A modern architectural practice at the beginning of the twentieth century

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Abstract. Son of Dumitru Berindey architect (1831-1884), Ion D. Berindey (1871-1928) studied architecture at the Beaux-Arts School in Paris which he graduated in 1897. Back in Romania, Ion D. Berindey opened his own architectural office in a pioneering era of Romanian architecture. His architectural office is one of the first well organized and modern architectural practices created in Romania. Having a native artistic talent and a great power of work, he had also an undoubted organisational spirit and sought for perfection in all his works.

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JEL codes: Y80, Y90

1. Introduction

Ion D. Berindey (1871-1928) is one of the renown Romanian architects of the first three decades of the twentieth century. His father, Dumitru Berindey (1831-1884) was the first Romanian architect who graduated the Beaux-Arts School in Paris (1853-1859), being a disciple of Henri Labrouste. Dumitru Berindey was minister of Public Works between years 1870 - 1871. In 1887 Ion D. Berindey leaves to France to accomplish his artistic studies, as the architecture department of the Beaux-Arts School in Bucharest was not completely organised at that time. Ion D. Berindey graduates the Beaux-Arts School in Paris in 1897. Other Romanian architects who also studied at the Beaux-Arts School in Paris are: Ion Mincu, Alexandru Savulescu, Dimitrie Maimarolu, Nicolae Ghica-Budesti, Petre Antonescu.

Fig. 1: Ion D. Berindey. Source: The National Library of Romania - Saint-Georges Fund, Ion D. Berindey archive, package CLXXX, file 7, leaf 56, article Tribute and Gratitude to Architect Ioan D. Berindey, Revista poporului, 13th year, 1904
Back in Romania, Ion D. Berindey opened his own architectural office in a pioneering era of Romanian architecture. His architectural office is one of the first well organized and modern architectural practices created in Romania. The impressive amount of architect’s work, the documents kept in the National Library of Romania, in the City Hall’s archives, in the National Archives of Romania and over 700 drawings from the Ion D. Berindey archive within the National Museum of Art of Romania prove this fact.

All of Berindey’s projects were studied in an equally thorough fashion, from the complex public buildings, to private houses, urban planning works or plain garages and ornamental details. His works remark themselves by the value of the architectural ensemble, but also by integrating the painting, the sculpture, the wrought iron art in architecture, which was conceived as a total art.

The stages of a typical project realized in Ion D. Berindey’s architectural practice, as it yields from the documents disclosed from the archives, were:

- Conventions, contracts between architect and client;
- Assignments (Program themes);
- The pre-project;
- Memoirs;
- Specifications and estimates;
- Contractor agreements;
- The project and the building permit;
- Work’s final reception;
- Building site survey and execution details.

2. Conventions, contracts between architect and client

Before starting the work, an agreement ("convention") according to which the beneficiary was instructing the architect "to prepare the sketches, the pre-project, the quotation, the layouts, the details and the specifications" was signed between the beneficiary and the architect.
3. Program themes

Each work had to be illustrated by a program theme including the building functions, surfaces, the site constraints, facility description, associated costs, the planning of the building etc.

In the 13 pages program theme written for Queen Elisabeth Almshouse, Berindey wrote that – in order to complete the assignment - he needed to know the number of disabled people, their gender, age and social status, the location, the sanitary facilities.

The conditions the architect had to comply with were:

- Plenty of air and light for the patients, any unwholesomeness avoided;
- Permanent water-supply of good quality;
- Separate gender dwelling possible by an adequate location of the pavilions;
- The establishment had to contain special pavilions for the completely disabled patients.
As for the number of the people with disabilities to be admitted in the almshouse, the architect thought that 300 would have been half the usual for 1902 and the area of the building, of the courtyards and of the garden had to be calculated accordingly.

The almshouse had to include:
- The administration;
- The healthcare service;
- The kitchens;
- The chapel;
- Doorkeepers and gardeners;
- Staff dwelling;
- Washrooms and hydrotherapy;
- A meeting and concert hall, a library for the disabled patients;
- Workshops;
- Water supply plumber service.

One chapter of the programme written for the future almshouse was dedicated to the planning of the buildings. The different pavilions and wings had to communicate easily between themselves in order to facilitate supervision, this being one of the main conditions to enable the existence of the almshouse.

Fig. 4: First page of the program theme draft for the construction of Queen Elisabeth Almshouse, carefully drawn up on 13 pages of handwritten and stored in Saint-Georges Fund of the National Library of Romania, Ion D. Berindey archive, package CCLXXXIII, file 7, leaf 49
4. The pre-project

The early stage of a project could be illustrated by a single board, containing plans, sections and elevations presented at a scale of 1:200, such as the pre-project of Emil Costinescu’s house, drawn in June 1910, kept in the National Museum of Art of Romania’s archives.

The manner of representing the pre-projects had a more artistic nature, the architect often using the technique of aquarelle, in combination with different colored ink and pencils. The building environment was very important at this stage, the drawings being often added with people, trees, vegetation, cars and carriages, horse riders and sometimes even dogs.

Fig. 5: Façade of Maria Filotti’s house (pre-project). Source: Cristina and Gheorghe Cantacuzino’s private collection.

5. Memoirs

A project would not start without clear indications regarding the building needed functions and costs of the construction; the memoirs preserved in archives were quite clear in this respect, demonstrating a pragmatic spirit and the architect’s attention to details.

For Margot Orascu’s property, Ion D. Berindey calculated the profitability of the building proposed to be constructed, planned to accommodate four large stores and a smaller shop at the ground floor, an office at the mezzanine (entre sol), a cinema room and a beer restaurant in the basement, three large apartments at first floor, seven smaller apartments at second floor and seven small apartments in the attic.

