

ROMANIAN ARCHITECTS IN POLITICAL RECLUSION. THE VIRGIL ANTONESCU CASE*

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Abstract. Since the earliest times the authorities have identified the major social impact that architecture creation would have and acted consequently. As for the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, the positions were totally different. Fascism started from what Mussolini said that ‘the new Italy needs a new architecture’. Sorin Vasilescu once stated that *‘during those two decades of Italian dictatorship, there was no case – not even the exception that proves the rule – of an architect to have been the victim of any kind of repression.’* In the Nazi Germany, the professionals who would not comply with the fundamental instructions given by the political sector for the state art and take part in other forms of artistic expression, would miss out on the major projects. The third case, the Bolshevik, is already known today – either a bullet in your head or a one-way trip to Siberia. The present study aims to bring to light what happened to the architects who protested or tried to enjoy a certain freedom in Romania between 1944 and 1964. Even though architect Virgil Antonescu had not been involved with politics and had no sympathies, he was active with George Manu’s efforts, his brother-in-law, to build a network of anti-communist resistance in the mountains. Along with Manu and his fellows, he identified possibilities of laying out hiding places, set up hosts, examined the strategy of a quick return and sheltering in the mountains and finding supplies during the conflict times. Architect, restorer and political prisoner, Virgil Antonescu is a leader of his generation from two points of view. Spiritual – he morally resisted the communist assault, by his conduct during prison time – and also professional, as he was an active presence in the restoration of historical monuments during the 6th–9th decades of the last century.

Rezumat. Puterea a identificat încă din cele mai vechi timpuri impactul social major pe care-l are creația de arhitectură, acționând în consecință. În ceea ce privește regimurile totalitare ale secolului XX, atitudinile au fost diferite. În cazul fascismului, pornindu-se de la afirmația lui Mussolini conform căreia noua Italie avea nevoie de o nouă arhitectură, așa cum spunea profesorul Sorin Vasilescu: *‘în cele două decenii de dictatură italiană nu a existat nici măcar un caz – nici excepția care să fi confirmat regula – de arhitect care să fi fost victima unei forme de represiune’*. În cazul Germaniei naziste, profesioniștii care nu respectau direcțiile fundamentale trasate de politic în ceea ce privea arta de stat și participau la alte forme de expresie artistică, pierdeau comenzile majore. Cazul celei de-a treia ipostaze – cea bolșevică – este astăzi cunoscut: glonțul în ceafă sau voiajul siberian. Studiul de față și-a propus să descopere ce-au pățit arhitecții care au protestat sau au încercat să-și păstreze o formă de independență în România anilor 1944–1964. Deși nu a făcut politică și nici nu avea simpatii anume în acest sens, arhitectul Virgil Antonescu participă la efortul cumnatului său George Manu de organizare a unei rețele de rezistență anticomunistă în munți. Alături de Manu și trimiși ai acestuia identifică posibilități de amenajare a unor ascunzători, stabilește gazde, studiază modalitățile de retragere spre munte și aprovizionare în caz de conflict. Arhitect restaurator și deținut politic, Virgil Antonescu se plasează ca lider al generației sale prin cel puțin două componente. Cea spirituală pe coordonatele rezistenței morale în fața asaltului comunist – evidențiată în mod special de comportamentul său în detenție – dar și cea profesională, participând consistent la efortul restaurării monumentelor istorice din deceniile 6-9 ale secolului trecut.

Virgil Antonescu was born in Bucharest, on the 5th of December 1909, the son of Sultana and Lazăr. He attended the middle school classes until 1920, and then he enrolled in the ‘Matei Basarab’ high school that he graduated in 1928. In 1937, he was awarded the degree of license from the Academy of Architecture in Bucharest. He was employed, between 1936 and 1941, in the position of architect with the City Hall of district 1 Yellow (for a certain period, the districts were given a colour code). He married Gabriela Storck¹ in 1938 and divorced her the same year. In 1939, he married Elena Manu, councilman Ion Manu’s daughter and the sister of Gheorghe Manu, the scientist. In the year of 1941, architect Antonescu won a competition-based scholarship for Accademia di Romania² in Rome, while working for Grandi Film Storici at the same

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¹ Architect, one of the daughters in the family of painters and sculptors Frederic Storck and Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck.

² The school was opened in 1922 as a follow-up of a law of 1920 ratified by the Romanian Parliament, supported by Nicolae Iorga and Vasile Pârvan, which was stipulating the opening of Romanian academies abroad. Between 1922 and 1947, this school was granting scholarships to the most brilliant Romanian graduates. The institution was closed after 1947 by the Bucharest authorities and will continue its activity under the name of the Romanian Library in Rome until 1990 when it regained its former status.