

Jewish Owners of Secession-Style Buildings in Timișoara

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AS THE residence of the main institutional structures in Banat, Timișoara received, by the Diploma of December 21, 1781 (issued by the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II), the title of “free royal city,” thus being granted the right to internal autonomy.

Before changing the administration, from German into Hungarian one, the city had had the following components: *the Fortress* and *the suburbs around the fortress* (Fabric, Iosefin, Mehala, Maiere), which had been craft, industrial and residential centers of the population. The *Fortress* was a centre of administrative, economic, military and residential interest, with three squares of social-cultural utility: St. George Square (former Seminar Platz), Freedom Square (former Parade Square, also called Prince Eugene Square) and the Union Square (former Domplatz or Losonczi).

The phase of changing the administration was marked by a more active concern for the economic development of the city, as well as of Banat region. Therefore, the organization of economy, the inhabitants’ trades, the system of dependency on production relations, the existence of some institutions and services, the demographic dynamics, the erection of public buildings (city halls, theatres), the outline of a monumental civic centre, the emergence of the phenomenon connected with scientific and technical discoveries in the second half of the nineteenth century, the provision with utility works (water, sewerage, electricity, roads, railways) all represent aspects that gave Timișoara a vanguard characteristic among other cities in western Romania.

Timișoara became a developed industrial city with factories in the manufacturing sectors: food industry, textiles, clothing and footwear items, furniture and woodworking, metallurgy, metal working, machine building, chemicals and building materials, to which “the Jews contributed with their wealth and initiative.”¹ Known as a city of trade and manufacturing traditions, Timișoara had “1322 enterprises of which 650 were small workshops” in 1891 as well as “32 banks in 1911.”² Many competitive products reached domestic and foreign markets (cereals) in Egypt and Brazil.³

Economic, commercial, financial and banking prosperity also facilitated the increase in the number of craftsmen, traders, officials and intellectuals in Timișoara. Thus, in 1851 there were 20,560 inhabitants (of which 18.51% Romanian, 42.64% German and 11.41% Hungarian); in 1880 there were 33,694 inhabitants (of which 10.10% were Romanian, 56.80% German and 22.20% Hungarian).⁴

Commercial and cultural contacts with the capital of the empire, and then with the nearest cities (Budapest, Oradea, Arad), accomplished by facilitating circulation, resulted in urban and architectural influences on the image of Timișoara at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century. The expansion of the cities (Arad, Cluj, Oradea, Satu-Mare, Târgu-Mureș, Timișoara), following the new urbanization, attracted Jewish concentration, they representing 18.5% of the entire Jewish population in Transylvania in 1910, the rest of 80% continuing to live in rural areas until the First World War.⁵ The evolution of their positive growth in number under the dualist regime (from 2.6%–3.5% of the total population between 1850 and 1910), was due to the civil emancipation policy,⁶ pursued by the government.

The first road and rail works had a special significance as they allowed the circulation of goods and people. The main axes of circulation, by rail and road from north to south, were crossing Banat region via:

- 1) Timișoara—Vârșeț—Biserica Albă —Baziaș—Danube;
- 2) Timișoara—Lugoj—Caransebeș—Orșova—Danube;
- 3) Szeged—Kikindia Mare—Becicherecul Mare—Pancevo—Tisa—Danube.⁷

The first railroad (1857) was connecting Timișoara to Budapest, through the city of Szeged. The railroads Timișoara-Baziaș, Timișoara-Orșova (1872–73) and Timișoara-Lugoj-Caransebeș were built a year later. In 1900, Timișoara had nine railways, seven roads and a navigable channel on Bega River.⁸

Public transportation increased the urban comfort. In 1867, the society of horse drawn trams was founded (the first tram in Romania started to operate in 1869); it operated on two lines, connecting the railway station (from Iosefin) to the Fortress and Fabric. The electric tram was inaugurated in Vienna in 1897, and it was put into service in Timișoara two years later, as well. Street lighting provided it with the appearance of a European city and, for the first time in Europe, Timișoara had lit streets in 1884. The telephone network was introduced in 1881.⁹ The urban planning works were the aim of the project for water supply and sewerage of the city (1904–1907). The course of Bega River was regulated in a single channel in 1910, the Turbines (the Hydro) being built on the occasion.¹⁰

