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2 Nordic-Romanian Connections: A Case Study of the Transnational Dimensions of 'National' Art

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores points of connection between Nordic design and Romanian debates around 'national' art at the turn of the century. From the 1870s onwards, there is evidence of Romania looking to Nordic models at World's Fairs for ideas about education and pavilion design. By the first decade of the twentieth century, discussion of Nordic initiatives for the protection, promotion and renewal of folk art featured frequently in Romanian discourses around the development of a modern language of decorative art, leading to study trips, exchanges and even isolated experiments with neo-Nordic interiors and furniture design. These points of connection show how Romanians used discussion of Nordic initiatives to drive debates around their own art and attempt to circumvent the challenges of perceived 'belatedness' or 'borrowing' brought by the rapid arrival of Western art forms in the nineteenth century. It was a fruitful exchange, demonstrating how problematic centre–periphery models of art could be successfully mediated by less hierarchical, but equally important, networks of transcultural interaction.

In 1996, the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History (*Norsk Folkemuseum*) in Oslo, in collaboration with the Village Museum (*Muzeul Satului*) in Bucharest, organized an exhibition of folk art from Romania and the Republic of Moldova. In the accompanying booklet, woven carpets and a smaller number of costumes, icons and ceramics, mainly dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were discussed in terms of distinctive regional techniques, geometric patterns and figurative motifs. This formalist approach underpinned a broader narrative that stressed the supposed timelessness of historical Romanian folk art and its seamless continuation in a tradition which, it was claimed, 'is still very much alive and a part of the daily life'.[1] Reified

1 The Village Museum Bucharest, Norsk Folkemuseum Oslo, *Eternity Was Born in the Village* (Oslo: Alkopi, 1996), 5.

as both 'universal' and 'local', folk art was here used as a cultural politics to forge links between West and East, North and South, part of broader efforts to reintegrate Romania into the European sphere in the years following the 1989 Revolution. In 1996, these efforts were recognized when the re-established Museum of the Romanian Peasant (*Muzeul Țăranului Român*) in Bucharest was declared European Museum of the Year.

This foregrounding of vernacular art as evidence of Romania's contribution to Europe's cultural heritage on the one hand, and its use in strategies of 'self-exoticization' or 'self-orientalizing' on the other, typified the delicate path the country had to negotiate in its quest for wider cultural and political recognition in the wake of socialism. What the Oslo exhibition did not acknowledge, however, was the historicity of the narrative of Romanian folk art that it presented. With its essentialist claim that '[f]olk culture is the foundation on which modern Romanian culture and art is based',[2] the exhibition uncritically reiterated an interpretative framework that was first formally established by Romanian art history in the early decades of the twentieth century.[3] Nor did the exhibition recognize that 1996 was not the first time that Romanian and Nordic folk art had been brought into conversation with each other. In fact, at the turn of the century, discussion of Nordic crafts played a small but significant role in the formation of ideas about Romania's own artistic heritage. These oversights are understandable: the key players in the Romanian story were largely written out of art history by the Cold War and the process of their recovery has been slow. Although they operated at the heart of vibrant transnational networks of academic and artistic exchange, they are today still little-known outside (and sometimes even within) Romania.

The aim of this chapter is to shed some light on cultural exchange between Romania and the Nordic countries in the late nineteenth and

2 Ibid., 9.

3 Shona Kallestrup, 'Problematizing Periodization: Folk Art, National Narratives and Cultural Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Romanian Art History', in Shona Kallestrup, et al., eds, *Periodization in the Art Historiographies of Central and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2022), 192–213.

early twentieth centuries and discuss its impact on evolving ideas about art and design in the young Balkan kingdom. Firstly, the chapter will explore how discussion of Scandinavian folk art informed the early development of modern forms of decorative art in Romania, as well as debates around a 'Romanian' national style. Secondly, it will discuss a specific case study of design translation: the Norwegian boudoir of Crown Princess Marie of Romania, created in 1910. Representing the finest material remnant of Romanian interest in Scandinavia from the period, the boudoir allows reflection on the international appeal of the dragon style, as well as the complex mediative processes of Nordic-inflected design in a Balkan context. The chapter will argue that Romanians used discussion of Nordic art and design to drive debates around their own art. Central to their interest was an awareness of the hierarchical problems posed by centre–periphery understandings of culture, which fated modern art outside Western centres to be seen as belated or derivative. In the Nordic countries Romanians saw models of how to foreground artistic traditions that were believed to be primary and authentic and use them to develop a modern identity that, if not entirely circumventing hierarchies, certainly valorized new ways of thinking about art and design.

The Problem of the Periphery

The term 'periphery' is one that much occupies turn-of-the-century art history. On a micro level, a self-perception of being peripheral (whether geographically, artistically or politically), or at least being labelled 'peripheral' by self-proclaimed centres, was an important driver in the creation of so-called national styles.[4] On a macro level, recent scholarship has started to explore what this meant for the construction of art historiographies

4 See, for example, Petra Brouwer and Kristina Jõekalda, 'Introduction: Architectural Identities of European Peripheries', *The Journal of Architecture* 25/8 (2020), 963–77.

across Europe.[5] And on a theoretical level, it has given rise to critical reflection on some of the oldest assumptions of Western art history, producing methodological attempts to recognize and disrupt hierarchical models, whether through 'horizontal' or 'entangled' history, a focus on networks, circulations and the 'lives of objects', the use of big data and mapping, or biological metaphors of 'intracultural contact'.[6] All of these approaches have emphasized transnationalism, finding new ways of re-engaging what the canon has deemed 'marginal'. To quote Alexandra Chiriac in her work on the Romanian avant-garde, this has led, among other things, to a reframing of 'the peripheral vocation of Eastern Europe as positive rather than pejorative … leading to pluralism, accelerated cultural rhythms and vast networks of relationships'.[7]

Recognition of these complex pan-European networks of exchange, patronage, study, exhibitions and personal connections has been slow. As Carmen Popescu has pointed out, historical Romania, which sits in a liminal space between Occident and Orient, has been doubly marginalized by traditional art history: it is 'twice a periphery', defined as Europe's cultural 'other' since the Enlightenment and side-lined once more by the Cold War polarization that denied, distorted or destroyed knowledge of

5 For example, the ERC-funded project *Art Historiographies in Central and Eastern Europe. An Inquiry from the Perspective of Entangled Histories* (ArtHistCEE 802700, 2018–21; PI Dr Ada Hajdu), hosted by New Europe College, Bucharest.

6 See, for example, Piotr Piotrowski, 'On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History', *Umění/Art* 56/5 (2008), 378–83; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison. *Histoire croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 30–50; Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, Artl@s project and bulletin <https://artlas.huma-num.fr/fr/>; Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds, *Circulations in the Global History of* Art (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius, 'Mapping Eastern Europe: Cartography and Art History', *Artl@s Bulletin* 2/2 (2013), Article 3, 15–25 <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol2/iss2/3/>. For 'intracultural contact', see Jeremy Howard, *East European Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.

