

THE COLORFUL FACADE DECORATIONS OF THE SECESSION STYLE IN SOFIA. SOFIA MINERAL BATHS AND THE RECOVERING OF MISSING ELEMENTS*

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Abstract. *The report presents the national specific of the Secession style in the colourful ceramic decoration of some buildings in Sofia. The most representative between them are the church of St "Nikolay Novi Sofiiski", buildings of the Synodal Palace, the Central Mineral Baths, and the Higher Theological School at the Holy Synod, built and decorated between 1900 and 1922. They are the works of the architects Friedrich Grünanger, Yurdan Milanov and Petko Momchilov.*

The accent of the research is the ceramic decoration of the facades of the Central Mineral Baths in Sofia, by the project of Haralampi Tachev. The details of the types of ornaments are presented and analysed. The graphic designs for the restoration of the missing elements were considered. The impact of colour in the design of the facades is analysed. The peculiarities in the decoration and the connection of this style with the medieval elements, were examined.

The connection of the facade solutions with the Bulgarian historical traditions of the early Middle Ages and Byzantium is explained through examples from Preslav, the capital of the First Bulgarian Kingdom. This way the coloured ceramic tiles of the facades of the Central Mineral Baths are represented as an expression of the Bulgarian medieval tradition in the Secession style in Sofia.

The colour facade interpretations of the buildings in Vienna, Paris and Prague of that period are presented for comparison and demonstration of the national differences, decisions and tasks of the Secession style.

Key words: *ceramic and mosaic facade decoration, Sofia, Mineral Baths, buildings, Prague, Vienna, Paris.*

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1. INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITION OF THE PECULIARITIES OF SECESSION STYLE.
SEVERAL REFLECTIONS AND EXAMPLES OF SECESSION IN EUROPE AND IN BULGARIA

The Secession style is one of the most interesting artistic phenomena in the European and American architecture and arts in the late 19th and early 20th c. According to its nature, it is multifaceted and is nationally colored. The national specificity in each country is related to the modern expression of the past styles or traditions, which are also expressed in the materials used.

The most representative examples in architecture in Vienna are: the decorative golden domed Secession Building (1897-98) [1] by architect Joseph Maria Olbrich (1867-1908); the glass-covered atriums in the interiors (Post Office Saving Bank, 1904-06); the metal (most popular is Karlsplatz station of the Vienna Stadtbahn (1894–99)), and ceramic decorations (Ceramic ceiling decoration and stained glass of Rumbach Street synagogue, 1870-73; Majolica House, 1898-99) by Otto Wagner (1841-1918) [2].



Fig. 1 Secession Building, Vienna, 1897-98, architect Joseph Maria Olbrich. The Great Building collection. Photography: Howard Davis.

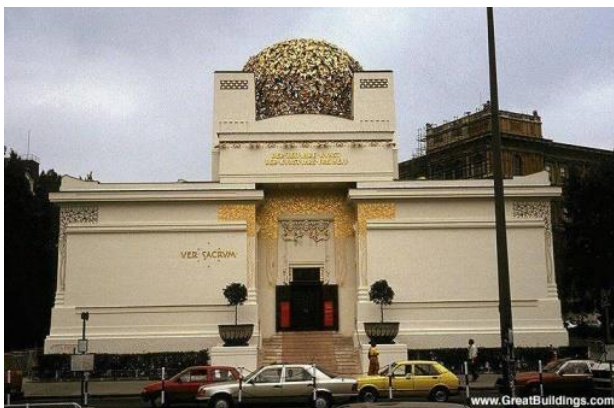


Fig. 2 Post Office Saving Bank, Vienna, 1904-06, architect Otto Wagner. The Great Building collection. Photography: Claudio Divizia.



Fig. 3 Majolica House, Vienna, 1898-99, Otto Wagner. The Great Building collection. Photography: Tibusay de Hoyos. <http://www.greatbuildings.com/>

The Secession in Paris is also expressed with the steel constructions, wall painting and mosaics, golden ornaments, covered passages and the domes of the large stores, decorated with colored glasses as: Bon Marche (1876, engineer Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel and architect Louis-Auguste Boileau) [3], Samaritaine (1905-10, architect Frantz Jourdain; 1926-28, Jourdain and Henry Sauvage,) [4] and Printemps (1865, Jules and Paul Sédille; domed hall 1904 Rene Binet) [5].



