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GIULIO MAGNI, AN ARCHITECT FOR THE PROJECT OF THE STATE ARCHIVES IN BUCHAREST AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Abstract

Purpose: *The aim of this article is a conceptual analysis of the first complex architectural project for the headquarters of the Romanian State Archives.*

Method: *The methods used for this article were documentation, comparison and analysis.*

The documentation was carried out in archives in Romania and Italy, as well as with the help of thematic books identified in Romania and Germany. The comparison was made between European archives and the proposed project for the Romanian State Archives. Finally, a detailed analysis was carried out for the final version of the project for the Romanian State Archives.

Results: *The research revealed many similarities and differences between the European trends and the proposed headquarters project for the Romanian State Archives.*

Conclusion/findings: *The results of the study showed that the project was in line with the trend of archives throughout Europe, despite the lack of the architect's experience with this type of projects. This archive building was the only one of its kind in Giulio Magni's entire project portfolio.*

Key words: *building, projects, history of archive buildings, storage warehouse, Romania,*

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INTRODUCTION

This text was prompted by the identification of some plans for the building of the General Archives of the Romanian State Archives, made by the Italian architect Giulio Magni.

We wanted to compare how his creation was specific to Romania or whether it was inspired by European archives that had already been built. To get there, an analysis of the European framework in the field of architecture will be done first, followed by the analysis of what happened in Romania.

In order to understand the relevance of the subject and the thinking of the architect Giulio Magni, we thought it would be useful to go through the subject step by step. We will therefore discuss the emergence of this architectural programme, as well as the first books on architectural theory in which this programme was included.

ADAPTING EXISTING BUILDINGS FOR ARCHIVES

In the 18th century, all archive buildings, regardless of the country, were adapted in buildings built with other purposes. Monasteries, schools, houses, and castles were used. Initially this was not seen as a problem, but as the chosen buildings were overcrowded, and no repairs or heating were done in the storage rooms, their condition deteriorated as they became full of mould and damp. The documents they housed began to deteriorate (Hermann Rumschöttel, 2006) and the solution had to be found. In the 19th century, the idea arose to build special buildings for documents. This was to keep them in good condition and to provide enough space.

THE THEORY OF SPECIAL BUILDINGS FOR ARCHIVES

The first books on architectural theory from the 19th century (architectural programmes) consider the library model as the starting point for archive buildings. The ideas of the reading room and the storage room were borrowed from libraries, but step by step improvements were made to meet the needs of archives.

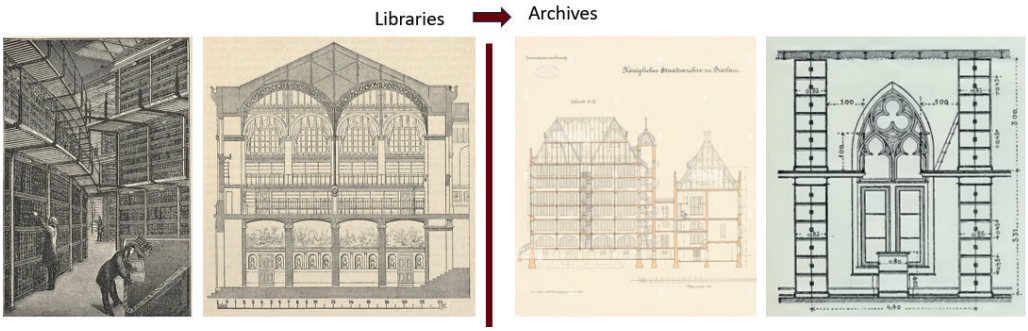

Figure 1: Collage, from libraries to archives

We believe that these improvements were due to the use of new building materials (metal and concrete), the increasing number of archival documents compared to libraries (which often made space insufficient), adapted storage conditions and the development of a theory of archival organisation.

In the 19th century, we witness the evolution and transformation of the architectural programme as practice becomes theory and is documented in books. Three books appeared in the German literature dealing with archive buildings. As the volumes developed, more examples were given. Their number increased, and if in the first book from 1887 there were 2 examples (Klasenn, 1887), in of 1893 edition there were already 9 (Opfermann, 1893) and in the last edition of the 20th century there would be 16 examples (Opfermann, 1906). The archives of: Bordeaux (1861-1866 - departmental archives), Wiesbaden (1879-1881 - state archives), Weimar (1883-1885 - state archives), Paris (1849 - archives of the Court of Audit), Frankfurt (1874-1877 - state archives), Munich (1832-1843 - Royal Court and State Library with Imperial Archives), Breslau (1875-1877 - state archives), Nuremberg (1877-1880 - district archives), Münfter (1886-1889 - state archives) were considered good examples. It is one of the few sources to which an architect of the period would have had access for documentation. This aspect is relevant to our study because it shows how widespread this architectural program was, and how it particularly developed in one region only.