7 Alexandra Chiriac, 'Putting the Peripheral Centre Stage: Performing Modernism in Interbellum Bucharest 1924–1934', PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 2019, 26.

art and design from the pre-socialist period.[8] With the exception of key figures operating in Western nexuses of the avant-garde (e.g. Constantin Brâncuși, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Iancu or Victor Brauner), Romanian artists of the first half of the twentieth century are rarely discussed abroad, while Romanian art history itself has only recently begun to look beyond the narrow box of national narratives to recognize the transnational aspects of its national style debates.[9] As new research increasingly demonstrates, however, discussions about the nature of Romania's artistic heritage were informed by interaction not just with the major artistic centres of France, Germany and Austria but also with Europe's so-called 'peripheries', from Catalonia to Norway.[10]

Nordic Role Models at World's Fairs

United in 1859, the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia won independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and became a kingdom under a German sovereign, King Carol I (1839–1914), in 1881. Their multi-lingual elite studied abroad; in their attempts to promote

8 Carmen Popescu, 'At the Periphery of Architectural History – Looking at Eastern Europe', Artl@s *Bulletin* 3/1 (2014), Article 2, 8–17 (9) <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas/vol3/iss1/2/>.

9 For an example of this new direction, see Ada Hajdu, 'The Search for National Architectural Styles in Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to World War I', in Roumen Daskalov, Diana Mishkova, Tchavdar Marinov, and Alexander Vezenkov, eds, *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 394–439.

10 See, for example, Lucila Mallart, 'Architectural Conversations Across Europe's Borderlands. Transnational Exchanges between Barcelona and Bucharest in the 1920s', in Eszter Gantner, Heidi Hein-Kirchner, and Oliver Hochadel, eds, *Interurban Knowledge Exchange in Southern and Eastern Europe, 1870–1950* (London: Routledge, 2020), 219–36.

Romania's Western identity (as a 'Latin island in a sea of Slavs'[11]) and gain a foothold on the world stage, they initially fostered Western models for their institutions and civic architecture. Many of these models were found at World's Fairs, where Romanians witnessed vigorous debates around whether historical periods, 'geographical rootedness' or folk culture were best suited to embody ideas of the 'nation'.[12] The late nineteenth century saw new archaeological research into Romania's Dacian and Roman past, as well as investigation of its Byzantine heritage, leading to the restoration of monuments, the setting up of museums and the study of churches and princely palaces.[13] There was also growing interest in the rich peasant culture of the region, contributing to a form of 'ethnic nationalism' (to use Anthony Smith's term) that, particularly in the interwar period, focused on folk heritage as a distinctive signifier of Romanian identity.[14] Folk culture was the subject of lively debate across all of Europe by the late nineteenth century. In particular, Romanians were aware of the studies of folk art emanating from Vienna, such as Crown Prince Rudolf's *Kronprinzenwerk* (1886–1902) which reinforced the imperial vision of a multinational state, or Rudolf von Eitelberger's article 'Folk Art and House Industry' (1876) which articulated the widely-held view that the peripheral regions of the empire (including some inhabited by ethnic Romanians) were culturally and economically backward. Eitelberger, like Alois Riegl after him, saw the *Volk* as a transnational category (writing that home industry 'has nothing to do with the political concept of nation'),

11 For the historical origins of this term in the Transylvanian School, see Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 37.

12 Carmen Popescu, 'Architecture: Introductory Survey Essay', in Joep Leerssen, ed., *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (electronic version; Amsterdam: Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms, 2022) <https://ernie.uva.nl/viewer.p/21/56/object/122-160747> accessed 20 March 2022.

13 See Cosmin Minea, 'Medieval Art, National Architectural Heritage and Museums in Late 19th-Century Romania', *Anastasis. Research in Medieval Culture and Art* 8/1 (May 2021) <https://doi.org/10.35218/armca.2021.1.06>.

14 Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1991), 82.

a fossil tied to an earlier stage of socioeconomic development, now in regrettable but inevitable decline.[15] As Matthew Rampley has remarked, this reflected a tendency to view the Balkan peoples as the 'primitives' of Eastern Europe, inhabiting an intermediate zone between Europe and the Islamic Middle East.[16]

As a newly emerging nation of this so-called 'intermediate' zone, Romania had to work hard to define itself against such pre-existing attitudes. The early stages of debate around its national identity were played out in material form at the Paris *Expositions universelles* in discussions around the country's pavilions, designed by French architects in a historicist mishmash of pseudo-Byzantine forms that pandered to Western ideas of Balkan orientalism but failed to satisfy a growing Romanian desire for 'authentic' architectural representation.[17] Instead, some Romanians showed an interest in the innovative local colour of the Scandinavian constructions, such as the Swedish-Norwegian pavilion by Henrik Thrap-Meyer (1833–1910) at the 1878 Exhibition (Figure 2.1), which was praised by the French press for its material honesty and rootedness in local tradition:

> Resting solidly on a double base of enormous trunks driven into the ground, it is assembled of entire trees woven steadfastly together. With its only openwork ornamentation consisting of several narrow arcatures grouped together under the shelter of a projecting roof, it seems made to resist sudden gusts of wind and withstand the heavy snows of the long winter. In fact, what we have before our eyes are rustic

15 Rudolf von Eitelberger, 'Die Volkskunst und die Hausindustrie', in *Gesammelte Kunsthistorische Schriften*, 4 vols (Vienna: Braumüller, 1879–84), ii, 267–75 (271).

16 Matthew Rampley, 'Art History and the Politics of Empire: Rethinking the Vienna School', *The Art Bulletin* 91/4 (December 2009), 446–62 (453) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2009.10786147>.

17 See Cosmin Minea, 'New Images for Modern Nations: Creating a "National" Architecture for the Balkan Countries at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889', in Mikos Szechely, ed., *Ephemeral Architecture in Central-Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2015), 91–106; Ada Hajdu, 'The Pavilions of Greece, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris', in Maria Couroucli and Tchavdar Marinov, eds, *Balkan Heritages. Negotiating History and Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 47–77.

constructions from the olden days: on the right the patriarchal residence, on the left an old bell tower, linked together at first floor level by a covered gallery.[18]

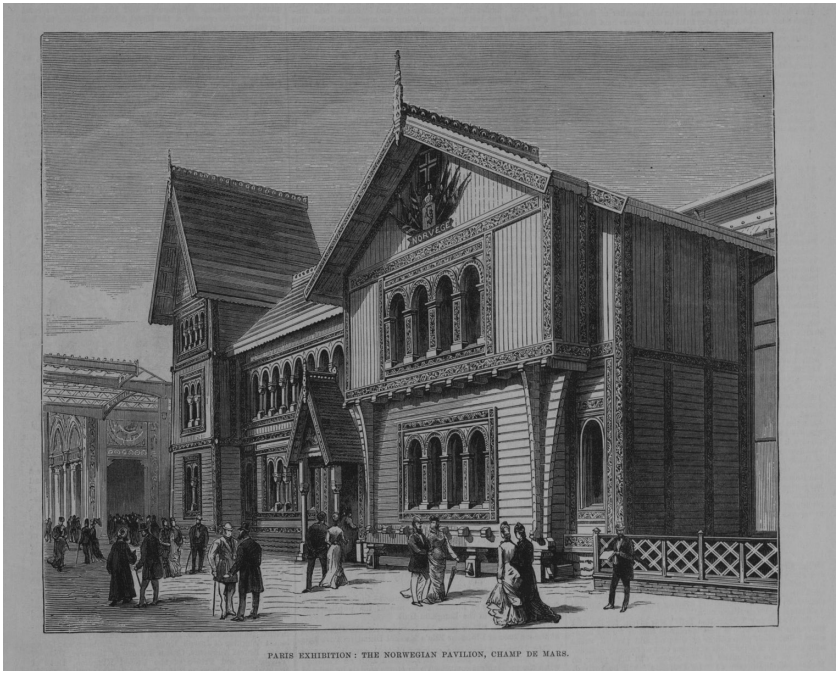

Figure 2.1. Henrik Thrap-Meyer, Pavilion of Sweden-Norway at the 1878 Paris *Exposition universelle* (now the Musée Roybert-Fould, Parc Bécon, Courbevoie). Source: *Illustrated London News*, 72/2034 (22 June 1878).