Fig. 4 Bon Marche, interior, Paris, 1876, engineer Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel and architect Louis-Auguste Boileau. Photography: Blagovesta Ivanova.



Fig. 5 Printemps, interior, Paris, 1865, Jules and Paul Sédille; domed hall 1904 Rene Binet. Photography: Blagovesta Ivanova.



Fig. 6 Samaritaine, interior, Paris, 1905-10, architect Frantz Jourdain; 1926-28, Jourdain and Henry Sauvage. Photography: Blagovesta Ivanova.

One of the most famous Secession-style buildings in Prague is the Municipal House (1912, according to the project of architect Antonín Balšánek and Osvald Polívka as a centre of the Czech cultural life). The lunette mosaic in this building is the work of Karel Špillar representing the apotheosis of Prague. Stucco relief medallions, depicted the types of Czech folk costumes [6], which is an expression of national identity are placed between the windows. According to the thematic scope of the compositions, it is closest to the building of the mineral baths in Sofia.



Fig. 7 The Municipal House, detail from the façade, Prague, 1912, according to the project of architect Antonín Balšánek and Osvald Polívka. Photography: Blagovesta Ivanova.



Fig. 8 The Central Mineral bath, detail from the façade, Sofia, 1907-1915, architect Petko Momchilov. Photography: Blagovesta Ivanova.

Romantic inspiration from the past styles and eras, and the using of the gold are distinctive for the Secession. The means of expression in the shaping of the buildings

facades are diverse. They represent relief ornaments or mosaics, or ceramic tiles, in which has been read the reflection of the past. In its stylistic features, Secession was inspired by the East (ceramics), Egypt (stylized forms) and Byzantium (gold and mosaic techniques). Its difference from the Eclecticism is the bold use of the line and the modern understanding of the forms.

Ivaylo Nachev makes a successful summarized definition of the ornamentation in the Secession, defining its character as a connection with the "organic principle in nature" [7]. According to the same author "Secession becomes, in some sense, an expression and the platform of the growing modernization and Europeanization of the Bulgarian culture." [8], on a cultural level.

Secession in Bulgaria expresses the romantic returning to the past periods of the national culture, similar to the European one. The using of multicolor and ceramic elements (mainly chamotte) is based on the Bulgarian medieval tradition, associated with the architecture of the second Bulgarian capital Preslav (in the 10th century). It is expressed not only in the decorative art work elements. It can be seen in the compositions of the facades formed with decorative or real mixed masonry (i. e. alternation of "brick" friezes in the "smooth stone masonry"), and the using of bifora and triforium located under the semicircular arches in the window openings, too.

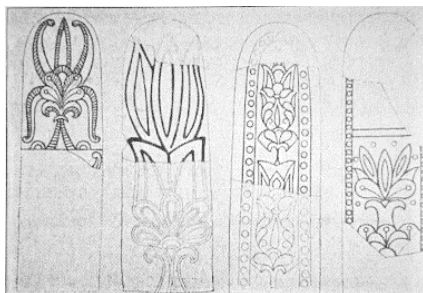


Fig. 9 Restored decoration of water lilies from Patleyna, [24], 330.

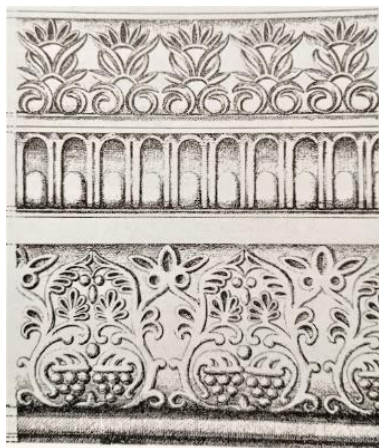


Fig. 10 Ornaments from the cornice from the Golden church in Preslav, [24], 211. (right)



Fig. 11 Palmette of metal works from Preslav, [24], 306.