The city received a modern look like all the other metropolises of the empire, showing its willingness to connect to European cities. The second half of the nineteenth century led to an upward construction activity, more pronounced after the disappearance of its character of a fortified city, accomplished through defortification on the basis of urban plans. Modernization of the city was made along with these works, by paving the streets and sidewalks. The newly drawn roads were furnished with imposing and representative buildings.

The presence of 1900 architecture in Timișoara

IN EUROPE in the second half of the nineteenth century, medieval towns, with irregular, narrow paths started urban planning following the pattern of the Haussmannian urban model or the Viennese ring. The old medieval areas in Paris, dense and unfit, were cut by wide boulevards with open areas, which extended outwards beyond the old city limits.

These interventions led to changes in urban image, by partially replacing the formerly built area, by ordering the street fronts, arranging public leisure spaces (parks and gardens) all based on combining the classical compositional principles with the landscape ones.

Like the modernization of the capital Vienna, the urban organism was unified in Banat (the intramural area with the extramural one) by demolishing the fortifications and by partially applying the principles of the Viennese ring during the imperial policy in order to develop and strengthen them as towns in the territory through the colonization of the Hungarians and Germans. Thus, the urban centers with administrative role began to be dominated by their larger number in relation to other ethnic components.

Financial power holders, the Jews (whose increasing number was determined by their investments in the area and who “consisted of over 12,000 people in the interwar period, that is more than 10% of Timișoara population at that time),”¹¹ as well as the Germans and the Hungarians, representatives of the collective beneficiary group (the municipal council) and the individual one, spurred the modernization of Timișoara, following the patterns of European capitals, Vienna and Budapest, materialized in imposing and iconic edifices. Among the great silent partners we mention some Jewish entrepreneurs: György Dauerbach (merchant), Ernő Neuhausz (business man, editor and publisher of the magazine *Magyar Művészet*), the industrialist Weisz and the companies Lloyd and Hilt & Vogel, etc.

These are the expression of the desire of an ambitious bourgeoisie who aimed at consolidating a prestigious social status. Among them, the Jewish society in Timișoara became well-known in the fields of culture (literature, architecture-arts, history, sciences), having foremost representatives through the international acknowledgement of their works.¹² Trained architects in the 1900 style at the schools in Vienna and Budapest, most of them Jewish (Lipót Baumhorn, Martin Gemeinhardt, Arnóld Merbl, Ernest Foerk, Eugen Reiter) together with the Hungarian ones (László Székely, Ignác Alpár, Fodor Gábor, Tory Emil, Kremer József and Komor Marcell, Jakab Dezsó), accomplished, for their families and with great financial powers, buildings with various functions in the spirit of the new architecture. Besides these, a large number of fine artists from Transylvania brought their exceptional contribution, through their creations, to shaping the society spirituality in 1900. Such are the painters: Izidor Kafmann from Arad who studied in Budapest and Vienna, Alexandre Bihari from Băița-Bihor, Adolf Hirsch from Timișoara, Maurice Goth from Oaș and also the sculptor Jacob Guttman from Arad.¹³

Timișoara, the city on the River Bega, was given the original feature, that of a symbiosis between the architectural shapes of the local cultural multi-ethnic structures, connected to the common European quests.

Examples of the large 1900 ensembles can be found in all architectural programs, starting with that of housing.