Another common practice was to visit for the purpose of study, but this will be dealt with in another sub-section.

As we have already mentioned, at the end of the 19th century there was an important push for such constructions in Europe, mainly in the Germanic and French

language area, and according to our research we can say that Romania also joined the European trend for the construction of archive buildings (Sas, 2023).

CASE STUDY

The case study for our research is the most elaborate project proposed for the construction of an archive building for the State Archives of the United Principalities at the end of the 19th century in the country known today as Romania. The subject is relevant because there has been no analysis of archive buildings in Romania, or of archives built in Europe compared to those in Romania.

We discovered that Romania was indeed part of the European trend of building archives, which took place in several countries from the second half of the 19th century until the 20th century. This trend continued after the 20th century, with interruptions due to the World Wars, but this period is not the subject of this case study. Therefore, we will limit ourselves to the 19th century, without considering that the subject is completely covered and closed.

The State Archives were founded in 1831, they were moved and distributed among several monasteries, houses, and the Orthodox Metropolis, but in 1864 they received the monastery of Mihai Voda in Bucharest, which was undergoing repairs until 1866, as their permanent seat. The works in the monastery gradually ceased but the State Archives were moved there before the reconstruction work would be completed for financial reasons.

This were the first permanent headquarters of the Archives in Bucharest at the end of the 19th century. After a lot of insistence and written requests from the directors and unfortunate events, the Ministry decided to support the Archives and to start developing a project, as it had heavily financed maintenance work over the years. Until then, there had been several unsuccessful attempts to build a special building, leaving only the blueprints as evidence of the attempts. At least five projects had been proposed before, but they remained at the level of intentions.

THE STEPS TO THE REALIZATION OF THE PROJECT

To make the project modern and responsive to the needs of the institution, but with a limited budget, two approaches were adopted. The first was to appoint the architect Gheorghe Duca to travel to Europe to visit and document the archive

buildings (Sas, 2023). He reformed polytechnic education (1881) and was a founding member of the Polytechnic Society. The second was to hire a foreign architect to design the building.

We assume that the first option was chosen because there was no technical information available in the country on the requirements and standards for an archive building, due to lack of experience. It was common practice to visit buildings that had already been built and learn from them. This approach was followed in the next century, in the construction of the Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (Csaba Reisz, 2015) and the Österreichisches Staatsarchiv – Haus, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna (Gustav Winter, 1903) and many other buildings.

The architect Gheorghe Duca had a three-month journey to Europe. He was sent by the Ministry to visit the archives in Fulda, Vienna, Munich, Paris, but he changed his itinerary and visited Vienna, Paris, Frankfurt, Wiesbaden, Weimar (Sas, 2023).

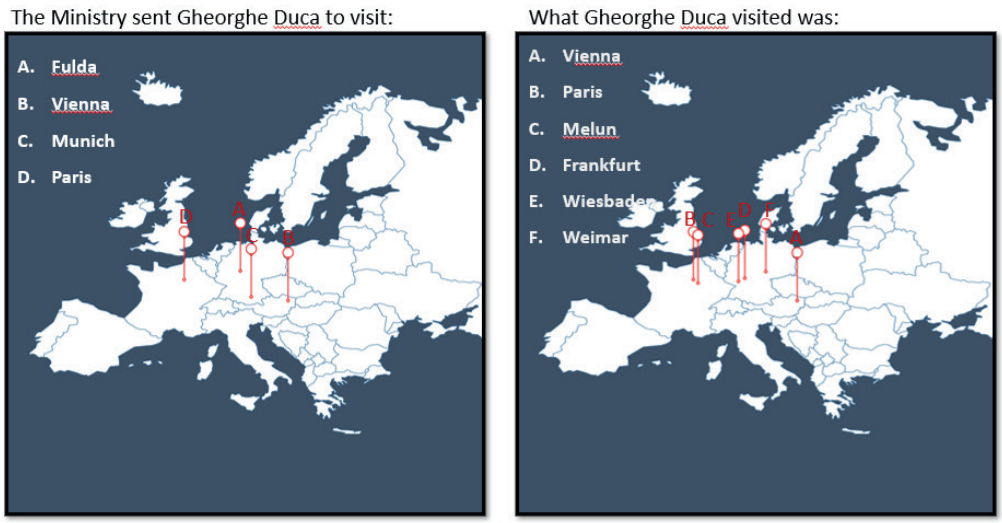

Figure 2: Map of Europe with marked cities, proposed and visited by Duca.