2. OBJECT OF THE STUDY

The study is dedicated to the decoration of the Secession-style facades in Sofia. The most famous are the buildings of the church "Nikolay Novi Sofiyski" (1896-1900), the Higher Theological School at the Holy Synod (1904-1908), the Synodal Palace (1904-1910) and the Central Sofia Mineral Baths (1907-1915). The common features in the decoration of their facades is the used of ceramics. It is an expression of the romantic view of Bulgarian medieval architecture and art. [9]

The highlight of the study is the decoration of the building of the Sofia Mineral Bath and the result of new technological possibilities for the restoration of the ceramic decorations destroyed by time.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Historical methodology and comparative analysis were used in the research. By historical methodology we understand the historical tracing of the objects of the research and the researches of other investigators about this problem. By comparative analysis we understand the indication of examples for comparison. In regard to the style of Secession, they are sought after in synchronous European analogues. The principle of diachronic observation is applied too. Relevant examples were searched through it. In this way, the goal of the research was achieved: an analysis of the decorative artistic elements of the Central Mineral Baths in Sofia as a synthesis with the architecture; an observation of the details as separate ceramic elements and the richness of their ornaments; the typological connection of the design of the facades with the medieval architectural heritage of Bulgaria; the displaying of the national specificity of secession; defining of the features of the Bulgarian Secession through a vivid architectural representative such as the Central Mineral Baths in Sofia, compared to the other European images in terms of the forms and materials used.

4. PREVIOUS RESEARCHES ABOUT THE SECESSION DECORATIONS OF BUILDINGS IN SOFIA

The facade decorations of the mentioned buildings are analyzed in the study of architect Petar Yokimov, dedicated to the Secession in Bulgarian architecture. In it, he examines the national specificity in the context of European secession. [10]

Valuable archival information about the ceramic studio in Sofia (little is known about the ceramic studios in Sofia from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century) and about the production of the ceramic cornice of the church "St. Nikola Novi Sofiyski" was published by church historian Hristo Temelski. According to the archival data that he indicates, its production was assigned to the "First Bulgarian Anonymous Joint Stock Company for Clay Products", which was unable to cope with their production. Thus, the author of the colored cornices of the church became the unknown sculptor Julius Silvai.[11] The data for the facade decorative decoration of the Synodal Palace were obtained from the same researcher. He points out that the designs for this mosaic decoration have been the work of Professor Haralampi Tachev and Gospodin Zhelyazkov. Floor, wall decorative tiles and majolica for the building of the Synodal Palace have been supplied from the Novi Khan (Elin Pelin) station factory. [12]

Temelski points out that in 1922, for the decoration of the building of the Higher Theological School, it was decided to "immediately plaster the external walls, assigning H. Tachev to make a color sample of the ceramic tiles and the plaster of the facade in the old Bulgarian style, by selecting the necessary tones for the harmony of the plaster with the tiles; the same Tachev have to present samples of ornaments for the medallions above the windows of the northern and western facades and present a project for a fresco on the pediment under the dome on the north facade. The members of the Synod have propose to paint the medallions on the facades depict the heads of "historic figures of our church enlightenment from all periods of our church history". [13] In the reference to "Old Bulgarian style" and "historical figures" in the above quote, the connection of the Secession with the Bulgarian medieval tradition in architecture is evident.

The subject of Violeta Vasilchina's article is the most detailed study of Tachev's work on the execution of the ceramic decoration of Sofia Mineral Baths facades and his co-work with the contractor of decorative ceramics, the painter Stefan Dimitrov. The article examines the general architectural and artistic approach, the style of the decorative solution of the building of the Mineral Baths and its importance for the construction of the new look of Sofia. [14]

Haralampi Tachev (1875-1944), who is the artist of the decoration projects of the mentioned buildings, is one of the famous artistic names in Bulgarian culture from the first decades of the 20th c. He is known as one of the best decorators such as the creator of the coat of arms of Sofia in 1900.[15],[16].

5. ANALYSIS

Before the analyzing of the decoration of the facades of the Sofia Mineral Baths, it is necessary to note the names of the architects worked at that time and in that style. Designer of the earliest Secession buildings decorated with colorful ceramic panels on the facades - "St. Nikolay Novi Sofia" is Anton Tornyov [17] (1868-1943, graduated in Stuttgart). The architect of the building of the Higher Theological School in Sofia was Friedrich Grünanger (1856-1929, graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna).

