascăr Catargiu 14 (1931). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011. Façade and plan from the archives of Bucharest City Hall

Some of the houses designed by Virginia Haret are in the development zone from the 1930s towards the north of the city and are of functionalist orientation (Figure 10, Figure 11), in such place being the regretted extension of the Rosetti-Solești house, other are in historic quarters such as the zone Armenească or the quarter Cotroceni, in the vicinity of which she also built a complex of cheap housing (Figure 12), and they are new-Romanian orientation, orientation which she followed in the 1920s, but also functionalist (the house Perianu, on Eroilor boulevard, formerly Kalinderu, Figure 13 or house Nestor, Figure 14). Also in the North of the city we can find houses of new-Romanian orientation (Figure 15). We would conclude that the style was only partially influenced by that of the zone, and rather of the direct vicinity.

We have a similar distribution of the planimetry also at the house on Spătarului entry, close to the Armenească church (Figure 16), a house of new-Romanian style from the year 1926: central hall which connects the day and the night zone, with an expressive arch in the interior, main and service stairs, and office attached to the night zone. So the modification of the plan in functional distribution is independent of the adopted architectural style.

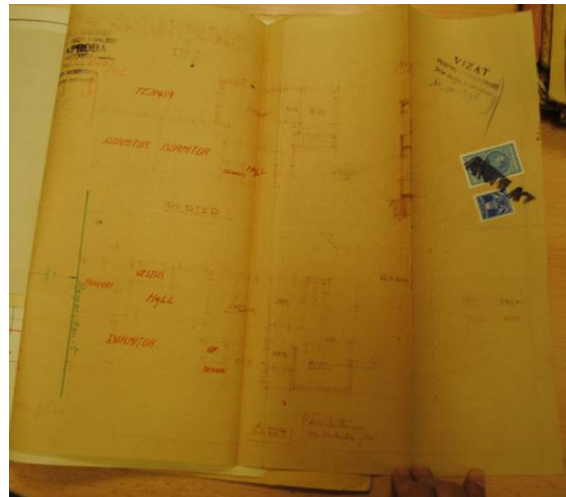
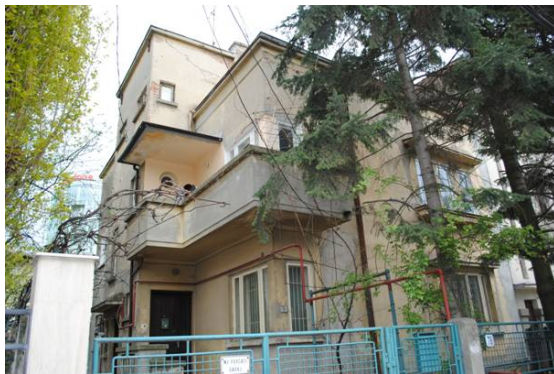


Figure 10. House Panait Mazilu, Str. PopaSavu nr. 76 (1936). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011. Plan from the archives of the Bucharest City Hall



Figure 11. House Dumitru Stoica, Str. Veronica Micle (1936-37). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011

The houses of Virginia Haret have an own history, for example the house in Bitolia street where “Grigore Nica (1936-2009) lived and created music between 1981-1990, one of the great Romanian musicians, composer, violonist and professor, member of the Union of Musical Critics, Redactors and Realisators “Mihai Jora”” (commemorative plate). Also the demolished Rosetti-Solești house has a remarkable history regarding its inhabitants. “Here lived Theodor Rosetti-Solești (Solescu), the brother of Lady Elena, the wife of Voivod Alexandru Ioan Cuza, together with his wife Pulheria (1847-1925)” is written in the report of Observatorul Urban regarding the demolition (<http://www.observatoruluiurban.ro/s-a-demolat-o-parte-din-casa-rosetti-solesti-de-pe-strada-povernei.html>)



Figure 12. Group of seven villas with 2 apartments each, str. Bibicescu (1929). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 13. House Radu & Elena Perianu, Bdul Kalinderu nr. 18 (today Eroilor) (1933-34)



Figure 14. House Nestor, str. Dr. Teohari 17 Parc Panduri (1935). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 15. House Stănescu, Str. Paris 43 (1923). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 16. House, Intrarea Spătarului 8 (1926)