After the journey in 1891, he submitted a comprehensive report on the buildings he had visited. The report included case studies as well as the essential general characteristics to be observed in such a structure, drawings, and explanations. The report also mentions Klasenn L. (1887). book, which was probably the only book on the subject in the field of architecture at the time. The theoretical approach and documentation were therefore an important element at the beginning of the project, as we will see.

The second option was to send the subject to the architect Giulio Magni, who was in Italy in 1983. He made a proposal and after the analysis of Magni's project by Romanian architects (Ioan Mincu and Louis Blanc) and the directors of the Archive (Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu - current director and Grigore Manu - former director), the contract was signed (Sas, 2023).

DETAILS OF THE PROJECT

The Ministry, together with the Commission, decided to keep the site of the Mihai Voda Monastery as the location for the new project. This meant that the church of the monastery complex would remain at the centre of the new proposals. This site was attractive because it was located on a hill known as Mihai Voda Hill, close to the state institutions, but not cramped between buildings, which would have easily facilitated a fire. It was furthermore protected by the Dâmbovița River, which ran along the valley of the hill and could have caused catastrophic floods.

In conclusion, they kept the site because it met the safety requirements and because they did not have to invest in the land, as it belonged to the Ministry (Sas, 2021).

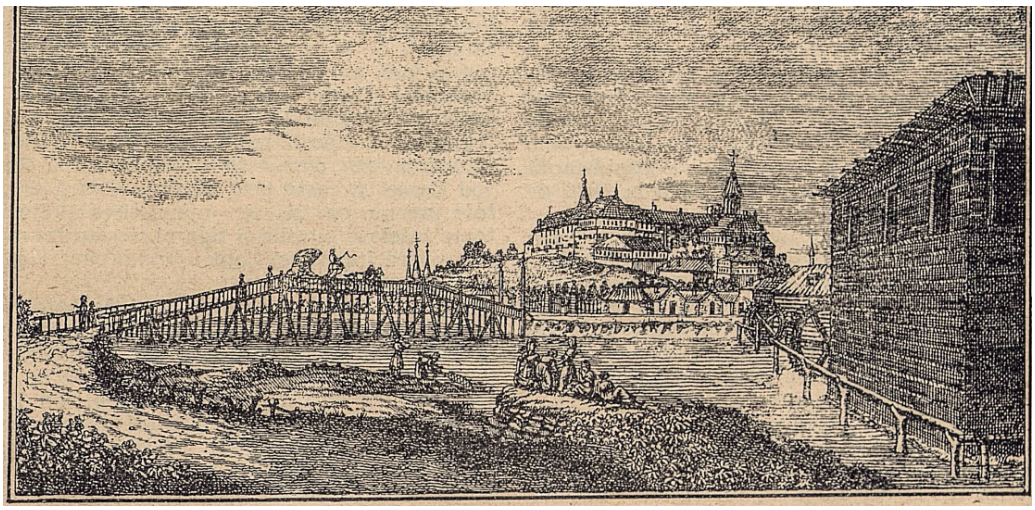

Figure 3: Lithograph of Michai Voda Monastery

The First Draft that was submitted

The first draft was made in 1893, even though the architect had never designed such buildings before. This project can therefore be seen as a challenge for Giulio Magni, to which he responded with an interesting solution.

In Italy until then there were a few archive buildings adapted for Archives, but we cannot say how relevant they were for architect Magni and his proposal for Romania. There was also a regulation for libraries completed in 1816 (Leopoldo Della Santa, 1816), but we do not consider it so relevant for this task. We do not know what he had studied or what materials he had access to, but nevertheless Magni's proposal shows a high degree of topicality, and we consider it closer to the German archive building model. It is therefore possible that Magni knew some of the information contained in the publications and that he also visited some of the archive buildings.