Dauerbach Palace, also called “Palace,” built between 1912 and 1913 for György Dauerbach, is the creation of the architect Székely László.¹⁴ Two ensemble buildings were erected on the esplanade called “Corso”—currently Victory Square—designed at the beginning of the 20th century from the urban planning project drafted by Székely László. They belonged to housing, commercial, financial and banking programs following the Viennese pattern and that of other European capitals. In this urban setting, Dauerbach Palace is located on three different streets (on 2 Goethe Street, on the same corner with no. 1 Măcieșilor Street and Victory Square). The building has a linear, broad development on Victory Square, encompassing all its housing, commercial functions and having the same height as the buildings in the area that is ground floor and three storeys.

Although the architectural shape of Dauerbach Palace is based on prismatic volumes, its image facing Victory Square is dominated by the three large, curvilinear attics built on the main body of the building, like the curvilinear shape of *the 1900 Style* promoted by the Budapest School, whose father was Lechner Ödön. These are more obvious at the central roof, which is more elevated than the side ones, and whose cornice, strongly corrugated and extended on the cantilever, is projected on the façade by the play of shadow and light.

Neuhausz Palace (formerly owned by Ernő Neuhausz) is attributed to the architect Székely László and was built in 1912.¹⁵ The edifice is located at no 4 Victory Square, having the function of collective housing, together with the commercial one located on the ground floor. The location of the new palace fit the urban delimitation of Victory Square drawn at the beginning of the 20th century in line with the two neighboring buildings, Lloyd Palace and Dauerbach Palace.

An expression of multifunctional unit with the neighboring buildings, Neuhausz Palace belongs, in terms of architectural form, rather to the geometric stage than to the curvilinear formula, expressed by the great curvilinear attic outlined on eight facets. The overall composition is displayed on a major axis of symmetry in line with the great prismatic volume of the bow window projected into the street and inscribed in three out of five bays of the façade, emphasized by the large openings of the commercial ground floor. The play of the balcony openings, semi-enclosed space of the loggias and the closed ones behind the vertical plan in relation to the structure are displayed vertically on the first, second and third floors, leaving the representation rooms to be easily read. Thus, the square cut-out on the first and second floor turns into an arch on the third floor together with their size reduction.

The applied ornaments, created out of ceramic tiles and stucco, colorful and with geometric patterns (buttons, squares, arches, triangular frames), as well as their alternation on levels reinforce the subordinate image of the decorative architectural form. Shape and ornament are in perfect harmony, which gives the building a particularly aesthetic outlook, highlighting the architect Székely László's qualities of a great designer.

Széchényi Palace, situated at no. 8 Victory Square, was designed by the architect Székely László and built in 1912, having housing, commercial, financial and banking func-

tions. In the urban area of the esplanade built in 1900, Széchényi Palace was at the opposite end to Lloyd Palace designed by the architect Lipót Baumhorn in 1912.¹⁶

On this site at the intersection of two streets, the architectural shape of the beveled corner allows the perspective from Hunyadi Bridge, the view from the esplanade and the former Piarist Gymnasium, nowadays the Polytechnic University. Prismatic volumes, bow windows, loggias, balconies shaped as a “porch”—these are the elements borrowed from traditional architecture—, advanced and deepened game plans are articulated in the corner marked vertically by the tower, triangular pediments and bulbar dome. The pyramidal tower, displayed on a hexagonal plan, repeats the triangle pattern on its facets in small attics outlined by a string course.

The ornaments with symbolic and iconic value are not missing. On one of the triangular attics, created in bas-relief, the angel-winged goddess Demeter carries a bundle of wheat ears, a “symbol of wealth,” and she is drawn between branches and the fruit of the vine known as “the Messianic tree.” The eagle, a heraldic piece with open wings, encompasses the base of the corner tower covered with a dome. A sign of the formal-stylistic identity aspect of Széchényi Palace is a hive made of plate sheet on top, decorated with flowers and festoons, its presence here suggesting the banking function.

