

*Strand 3. The New Frontiers: Unveiling Art Nouveau Cities*

## **To the borders of Art Nouveau: Czernowitz and Harbin**

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### ***Abstract***

Harbin (Northern China) and Czernowitz (Bukowina, Habsburg Empire until 1918, then Rumania until 1945, now Ukraine), are two examples of cities at the edges of empires, close to the borders of countries with a consequent melting pot of people and nationalities. In this framework of needs of representation of different national or religious characters, at the beginning of XXth century the Art Nouveau architecture played a key role on a background of never-ending Eclecticism. Less as a fight against Eclecticism and more as a symbol of modernity and super-national feature, Art Nouveau reached these outposts of Western culture directly by Vienna or through the Russian version of it. The Postsparkasse in Czernowitz (1900) and the Chinese Eastern Railway buildings (1902) in Harbin are the best examples of this search of modernity. The Art Nouveau era in Czernowitz, strongly related to the imperial core, vanished in 1918, but in Harbin it lasted until the 20's, thanks to its iconic value.

**Keywords:** Czernowitz, Chernivtsi, Harbin, Jewish community, Chinese Eastern Railway, Gessner, Hubert, Marmorek, Oskar, Wagnerschule, Eclecticism, Russian Art Nouveau

Some cities grow slowly century by century, “in the same place”, with the same families, generation by generation, joining monument to monument, district to district. Some others, on the contrary, are caught by historical and political earthquakes, and they change name, people, and “place” because of the shift of the borders and the change of the nation they belong to. We'll discuss two case studies: Czernowitz

(Chernivtsi) in Ukraine and Harbin in China, both along the borders of their countries representing urban stories where the position played a key role in their development. These sites turned a borderline position in their states in an opportunity of richness and cultural identity because they were inhabited by a multi-ethnic population boosting economic and cultural exchanges. Within their own chronology, these cities share their “golden age” period, around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, adopting the Art Nouveau language as symbol of modernity. The paper focuses on the strong role that their position played in the urban development and analyses in a comparative perspective how the architectural language contributed to build up their urban identity.

## **1. Borders, names & people**

### ***1.1 In Czernowitz (Chernivtsi)***

Today Chernivtsi is an Ukrainian town, but this status belongs to the town only since WWII: before it was called Cernauți as a part of The Greater Romania (1918-1940, 1941-44), and before Czernowitz under the Austrian empire (1775-1918). Until 1918 Czernowitz was the capital of Bukovina<sup>1</sup>, the eastern area the empire, surrounded by other parts of the same empire (Galicia and Lodomeria, inhabited by Ukrainians and Poles, ruled by Vienna, Transylvania, inhabited by Romanians and Hungarians ruled by Budapest) and Romania.

The capital was close to Romanian border et very close to the Russian Empire. The region, because of its position but also because of the immigration promoted by Austria for peopling the area, was a melting pot of Ukrainians, Romanians, Poles, Armenians,

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1 About Czernowitz/Chernivtsi see: Florence Heymann, *Le crépuscule des lieux*, Paris, Stock, 2003; Dmitro Tanashik, *Chernivtsi*, Chernivtsi, Zoloti Litavry, 2005; *Mithos Czernowitz. Eine Stadt in Spiegel ihrer Nationalität*, Potsdam, Deutsches Kulturforum östliches Europa, 2008; Marianne Hirsch, Leo Spitzer, *Ghosts of home. The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*, Berkeley Los Angeles London, University of California Press, 2009; Svetlana Frunchak, *Studying the Land, Contesting the Land. A Select Historiographic Guide to Modern Bukovina*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian & European Studies, Pittsburgh, 2011, n. 2108; Davide Rechter, *Becoming Habsburg. The Jews of Austrian Bukovina 1774-1918*, Oxford-Portland, Oregon, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013; Paolo Cornaglia, “Czernowitz. ‘Un ermellino a Cernopol’ tra Impero, Romania e Ucraina”, in Salvatore Adorno, Giovanni Cristina, Arianna Rotondo (Eds): *Visibile/Invisibile. Percepire la città tra descrizioni e omissioni*, Catania, Scimm, 2014, p. 1715-1725.