From the first draft that was submitted, only an axonometry and two sections are preserved in Italy, but thanks to the comments of the committee, preserved in writing in Romania, I have more details. The proposed building was „U"-shaped, with the main side dedicated to administration and study rooms, and the ends, resolved in a mirror, for storage rooms.

This first draft that was submitted, although interesting, was criticised by the committees that examined it, because the storage buildings were each 16 metres wide and about 22 metres long. Considering the materials that could be used, this would have been a very heavy building for an archive repository at the time, and its structure would have posed serious safety problems due to its location on a hill (on an unstable terrain). Following these observations, Giulio Magni redesigned the project (ASCV, 1893).

The Second Draft that was submitted

The second draft that was submitted gave the project its final shape. This version was worked on and perfected before the project was handed over.

In this draft, the shape of the building was changed from „U" to O". Thus, the main body remained for the administration, study rooms, museum and palaeography school, and the rest of the remaining U-shaped building was to be used for the warehouses.

The architect reduced the width of the building for the storerooms and organised the building around the church, thus obtaining a composite in which he combined the functional, aesthetic, and historical parts of the site in a beautiful proposal.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAGNI PROJECT

The project was complex, requiring urban interventions and the demolition of all other buildings in the area that could pose a danger to the archives. The building was divided into two functional parts: one for administration and the other for storage. The two buildings were connected by an underground and an overground passage.

Storage area had metal shelves with an impressive structure, like the archives in France and Germany, and had lifts for documents, as the storage areas were arranged on several levels. The warehouse building had a basement and two floors divided by a metal ceiling. This gave five floors of storage space.

Administration building was functionally resolved in mirror image, using the monumental staircase and the Hall of Honour as an axis of symmetry, resolving the distribution of rooms.

The ground floor of the administration building was organised with rooms for the porter, the steward, the technicians (for the heating system) and the bookbinder's office (there were two such rooms).

The first floor was used both for the administrative area (offices of the archivists, the director, and the deputy director) and for the study rooms, of which there were two, as mentioned above. The vertical and horizontal corridors (passageways) have been retained, with minor modifications.

On the second floor there was a series of five rooms arranged in a single wing on the west side, as follows. The library was located on the axis of the main staircase, and the rooms to the left and right of the library were also connected by a door. On the left was the Museum and the Hall of Heraldry, and on the right the School of Palaeography and the Hall of Stamps and Miniatures. On this level there was no longer any connection between the administrative and storage buildings (Sacerdoțeanu, 1940).

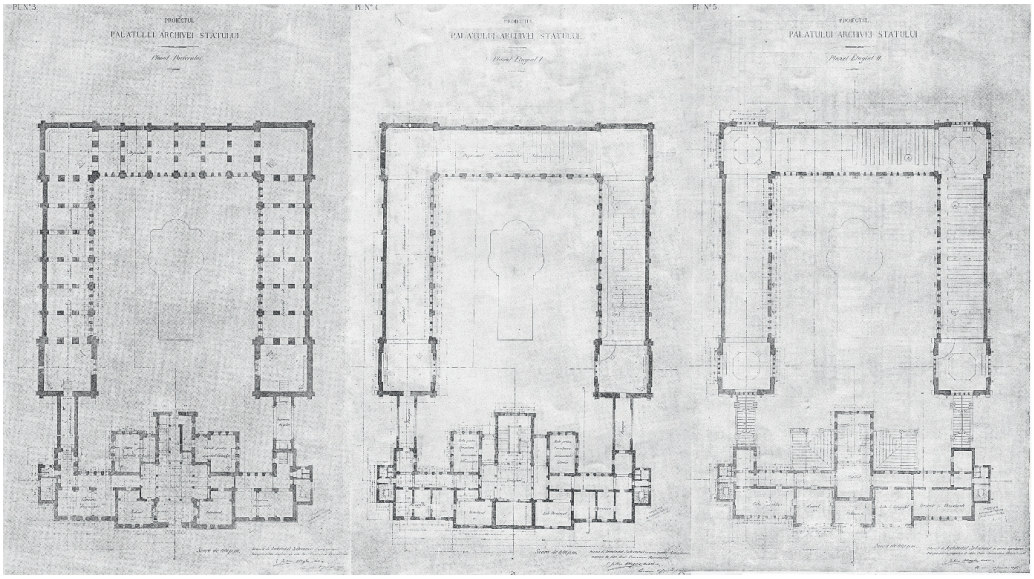

Figure 4: Plans of the project, drawn up in 1895 by Giulio Magni (Sacerdoțeanu, 17–20).

COMMON ELEMENTS OF THE MAGNI PROJECT AND EUROPEAN ARCHIVES

The project was framed in the European framework archives, there are therefore common elements in the construction of archives building at the end of the 19th century, as reflected in Magni's project:

A) Separation of the administrative and storage buildings; this increased safety against fire and burglary and allowed the building to be expanded in the future, doubling the storage capacity without interfering with the functional circuits.

B) Connection of the two buildings with passageways, as the administration and warehouses were separated.

C) Isolation of the building from the surrounding buildings; to find a plot of land large enough to isolate the buildings, or to demolish buildings that were in the way and posed a danger to the Archives.

D) Using fireproof materials and excluding wood from any part of the building.

E) Using iron galleries with perforated metal to allow light into the warehouse.

F) Retaining the windows of the warehouse building, but in Mani's final proposal only in the courtyard.

G) Using the basement only as a back-up storage area.

H) Keeping as much of the permanent storage space off the ground as possible.

I) having a library and a museum.

J) Avoiding the need for mobile staircases and not to use rooms with high ceilings.

K) Putting the windows in the middle of the corridors between two shelves.

NEW CHANGES AND ENHANCEMENTS

The designs were analysed by a committee of Romanian architects who helped a lot to improve the project. We believe they were very much inspired by Duca's report because their observations were followed step by step after that. As mentioned earlier, what was and is imported into every project, and we believe they had access to this documentation because some of the committee members who reviewed Magni's project also reviewed Duca's report when it was submitted (Sas, 2023).

The solution was unique for several reasons:

A) the whole project was compared to other archive buildings built in Europe up to that time on a very large scale.

B) the church conditioned the location of the buildings around it; in other archives made until then, we have the deposits in the form of I, but in no example in the form of „U".

C) the solution was to have two study rooms on the first floor for the two storage sections (administrative and historical documents); only in the twentieth century do we find this concept applied to the Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár; it would therefore have been necessary to create the study according to the documents selected in the hall (not very different from today if we refer to the technology and the way study rooms are converted).

D) The size of the storeroom was 1600 square meters and the height of the storeroom was 5.40 metres; in reality, the storerooms built up to that time had an average size of 500 square metres at the most.

E) The lack of windows in the warehouses facing the street, which today seems logical and perhaps even trivial, but in Europe at that time all buildings had windows, so there was no difference in appearance between the warehouse and the administration as we are used to today.

F) The connection between the two buildings (administration and storage) was underground and above ground to ensure the security of the documents. We do not have both options, as is the case in other Archives in Europe.

G) On the top floor of the administration building, there was a museum, a library, a school of palaeography, a room for heraldry and a room for stamps and miniatures.

H) The project was designed to be built in stages, not all at once. This was a fantastic innovation because of the cost of such a large building was high.

All these innovations were gradually introduced into the design after discussions with the committee. By the end of the project there were five drafts of the project, but the shape and organisation around the church remained the same.