Although this romanticized description did not recognize that the pavilion was assembled from prefabricated pine modules transported from Oslo to Paris by boat, the fact that Thrap-Meyer brought local craftsmen from Norway to reconstruct it was not lost on the Romanians. Like other Balkan peoples fighting for independence in the Russo-Turkish War in

18 Paul Sédille, 'L'architecture au Champ-de-Mars et au Trocadéro', in M. Louis Gonse, ed., *Exposition universelle de 1878. Les Beaux-arts et les arts décoratifs*, tome I: *L'art modern* (Paris: Gazette des Beaux-arts, 1879), 231.

1878, they did not have a pavilion at the exhibition, but they did have the memory of the criticisms levelled at their 1867 pavilion, designed by the French architect Ambroise Baudry (1838–1906) in the form of a truncated Byzantine church. Critics had accused it of having no recognizable identity beyond an uncomfortable mixture of architectural styles and a languorous orientalism. One even wrote, 'Romania doesn't exist by itself. It doesn't shine.'[19] Thrap-Meyer's 'honest' construction must have offered a promising way forward: it demonstrated how identity need not be rooted in aspirations to 'high' culture but could be found in local models. After the exhibition the Swedish-Norwegian pavilion was purchased by the Romanian politician Prince George Barbu Știrbei (1828–1925) who installed it in the grounds of his Parc de Bécon residence in Courbevoie, where it still stands today.[20] It is possible that the pavilion influenced Romania's contribution to the next Paris *Exposition* in 1889: an asymmetrical wooden restaurant which combined deeply projecting eaves with the traditional trilobate-arched porch and tower of princely manor houses and a very modern use of large glass windows. Inside, surrounded by vernacular pottery and weavings, diners were entertained by Roma musicians and served by waitresses in embroidered folk costumes.[21] In the words of the Romanian General Commissioner, Prince George Bibescu (1833–1902), this marked a shift to an understanding that 'the most authentic expression of the nation is the Romanian peasant, his way of life and what he creates'.[22]

19 *L'Exposition illustrée*, tome II, 1900, 130–2, cited by Cosmin Minea, 'An Image for the Nation: Architecture of the Balkan Countries at 19th-Century Universal Exhibitions in Paris', MA thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2014, 49.

20 It was used as a studio by Știrbei's adoptive daughter, the painter Consuelo Fould. His wife, the French actress Valérie Simonin, later also purchased and reconstructed part of the so-called 'Indian Pavilion' from the 1878 Exhibition, designed by the British architect Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke.

21 The restaurant was constructed by the French architect Oscar André. See Cosmin Minea, 'Roma Musicians, Folk Art and Traditional Food from Romania at the Paris World Fairs of 1889 and 1900', in Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm, eds, *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 144–69 <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004500327_007>.

22 Georges Bibescu, *Notice sur la Roumanie. Productions-Industries* (Paris: J. Kugelmann, 1889), quoted in Minea, 'An Image for the Nation', 63. Although Romania, as a monarchy, did not have an official pavilion at this centenary celebration of the

The purchase of the Swedish-Norwegian pavilion was not the first instance of Romanian interest in Scandinavian models at World's Fairs. Even before independence, the Romanian government had approached the Swedish government to request the plans of the Swedish schoolhouse shown at the 1873 Vienna *Weltausstellung*.[23] This full-scale wooden schoolhouse, designed by Pehr Johan Ekman (1816–84), was an example of how Sweden used 'travelling schoolhouses' to establish an international reputation for educational excellence.[24] The new modern standards pioneered by the teacher Per A. Siljeström (1815–92) were much admired by the educational representatives of other countries, with the Boston US Superintendent of Schools reporting from Vienna that 'the educational display of Sweden is far more satisfactory … than that of any foreign country'.[25] Surviving plans for rural Romanian schools suggest that politicians and architects were influenced by Swedish ideas of how well-designed, light and healthy schoolhouses could improve children's learning. In 1889, for example, Ion Socolescu (1856–1924), a key figure in early national style debates who was involved in the Romanian restaurant in Paris, designed a school in Săceni in the county of Teleorman, funded by the Minister of Agriculture and Industry, George Pĕucescu (Figure 2.2).[26] Its attractively simple structure of wood, cement and brick, with a shingled roof and a central hall flanked by four whitewashed classrooms, echoed the practical modesty of the Swedish schoolhouse. In a nod to the Muntenian climate and local building traditions, it also incorporated a large covered entrance veranda decorated with wooden fretwork.

French Revolution, it invested significant energy in the restaurant, which became a focal point of early debates around a so-called national style in architecture.

23 Christian Lundahl and Martin Lawn, 'The Swedish Schoolhouse: A Case Study in Transnational Influences in Education at the 1870s World's Fairs', *Paedagogica Historica* 51/3 (2014), 319–34 (327; 332) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2014.941373>.

24 The afterlife of another travelling schoolhouse brought to the USA for the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition offers an interesting example of Nordic design in translation. See Charlotte Ashby, 'Transatlantic Exchange: Performing Scandinavia at American World's Fairs', in Bobbye Tigerman and Monica Obniski, eds, *Scandinavian Design and the United States 1890–1980* (Los Angeles: LA County Museum of Art, 2020), 137–50 (139–41).