Hilt & Vogel Palace is situated near Széchényi Palace (at no. 6 Victory Square), being attributed to the architect Székely László.¹⁷ On the urban esplanade at the beginning of the 20th century, Hilt & Vogel Palace, together with Merbl Palace, formed a square detached from the promenade. All these palaces (Dauerbach, Neuhausz, Széchényi, Hilt & Vogel Palace) constitute a compact, picturesque and unitary formal-stylistic front of the esplanade. They belong to the same multifunctional programs, those of housing and commercial purpose, by the emphasis of horizontality and the extensive openings of the shops, higher on the ground floor, by the play of prismatic volumes and the same vertical height.

The formal-stylistic classification of Hilt & Vogel Palace corresponds with the geometric phase of the *Secession*, having Viennese influences. If Székely approached the type of axial compositions in the projects of the nearby buildings, Hilt & Vogel Palace, by its composition asymmetry and its location on the corner facing the square, breaks the monotony of the ample display of the street gable.

There is hardly any applied ornamentation, its role being purely decorative. Created in stucco and plaster of various colors, the frames are emphasized by buttons, geometric shapes (wreaths, medallions), placed on the parapets, thus strengthening the subordination of the décor to the architectural form, yet ensuring its aesthetic appearance.

Weisz Palace was designed by the architect Székely László,¹⁸ as a tenement house, with commercial areas, being located at no. 1–1/A Victory Square.

The new palace became known from a formal-stylistic point of view by its axial composition, displayed on a raised ground floor and four storeys. In the major axis, a large bow-window projected into the street, framed in a square by the three structural bays, is crowned by a curvilinear gable, behind which there is a much higher roof, of Baroque shape. It is encompassed in the geometric variant of the epoch styles, with Eclectic influences, even though the serpentine formula in the large attic is present.

Ample loggias, corresponding to a structural interaxis, are arranged on the bow-window axis which creates window openings. Alignments of three arched windows are placed on both sides of the loggias, thus strengthening the symbiotic relationship between form and structure.

Lloyd Palace, built between 1910 and 1912, was designed by the architect Baumhorn Lipót.¹⁹ It is located in the current no 2 Victory Square and it was the first edifice built on “Corso” esplanade, after the demolition of the Fortress walls. Lloyd Palace (nowadays the Polytechnic University) is on the outline of the beveled edges of Victory Square and symmetrical to Weisz Palace (built later); the palace with a raised ground floor and three storeys imposed the pattern of multifunctionality in the following buildings. Besides commercial areas and shops, there was also a “coffee house here, (which used to be) the meeting hall of Lloyd Society and the Agricultural Stock Market partially situated on the first floor,”²⁰ the rest of the floors being designed as lodgings.

The four antique statues placed on the façade of the building entrance, on the base of the arch from the third storey, are pieces with symbolist references. The mascarons located on the attic, on top of the arch, and the string course that defines the attic base from the rest of the storeys, ultimately provides the decorative and particular feature of the palace.

In Timișoara, the German *Secession* called *Jugendstil* proved its expressiveness representation in buildings in which the owners showed their social status, starting from the architectural form to the applied decorative details (the graphics of the curved or straight line in representations of vegetal, zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and geometric world).

The architecture created in the capital of Banat, following the European movement, is an expression of the inhabitants’ desire to be part of the great European metropolises. Timișoara remained tributary to the sources of Viennese stylistic concerns and that is due to the important position of Banat in the geographical territory of the empire, the contacts with “the centre” and last but not least, the prosperity of the society in Banat region in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

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Notes

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Abstract

Jewish Owners of Secession-Style Buildings in Timișoara

Like the modernization in Vienna, the unification of the urban body (the intramural and extra-mural area) also took place in Timișoara following the demolition of the fortifications and the partial application of the principles of the Viennese ring, along with the imperial policy to develop and strengthen them as cities through the colonization of the Hungarians and the Germans. Social classes in the hierarchy of power and financial power holders, the Jews, the Germans and the Hungarians, as representatives of the collective beneficiary (the municipal council) and the individual one, have given a boost to Timișoara’s modernization, following the model of the European capitals, Vienna and Budapest, materialized in imposing and iconic edifices.

Keywords:

Urban organism, Viennese ring, collective beneficiary, individual beneficiary, architectural form