The architects of the Holy Synod are Petko Momchilov (1864-1923, studied architecture at the German Higher Technical School in Prague) and Yurdan Milanov (1867-1932, graduated from the Higher Technical School in Vienna). The architect of the building of the Sofia's Central Mineral Baths is Petko Momchilov. The common line of their creativity is their academic education is the Austrian school of architecture and art. [18] Friedrich Grünanger is older than Momchilov and Milanov and in his work he is closer to the style of Baroque, and the tendencies of Eclecticism and Neoclassicism. Momchilov and Milanov are innovators. In the buildings of the Holy Synod and the Mineral Baths, the opportunities for inspiration from the Bulgarian medieval architecture have been used. Peter Yokimov defines their style as a late historicism, with the domination of the decorative [19] principles.

In one of his letters, the artist-designer of the decorative ceramic panels on the facades of the Sofia Mineral Baths, Petko Momchilov, describes the motifs of the different panels. They can be have figural motifs, as well as a motives with a figures and ornaments, and have a national style ornaments. According to him, they should be monochrome, dichromic, tricolor and polychrome. [20]



Fig. 12 Decorative panels with floral ornaments and water lily, central in the triangular panels near the triforia. Bottom a frieze with swans and beasts, Central Mineral baths, Sofia. Photography: Blagovesta Ivanova.



Fig. 13 Graphic documentation for the restoring of the frieze with swans and beasts, Archive photography, Sofia Museum of History.

The Sofia Mineral Baths were declared an architectural monument of national importance in 1978. In 1988, the building was stopped from operation. In 2015, after restoration, its central part became the Regional History Museum of Sofia.

The restoration documents [21] allow for detailed tracking of the specific fragments of the tiles made of chamotte, which were projected by the artist Haralampi Tachev. Brick-coloured tiles (brown), are used in the window openings framing the arches of the domes' drums, and between them there are located masonry imitating panels (green relief circles), which are inherent for the Moesian architectural school. The cornices of the domes (located around the arches' window openings) are intricately composed. The banded frieze consists of blue royal lilies on an ochre background, separated by a brown zig zag. The cornice is framed with a blue ribbon and creates the feeling of growth of lilies from it. The lower row of the "window holes" represents deaf arches (niches) located at the level of the dome drum. Their walls are decorative panels with stylized plant ornaments. Ornaments build a complex tangle system.

In her research, Violeta Vasilchina notes that the lower coloured decorations are more complex, and the higher ones are more elementary. [22] This feature is related to the perception of the eye. The graphic documentation of the recovery of the lost elements and the restoration, show that this is indeed the case. [22] From separate elements we can determine the types of neo-Byzantine elements that Haralampi Tachev used. These are palmettes motives, "royal lilies" type, numerous stylized teratological elements, floral and braided elements combined with swans, lion bodies and water lilies. All of them are executed in relief. The colours are blue, green, ochre and brown.

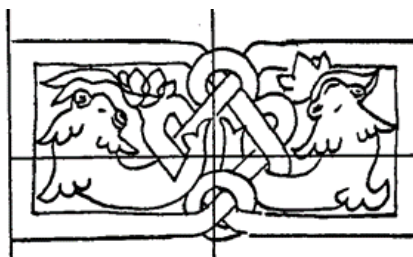


Fig. 14 Tile decoration of the front of the arch of the dome's drum. Archive photography, Sofia Museum of History.

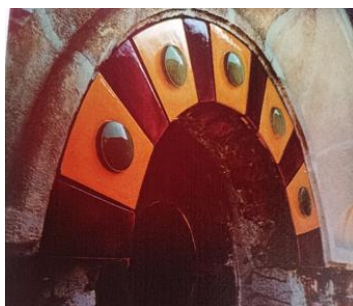


Fig. 15 Graphic documentation for the restoring of the frieze with beasts, Archive photography, Sofia Museum of History.

The origin of some of these motives is related to the creation of a new image in the second decade of the 20th c. built on the basis of traditional Preslav's architecture sculptural

stone and ceramic painted elements. One possible typological example is the artistic elements in the architectural decoration of the “Golden Church” in Preslav, dated 907 [24], as well as other examples from the architecture of the second medieval Bulgarian capital, Preslav.

The compositional elements in the panels in the Sofia Mineral Baths are repeated on every one secular facade and in their different parts. Thus, for example, the two water lilies, which are located on a small rectangular tile, are included as a central element on one of the triangular (corner) panels in the windows. From the documentation of the graphic reconstructions, it appears that the same modules are included in the small modules and in the large modules of the frieze. The elements are united in more complex groups and they are located on the walls above, around and below the windows of the building. All of them are adapted to the tectonics of the walls, and are organically included in the wall’s decorative system. Through them, the synthesis between the form, material and colour of the building was achieved. The masonry of the building imitatively represents the mixed masonry characteristic of the High Middle Age period. It is characterized not only by the horizontal alternation of the brick and stone (in the 20th c., brick and white plaster), but also with the composing of the high windows, with the foreheads of the arches (imposts), as well as blind niches, such as we see on the facades of the Mineral Baths in Sofia.