25 Quoted in Lundahl and Lawn, 'Swedish Schoolhouse', 326.

26 I am grateful to the late Ada Hajdu for bringing this example to my attention.

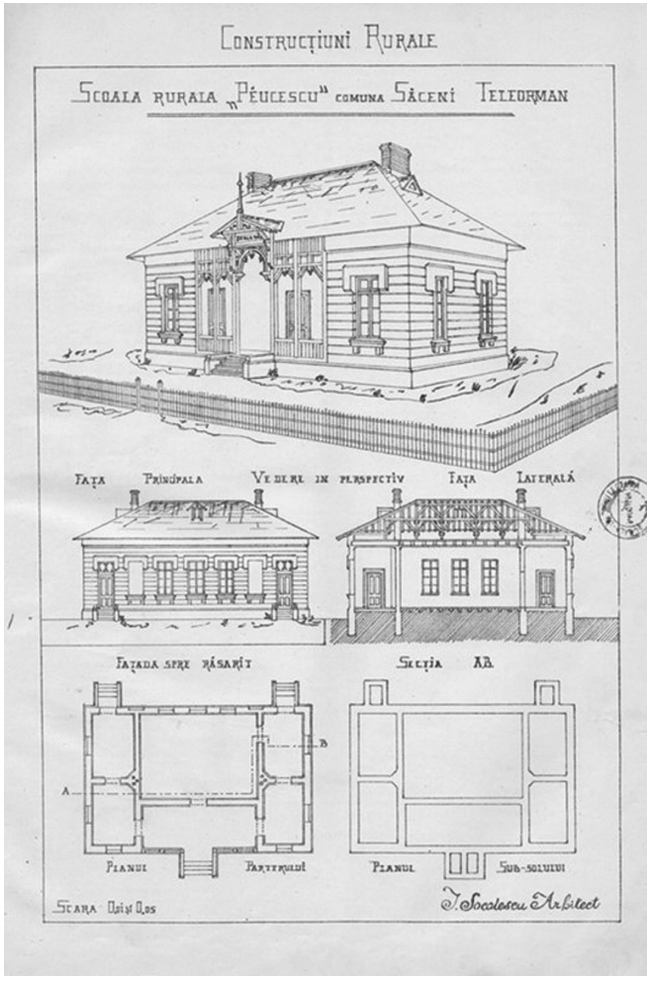

Figure 2.2. Ion Socolescu, design for 'Pĕucescu' rural school in Săceni Commune, Teleorman, 1889. Source: 'Şcóla rurală "Pĕucescu"', *Analele architecturei și ale artelor cu care se légă*, 1/31 (March 1890), 68–9.

Socolescu published his design in the important mouthpiece of new architectural ideas, *Analele architecturei și ale artelor cu care se leagă* ('The Annals of Architecture and Related Arts'), that he founded in 1890. From this point onwards, the Romanian national style debate articulated itself most loudly in architecture. Initially, its proponents seem to have hesitated between the two reservoirs of vernacular culture (folk architecture) and history (Orthodox and princely architecture) explored at the Paris Exhibitions. But a preliminary design by Ion Mincu (1852–1912) for the 1889 restaurant, rejected for Paris but realized three years later as *Bufetul* restaurant in Bucharest, pointed the future development of the style in the direction of history, launching a creative repertoire of architectural forms inspired by the distinctive language of historical monuments, particularly those built under Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu (1654–1714) at the turn of the eighteenth century.[27]

Nordic Craft in Comparison: Folk Culture as the Source of a 'National' Art

Attention to folk culture as a potential source of national expression did not disappear, however. Debates around what form this should take often cited the example of the Nordic countries, mirroring the wider international interest of decorative arts magazines like *The Studio* and *Art et Décoration* in Scandinavian art. Commentary could be both positive and negative. In 1908, for example, in probably the most important article written about the search for a Romanian national style in the decorative arts, the artist Apcar Baltazar (1880–1909) criticized the tendency of some Norwegian craft schools to produce low-quality souvenirs for tourists, rather than original pieces that reinvented 'the particular and powerful character of the art of the conquering Vikings'. He also believed that Norwegian artists' deference to German Secession Style models

27 See Carmen Popescu, *Le Style national roumain. Construire une nation à travers l'architecture 1881–1945* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2004).

undermined their national style, thus drawing a pointed parallel to the debate then raging in Romania between national style proponents and 'those who believe that our decorative art, like many others, has to draw its life from abroad'.[28] Central to his belief in the value of folk art was its appropriateness to context and function. This, he argued, allowed identification of similarities between Romanian peasant art and that of not only the Finns and Norwegians but also the Russians, Bulgarians, Serbians and Albanians. The danger, however, lay in believing that a national style could be created simply through indiscriminate borrowing of motifs: this would lead to 'a merely popular style, limited to an inferior decorative concept and nothing more'.[29] A truly national work of art should not be a pastiche of different borrowed elements but should reinterpret the 'spirit' of vernacular art according to the needs of modern decoration. It should offer 'a transformation and reinterpretation of old motifs, according to modern artistic taste, without altering their essential character'.[30]

Baltazar, who died aged 29 in 1909, was an articulate advocate of folk art as a source of renewal. It is significant that his article appeared not long after the founding of the Romanian Museum of National Art (today the Museum of the Romanian Peasant) in 1906.[31] This was the brainchild of the dynamic and argumentative Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș (1872–1952), Romania's first professor of art history, who gathered together rich collections of folk art that he saw as increasingly threatened by the modern age. By 'national art' he understood all forms of art, bringing together folk art, religious and prehistoric artefacts, Graeco-Roman art and a modern painting gallery in a display designed to assert the artistic continuity of Romania from prehistory to the present.[32] This brought folk art into dialogue with

28 Apcar Baltazar, 'Spre un stil românesc', *Viața românească* 11 (November 1908), republished in *A. Baltazar 1880–1909* (București: Pinacoteca Municipiului București, 1936), 39–59 (59).

29 Ibid., 51.

30 Ibid., 56.

31 Initially called the Museum of Ethnography, National Art, Decorative Art and Industrial Art.

32 Iulia Pohrib, 'Tradition and Ethnographic Display: Defining the National Specificity at the National Art Museum in Romania (1906–1937)', in Dominique

archaeology and fine art in a manner that broke with existing disciplinary boundaries and opened the door to a new appreciation of folk art as a repository of national values – both artistic and 'essential'. At a time when national style debates were dominated by the Neo-Romanian school of architecture's focus on boyar, Brâncovenesc and Byzantine forms, Tzigara-Samurcaș became the key voice arguing in favour of folk art as the source of a new 'Romanian' language of art. He wrote: 'Only by cultivating and developing folk art will we truly be able to strive towards a great Romanian art.'[33] In his determination to promote Romanian folk art at home and abroad, he was also the pivotal figure in interactions with Scandinavia.

1906 was a significant year for Romania: its first major exhibition, the Jubilee Exhibition in Bucharest, had stirred up intense national fervour. Examples of craftwork from across the principalities were brought together in an important display; after the exhibition, they formed the kernel of Tzigara-Samurcaș's new museum. In addition to carved crosses, gateways and chairs, painted eggs, ceramics and embroidered costumes, they included an entire carved peasant house made by a certain Antonie Mogoș from Gorj who was brought to Bucharest to reconstruct it (Figure 2.3). King Carol I was apparently greatly taken with the museum and brought the 'Swedish princes' to visit it when they were in Bucharest. The princes, the sons of Oscar II of Sweden, were the cousins of Carol's consort Queen Elisabeth (1843–1916). Tzigara-Samurcaș gleefully reported the princes' comment that the museum's careful choice of artefacts surpassed Artur Hazelius's overwhelming and 'tiring' displays in the Nordic Museum in Stockholm.[34]

Poulot, Felicity Bodenstien and José María Lanzarote Guiral, eds, *Great Narratives of the Past: Traditions and Revisions in National Museums. EuNaMus Report no. 4* (Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2011), 317–29 (320) <https://ep.liu.se/ecp/078/ecp11078.pdf> accessed 20 October 2021.

33 Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Arta țăranului nostru', *Noua Revistă Română*, 1 October 1908, republished in Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, *Scrieri despre arta românească*, ed. by C. D. Zeletin (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1987), 38–46 (46).

34 Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Arta scandinavă și a noastră', *Convorbiri literare* 43/7 (July 1909), 794–8, reproduced in Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, *Memorii I*, ed. by Ioan Șerb and Florica Șerb (Bucharest: Grai și suflet – Cultural națională, 1991), 273–4 (273).

Figure 2.3. House of Antonie Mogoș from Gorj, before transportation to the Museum of National Art in Bucharest. Drawing by Octav Roguski. Source: Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, *L'Art du peuple roumain* (Geneva: Kundig, 1925), 14.

There was also a political urgency to Tzigara-Samurcas's efforts on behalf of Romanian folk art. Barely a year after the 1906 Exhibition, the country was rocked by a violent peasant revolt which was brutally suppressed. Although significant political reform did not appear until after the First World War, this pushed the peasant question to the forefront of public awareness. Concurrently with the founding of the museum in 1906, a decorative arts section was set up in the Bucharest School of Fine Art under the direction of the architect George Sterian (1860–1936). It attracted praise from the Swiss designer Eugène Grasset (1845–1917) who drew parallels with the craft revivals in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Zakopane and Switzerland in the way that the section took inspiration from vernacular and Byzantine art without indulging in 'primitivism'.[35] In this vein, Nicolae Ghika-Budești (1869–1943), the architect of Tzigara-Samurcaș's

35 Eugène Grasset, 'L'École Nationale des Arts Décoratifs de Bucarest "Domnita Maria"', *Art et Décoration* 23 (January–June 1908), 125–32 (131).

new museum, published an important article in the first edition of the magazine *Arhitectura* (Architecture) in 1906 discussing how folk art could be reinterpreted to meet the needs of a modern interior. He described his approach as a Romanian variant of 'the so-called "Modern Style" which seems to have begun to emerge in England and the countries of Northern Europe'.[36] It is certainly possible that he was aware of comparable projects, such as the interiors of Gerhard Munthe's Lysaker home Leveld (1898–9). Ghika-Budești's design for a 'national' interior, featuring furniture in polished reddish alder with perforated decoration inspired by carved wooden verandas and unified by a vernacular-inspired colour scheme of green, white and orange, is approached very much in the same spirit as Leveld, right down to the careful use of a peasant colour-palette (Figure 2.4). The rhetoric of both projects vaunted the superiority of the living peasant culture

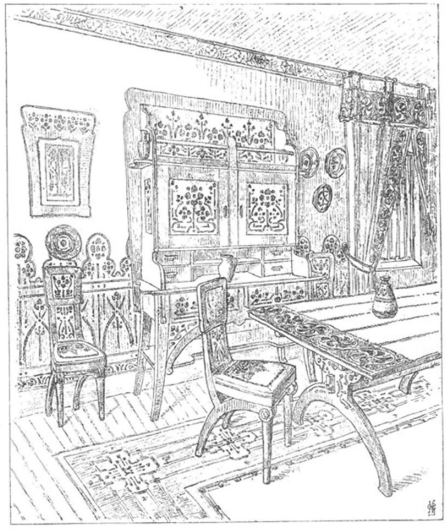

Figure 2.4. Nicolae Ghika-Budești, Project for a 'Romanian' dining room, c.1906. Source: *Arhitectura*, 1 (January–February 1906), 38.

36 Nicolae Ghika-Budești, 'Încercări de artă decorative românească', *Arhitectura* 1 (January–February 1906), 38–41 (39).

of the European 'periphery' as an inspiration for the renewal of art, in contrast to 'Western countries where these sources have somewhat dried up'.[37]

By 1909, the collection of the National Museum was sufficiently well established that Tzigara-Samurcaș was able to contribute an important section to the International Exposition of Folk Art in Berlin – the first time, he claimed, that Romanian folk art had been exhibited abroad.[38] Held in the Jugendstil surroundings of Wertheim's department store, it was organized by the German Lyceum Club, a women's association whose members included the artist and author Marie von Bunsen (1860–1941) and her good friend the German writer Carmen Sylva. Sylva was the pen name of Queen Elisabeth of Romania who, as President of the Berlin Lyceum Club and Honorary President of the exhibition, ensured that the Romanian section was given pride of place. An early example of the commercial association of the museum and the department store, the exhibition displayed folk art from fourteen European countries, as well as China, Egypt and Cameroon.[39] In his entirely partisan account of the event, Tzigara-Samurcaș claimed that the Romanian section outshone all the other national contributions, taking evident delight in one critic's observation that Germany, which had provided collections from at least eleven of its museums, was the weakest country in comparison. Significantly, he identified Romania's closest competitors as Sweden and Norway – but even here he was at pains to point out that 'Swedish costumes cannot compare with ours: they are made of factory cloth dyed in a single colour'. And while 'our hangings look like those from Sweden and Norway, they surpass them due to our splendid handling of colour'.[40] Tzigara-Samurcaș's boasts seem to have been backed up by the economic success of the exhibition, with Liberty's department store in London placing an order worth more than 20,000 lei for Romanian linens. The Romanian section then travelled to Amsterdam Museum, while

37 Ibid., 40.

38 Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Expoziții române la Berlin și la Amsterdam', *Memorii I*, 269–72 (269).

39 Gudrun M. König, 'Displaying Things: Perspectives from Cultural Anthropology', in Karin Priem and Kerstin te Heesen, eds, *On Display: Visual Politics, Material Culture, and Education* (Münster: Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2016), 35–46 (42–3).

40 Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Expoziții române', 269–70.

the influential German architect Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927) invited Tzigara-Samurcaș to give a lecture on Romanian folk art in the great hall of the Künstlerhaus in Berlin in January 1910.[41]

Following the Berlin exhibition, Tzigara-Samurcaș travelled to Stockholm to visit the 1909 Industrial Arts Exhibition organized by *Svenska Slöjdföreningen* (the Swedish Society of Industrial Design). Here he admired the model home approach of its staged domestic interiors. The idea of display homes as a practical solution to housing problems had its origins in the writings of the Swedish feminist philosopher and theorist Ellen Key (1849–1926), particularly her important essay 'Beauty in the Home' (1899). She argued that if the ideal home is created, social and political reform will follow. Interestingly, her description of the ideal home quoted extensively from Carmen Sylva's ideas about lightly furnished rooms painted in fresh blues and greens, with a focus on books and music rather than stiff formality.[42] To anyone familiar with the heavy *Altdeutsch* decoration of the Romanian royal palaces, Sylva's comments may have seemed surprising. As Key recognized however, the palaces reflected the taste and political agenda of King Carol rather than the Queen: 'We do know, though, that however much she may be Queen, Carmen Sylva has not been able to fully realize her ideal! And many are, like her, bound by circumstance.'[43] The Queen's refuge from 'circumstance' was her literary persona: as Carmen Sylva she could express her ideas more freely (she famously wrote: 'The profession of Queen demands but three qualities: Beauty, bounty, and fecundity'[44]). This rare instance of ideas flowing from Romania to Sweden was underpinned by the Queen's personal connections: as well as her links with Key, she was the cousin of the artist Prince Eugen (1865–1947), presumably one of the

41 Alexandru Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'A doua conferință la Berlin', *Memorii I*, 269–72 (269–70).

42 Ellen Key, 'Beauty in the Home' (1899), translated by Anne-Charlotte Harvey, in Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg and Barbara Miller Lane, eds, *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 32–55 (35–6).

43 Ibid., 36.

44 Carmen Sylva, *Thoughts of a Queen*, trans. H. Sutherland Edwards (Covent Garden: Eden, Remington & Co, 1890), 127.

'Swedish princes' who visited Bucharest.[45] It is likely, therefore, that she opened doors for Tzigara-Samurcaș during his Scandinavian travels – the Berlin exhibition had, after all, demonstrated how effectively the author Queen and art historian could present Romania on the world stage.

While Tzigara-Samurcaș, in his 1909 essay 'Scandinavian Art and Our Own', did not comment on Scandinavian ideas of the 'ideal home', he did give his impressions of the newly opened Nordic Museum (agreeing with the Swedish princes that it 'displays too many similar examples') and of Skansen (a 'fine innovation by Hazelius').[46] He also visited Uppsala University to see the Goslar Gospels and made contact with the Professor of German, Hjalmar Psilander (1869–1957), who paid him a return visit in Bucharest in 1921. Tzigara-Samurcaș wrote:

> From Stockholm I travelled to Oslo where I found the same affinities between our art and Norwegian art; more modestly but more pleasingly exhibited by Director Gosch who, in Bygdo [sic], by the edge of the sea, has an open-air museum that is less pretentious but more interesting than the one in Stockholm which also served as a kind of pleasure ground with Sunday dances. My return took me through Copenhagen which I found greatly changed since my student visit there in 1895. I saw again old Director Sophus Müller [archaeologist and Director of the Danish National Museum] and I visited the new, very interesting ethnographic museum at Lingby [sic]. I returned home from the Scandinavian countries filled with inexpressible admiration; not only for their historical art and home crafts, but also for their good way of life and the order and civility of the population in general.[47]

He brought back with him a significant collection of postcards and glass slides of Scandinavia which he used to give a series of talks on 'Nordic wonders'.[48] The collection demonstrates his detailed observation of folk architecture and design: postcards of different cottage interiors from Skansen and *Norsk Folkmuseum*, the Skåne, Finnish, Dalarna and Gotland

45 Key's writings were clearly read by others than the Queen in Romania: for example, the leading artist and feminist Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck (1879–1969) painted a quote from Key's 1903 tract *Kärleken och äktenskapet* below her wall mural 'Spiritual Love' in her artist's home in Bucharest (c.1913).

46 Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Arta scandinavă', 273.

47 Ibid., 273–4.

48 Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Conferințe și excursii din țară', *Memorii I*, 275–7 (275).

rooms from the Nordic Museum, watercolour illustrations of Swedish and Norwegian folk costumes, and photographic glass slides of Norwegian fjords and stave churches.[49] Tzigara-Samurcaș, who pioneered the illustrated teaching of art history in Romania, became a vital conduit for knowledge of Scandinavia. He used his Scandinavian research to elaborate two main lines of argument. The first related to the common ground between the folk art of different nations. He argued repeatedly for formal and technical similarities between Romanian and Scandinavian folk art, particularly in textiles and woodcarving, going as far as to display Norwegian examples in his museum, and writing: '[n]o-one would suspect the Norwegian sideboard exhibited in the Museum in Bucharest of not being Romanian.'[50] His argument was echoed by other early scholars of Romanian folk art, including Margareta Miller-Verghy (1865–1953), who published one of the first illustrated pattern albums of decorative motifs in 1911 and claimed that they approximated most closely to 'the peasant art of Sweden … The origin of this kinship between the decorative art of two countries so remote from one another is a question that remains to be solved, though it is suggested that it may have originated in intercourse with Byzantium.'[51]

In fact, the idea of similarities between the folk art of different peoples was already an important feature of art historical discourse at this time. As early as 1891, the Croatian art historian Izidor Kršnjavi (1845–1927), looking to legitimize the art of his region in the face of Habsburg rule, claimed similarities between South Slavic, German, Hungarian, Norwegian and 'Oriental' ornament, arguing this revealed shared origins in classical art.[52]

49 This collection is now in the archive of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest. Tzigara-Samurcaș was an early maker of glass slides; further parts of his collection (including urban views of Stockholm and Copenhagen) are held by the Romanian Academy and the Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urbanism in Bucharest (see <https://tzigara-samurcas.uauim.ro/en/>).

50 Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Arta scandinavă', 273.

51 Marguerite Miller-Verghy, *Motifs Anciens de Décoration Roumaine* (Bucharest: Carol Göbl, 1911), reviewed in *The International Studio* 49 (March–June 1913), 172.

52 Izidor Kršnjavi, 'Ueber den Ursprung der südslavischen Ornamentmotive', *Mittheilungen des k. k. oesterreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie* 69 (1891), 462–9.

Tzigara-Samurcaș, on the other hand, attributed the perceived connection between Romania and Scandinavia to the Goths:

> Underpinning the similarities are: firstly, the coexistence in ancient times of the Goths and our ancestors in the region of Ukraine and, secondly, the same living conditions in similar regions. Wood and linen have conditioned the art of both peoples … The same log houses and the same gates … Scandinavian forms have our carved notches, to which they add colour. The Scandinavian highlander uses the same bucium [alp-horn] wrapped in birch strips as we do.[53]

Tzigara-Samurcaș was clearly aware of the powerful ideas of the controversial Viennese art historian Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941) whose interest in wooden architecture and efforts to reorientate art history away from Greece and Rome contributed much to the emergence of nationalist histories of art in the region. By the 1920s, when Tzigara-Samurcaș and other key figures like the historian Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940) were constructing overtly national narratives of Romanian art based on the primacy of Thracian civilization, they drew on Strzygowski's belief in the importance of artistic influence from the North and East, his focus on material artefacts over written records and his championing of cultures at the margins of traditional art historical interest to justify their focus on peasant art as a legitimate manifestation of the national 'soul'.

Tzigara-Samurcaș's second argument related to his opposition to the establishment of an open-air folk museum in Bucharest. The pioneering success of the Scandinavian village museums was a subject of much discussion and emulation across Europe at the time.[54] But while Tzigara-Samurcaș admired Skansen, and even more *Norsk Folkemuseum*, he did not feel the model was yet appropriate for Romania whose folk culture, he claimed, was still very much alive. He wrote that Hazelius did not found Skansen 'out of scientific interest or a passion for collecting, but rather from the moral urge to fix in perpetuity the cultural state of his people who in that period found themselves at a crossroads'. Noting that Scandinavian

53 Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Arta scandinavă', 273.

54 See, for example, the discussion in George Bröchner's article 'Open-Air Museums for London: A Suggestion', *The Studio* 21 (1901), 158–71.

vernacular culture was irredeemably threatened by the arrival of industrial production, he deemed Skansen to be 'the characteristic product of the romanticism of the end of last century'.[55] In contrast, '[t]he whole of Romania is an open-air museum! In whatever village you visit, you can see more convincing, more original ethnographic demonstrations than the artificial ones of museum enclosures.'[56]

To those who argued that his position was undermined by the collection in the National Museum, he claimed that these artefacts – even the house of Antonie Mogoș – belonged to the realm of 'art' and should be in 'closed collections sheltered from the weather'.[57] Open-air museums, with their costumed actors, were no more than a 'parody', whose relation to his art museum was similar to that between a zoo and a zoological museum.[58] It is interesting that when a Village Museum was finally established in Bucharest in 1936, it was within the context of the international festival *Luna Bucureștilor* (Bucharest Month).[59] Tzigara-Samurcaș's insistence on the separation of 'performed' folk culture as public spectacle and ethnographic artefacts as art objects brought him into conflict with ethnologists, but would find international support when the Society of Nations developed folk art into a legitimate domain of art history in the interwar years. As Carmen Popescu has pointed out, for countries like Romania, 'perceived as rich in folklore but deficient in great art … including the "folk arts" as a constitutive field of art history amounted to the possibility of overcoming the obligatory reference to the Western canon.'[60]

55 Tzigara-Samurcaș, 'Muzeele în aer liber', in *Scrieri*, 320–30 (322).

56 Ibid., 326.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 327–8.

59 Although based on scientific research by Dimitrie Gusti and Florea Stănculescu, the open-air Village Museum was framed in the context of the 'spectacle'. It was preceded by the temporary 'Bucharest Old Quarter' of the previous Luna and was succeeded (in the discriminatory terminology of the period) by a 'village of dwarfs' in 1937 and a 'Negro village' in 1939. See Carmen Popescu, '"Cultures majeures, cultures mineures". Quelques réflexions sur la (géo)politisation du folklore dans l'entre-deux-guerres', in *Spicilegium, Studii și articole în onoarea Prof. Corina Popa* (Bucharest: UNArte, 2015), 235–46 (243).

60 Carmen Popescu, 'Being Specific: Limits of Contextualising (Architectural) History', *The Journal of Architecture* 16/6 (2011), 821–53 (839).

Nordic Design in Translation: The Norwegian Interiors of Crown Princess Marie

In his efforts to preserve traditional craft on the one hand, and promote a new Romanian decorative arts scene on the other, Tzigara-Samurcaș found another valuable royal ally in British-born Crown Princess Marie (1875–1938), wife of Prince Ferdinand, the heir to the Romanian throne. An artist and an exhibiting member of the group *Tinerimea artistică* (Artistic Youth), Marie was also patron of the new decorative arts section at the Bucharest School of Fine Art and had exhibited pieces of her own applied art at the 1909 Berlin exhibition. Following the example of Queen Elisabeth, who promoted the wearing of peasant costume at court, Marie involved herself in efforts to raise awareness of vernacular crafts and use them to stimulate modern decorative art. She was patron of the *Domnița Maria* (Princess Marie) Society which, in addition to running a workshop which copied weavings from Tzigara-Samurcaș's museum for sale to the public, ran competitions encouraging artists to re-invent old motifs and styles for contemporary use, contributing to the debate around a national language of modern art.

In her early years, Marie conflated her interest in the vernacular with a broader fascination with the Celtic, Nordic and Byzantine revivals. The result was a range of unusual interiors in the palaces of Cotroceni in Bucharest and Pelișor in Sinaia designed between 1897 and the First World War.[61] Her ideas were influenced, in part, by her awareness of Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau ideas across Europe (her sister and brother-in-law founded the Darmstadt artists' colony), but she also styled herself as a *princesse lointaine* in an eastern country, drawing on romanticized ideas

61 For discussion of Marie's palace designs, see Shona Kallestrup, *Art and Design in Romania. Local and International Aspects of the Search for National Expression* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 2006); Marian Constantin, *Palate și colibe regale din România. Arhitectura și decorația interioară în slujba monarhiei (1875–1925)* (Bucharest: Compania, 2007); Macrina Oproiu, 'Monografia Castelului Pelișor (1903–1948)', PhD thesis, Școala de Studii Avansate a Academiei Române Institutul de Istorie 'Nicolae Iorga', 2021.

of the archaic and primeval in her golden salon (1901) and silver Neo-Byzantine bedroom in Cotroceni (1905) and Neo-Celtic golden boudoir in Pelișor (c.1903–6). She described these as 'beautiful in an almost barbaric unconventional way'.[62]

The daughter of the Duke of Edinburgh, and cousin to Queen Maud of Norway, Marie was clearly aware of design trends in both Britain and Scandinavia and subscribed to decorative arts magazines like *The Studio* which discussed them regularly. In creating her rooms, she worked closely with the Czech architect Karel Liman (1855–1929), the Viennese furniture designer Bernhard Ludwig (1866–1939) and the Sinaia Arts and Crafts Workshops. From around 1905 onwards, she produced a range of gilded limewood furniture inspired by medieval Norwegian chairs in the Historical Museum in Oslo. Several variants (both single and double chairs) were modelled on the twelfth-century Tyldal church chair (Østerdalen, Hedmark; Figure 2.5), while another copied the thirteenth-century Blakar chair (Lom, Oppland), both illustrated in *The Studio*.[63] Marie was not the only designer inspired by these models. The Oslo woodcarving workshop of Johan Borgersen (1863–1930), which executed many of Gerhard Munthe's designs, crafted a copy of the Blakar chair that was illustrated in *The Studio* in 1900.[64] Munthe and Borgersen similarly included a version of the Tyldal chair in the Fairytale Room of Holmenkollen Tourist Hotel in Oslo (1896). The model also appealed to the Celtic Revival tastes of Irish Arts and Crafts workshops, as evidenced by its presence in a c.1904 photograph of the showroom of Bray Art Furniture Industry in Co. Wicklow.[65]

62 Queen Marie of Romania, 'My Different Homes. Cotroceni I', no date, National Archives of Romania, Bucharest, fond Regina Maria III/79, 15.

63 In J. Romilly Allen, 'Early Scandinavian Wood-Carvings', *The Studio* 10/47 (February 1897), 11–20.

64 S. Frykholm, 'Round the Exhibition. –V. Scandinavian Decorative Art', *The Studio* 21/93 (December 1900), 190–9 (196).

65 Run by Kathleen Scott and Sophie St. John Whitty. I am grateful to the late Nicola Gordon-Bowe for sharing this information with me.

Figure 2.5. Comparison of Tyldal Church chair (Østerdalen, Hedmark), c.1150–1200, in the Museum of Cultural History, Oslo, with one of the gilded 'Norwegian' chairs designed by Karel Liman after Crown Princess Marie's indications and made by the Sinaia Arts and Crafts Workshop for the Golden Boudoir, Pelișor, 1905. Credits: author (left) and Udvardi Arpad (right).

Marie's furniture, therefore, sits within a wider field of design translation, drawing on a fascination with the decorative forms of the old Nordic world that circulated internationally through magazines, postcards, travel writing and exhibitions. It is likely that Marie was aware of Borgersen and Munthe's work, which enjoyed success at the World's Fairs in Paris 1900 and Liège 1905 and was bought by museums like the Victoria and Albert in London and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.[66] It is also possible that she had visited her cousin Emperor Wilhelm II's dragon-style hunting lodge in Rominten, built by Holm-Munthe and decorated by Borgersen in 1890–1 (see Chapter 4). In 1910, she designed her own Norwegian boudoir in Cotroceni (Figure 2.6). This marked the end of her gilded phase:

66 Jan Kokkin, *Gerhard Munthe. Norwegian Pioneer of Modernism* (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 2018), 146.

Figure 2.6. Crown Princess Marie of Romania and Karel Liman, Norwegian boudoir, Cotroceni Palace, Bucharest, 1910. Period photo. Coll: author.

> After that I sobered down and my next creation was a quaint carved room in dull brown the colour of a good cigar. The ceiling was low with heavy beams, the doors heavily decorated with rough iron designs. This room was inspired by pictures I had seen of Norwegian farmhouses.[67]

The 'pictures' came from Paul du Chaillu's book *The Viking Age* (1889), which Marie purchased in 1910.[68] Some of the borrowings were literal: the decorative ironwork of the two doors was copied from Faaberg Church in Lillehammer and Björksta Church in Västmanland (Sweden),

67 Fond Regina Maria III/79, 18–19.

68 Paul du Chaillu, *The Viking Age*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1889). A receipt for the book is in the palace papers in the National Archives of Romania, Bucharest (fond Castele și Palate, dos. 416/1910, fol. 69), while the book itself is in the library at Pelișor.

and the carved scrollwork and decorative arcades of the upper register of the walls echo du Chaillu's illustration of Thorpe (Torpo) stave church in Hallingdal. The much-extended scrollwork menagerie of the alcove has elements of the carved portals of the twelfth-century stave churches of Ål and Flå. The ceiling was formed of two shallow barrel vaults with carved rafters and the room was originally filled with Marie's collection of jade, icons and pseudo-Norwegian furniture. In letters to family and friends, the Princess called 'the new most adorable Norwegian room' her 'greatest delight' and 'a real little snuggery'.[69]

How, then, should we understand this idiosyncratic translation of Nordic models? It differed from Norwegian-made dragon-style interiors like the Fairytale Room at Holmenkollen in that it lacked their creative pictorial interpretations of saga and myth, as well as Munthe's essentially modern decorative language inflected by Japonisme and Art Nouveau. Munthe's interiors began as pictorial designs that were reinterpreted three-dimensionally in carved and painted wood. Marie's interior, in contrast, appropriated literal elements of historical Norwegian and Swedish churches and adapted them to meet the needs of a domestic interior. Moreover, it was a thoroughly international affair: a Norwegian boudoir created by a Czech architect and an Austrian furniture designer for the British consort of the German heir to the Romanian throne. It happily mixed sources, with a large whitewashed Romanian hearth in one corner and eclectic collections of Orthodox icons, Venetian glass and Art Nouveau *objets d'art*. As an artist and a writer of fairy tales, Marie was clearly captivated by the archaic, picturesque aspects of stave church decoration; as a protector of societies for the preservation and encouragement of Romanian folk crafts, she probably identified with efforts to celebrate and preserve disappearing rural heritage. But as the soon-to-be Queen of a 'peripheral' country struggling to win recognition for its cultural heritage (one that did not fit comfortably into Western hierarchies of periodization, style or artistic value), she must have been aware of the national soft power of the dragon style in

69 Queen Marie of Romania, letter to her mother, 14 October 1910, V/2668/1910; letter to Roxo Weingartner, 26 January 1925, V/5365/1925. National Archives of Romania, Bucharest, fond Regina Maria.

its home context. Set against the longer history of Romanian interest in Scandinavian craft, and its relation to debates around Romanian national art, the Norwegian boudoir was more than just the curious project of an imaginative princess.

Conclusion

Marie became Queen Consort four years after the creation of the room. She emerged from the First World War as a national icon, the 'mythical saviour' of the country during occupation and the unofficial architect of Greater Romania at the Paris Peace Conference.[70] By the early 1920s, she was possibly the most famous woman in the world, celebrated in Hannah Höch's photomontage 'Da Dandy' (1919) and appearing on the cover of *Time Magazine*. She had an acute understanding of the power of visual media, particularly photography, and used her residences as stage-sets to perform her role as 'Mother of all the Romanians'. With the new ideological focus on the Romanian peasant as the symbol of unification,[71] Marie cultivated what she called the 'Regina Maria style' – a more earthy design aesthetic combining Neo-Romanian, vernacular, Byzantine and Turkish elements – in architecture, interior design and even her own clothing.

At the same time, art historians like Tzigara-Samurcaș, Iorga, George Oprescu (1881–1969) and Coriolan Petranu (1893–1945) began to argue seriously for the central role of folk art in a national history of art. Through publications and international exhibitions, they posited the existence of an autochthonous Romanian artistic tradition that had been preserved by

70 Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 208.

71 At the Paris Peace Conference, Romania's territorial claims rested primarily on the presence of Romanian ethnic communities in Transylvania, the Banat, Bukovina and Bessarabia. With the creation of Greater Romania, the peasant went from being a minor strand of national identity to the common ethnic denominator of unification, mobilized by disciplines and institutions.

peasant art during foreign occupation and that proved the radiating force of Thracian (as opposed to Classical) civilisation. According to this narrative, the abrupt arrival of Western forms in the nineteenth century did not condemn the Romanians to a perpetual game of 'catch-up'. Instead, by valorizing Romania's own traditions, both Orthodox and vernacular, art historians claimed that the native artistic sensibility managed to cross the shift to Western art practices and inform a new, distinctively national, modern idiom. Moreover, they maintained that the 'authenticity' of the national spirit, in a country which still boasted a vibrant peasant culture, could offer a source of renewal for the 'tired' centres of modern art. In this they had the support of the French art historian Henri Focillon (1881–1943) who, in his introduction to the Acts of the 1928 International Congress of Folk Arts and Folklore in Prague, widened the definition of 'art' to include work hitherto considered to belong to ethnography.[72]

Folk art moved to the heart of ideas about Romanian identity in the 1920s and 30s, the seeds which had been sown in the early years of the century blossoming into powerful statements about folk art's role in a national language of art. Comparisons with the Nordic countries did not disappear – on the contrary, Tzigara-Samurcaș organized further exhibitions of Romanian folk art in Helsinki and Oslo in 1935. In 1933, Oprescu, one of the most important Romanian art historians and a close friend of Focillon, attended the Thirteenth International Congress of Art History in Stockholm. The main focus of the conference was 'national schools' and the Swedes were clearly interested in Oprescu's interweaving of fine and folk art in his discussion of modern Romanian art. On the back of the congress, the Malmö editor John Kroon (1881–1968) persuaded him to compile his thoughts into a book, *Roumanian Art From 1800 to Our Days*, which was published simultaneously in English, French and Swedish editions.[73] Sixty years after Romania had taken an interest in Swedish educational models at

72 Henri Focillon, 'Introduction', *Art populaire, travaux artistiques et scientifiques du 1er Congrès international des arts populaires, Prague, 1928* (Paris: Éditions Duchartre, 1931). Focillon, who built up a fine collection of Romanian folk art, also wrote an article for the catalogue of the 1925 Exposition of Romanian Art in Paris.

73 George Oprescu, *Roumanian Art from 1800 to Our Days* (Malmö: A. B. Malmö Ljustrycksanstalt, 1935).

the Vienna World's Fair, it was fitting that the first major book on Romanian modern art for a foreign audience should have been produced in Sweden.

Ideas around national art in the early twentieth century were driven by transnational dynamics, whether philosophical, political, social, literary or artistic. The hierarchical assumptions of Western art history, evident even at the 1933 Stockholm Congress where the so-called peripheral countries strove to demonstrate that they had a national art that belonged to the 'universal' family of art, meant that the onus was on smaller nations to prove their value in relation to the centre. But intermeshed with these centre–periphery relations were other, less studied, less hierarchical, mediative processes of intracultural contact. As this chapter hopes to have shown, attention to Nordic design's eastern (or south-eastern) turns opens new perspectives on the transnational 'national'.

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