

The messages in the architectural image of the building of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

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Abstract. The main focus of this article is the architectural image of the building of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) as a visual benchmark in the urban structure in the centre of Sofia. In fact, this building contains two contrasting images: one of them is turned to itself, to a quiet and calm inner yard, while the other is exposed to the city, with its messages to the public. It is precisely the second that is the immediate subject of this study. We consider the façades that have composition and volume-to-space relations with some other key buildings in the political centre of the capital city such as the symbols of statehood, the buildings of the Bulgarian Parliament and the Christian St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral towering over the former two. The thesis we would like to provide our reasons in favour of is that the façade composition of the BAS building was constructed according to principles and symbols as set by the architecture of the Italian Renaissance. This building's representative façades may be likened, not literally but based on a sufficient number of stylistic characteristics, to the Italian palaces in Florence from late 15th and early 16th c.

Keywords: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS), Sofia, architecture, Bulgarian architects, eclectics

In 2019, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) celebrated its 150th anniversary. Its emerging as Bulgarian Learned Society (BLS) in Brăila and the first years of its existence came as a result of the activities and will of a number of Bulgarians, including heroes from the Bulgarian National Revival pantheon such as Vasil Levski and Hristo Botev. In the context of the times when it was established, it was a remarkably progressive and modern organization based on knowledge, freedom of human spirit and thought. This important anniversary is a good reason to focus our attention on the building of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences right in the centre of Sofia, to undertake an up-to-date rethinking of its messages and to unveil the nature of the original intention as accurately as possible.

The BAS building follows its own history and mirrors the fate of this academic institution at the same time. A key purpose of this research is reading the architectural image of this building from a perspective of memory much the way how recalling occurs, so that its meaning could be revived and re-appropriated.

If we take this research as an architectonic discourse what we should do first is decompose the building according to its grammatical elements such that the focus should cover just one of them: the façades. A clarification is needed here and it is that the subject of this research is the façades that form the architectural image of the BAS building: as public, familiar and even consumed through electronic media as it is. This building has another vision, too, which is seldom seen by common public and is almost unknown. The façades that get out of sight of active street life are the constituent parts of the internal yard, a very calm and quiet place of a towering spirit. In this study, we decode the messages of the façades that are turned to the city, that constitute the landscape of the Narodno Sabranie Square, St. Alexander Nevsky Square and 15 Noemvri Street and make part of it. The two squares are places for political protest, places where Bulgarians have manifested their free will, especially after the fall of the Communist Government in 1989. We need to underline however that this political centre has, since quite recently, been displaced off its traditional sense as the National Assembly of Bulgaria, being one of the fundamental powers in a parliamentary republic, has moved somewhere else in Sofia, with all its sittings having been held in a new location since 2020. The political weight of the urban spaces around the old Parliament got somewhat smaller, so anything to do with ‘political’ acquired more sense in a historical context¹.

The methodology of our study is constituted by two main threads concerning the retrieval of data. The first one is familiarization of the available graphic design documentation as retrieved from the Scientific Archive of BAS and its reviewing in juxtaposition with the actually erected building. The second thread refers to retrieving and collecting information to complete the biographical profile of this building’s architects, which profile was analysed in the context of the process of transformation of Sofia into Bulgaria’s capital city. The thesis of our study is that what is embedded into the façades of BAS building exposed at public urban spaces are the spiritual values and symbol of Italian Renaissance architecture. These façades may be likened, not literally but based on a sufficient number of stylistic characteristics, to the Italian palaces of Florence from late 15th and early 16th c. What has served us as a theoretical platform in terms of construing of Renaissance architecture has been the scientific papers by Prof. Arch. Milko Bichev *Italian palaces during the Renaissance. Basic stages of façade composition. (Italianski dvortsi prez Renesansa. Osnovni fazi na fasadnata kompozitsia)* (Bichev 1943). This author was an eminent Bulgarian researcher and Professor in European Architecture and was also the Chief Architect of the City of Sofia until 1947. It would be important to notice, for the purposes of this study, that the said architect belonged to the group of Bulgarian architects (including those who authored the BAS building) sharing some similarities in their creative careers throughout the first half of the 20th c.: e.g., an identical university education acquired in Western Europe, mostly in the lap of the German architecture school. Prof. Bichev graduated in architecture in Dresden in 1925. We believe that his research on the Italian Renaissance in the book, published in 1943,