6. Specifications and estimates

The Saint-Georges Fund of the National Library of Romania stores documents that had been carefully prepared in Ion D. Berindey’s architectural office, such as various specifications, estimates, schedules.

In the article *Homage and gratitude to architect Ion D. Berindey of Revista poporului (People magazine)*, year XIII, 1904, can be found estimated costs of some of the buildings designed by the architect, such as: Alexandru Florescu’s house - 230,000 lei (445 sqm.), General Arion’s residence – 391,948 lei (448 sqm.), Colonel Andreescu’s private house - 26,000 lei.
7. Contractor agreements

Contracts were signed also between the beneficiary and the contractor. Some of them have been preserved in the archives:

- The contract between Mr. and Mrs. Arion and Thoma Grant, the entrepreneur of the residence built on Coltea Street (nowadays, 15, Lascar Catargiu Bld.).

- The plaster work and interior decorations of Toma Stelian’s house were executed by sculptor William Dietz, as recorded in the contract between Wilhelm Dietz and Toma Stelian, signed on 24\textsuperscript{th} of March, 1914. The contract reads: "All work will be executed as planned, detailed and directed by Mr. Architect Berindey, charged with the direction and supervision of works." The contractor was also required to have at all times, a project supervisor "with technical knowledge."

- The contract between contractor Toma Stelian and Tomat & Co. for the partial works of the mausoleum designed in Bellu Cemetery.

- The contract between architect Ion D. Berindey and Mr. Torjescu for the works of the future Disinfection Pavilion of Queen Elisabeth Almshouse.

The architect was also the project supervisor of the works designed by him. The construction was conducted under architect’s direct instruction.

8. The project and the building permit

Over the time, many of Berindey’s layouts underwent several changes. For example, the pre-project of the Journalists’ Syndicate Palace was illustrated by a wonderful view in 1912. A first version of its façade was made on 25\textsuperscript{th} of January 1913, another one with the corner underlined by a raised dome dated January 1914. The building permit was obtained on 31\textsuperscript{st} of October 1915. The construction of the Journalists’ Syndicate Palace stopped in 1916, during World War I, resumed in 1919 and completed in 1921/1922.

Projects that were approved by the City Hall included: site plan, plan levels, elevations and sections. They were accompanied also by a brief description of the building where the beneficiary or his wife had written a request to the City Hall, indicating specifically the name of the architect.

Fig. 6: Cantacuzino Palace. Front elevation.
Source: the National Archives of Romania, City Hall Fund, Technical Service, file 258/1902.
9. Minutes of work’s final reception

Interim or final receptions held in the Saint-Georges Fund of the National Library clarify certain stages some projects had passed, proving that sometimes a project was spanning over several years.

The research in archives revealed:
- Minutes of Final Reception (Cantacuzino Palace - October 12, 1906).
- Minutes Reception (Queen Elisabeth Almshouse - 1915).

From the preserved documents, we established that the architect was involved throughout the process, tracking all the work site activity, linking the details drawn in his office with their implementation. An excerpt from the article dedicated to Berindey in Ilustratia magazine (XIVth year, no. 115-118, Sept. - Dec. 1925), on the occasion of the completion of work on the Administrative Palace in Iasi is relevant: "I saw him on his site, asset and easy step as in his early years. Eternal ready to talk to each, to explain, to give attention to the latter worker - faithful soldier of his regiment craftsmen, happy to be on the orders of their beloved master."²

10. Building site survey and detail drawings

The correspondence that is kept in the National Library of Romania, Saint-Georges Fund and in the National Archives of Romania show the close relationship the architect had with his clients and Berindey’s full involvement in all the stages of a project, particularly impressing the role he had in the supervision of works on site. His clients (Alexandru Em. Lahovary, Toma Stelian, Marioara Voiculescu) or collaborators (painter Nicolae Vermont, sculptor Raffaello Romanelli) wrote him in order to clarify some aspects of construction, site or contracting work.

In a letter addressed to Ion D. Berindey, by Toma Stelian, on 23rd of July 1912 from Marienbad, the minister asks the architect: "Please, by all means, do not stop with the supervision" of the construction located on Kiseleff Road. The design of the house and numerous detail drawings took over seven years (1908-1914).

Fig. 7: Letter addressed to Ion D. Berindey, by his client, Toma Stelian. Source: The National Library of Romania, Saint-Georges Fund, Ion D. Berindey archive, package CXCI, file 2, leaf 8

Ion D. Berindey remained in the posterity’s conscience as a prolific architect, having numerous works, among which famous residences (Cantacuzino Palace, Assan house, Toma Stelian house), the Administrative Palace in Iasi. Some of them represent true emblems of their cities. Having a native artistic talent and a great power of work, he had also an undoubted organisational spirit and sought for perfection in all his works.

The quality of his creation was reasoned not only by his great talent or that he graduated the Beaux-Arts School of Architecture in Paris (DPLG 1897), but also by the meticulous way of accomplishing his work.

The research brought to light several names of architects who worked in his office: Paul I. Cristinel, Alexandru Baucher (Bocher), Nicolae (Filip) Banescu, Ion D. Berindey’s son - Ion I. Berindey, who was also a Beaux-Arts graduate (DPLG) in 1924, Niculae Tonea, Niculae Covaci, Adrian Petrescu.

Ion D. Berindey’s projects archive was almost entirely preserved and is now part of the Drawings and Engravings Collection of the National Museum of Art of Romania, today having heritage value. After almost a century of indifference, Ion D. Berindey’s layouts finally came to light and can well serve as examples for the next generations of architects, raising their self-esteem and the architects’ guild conscience.
11. References

Books

Reviews

Archives: