

ennoble warm and natural sentiments and human feelings. The book presents us the ardour and work of a man who put his destiny, his work and his knowledge to the service of the people he really loved: Romanians and Hungarians side by side. This book, I dare say, is the “investigation” of the way in which historical reality can be seen – a new point of view, a new perspective, beyond passions, hate, political wanderings, rancour, the repression and disapproval of all that violates good faith.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

The Buildings of Cluj or the Silent Witnesses

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The National Theatre and the Romanian Opera, the Clinical Hospitals, the Hungarian Theatre and Opera, the Franciscan Church and Monastery, the Calvinist Church, the Saint Michael Church, the Bánffy Palace, the Taylors’ Bastion, the Neolog Synagogue, the Palace of Justice, the National Historical Museum of Transylvania, the Main Building of the Babeş-Bolyai University, the Central University Library are like some silent witnesses, indifferent to the hurried passer-by bored and tired of the unchanging scenery, revealing the local history and the history of mentalities for those who want to see “in them” more than simple buildings.

The Central University Library of Cluj is such a witness, and the volume bearing the same title, published by the Alma Mater Publishing House, signed by the architect Gheorghe Vais,² captures the attention of any person for whom the building situated on the western side of the former Arany János Square, placed at the intersection of Clinicilor and Babeş Streets, is not a unknown or tourist object, monument, but, on the contrary, an element of students’ life, of memories, an “information” which must be given value.

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² Gheorghe Vais, *Biblioteca Centrală Universitară Cluj 1906–1909* (The Cluj Central University Library 1906–1909), Cluj-Napoca, Editura Alma Mater, 2006.

Exceeding the note of subjectivity which the reception of such a work imposes, I believe, on any employee of the institution housed by the building described on the 142 pages of the book, I can state that from the beginning, when the eight projects initially proposed for the construction of a building which was to house both the library of the University and that of the Transylvanian Museum are presented in detail, the reader is drawn into the architectural atmosphere of the beginning of the 20th century. It must be mentioned the fact that the building was devised from the start for specifically library functions, being among the few edifices constructed directly as libraries at that time and especially in the present territory of Romania, with the exception of such locations as the Teleki Library in Târgu Mureş and the Batthyaneum Library in Alba Iulia. The first was built between 1799 and 1808, according to the plans of the Vienna architect Ignatz Schlaff, by Count Sámuel Teleki, and the second building was taken over in 1792 and transformed into a library and the premises of the Scholars' Institute by Bishop Batthyány. Not even the Library of the Romanian Academy had had a special library space, the construction of such a building was begun only in 1927–1928,¹ almost two decades after the construction of the University Library in Cluj had begun.

The *Project Ágoston Kesselbauer*, the *Project Jenő Kismarty-Lechner – László Wurga*, the *Project Flóris Korb – Kálmán Giergl*, the *Project Marcell Komor – Dezső Jakab*, the *Project Adolf Láng*, the *Project Ambrus Orth – Emil Somló*, the *Project Artúr Sebestyén*, the *Project János Villányi – Alfréd Hajós* are the titles of the initial projects proposed for the construction of the building and, at the same time, the subtitles of the chapter *The competition of projects*, in which the author comments, using in some measure the architectural and technical language, the functionality of the plans participating in the competition, without neglecting their visual impact. Images showing the plan of the different floors from different angles are introduced frequently into the chapter, as in the entire work, the reader able to understand the importance conferred to the construction of the library. This “architectural atmosphere” is completed, however, by the author with a historic aspect, which also explains the motives for which the construction of such a building was necessary, the cause why it was placed in that particular place of the town.

¹ Sîrghie Anca, *Pagini din Istoria bibliotecilor. Sibiu* (Pages from the History Libraries. Sibiu), Editura Alma Mater, 2003, p. 164.

Considered insufficient or more exactly inadequate for a building which was to house this library, the proposed plans were followed by another three, two of which are described in the present volume. In the second phase of the competition were included the plans elaborated by the architects Orth–Somló and Korb–Giergl. The latter two probably were not chosen accidentally, since they had planned the Clinical Hospitals as well, a fact otherwise underlined in Gheorghe Vais' work.

The modifications Korb's and Giergl's project underwent from the moment it had been accepted as the winner of the competition and until its finalization are described in two separate chapters, objectively entitled *The execution project* and *The execution of the building*.

Starting therefore with exercises of the imagination during which the reader can picture for himself how the building of the library would have looked if other factors of decision had been chosen at that time, one is tempted to make comparisons when studying the functionality of the library spaces as they had been initially conceived and are presented in the chapter *Functional units*: the functional units of the reading spaces, the stacks, the connected, administrative, auxiliary and circulatory spaces, all these being described separately in the volume.

Even if the technical descriptions accompanied by images and figures are predominant, although there is a chapter dedicated to the elements of the architectural language, speaking about the combination of the Neo-baroque style with Secessionism, about the mark the two architects, Korb and Giergl adopted, I think that this work is not intended only for those who study architecture, but also for those who are interested in urban landscape, especially the urban landscape of Cluj. This work intends to present places, events and personalities historically only so far as they are connected to the construction of the library building, and its value consists exactly in the fact that it presents a library from the point of view of its space.

The analysis of the construction of the library accomplished in a short period, in the years 1906–1909, a period marked out in the title of the book, seems to be a disadvantage, for which one is compensated by the fact that the modifications the library underwent in the different periods are observed and emphasized by means of comparisons.

Due to the information it gives about the library in Cluj designed by Korb and Giergl and its history, though it is not intended to give a complete history and therefore encourages new investigations,

Biblioteca Centrală Universitară Cluj 1906–1909 is a work which is worth being consulted, read and studied, exactly because of the perspective from which the library is regarded.

It is a “historical” perspective, since it is in fact the history which tells how the architectural-institutional idea of the library evolved and it is the history of the realization of this idea. Namely, the “history” of the process in which the “building” and the “institution” of the Library was founded – architecturally and institutionally – and took its place in time and space.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

The Architecture of the University Clinics in Cluj, 1886–1903¹

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Octavian Goga County Library, Cluj

The architectural heritage of our town is very rich and varied and the persons whose duty is to popularize and preserve it must assume proper responsibility. One of these persons is Mr Gheorghe Vais, who has already published a previous work in this domain, *Biblioteca Centrală Universitară Cluj, 1906–1909* (The Central University Library of Cluj, 1906–1909), Editura Alma Mater, Cluj-Napoca, about which we wrote³ on another occasion. The architectural complex of the University Clinics is a distinct unit in our town. If the former work was dedicated to a larger public (we considered it useful not only for professionals, historians, art historians, but also for librarians, library directors wishing to extend their own building, researchers of local history and many others...) this one is addressed more conspicuously to architects because of its professionalism. However, we consider that no one interested in the history of Cluj can disregard it...

In the *Preface*, art historian András Kovács makes the necessary and welcome presentation of the age (the period of the Austro–Hungarian Dualism, the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century) when

¹ Gheorghe Vais, *Arhitectura clinicilor universitare din Cluj, 1886–1903*, U.T.Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, pp. 221.

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³ See in the journal *Lectura*, no. 1–2, 2007, p. 58.