Another aspect we see comparing the archive images is the growth of vegetation. Archive images present the building in its totality, while today important parts are covered by vegetation. At the house in PopaSavustreet and that on Bitolia street this is represented by impressive fir trees, which cover the building also in winter. In case of others, like the former street Olga Bancic (Figure 17) or in Dr. Obedenarustreet (Figure 18), the image in 1976 presents us the house covered by running vegetation, but in the meantime it was restored. The house on Povernei street was caught on film, for example by Silvia Colfescu (<http://silviacolfescu.blogspot.com/2011/02/cateva-stradute-bucurestene-un.html>), who also documented the demolition, the images being much more rare regarding the demolition, similarly abusive of the villa Prager by Henrietta DelavranceaGibory. We see in this image the harmonised style of the portico which is continued, which puts a question sign on the stilistic mentioned by RalucaBem (2000). In this case the vegetation covers for the moment the mutilation of the assembly.

5. Again the Public Buildings

Virginia Haret also built administrative buildings, other than the public buildings protected as monuments in the rapidly growing areas of transport such as the airport or the train station (Figure 19, Figure 20). Also renovated was the church in Ghencea, in 2007 (<http://www.sfantatreimeghencea.ro>) (Figure 21).

Collaborators of Virginia Haret were N. Stănescu at Cantemir Lyceum (<http://www.monumenteromania.ro/>), Jean Pompilian at the Faculty of Medicine, the Holy Trinity Church in Ghencea and the Block „Romanian Youth” (Tinerimea Română), where the construction was done by Raul Negru and eng.Valer Paler (<http://www.centrul-tinerimea-romana.ro/DocumenteHtml.aspx?keyword=istoric>). In case of the house Rosetti-Solești the initial construction was Art Nouveau built by Wilhelm Bast in 1891.

6. Research and Exchange with Italy

Remarcable is the interest for research. Virginia Haret was not only the first woman architect in the world, but also the first architect mobile between Romania and Italy. Although LuminițaMachedon (1999, p. 34) writes that Virginia Haret completed her studies at the Romanian School in Rome, where also were NicolaeCucu, NicolaeLupu and Richard Bordenache. Actually, the Romanian School in Rome started its activity on the 1st of November 1922, and it is probably that the study stay of Virginia Haret was before this.NicolaeCucu, NicolaeLupu and Richard Bordenache received indeed scholarships from the school, as it is confirmed by the dictionary of Paul Constantin.



Figure 17. House A. Opran, street formerly Olga Bancic 15 (1928). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 18. House, str. Dr. Obedenaru 14. Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011

The IAWA database in the newsletter from the autumn of 2000 (<http://spec.lib.vt.edu/IAWA/news/news12.pdf>) mentions only the continuation of the studies in Rome. About Virginia HaretRaduHaret (1976) affirms that she

worked under the supervision of Gr. Bargellini one year long in his office and of prof. Montecchi, “known archeologist and president of the society, Fra icultoridell’architettura e archeologia” with whom she made a number of studies. Retrospectively looking at the architecture history of the 20th century, it seems that she did better than her masters. We haven’t found data about the architect and archeologist with whom Virginia Haret worked, but, the artistic association “Fra icultori dell architettura” which had a decisive contribution to the way the architect title is conferred and the architectural education in Italy, and which has among its founders GiulioMagni, the architect who also built in Romania, ten years long. The fascist architecture with which she came in contact did not leave its traces on the style of Virginia Haret, as it is the case for NicolaeCucu (http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Nicolae-Cucu-un-maestru-al-arhitecturii-romanesti*articleID_10511-articles_details.html) who, like G.M. Cantacuzino “recreated, in their peak works, the monumental neoclassic style”, which is otherwise specific to fascist architecture. Virginia Haret was situated, as it was affirmed above, in the major currents of the epoch, new-Romanian and functionalism. Returning to the Italian influence, at the begin of the third decade of the 20th century, the architect JózsefVágo from Oradea imigrated to Italy, and, as in the case on Povernei street, worked on projects of intervention on existent substance.

What is however sure is, that after the stay in Italy, Virginia Haret started working in research, which is reflected in the building surveys she did, research method in architecture history, and in working together with Ghika-Budești. She was an example of early mobility of women in research, subject which today, after Romania adhered to the European Union, is of great actuality, Virginia Haret being a so-called role model for mobile women in architectural research.