¹ In the summer of 2021, the National Assembly returned to sit in its old building. The presence of two parliamentary halls, as well as the relocation of the sittings, is another sign of the political instability in the summer of 2021.

was influenced by architectural trends in Europe, which drew inspiration and architectonic techniques from history, namely Western European traditionalism in architecture. The fundamental studies of Arch. Bichev do not give an answer the question of how to reuse the architecture of the Italian Renaissance, but ideally, to the question what the main compositional characteristics of the Renaissance palace are. In his book the author considers a number of examples, paying attention mainly to the façades, which are bearers of an architectural image. This is another reason to focus on the publication of this scholar.

The location of the BAS building within the city structure of Sofia is significant and decisive for the overall architectural ensemble of the political centre in the capital of Bulgaria. It proves necessary to make a clarification as to the use of two terms in this study. To define what is “political” in terms of architecture, the article highlights the theses of the French philosopher and researcher of the visual world from antiquity to the present, Sylviane Agacinski, and her work *Volume. Philosophies and policies of architecture (Volume. Philosophies et politiques de l'architecture, 1992)*. What she proves there is that architecture is something beyond the building and is a manifestation of society’s collective will. “The advantage of the city which is a contemporary with the political idea of social representativeness is expressed in its impetus and justification for the shaping of a city centre” (Agacinski 2005, 55).

The second term in the present study, “ensemble”, would correspond to a part of the city centre and include the specific spaces of two of Sofia’s squares



Fig. 1. Narodno Sabranie Square and St. Alexander Nevsky Square

and one street together with the buildings that face them and shape their silhouettes. While the BAS building is just one of the beautiful buildings arranged as an oval and surrounding the Narodno Sabranie Square, the paving of yellow cobblestones has become an emblem of the central city area. Three are the remarkable buildings composing the ensemble the building of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences makes part of. These are the building of the National Assembly, with the BAS building standing to the west of it, and the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral towering over the former two. The composition is completed by the delicate monument to the Tzar Liberator authored by the Italian sculptor Arnaldo Zocchi. The Narodno Sabranie Square seamlessly leads to another oval square, the one

around the St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, and it is the building of BAS that unites the building of the Parliament and that of the Cathedral in a single set through the linking street, 15 Noemvri Street (Fig. 1).

Historical context of the BAS building

What we need in this context is to place this building in the context of the time when the idea of its construction emerged and that was in the first decades of Sofia's development as the capital of Bulgaria. If we accept this perspective we should take as a key the sense that Prof. Agacinski puts into her *Volume. Philosophies and policies of architecture*, and it is that "anything being evaluated from a historical point of view is the very form of memory, requiring a relation to the past engaging a specific concept of the collective memory" (Agacinski 2005, 144). Upon the National Liberation, Sofia as a capital city would definitively part ways with its Oriental and patriarchal image. The education champion and honorary member of BLS Konstantin Jireček, in his book *The Principality of Bulgaria (Knyazhestvo Bulgaria)*, testifies about the situation in the town in pictures recreating the winter of 1880, depicting "the abandoned mosques, the half-demolished caravanserais, the variety of newly constructed buildings, the spacey Turkish cemeteries and the poor view of the mended (patched) or interim Governmental buildings" (Jireček 1899, 29). Sofia's cityscape over the period extending throughout the 1890s represents the condition of the new state as "a politically free yet still submerged into physical and technical chaos Bulgaria" (Gadev 1928, 367). For the period 1895-1912, when the first stages of the construction of the BAS building were carried out, the State launched a political programme targeting the Europeanization of the capital through architecture. The new vision of Sofia sees it as a European city including an unseen scale of urban development. The political aspect was manifested by the State's support in terms of architecture and construction at many levels: administrative, cultural and economic. For example, as Sofia did not have any building materials production facilities, the State would stimulate the construction of cement factories as well as brick-yards, iron working and furniture producing shops. The young capital city transformed into a huge construction site in the late 19th and early 20th c.

While city's area expanded, according to the contemporaries, "the healthiest part of the city was that around the church St. Alexander Nevsky and Moskovska Street where the building lots measured between 1000 to 2000 sq.m and were sold by the Municipality to individuals at 0.5 to 1.5 leva per square metre" (Trendafilov 1928, 364). In this area, "the new construction of the streets would take place according to the regulation plan already approved in 1881, so the Municipality would supply lots to all newcomers pouring in increasing numbers into the capital of Bulgaria" (Gadev 1928, 368). This is the area where the lot of the Bulgarian Learned Society was located, and more precisely in Tsarigradska Street, however, the way this lot was acquired had a bearing with a dramatic prehistory. It was a dynamic period for the new capital city, with urban planning changes and construction activities, and on 7 April 1882, Vasil D. Stoyanov, the President of the Bulgarian Learned Society sent the first of a sequence of

letters to require the Municipality to allot 4000 sq.m in Tsarigradska Street to erect a building for the Society. Those letters were left unanswered, yet later, the Municipality people suggested another lot, of smaller area, on Moskovska Street, which was rejected by Stoyanov. At the same time, the State Council was established, which included such members as Vasil D. Stoyanov and another BLS member, Marin Drinov, who most probably exerted their influence over the Capital City Municipality so the request was accepted (Hristova 1999, 23). While in 1883, the Mayor allotted 4600 sq.m of land free of charge located in Tsarigradska Street, the State Council approved the act of the Municipality. On 6 March 1884, the Sofia City Municipal Administration granted the Bulgarian Learned Society a lot of land free of charge for the construction of a building to be located in the most sought-after and expensive area.

A few years later, when the land was still empty, the Ministry of Education stated its desire to acquire the same property to build a museum and a library. This prompted the managers of the Bulgarian Learned Society to speed up the process of finding an architect, the preparation of a project for a building of BLS and the construction thereof (Popova 2019, 23).

Composition in the architectural image

The BAS building is a valuable monument within Bulgarian capital's architectural heritage, because despite several reconstructions and additions in the process of design and construction, there is a stable line of continuity in its architectonic and artistic image. The building of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, like any significant architectural work, mirrors the system of values typical of the society that creates it. This image is of paramount importance for the national identity and the values professed by the Bulgarian society in the first years after the Liberation. The creative regularity embedded in the façades does not in any way suggest that over a period of about four decades, six architects have invested their skills at different times. Here they are, listed: architect Heinrich Meyer and architect Theodor Hünerwadel, architect Petko Momchilov, architect Yordan Yordanov and architect Sava Ovcharov, architect Lyuben Konstantinov (Popova 2019, 26).

Over the second half of the 19th c., Europe experienced the imposition of a trend in architecture called eclecticism (Stoilova 2003), which is characterized by its historicity and free combination of architectural stylistic elements. In terms of means of expression, architecture turned to the past and borrowed architectonic compositional principles and elements from bygone eras. According to the French philosopher Agacinski, "this revival of interest in works from an old period cannot be the result of mere curiosity about history in the scientific sense of the word, nor as a return to a world through its resurrection, but rather as an expression of the need by bearers of a new culture or a new mythology based on history - as imaginary as it is real" (Agacinski 2005, 143). The architectural appearance of the buildings gives the impression that they were built many years or centuries ago, but in fact they were created using modern construction techniques. Metal structures and reinforced concrete elements are hidden in the shell of the architectural language of Gothic, Renaissance or Byzantium. The

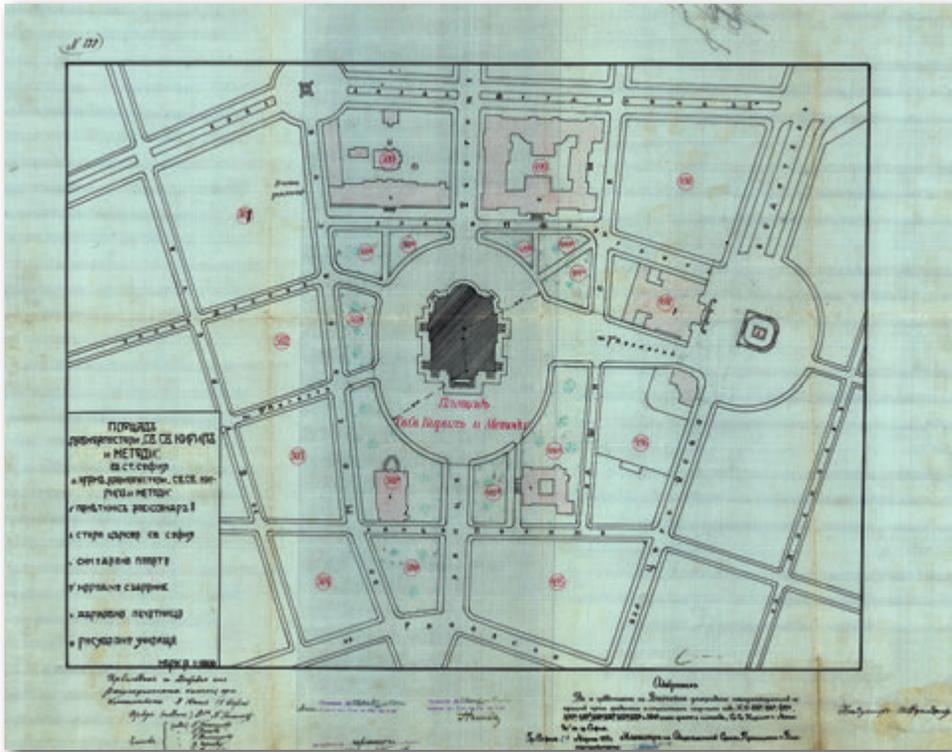


Fig. 2. Development plan from 1917, which shows how the geometry of the street 15 November (then called 7 November) opens at an angle to the St. Alexander Nevsky Square, which at that time was called St. Cyril and Methodius. The BAS building is imaged at the first stage of its construction

reason is not only in the nostalgic beauty of the old architecture or in society's or architect/designer's preference of history, but in the re-use of the spiritual signs, which are encoded in the architecture of the respective epoch. In this sense, the vision of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences' building has a deliberate content, which led us to explore the image in its façades as a bearer of values and symbols carried by the architecture of the Italian Renaissance. We stand the position that the Renaissance elements of the façade are not accidental. There are two messages that are embodied in the architectural image of the building: the strength of the human spirit and the values of the republic, where man is the measure of the world, and human freedoms are primordial rights (Fig. 2).

Façades by architect Heinrich Meyer and architect Theodor Hünnerwadel

The first architectural design for the BLS building was drafted by Konstantin Jovanović, a Viennese architect with Bulgarian roots, who graduated in architecture in Zürich, and author of the project for the National Assembly building. His idea for the BLS building dated 1885, however, was never

implemented², but we stand the opinion that it had significantly influenced the subsequent solutions, even if we accepted that those were drawn up as an antithesis in terms of the method of urbanization, construction, vision and content. It was not until quite recently that the drawings to the design gained publicity driven by the publication of Associated Professor in Architecture Stela Tasheva (Tasheva 2019, 54-55). In our opinion, Jovanović succeeded in setting the frameworks for the future building by creating a model to be used to determine the parameters of the architectural ToR, i.e., the scope and the cost of the construction. The first architectural project was entirely compliant with the modern phase in what architectural design and pre-design investment studies used to be.

The team headed by the Swiss architects Heinrich Meyer and Theodor Hünerwadel implemented the next project for the BLS building. Both were graduates of the Faculty of Architecture at the Federal Polytechnic School in Zürich. Architect Meyer also designed some further buildings all over Bulgaria, with one of them being the Prince (Knyaz) Battenberg Mausoleum. Moreover, he was granted a civil title - he was the Governmental Architect. Very much like architect Meyer, architect Hünerwadel was in civil service, but in the municipal administration of Sofia. It would be difficult to judge to what extent they invested their own vision and to what extent they were influenced by the solution that had already been developed by architect Jovanović. The fact is that the project was executed and was reflected in the future architecture of the building, which for thirty years underwent several stages of expansion, which were authored by other architects. The executed project reveals elements typical of the Renaissance architecture and the Renaissance principles from the end of the 15th century, which are skilfully adapted in the composition of the façades. According to the opinion of Professor Milko Bichev, an architect, “the means of expression of the Renaissance is the line: it is a guide for the eye. Bodies have tangible boundaries, the individual shape is isolated, and the contour is emphasized” (Bichev 1943, 134). Following this principle, the architecture of the BLS building emphasizes the horizontal through the organization of the openings in rows, through the plaster that mimics the rustic³ on the ground floor, and the smooth wall in the upper floors (Fig. 3). The two façades, designed by Swiss architects, are an architectural expression of the desire to separate Sofia from the patriarchal image: another step towards the European identity of the capital. Just as man is a measure of the world, so he/she is a measure of architecture. This basic principle of Renaissance humanism became a principle in construction in the design and execution of façades. As in the Renaissance, architecture “no longer depends on tradition or practicality, but on the free-creating artistic will of the individual” (Bichev 1943, 17).

Over the period 1892–1892, when the first stage of construction at the lot provided for the BLS building was taking place, including the crossroads

² The drawings of the academic building are stored in the Scientific Archive of BAS.

³ Rustic is a type of stone masonry used in the eras of Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque and New Age.



Fig. 3. The façade of the BLS building facing Tsarigradska Street, 1907

between Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd and 15 Noemvri Street, the following items were built: one wing with three vertical axes located at the southern side of the lot along Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd, and another wing featuring three axes along 15 Noemvri Street. The two wings were connected to a tower in the corner crowned by a dome. The highlighting of the corner with the dome gives an impression of completeness and integrity all the more that it is there where the central entrance is located (Fig. 4) , i.e., the centre of the symmetric composition. The dome resembles a scaled-down model of the dome of Florentine Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flower. It manifests the free combination of architectural elements as it is featured in eclecticism, the benchmark in this case being the Florentine Renaissance times, but such elements being taken from residential and church architecture, each having different functions (Popova 2019, 30).

Above the entrance and under the dome, on the second level, a small balcony is essential for the impact of the façade, as the wrought iron railing and the door leading to the balcony bring a human scale to the façade. The windows are arranged on the levels in horizontal rows, with the openings being at equal distances. They strictly pass through the levels and form vertical axes. The only division of the façade plane is introduced by the lines of the window sills. The windows themselves end in a small arch on the first level, while on the second they end in a semicircle, where side columns and a railing balustrade decorate each of them as if embedded in a frame. These, however, are stored in the plane



Fig. 4. The entrance to the building designed by architect Meyer, which was the entrance to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 1944. Photo by A. Mihaylov

of the wall, so they do not shape any relief or deep shadows. The pilasters on the façade of the tower protrude slightly and do not disturb the impression of the panel.

Renaissance palaces in Florence feature arched windows with segmental arches, as well as stone frames to the openings. A characteristic Renaissance technique is the shaping of the façade with various types of cladding on the individual levels: roughly carved blocks shaping the so-called rustic style, with a grid of deep vertical and horizontal joints structuring the rough surface of the wall with their shadows. In the same way, the impression of horizontal alignment in the BAS building is enhanced by the different raster of the cladding: while on the ground floor it imitates rough masonry with visible joints, upwards the wall becomes smooth. The composition of the façades is simple, based on a clear geometric logic, with the number of ornaments being quite circumspect. The vertical axes lead through the basement, the ground floor and the first floor. The part formed by a window in the ground floor, above it on the floor a window with an arch and a balustrade and another small rectangular window in the basement, is repeated three times without change in the two wings. This is how the rhythm becomes clear. The impair number of axes is typical of the Italian palaces in Florence. The arcades proper surrounding the windows on the second level are shaped as squares. As Professor Bichev, architect, qualifies the Renaissance architecture of palaces: “While beauty is set in by proportions, aesthetic pleasure is originated by clear proportions” (Bichev 1943, 40).

In 1892, the project authored by architect Heinrich Meyer and architect Theodor Hünnerwadel was completed with the erection of the edifice. Although the BLS structure expanded over the following decade adding new researchers and scientists, the members of the Academy of Sciences were unable to make use of the edifice constructed for them as the rooms there were rented out to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Confessions.

Façades by architect Petko Momchilov

The second expansion of the Bulgarian Learned Society’s building took place in 1906. One wing with five vertical axes was further attached to the edifice along Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd, and another wing featuring two vertical axes along 15 Noemvri Street, based on the project authored by architect Petko Momchilov. He graduated in architecture in Prague, Austro-Hungary, in 1892, and was among the first Bulgarian architects with diplomas, who started to change the tendency of hiring foreign experts in architecture. This novelty was reflected specifically in the long series of architects who put their efforts into the BAS building. While the architectural image in the façades of another two buildings authored by architect Momchilov in Sofia, the Central Mineral Bath and the Synod Palace, reminds of the spirit of the Bulgarian Middle Ages, the BLS building relied on manners and elements typical of early Renaissance palace architecture. The new extensions were fully synchronized with the original edifice, however there were minute, nearly imperceptible elements prompting