Hungarians and Jews. In 1918, with the collapse of the Central Empires, new-old Nations appeared on European scene, and new borders were traced: Bukowina became a part of the Greater Romania (Moldavian and Valacchian principalities plus Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania) and the closest borders were with Poland and Soviet Union (Ukraine). The last twist of fate happened in 1940, then consolidated in 1944: the upper part of Bukowina (with a majority of Ukrainians) was joined to Soviet Union (Ukraine), Romanians (and Jews with Romanian nationality) were 'suggested' and allowed to move back to their "homeland", the capital, now called Chernivtsi, became mostly a Slavic language and culture town. The only borders today still extant are the ones with Romania and Moldova.

For Czernowitz the golden age, the period within the reality and the idea of a tolerant multicultural town grow up, ran between 1775 (the annexing of Bukovina to the Austrian empire) and 1918, when the duchy became a part of the Greater Romania. It was the 'far East' of the empire, the bastion of the western civilization and culture. For German speaking Jewish writers as Karl Emil Franzos it was a sort of oasis in the barbarian East, for travellers is an European place, well linked to Vienna. As in all the regions of this part of the empire there was a strong contradiction between the élites ruling the urban areas and the countryside: in a duchy mostly Ukrainian and Romanian, the capital was the mirror of the German culture and language, because of the Austrian state officers related to the imperial administration, the German community and the increased assimilation of the Jewish community as a German-speaking society. The Jewish people leaving the villages (the *shtetl*) to settle in Czernowitz, left the old language too (the Yiddish), entering the "German world", in a sort of upgrading. In 1900 30% of Czernowitzer was Jewish (30.000 people within 88.000). In 1914 the Jews were 40.000 and in 1941 about 50.000. All these German speaking people made Czernowitz as a German town in the middle of a territory full of Romanians and Ukrainians: this contradiction will bring Romania, and after Ukraine, to claim and get the region and its capital. The strong percentage of Jewish people in Czernowitz was balanced, anyway, by other national groups. In 1910, beyond Germans and Jews (1/6 of population), there were Romanians (1/6), Ukrainians (1/6), Polish (1/6), plus Armenians and Hungarians. According to official reports of the end of XVIIIth century, 75% of people in Bukovina region were Romanians, and the most used language was

Romanian. The Austrian power always tried to reduce this predominance, allowing Ukrainian immigration, to limit the Romanian claims about the region. In Czernowitz the different ethnic groups played as different social bodies: if you could find Jews and Germans in the urban élite, guardians, housemaids and nannies were Ukrainians, craftsmen, market sellers and retailers were Polish and Romanian. The multicultural character of Czernowitz was showed continually by the name of the streets (written in the three main languages), by the multi-language newspapers or magazines (as the Bucovina, a cultural magazine, published in German and Romanian), and was forced by the need to know most of the languages spoken in town to communicate: at the market or with the nanny...

### ***1.2 In Harbin***

Harbin is a Chinese city in the Manchuria region (Northeast China). Though a fishing village existed in the area, in the past named Alejin (Harbin name is derived from it by different sources to say “Honour” or "a place for drying fishing nets”), the city was founded when Russia obtained the right to build the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) at the end of 19<sup>th</sup>. Things went very fast: the concession was signed in 1896, works begun in 1897 and traffic on the line started in November 1901. The CER permitted to link the Siberian region to the harbour of Vladivostok (on the Sea of Japan) cutting the way through China’s territory. At that time the Transiberian Railway became the world's longest railroad, Harbin the hub of the railway company. The city was founded on the South bank of the Sungari River, or Songhua, where the railroad intersected with extensive river traffic. Its construction started in 1898 and was conceived as a sort of Russian outpost alongside the goods’ traffic. By the description of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the cool climate with cold winters last four or five months; subzero overnight low temperatures are common and can reach  $-40\text{ }^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-40\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ )<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless

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2 "Harbin", entry, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2014, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/254877/Harbin>>. Consulted on 30/06/2014. See also-family stories in the web site of the Jewish Communities of China <<http://www.jewsofchina.org/>>. Cf. Nikolaj Petrovič Kradin, *Kharbin — russkaia Atlantida* [Harbin: The Russian Atlantis], Khabarovsk, Khabarovskaja Kraevaja tip., 2001, p. 183–84.

because of its position Harbin became quickly very attractive for merchants as well as for populations discriminated on the other side of the border. At different moments in the 20<sup>th</sup>, wars and political changes created various conditions encouraging a multi-ethnic people to join Harbin and its special status of city not completely belonging to anyone. In one hand the city had a Russian organization, with a European style of life, western stores and amenities, on the other hand it could offer different rules and rights. In Harbin not so far away from the border, many people found a place to live without fear of persecution. Jews from Russia, Ukraine and Siberia were among the first arriving there. In the aim to improve economic development, in fact, the Czar had offered them a chance to live in this Russian ‘enclave’ without restrictions. As local Chinese people had no tradition of anti-Semitism, Jews took the opportunity to enjoy residential permission plus economic and political rights unavailable in Czarist Russia. Rights remained also with the political change of the Russian Empire, when the Soviet Union acquired the railroad zone and later when the Soviet sold the zone to Japan in 1936. The first Jew, S.I. Bertsel, arrived in 1899; many cultural institutions were established soon, including a Talmud Torah which played an important part in the daily lives of the residents<sup>3</sup>. Among the multi-ethnic communities living in Harbin, the Jews played a leading role. They developed the main traffics with the export of furs and the maritime insurance, as well as they had a key role exchanging goods and services for the everyday life of the city too. Their fruitful presence is testified by some of the oldest buildings in Harbin still existing, owned by Jewish citizens: their private rich mansions as well as buildings for strategic service in the city – such as The Hotel Moderne (a multiservice structure with a restaurant, a cinema, a ballroom, a billiard room, a bar, a barbershop and shops run by the same owner who also owned a jewellery and realized a chain of theatres)<sup>4</sup>, and the Hospital directed by Dr. Abram Yosifovich Kaufman who

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3 Jonathan Goldstein, Irene Clurman, Dan Ben Canaan, *Detailed History of Harbin*, The Sino-Judaic Institute, 2009, <[http://www.sino-judaic.org/index.php?page=harbin\\_history](http://www.sino-judaic.org/index.php?page=harbin_history)>. Consulted on 05/05/2015. Cf. Yaacov Liberman, *My China: Jewish Life in the Orient: 1900-1950*, Jerusalem Gefen Publishing House, 1998 and The Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, CA 2007; See also Eleanor Parker, *Book Review: My China: Jewish Life in the Orient: 1900-1950*, by Yaacov (Yana) Liberman, in “China Judaic Connection”, July, 1998.