7. Conclusions

Although it is disputed if Virginia Haret has really been the first woman architect of the world, based on the criteria for which this primacy is awarded (first diploma, first practicing architect etc.), she was undoubtedly an early leading figure, and a pioneer through her studies, research and practice. Particularly notable in the context of our research is also her mobility, later followed, until today, by a number of architects.

In terms of practice, her works span between the two mentioned styles, but they are also innovative in technology, considering the early employment of reinforced concrete in housing and in industrial buildings. She built both housing and public buildings, and the later constitute the monuments of today. Unfortunately also regarding the work of Virginia Haret we note the lack of efficient protection, for which reason studies like this are important to bring awareness and conserve the records.



Figure 20. Administrative building Baneasa airport. Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011



Figure 21. Depozits, administration and housing, Banca Viticolă, str. Petru Rares 17-21 (1926), in the vicinity of the North railway station. Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011

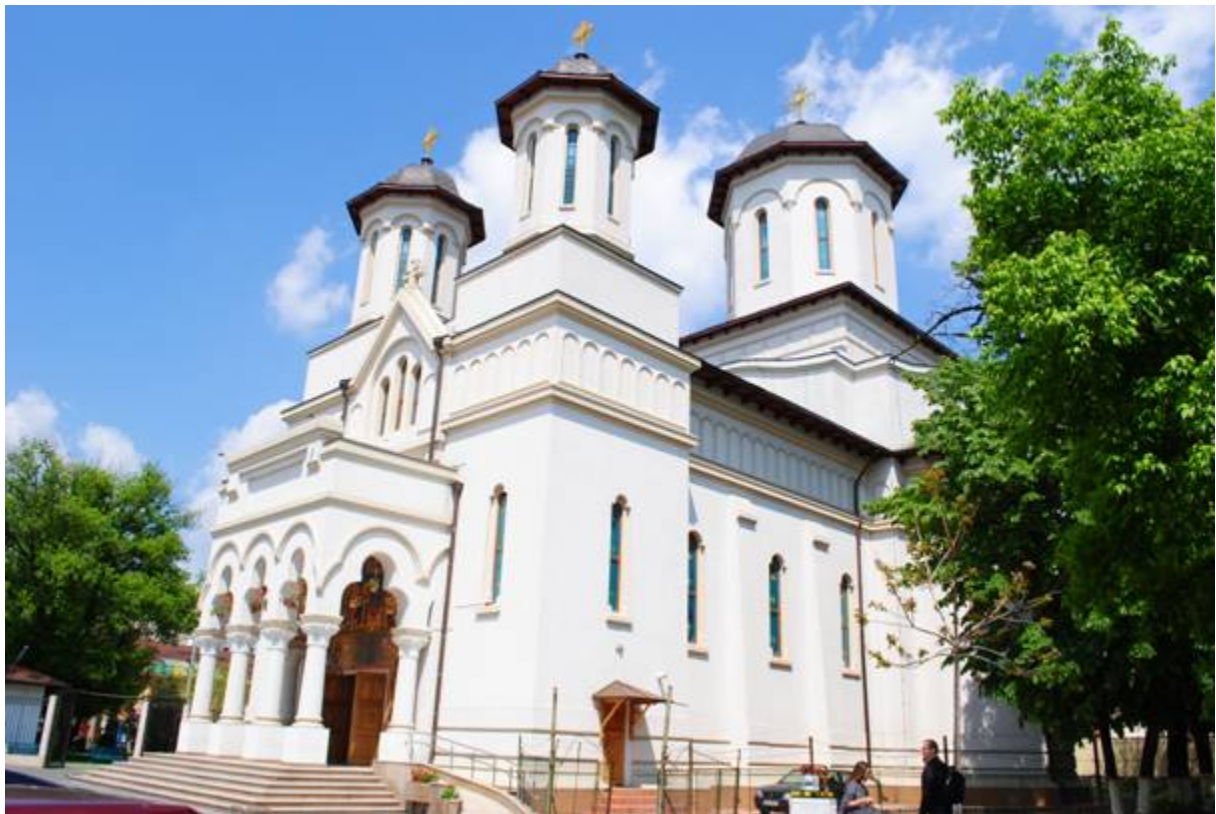


Figure 22. Church Sf. Treime (Ghencea) (1927-34). Photo: M. Bostenaru, 2011

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