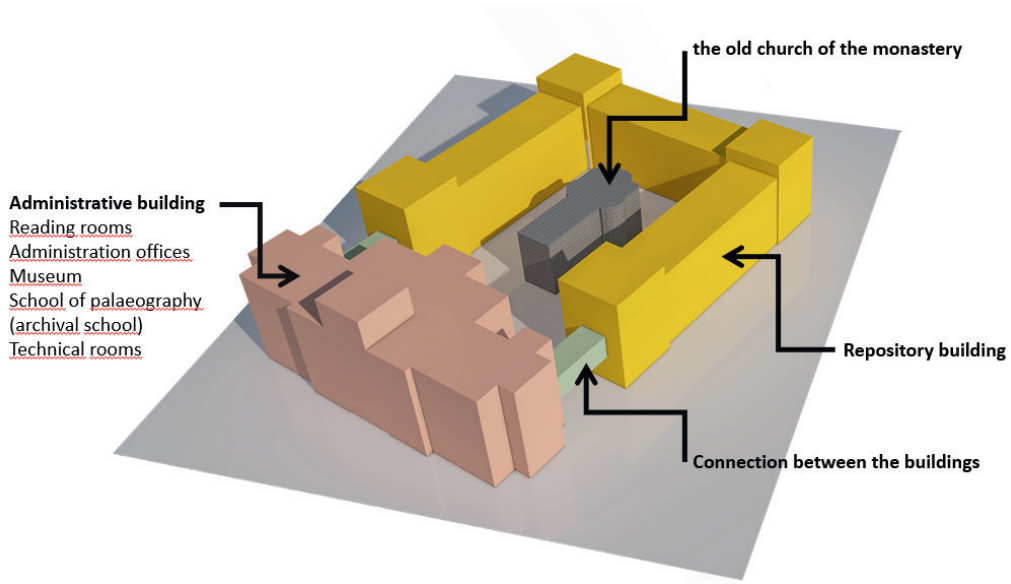

Figure 5: Schematic representation of how the archive designed by Magni is organized.

THE PROBLEM OF WINDOWS IN ARCHIVAL REPOSITORIES

Until then, all Archives in Europe had windows, as mentioned earlier, but at that time windows were used to provide light in the repositories so that archivists could do their work with ease. We are talking about a period when electricity was beginning to spread, but not all buildings had this facility, so oil or gas lamps were sometimes used for archives, which posed a great risk to the safety of the documents.

To increase the amount of light in the repositories, the walls were painted white and the furniture grey, and the intermediate galleries were made of perforated metal to increase the amount of light and avoid shadows.

The Commission insisted on several occasions that the windows on the external façade should be removed because they posed a risk of burglary or fire (as the building was on the boundary of the site, it could not be fenced off).

The project retained the windows on the internal façade (from the courtyard and the church), which were safe and probably sufficient for the lighting requirements. This project was the first in Europe to be identified as having no windows in its warehouses, even if only on the outside.

What today would be seen as a need to maintain temperature and relative humidity was then seen as a need to increase security.

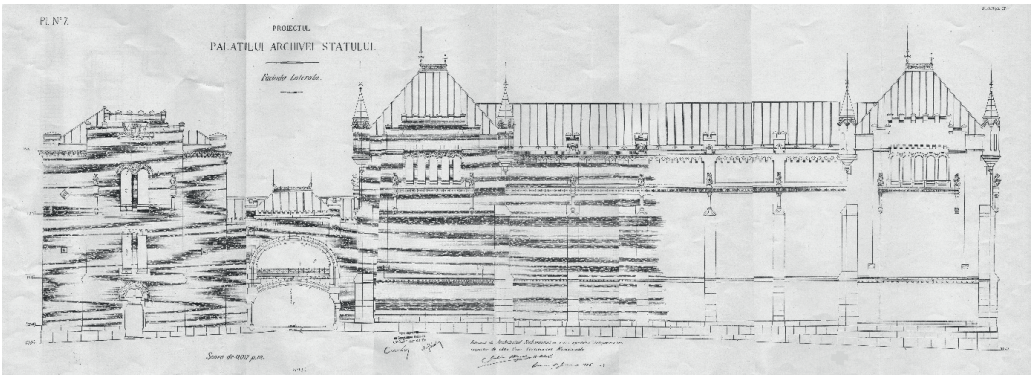

Figure 6: The southern exterior facade of Magni's building (Sacerdoțeanu, 1940, 28).

A DRAWBACK OF THE PROJECT

The question remains: how did they come up with the idea of building such large warehouses? We understand that storage space was needed, but the size of 1600 square metres was too large for one room. We also think it would have been very difficult to control the temperature inside. We believe that they took the information from other warehouses in Europe and applied it on a larger scale, not realising that in many ways it would have worked much better if the space had been divided into smaller areas 200-300 square metres.