4 The same owner Joseph Kaspe also had a jewelery store and realized a chain of theatres.

was in the Siberian Army, matriculated in medicine in Switzerland with his wife, moved to Harbin and headed the Jewish community before and during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. The role played by Madame Kaufman also is a sign of the modern and open-minded vision introduced by Jews community. The 1913 census of the CER mentions about 70.000 citizens of 53 nationalities, speaking 45 languages (34.313 Russians, 23.537 Chinese, 5.032 Jews, 2.556 Poles, 696 Japanese, 564 Germans, 234 Tatars, 218 Latvians, 183 Georgians, 172 Estonians, 142 Lithuanians, 124 Armenians, and some Crimeans, Ukrainians, etc.). A second wave of immigration started in 1918 when the city hosted the White Russian *émigrés* as consequence of the Russian Socialist Revolution of 1917. In the 1920's the collectivization of Stalin also encouraged many German-Russian families, especially Mennonites of South Russia and Lutheran, to cross the sino-border. In the early 1920's the consulates of principal countries were built or renewed: the Japanese General Consulate, the Danish, the Italian and the German Consulate, all were built in 1920, the French one in 1923 and the General Consulate of Soviet Union in 1924. As the city was mounted to 100.000 inhabitants in 1917, and to 120.000 in the 1920's, also new stores and markets were realized, as well as schools, hotels, restaurants, cinemas. Some of these buildings were very rich, such as the imposing façade of the Shuidu Cinema (1929). The demographic growth boosted the economy and several banks were built in few years: Wanguo Bank (1922), The National Bank of Jews, Agevlov Foreign Bank, the Brithis Huifeng Bank (all built in 1923), the Bank of Communication (1928). Each one had its architectural style. The cosmopolitan components also increased. New religious buildings were built: the Russian orthodox Saint Sophia Cathedral with Russian aspect (1923), the 'oriental' style New assembly Hall of Jews (1921), the Chinese style temples, the Buddhist one (1922), the Temple of Ultimate Bliss (1923), the Confucius Temple (1926), and more Orthodox churches, such as the Eastern Orthodox Saint Alexeevsky then catholic (1931). The city looked as a cosmopolitan rich metropolis, well known as the "Oriental St. Petersburg" or the "Paris of the Orient". The number of journals and periodicals published there also is a sign of the urban development. Most of them were Jews: in the early 1900<sup>th</sup> Moshe Levitin had established a Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian publishing company and about twelve Russian-language Jewish periodicals were published between 1918 and 1930<sup>5</sup>.

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5 J. Goldstein, I. Clurman, D. B. Canaan, *Detailed History of Harbin*.

If this melting-pot population was almost Russian speaking, did the architecture have a common language? Harbin was born around the period when Art Nouveau was developed in Europe. Did this style play any role in the building up the image of this city?

## **2. From Eclecticism to Art Nouveau on a multicultural stage**

Czernowitz and Harbin in different way arrived to host people coming with their own traditions and cultural identities. Mixing the different period of history with the wide range of the national references, the eclectic language seems to be the most represented in these cities. In fact their buildings' facades needed to remember the provenance of their owners by some characters. Architects and builders mostly conceived a language as a common language easy to shape in front of the richness of various artistic influences. Neither the neoclassical, or the neomedieval or the neorenaissance styles, in fact, seem related to any a cultural choice referring to a theory or some moral values. Their characters were just used as available elements 'to tell' about cities looking at a generic 'European style'. Harbin was an outpost of the Eastern Europe in China and Czernowitz was the Eastern limit of the Central European civilization (that is an outpost of the Europe in the Far East). The architectural language was a tool to emphasize European culture as a common ground.

### ***2.1 Eclecticism in Harbin***

In Harbin the eclecticism was differently used as "lingua franca" or as an ethnic style. Looking at the documentation of the early buildings realized we can recognize as the residence of a foreign emigrant was conceived as neomedieval but the house of the Polish Merchant Kovalisky (1909) was neoclassical; on the other hand, the Central Assembly Hall of Jews (1906) looks 'oriental', and the red bricks Central Telephone Office of CER (1907) denoted an eclecticism neogothic style's inspired, as well as the 1910 Staffs' Sport Club<sup>6</sup>. The general image of Harbin at that time had to be not so far

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<sup>6</sup> Nye Yunling (Ed.), *Harbin Historic Architectures*, Harbin, 2005; S.S. Levoshko, *Russkaia arkhitektura v Man'chzhurii. Konets XIX — pervaiia polovina XX veka* [Russian Architecture in Manchuria: End of the 19th – Early 20th Century], Khabarovsk,