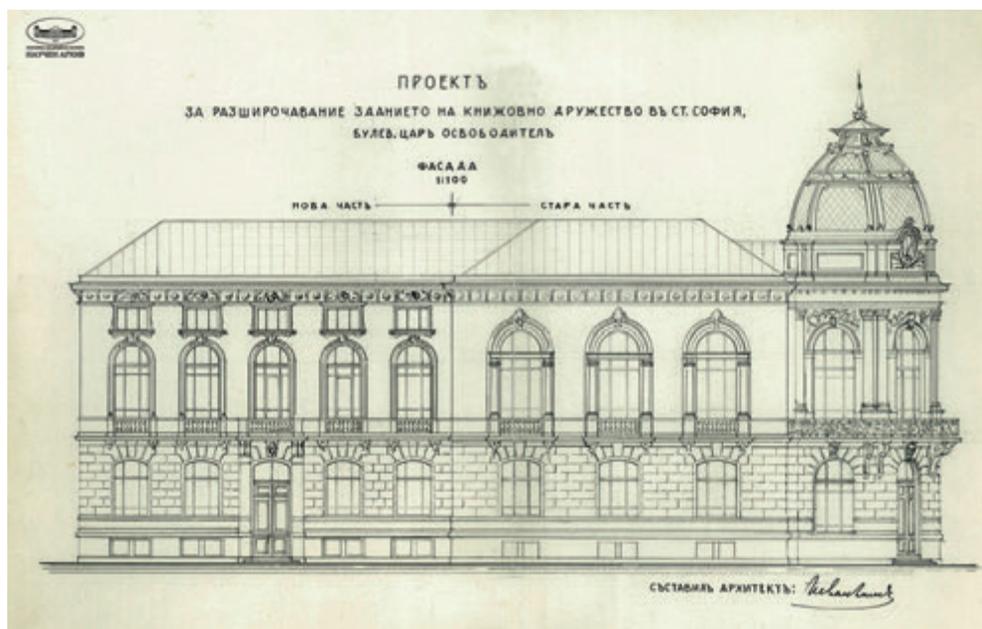


Fig. 5. Façade on Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd, taken from architect Momchilov's project. The new part makes a difference, with its smaller windows and a fourth row of windows just below the roof cornice



Fig. 6. The BAS building, with what was built based on the projects of architect Meyer and architect Momchilov and the start of construction of the wings designed by architect Yordanov and architect Ovcharov

the new construction period. The vertical axes end with square windows just under the roof cornice. While the windows at the second level are smaller, they still keep the original shape found in the design of architect Meyer and architect Hünérwadel (Fig. 5).

Both the BLS edifice and the Narodno Sabranie Square just in front of it were gaining a more and more finished appearance, but were very far from the vision we know today (Fig. 6). 1907 saw the inauguration of the Monument to the Tsar Liberator. Albeit the fact that BLS had a building of its own, the members of the Academy of Sciences were located dispersed in many places around Sofia. Even in 1911, i.e., when the Bulgarian Learned Society was renamed into Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the meeting on this occasion was held in the Slavyanska Beseda Hall (Vasilev 1991, 195). Then followed a string of world events: wars, epidemics, economic disturbances, which caused a negative impact on both capital city and Academy's growth and development.

Façades by architect Yordanov and architect Ovcharov

In 1926, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences launched an architectural competition the subject being the expansion of the edifice to the northeast along today's 15 Noemvri Street. The winners were the team of architect Yordan Yordanov and architect Sava Ovcharov. Those architects proposed two solutions to the architectural task. One concept that was ranked first, suggested an entirely symmetric composition establishing a balance between the two squares. The board of assessors engaged for the competition determined their second design proposal as unsuccessful; it was asymmetrical in its composition and emphasized the part of Alexander Nevsky Square.