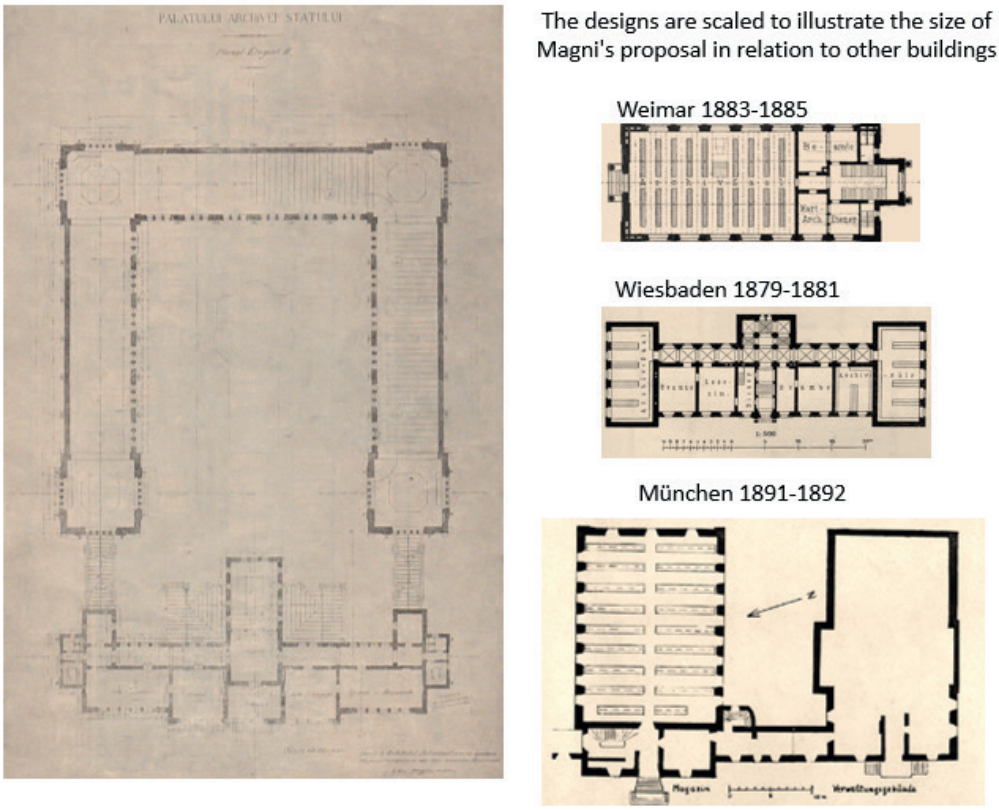

Figure 7: Many plans for archive buildings ran parallel to Magni's project. The plans are scaled to show the size of the proposed building.

THE FINAL PROJECT

The implementation of the project was delayed by discussions between the Ministry, the Archives Institution, the Commission, and the Town Hall, as it was necessary to carry out some expropriation work to increase security. The problems were financial, as there was a mismatch between supply and demand for the land required. The Ministry did not want to invest as much as the municipality wanted, and the municipality did not want to accept as much as the Ministry offered.

A major urban development was to take place in the area, with the extension of a major boulevard that would pass in front of the institution. The city therefore wanted to charge the Ministry for the construction of a section of the boulevard, since the Archives were located there.

On 4 December 1896, the architect presented the final version to the Ministry. Shortly afterwards, however, the minister changed and Spiru Haret, who succeeded him at the head of the ministry, did everything in his power to stop the project.

He persuaded the Council of Ministers to cancel the contract that had been awarded for the construction of the building, without any justification. He basically presented the issue in a way that suited him, without fighting for the protection of the Archives as he should have done. Thus, in June 1897, the Council of Ministers approved his request, finally burying any hope of realising a project for the Archives in that century. Spiru Haret was a Romanian mathematician, astronomer, and pedagogue, famous for the organisation of modern Romanian education, several times minister of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Instruction, but clearly without any understanding of the importance of the archives.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this was a thorough and ingenious project, both functionally and constructively, in relation to the period in which it was carried out. This may have been due to the involvement of so many architects in its co-ordination, as well as the relatively long planning period which allowed for its refinement.

It will go down in history as the first project to come so close to realisation, and sadly it won't be the last to end that way.

After a careful analysis, based on literature and archival documents, we can say that none of the buildings has been completely copied between them. The functional, technical, and organisational elements were taken as models because it was more practical to invest the little money the Archives received in something that really worked, rather than testing it out.

So, the solutions were customised and adapted to the needs of their owners in all the archive buildings.

We have been able to see that the elements used in some buildings can be found in others, which means that this architectural programme has evolved step by step, and I think there is still a lot to be said and done.

We think that it is important to understand the past of the archive buildings and how they came to be, because they need to be improved in the future. So, this kind of research is necessary because we can't improve if we don't know how architects and archivists worked together before us. But some questions remain unanswered: Is there still a need for such buildings? What will happen to the existing buildings, will they be extended, or will we be limited to maintenance work? How big should an archive be in the future? Will all the basic rooms still be needed, or will new ones be created?

I believe that these questions should be considered by architects and archivists together as a team, because soon we will get all the answers and we need to be prepared.

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