than the image of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century historicist facades of cities across the Europe. The city also doesn't seem inspired by any special urban model. It was developed by patterns of a general Western urban culture, also using town planning in order to create a mobility structure, blocks and plots according to a Western organization of the urban space, with hierarchy of the spatial elements. As a result, the core of Harbin mostly looked as a European city. So urban design and its decoration (see the balustrades of the Courtyard were today is the Heilongjiang Electric Power Bureau) also was a part of the *mise en scène* with a main road linking the railway station to the square and the church of Saint Nicholas as well as buildings for social life, cinemas, stores. The Japanese Merchant Firm (1916), for instance, with the imposing corner surmounted by the dome and the pillars-statues sustaining the balustrade, reproduced a shopping building type that we could find in France or in Northern Europe. The architectural language was also used as a tool to link people living in these cities to their own original countries/cultures. In the case of Harbin, the buildings related to the religions (churches, synagogues, mosques, schools) became the special places made to evocate the memory of the different origins of peoples living there. So the various religions represented underlined through the architecture of their buildings different styles to signify their various provenances: the Turkish Mosque (1906) had different ethnic style compared to the Arab Mosque (1908), both differently referring to the Islamic culture; the Eastern Orthodox church of the Russian's Emigrants and the Orthodox Virgin Mary church (1922) evoked the origin of their members compared to the German style roof of the German Lutheran church (1914). The same cultural multiplicity was within the Jew community where ideological diversities reflected in their organizations Zionist and Revisionist (there were even some Jew communist and Karaites)<sup>7</sup>. All the ethnic affiliation of the people was made visible through the architecture of their temple, as well as for the Chinese people distinguished by their temples adopting the 'Chinese' style related to a range of cultural references. These buildings by their architectural

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Chastnaia Kolleksiia, 2003, pp. 88–90; Chang Huai Sheng, *Harbin Architecture*, Harbin, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> This part of the Harbin history benefits from more documents collected by Jewish organizations. Cf. photographies from the Sitsky Toper Collection and more pictures by the Sino-Israel Research and Study Center <<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org>>.

language showed the multiculturalism as a component of the city ADN, also underlining the diversity and the heterogeneity of the urban image.

## ***2.2 Churches, National houses and “ethnic” architectural languages in Czernowitz: building types***

The urban elements that, at first, recall the many different identities of the society are, of course, the churches related to the many religions of Czernowitz. Beyond the ancient wooden churches, the oldest temple in town is the roman-catholic Holy Cross church (1787-1814), built in a neoclassical style but with clear references to the late-baroque style very appreciated in the empire in the late XVIIIth century yet. The late neoclassical greek-orthodox cathedral of the Holy Spirit was built in 1844-1866 by Ferdinand Roell, while the Greek-catholic Virgin Mary church was built in 1825-1830 joining a neoclassical design to the typical Slavic five domes in a bulb shape. Other churches belong to the Eclecticism: the neogothic Jesuitical church of the Sacred Heart (1891-1894), and the Saints Peter & Paul Armenian church, built by the Czech architect Jozef Hlavka in 1869-1875. He designed the most important and monumental building in town too, the Residence of the Metropolitan of Bukovina and Dalmatia (1864-1875). Conceived as a “crown of the town”, placed on the upper part of the downtown, the building speaks clearly about the Austrian project to make of Czernowitz the Vatican of the orthodox church in the empire. The building, a red brick monument, shows a mixed world of references: German pediments and gables, Byzantine-Romanesque elements, regional Romanian details and the classical five domes of the church. In the same period and in the same eclectic world the main Jewish Synagogue was built. It was centrally located, more than the previous one, and it became, with the Metropolitan Residence, one of the landmarks shown on the post cards of the period. The synagogue<sup>8</sup>, built between 1873 and 1878, was designed by the Lemberg (Lviv/Lwow) based polish architect Julian Zachariewicz. He used a Moorish-byzantine language, already experimented by Ludvig Förster in the synagogues built in Vienna (1854) and Budapest (1859), but joining a dome to the temple, as Eduard Knoblauch and Friedrich August Stüler did in Berlin (1859-1866). After these works the Jewish community placed

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<sup>8</sup> About the Synagogue in Czernowitz see Sergey R. Kravtsov, “Jewish Identities in Synagogue Architecture of Galicia and Bukovina”, *Ars Judaica*, 6, 2010, p. 81-100.