In the lower register around the entrance to the niches of the Central mineral baths in Sofia, there are images in medallions of Apollo Medicus and Ulpia Serdica.

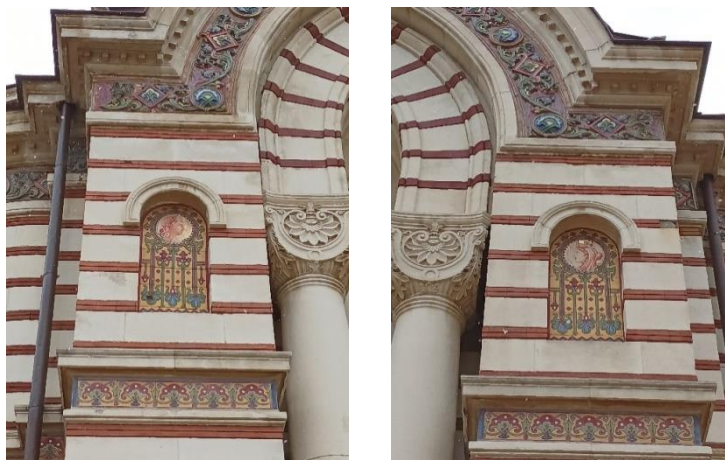


Fig. 16, 17 Ceramic panels “Apolon Medicus” and “Ulpia Serdica”, central façade of Sofia mineral baths. Photography: Blagovesta Ivanova.

On the left and right sides of the facade, between the windows in the niches under semi-circular arches, there are female heads. Below the images are vertical plant ornaments like as mentioned panels.

For the restoration in 2000, the missing decorative parts were made. Graphic drawings show in detail the variety of fireclay elements.

5. CONCLUSION

The decorative decoration of the central mineral baths in Sofia is the richest and most complex among the other buildings from the reviewed period. The decoration shows the possibilities of complex synthesis in the unification of color, relief, strict tectonics and fine ornamentation.

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RAZNOBOJNA FASADNA DEKORACIJA ZGRADA U STILU SECESIJE U SOFIJI. SOFIJSKA MINERALNA KUPATIŁA I RESTAURACIJA NEDOSTAJUĆIH ELEMENATA

Rad predstavlja nacionalne specifičnosti stila secesije u raznobojnoj keramičkoj dekoraciji nekih zgrada u Sofiji. Najreprezentativniji među njima su crkva Svetog „Nikolaja Novog Sofijskog“, zgrade Sinodalnog dvora, Centralne mineralne banje i Više bogoslovske škole pri Svetom Sinodu, građene i ukrašene između 1900. i 1922. godine. arhitekta Fridriha Grinangera, Jourdana Milanova i Petka Momčilova.

Akcenat istraživanja je keramička dekoracija fasada Centralnih mineralnih kupatila u Sofiji, po projektu Haralampija Tačeva. Prikazani su i analizirani detalji o vrstama ornamenta. Razmotreni su grafički dizajni za restauraciju nedostajućih elemenata. Analiziran je uticaj boje na dizajn fasada. Ispitane su posebnosti u dekoraciji i povezanost ovog stila sa srednjovekovnim elementima.

Povezanost fasadnih rešenja sa bugarskom istorijskom tradicijom ranog srednjeg veka i Vizantije objašnjena je na primerima iz Preslava, glavnog grada Prvog bugarskog carstva. Na ovaj način su obojene keramičke pločice fasada Centralnih mineralnih kupatila predstavljene kao izraz bugarske srednjovekovne tradicije u stilu secesije u Sofiji.

Prikazane su kolorističke interpretacije fasada građevina u Beču, Parizu i Pragu tog perioda radi poređenja i demonstracije nacionalnih razlika, odluka i zadataka secesijskog stila.

Ključne reči: keramički i mozaički ukrasi fasade, Sofija, mineralna kupatila, zgrade, Prag, Beč, Pariz