The winning design project had the avant-corps placed in the centre of the composition, which is where the new official approach to the Academy is. The south-east façade's composition design featured absolute symmetry. The dome from the Meyer and Hünérwadel's design added a mirroring volume by an additional dome. That was how the composition was given the sought balance by means of the dome designed by the architects Yordanov and Ovcharov. Those two architects were credited with deciphering the Renaissance messages and their reaffirmation by using an avant-corps. This is an architectural element where part of the building protrudes to the front almost imperceptibly. The new façade, along with the existing wing, looks like a replica of a *palazzo* in Florence. The resemblance is not literal; however it has a lot of elements prompting the influence. The prototypes of the artistic image may be sought in façades such as those of Palazzo Medici-Riccardi and Palazzo Pazzi-Quaratesi from the end of the 15th c. (Popova 2019, 34).

The avant-corps, crowned with a pediment, is composed of five vertical axes, with the central three on the ground floor containing the gates of the Academy under a Dorian colonnade, and a balustrade passing above them, in front of three windows. The architects completed the design of the façade, which had been initiated by others before them, by adding five vertical axes to the right of the avant-corps. And that was how the rhythm becomes clear

and even: 5: 5: 5 (Popova 2019, 35). “Alternation is a basic principle of length division and is rooted in an innate sense of order and regularity. The individual form, through successive repetition, acquires greater strength and significance. Simple alternation is characteristic of the beginning of the Renaissance” (Bichev 1943, 50).

The façade is designed in the gradation typical of an Italian *palazzo* by alternating a raster of rustic on the first ground floor and smooth plaster on the next, so that the wall gradually visually lightens in height. The ground floor and the first floor act as wide horizontal areas, separated by cornices on which the windows stand, and the roof cornice contrasts markedly as a finish to the façade. “And as much as these regularities or influences are invisible to the eye, for the general impression they are of great importance. And as Heraclitus wrote in Antiquity: ‘More than the visible, the invisible harmony applies’” (Bichev 1943, 48).

Despite the stylistic similarities, the innovative approach applied by the architects Yordanov and Ovcharov distinguishes the building from the Renaissance *palazzo*. The volumes of the building and the overall composition of the new building follow with a confident rhythm the character of the rising terrain to Alexander Nevsky Square, and the silhouette of the façade opens with a small angle to the cathedral square. The architects drifted away from the idealized uncompromising straight line and flat terrain typical of the Renaissance, choosing to bring the character of the place to the fore.

The sketches for the project together with the entire archive of the authors disappeared during the destruction of their architectural studio during the bombings in 1944 (Avramov 1988, 39). However, their concept for the competition project on the expansion of the BAS building can be deduced from what has already been built, namely that it carries the vision of a palace of knowledge, science and literature. The project of the team of two architects was the third in a row to expand the building of BAS, but what they created dominated over the previous two projects with the introduction of new volumes on a larger scale, with the achieved absolute symmetry of the façade on 15 Noemvri Street and a radical change in the approach to the building from the Parliament oriented side.

The influence of the Italian Renaissance may be traced based on those two architects resumes. 1920 saw the founding of the Design Bureau called Architect Yordan Yordanov and Architect Sava Ovcharov. “In those years of decline and wandering, they relied mainly on the sound aesthetic principles and laws of the Renaissance, showing a desire for independent creativity” (Kuteva 1965, 18). The architectural team Yordanov-Ovcharov was very successful and it is not possible to definitely find out what creative contribution each of them had in the BAS building design. Despite that, the mere fact that all their joint design efforts had the name of architect Yordanov before the name of architect Ovcharov, may be interpreted in a way that the former was the leader in their joint effort (Avramov 1988, 39). When the team won the competition for the BAS building expansion, architect Yordanov was at the peak of his career, having accumulated, together with architect Ovcharov, a lot of experience in both designing and construction of a number of public buildings. He graduated

in architecture from the Technical University of Munich. Right prior to the architectural competition, architect Yordanov could personally get impressions of the palaces in Florence. “The strong influence of the Italian Renaissance left deep traces in architect Yordanov during the several months he spent in Italy in 1925-1926. Even today, these buildings make a strong impression with their pronounced tectonic nature, expressive proportions and exquisite detail” (Stoyanov 1961, 19).