another “mark” in the town, having the Jewish House (Jüdisches Haus) built in 1905-1908, a Neobaroque monumental palace – with some Secession elements in the internal and external railings and in the large bay on the left side - designed by Tadeusz Levandovsky<sup>9</sup>, with four really ‘Viennese’ atlases in the front. In those years, as we can see in the postcards, the Jewish House in the foreground and the dome of the Synagogue in the background were two related elements of the urban landscape, showing the prominent role of the Jewish community in Czernowitz. David’s stars decorated the doors and the staircase railing. Not only the Jewish community had a ‘national house’: all the nationalities had specific building for meetings and for promoting each different culture.<sup>10</sup> The Romanian house (Palatul National) was in the main square, the Ringplatz, but it was formerly a hotel built in the XIXth century with an Eclectic façade, decorated with Romanian details only during the Romanian interwar period. The Ukrainian (Ruthenian) House, a monumental building with no ‘Ruthenian’ decorative elements, was just in front of the Armenian church, close to Herrengasse, the main street where the Polish National House played a visible role, decorated by Polish architectural features in 1902-1905. Just in front of the Polish House the Christian German community of Czernowitz built in 1910 the biggest national house in town with the Jewish one, the Deutsches Haus, a masterpiece of Jugendstil, with vernacular and ‘gothic’ details, by Gustav Fritsch, a German architect from Sudetenland<sup>11</sup>. As Florence Heymann remind us, the growing importance of these national houses wasn’t a mark of the multicultural society but, on the contrary, the signal of the decay of fluent relationships between communities. If all groups had strong connections for trading and working and because of the daily life, real interethnic relationships or friendship depended on specific situations, case by case.

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9 According to information by Irina Korotun (Czernowitz, National University Yuryi Fedkovych). Thanks to her, who kindly guided me in town in summer 2013 and gave me many historical information and advices, to Svetlana Frunchak for her book, to Mykola Kushnir (curator) and Alex Kohen, of the Jewish Museum in Czernowitz, for their help in focusing the Jewish history of the town.

10 Volodimir Starik, *Chernivtsi Multikulturni*, Chernivtsi, Ukrainskij Narodnij Dim, 2012.

11 Whose Imperial and Royal Government Administration Building in Czernowitz (1871) shows a standard historicist conceiving.

### *2.3. The architectural identity and the Art Nouveau language in Harbin and Czernowitz*

Although the historicism was very popular, in Harbin the major buildings that were related to the CER mostly adopted the Art Nouveau style. The Office of CER Management Bureau (1902) [Fig.1], the Hotel of CER Management Bureau (1902), and the residence of the deputy director, all of them had similar signs, elements, decorations Art Nouveau inspired<sup>12</sup>. As they were almost the first buildings in Harbin, their style was very up to date in the context of the European development of the Art Nouveau movement. Decorations, materials, architectural composition indicate some very interesting references differently inspired from various aspects of the new artistic vogue. The irregular prospect of the residences, the shape of the windows and the wooden insertions giving the idea of a urban cottage, are Arts and Crafts and Mackintosh inspired, instead of the Art Nouveau official building of the administration whom façade is geometrically designed to give a strong impression in a style more ‘continental’. Though the stone appearance of this building hides a brick structure, it was a considerable investment testified by the wooden details of doors and the interior decorations. It had to look really “new vogue” to citizens and visitors arriving in the far East land of China at that time. The program strongly underlined by the Russian Company, became a sort of brand of the company within the city. The image of the modernity of the company identified by the “new art” of the buildings linked different buildings and functions in a long period. It was carried on also when in the 1920’s new buildings were realized. At that time the Art Nouveau was expired in Europe but in Harbin it had been interpreted in a different way. The “new art” didn’t have the same relevance than in Europe as a rupture with the past and a research of new references or new materials for designing and composing. Rather than an use against the eclecticism it was used next to it. It was used as a new style adding new stylish elements to others. The buildings in Art Nouveau style didn’t have pure plain Art Nouveau composition. Most of them mixed some eclectic element too. Nevertheless in the first decades of the