Architect Sava Ovcharov got his diploma in architecture from the University of Vienna in 1915. There were witnesses who shared the words said by architect Sava Ovcharov regarding architecture and an architect’s job, which are also valid in the case of the BAS building: “How little people know about our work. Looking at all this - well-proportioned, calm, everything in place - they think it happened as soon as we took the pencil. No one even suspects how much work and skill it takes to achieve this end result” (Kuteva 1965, 20). The successful tandem disintegrated in 1948, when under the auspices of the totalitarian regime, the possibility of the existence of private architectural studios and private practice was destroyed. After that, architect Yordanov again bound his destiny with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. He published his works and ended his career as a senior research associate at the Institute of Urban Planning and Architecture at BAS, where he was the head of an experimental workshop in the period 1951-1959. Architect Ovcharov continued to practice his profession as head of department in a state design organization, which was later renamed into the *Glavproekt* Design Institute, which became famous in socialist times.

The architects Yordanov and Ovcharov had various contributions to the BAS building design. First of all, they managed to combine the principles of the classics with innovative views through simplicity in form, proportions and monumentality, which does not exclude man as a measure. Second, they elegantly integrated the extension of the existing building. Some significant and successful changes were made: the approach to the building was moved so the main entrance is on the side looking at 15 Noemvri Street, the new element, the avant-corps was introduced, crowned by a pediment, but everything was done by taking into consideration the existing stylistics of the building so the eye cannot possibly catch where the differences in the transitions on the façades of the added wings are.

In 1929, BAS was found a new home in its own building, however just the new part was used, the one designed by architect Yordanov and architect Ovcharov. After 1944, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs completely vacated the members of the Academy of Sciences’ building.

Façade by architect Lyuben Konstantinov

In 1944, during the Sofia bombings, the BAS building on the Narodno Sabranie Square was significantly destroyed. Part of the northern wing was levelled, with floor and roof constructions and four of the vertical composition axes of the façade were affected (Fig. 7). Such substantial damage called for undertaking some exceptionally specific work taken on by the next architect,



Fig. 7. The façade, which was destroyed over the 1944 bombings



Fig. 8. The restored façade by architect Konstantinov, with no traces of repairs.
Photo by A. Mihaylov

who put his efforts into the restoration of the damaged structure. Architect Lyuben Konstantinov graduated in architecture abroad, in Dresden, and, like the precedent architects who had designed the BAS building, was a disciple of the German architecture school. His professional activity was associated mainly with the construction of the northern and southern wings of the Sofia University, which started in 1940 and continued after the end of World War Two. His architectural career, like that of architect Ovcharov, ended in the design organization *Glavproekt*. Restoration in architecture excludes any gross intervention, with the design of the BAS building authored by architect L. Konstantinov being fully compliant with this principle. The façade was reconstructed with finesse so the newly built part was impossible to distinguish. The architect's responsibility for the

building is evident everywhere, because over the past 20 years it has become an element of the cultural landscape of Sofia (Fig. 8). Lyuben Konstantinov's intervention in architecture during the restoration to reproduce its original image can be defined as "The very sense of responsibility towards culture itself" (Agacinski 2005, 152).

Conclusions of the BAS building's image

The BAS building is a benchmark of what continuity and consistency are in architectural design. We need to pay tribute to each of the architects, because preserving, inscribing or restoring the old in design and construction requires more work, skills and conscience than erecting a new one. The architects who designed the BAS building made efforts to continue the line, the order and the rhythm, managing to preserve the original imagery of the façades facing the city. Evidence of the difficulties they encountered in their quest to preserve the general conceptual design in the façade, may be found in barely noticeable discrepancies between the different stages - small deviations from the initial vision under the pressure of practicality and function. The first discrepancies are on the scale originally set by Swiss architects. Architect Petko Momchilov almost imperceptibly ground the proportions of the composite axes. The size of the windows on the first two floors was reduced, but a new row of small windows appeared under the roof cornice. The image remains in the plane set in the previous project. An explanation can be found in the need to increase the number of independent offices for the purposes of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The next design was made by architect Yordanov and architect Ovcharov, and, in opposition to Momchilov's, zoomed the scale by adding both compositional axes and new volumes. Moreover, their design introduced a second essential change to the approach to the building. The façade containing the new entrance was designed in absolute symmetry and turned to the street, facing the Parliament and not the square.

In the summer of 2021, the parliamentary sittings moved once again from the new back to the old building of the National Assembly. The hesitant political situation currently confirms the thesis that the examined urban space around the old Parliament, where the BAS building is located, is politically dependent. From a state of museum lull, it quickly returned to the heat of political events. However, the BAS building remains a symbol of continuity and stability with its everlasting image.

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