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<sup>12</sup> About Art Nouveau in Harbin cf. Anastasia A. Artem’eva, *Modern v arkhitekture dal’nevostochnykh gorodov (Art Nouveau in the Architecture of Russian Far Eastern Cities)*, PhD dissertation at the Research Institute of the Theory and History of Architecture and Town Planning of the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction Sciences (Khabarovsk branch), 2007

20<sup>th</sup> Century the Art Nouveau language had been recognized as giving the Harbin identity. Harbin was a company city where the more relevant buildings of the company, the CER, had been realized in Art Nouveau style. So the Art Nouveau image became the sign of the city. More buildings commissioned by private owners in fact had adopted the same Art Nouveau style or simply added some Art Nouveau decorations to their eclectic buildings (see the 1915 Tianfeng Grocery, eclectic with some Art Nouveau style decors). The essential role of Jews community in the foundation of Harbin is also specially testified by their Art Nouveau buildings, in order to exhibit their status by buildings 'on vague' under the point of view of the architectural language. Initially Jews as economical skeleton of the city shared the same new language related to the modernity of this new world. This attitude is specially testified by the Judaic Emigrants' Association of 1902 and the magnificent Hotel Moderne built in 1906 run by the Russian Jewish Merchant Jose Kaspe (whom son became a well-known pianist French naturalized in the 1930's), and the Brother Chamber of Commerce by the French Jew Samsonovsky of 191013.

After the beginnings of the Century, the Art Nouveau style was reiterated at the second stage of the development in the 1920's when the city numbered about 120.000 inhabitants. At that time the Russian Revolution made the life difficult in the territories of Eastern Europe. Many families, special people with religious traditions, moved to Harbin boosting a new development. Recent research in Lutheran archives enlighten this period because many Mennonite and Lutheran families arrived to China. Their organizations around the world (such as the Mennonite Central Committee) helped them<sup>14</sup>. The Lutheran World Convention of 1931-1932 provides details of the effort to rescue German-Russian Lutheran refugees that had escaped Russia and were living in Harbin. In these years the company buildings repeated "their" own style to build more offices and high rank residences. The Art Nouveau was adopted as 'the' language: see

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13 Cf. Mark Gamsa, *The many faces of the Hotel Moderne in Harbin*, in "East Asian History", 37, December 2011, p. 27-38.

14 The history of the Germans from Russia was found in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Archives (Rosemont, Illinois). Cfr. V. A. Less, *The Federation of East European Family History Societies Web Site, Harbin Lutheran Refugees*, FEEFHS, 1995-2003, <<http://feefhs.org>>. Consulted on 30/06/2014. Cf. Katie Michelson Melvin, "Escape From Russia", *AHSGR Journal*, 10, 2, Summer 1987; John B. Toews, "Flight Across the Amur Into China", *AHSGR Journal*, 2, 1, Spring 1979.

the Railway Technical School in 1920, and the Engineering Department of Railway Bureau in 1921 [Fig. 2]. Nevertheless looking at the Art Nouveau former residences of the CER of the same years, at the large wooden terraces or at the shapes of the roof, we can recognize how this architectural language has moved to a more eclectic style. Many buildings of this period are still preserved showing how larger Art Nouveau was adopted then. At the same moment this style was expired in Europe and new research were linking to the idea of modernity. In Harbin buildings were mixing architectural historicism with exotic local inspired decorations, originating a sort of local Baroque. In this melting pot architecture the Art Nouveau still lasted as a main reference. In a way the Art Nouveau imprinting was probably built up much more in this late period, when also the private multi-ethnic patronage mainly adopted this style: see the 1926 Fulun yucai Lecture and Study Institute, Miniature Restaurant run by the Jew A. Karci, and so on. Strictly evaluated under the point of view of the architectural research these buildings aren't a masterpiece. In the other hand, they are very important in the cultural identity of the city. It's precisely its spurious interpretation of the language, its uniqueness mixing characters coming out from Harbin previous buildings, the way this style arrives to origin a unique local language giving the city its own identity for ever.

In Czernovitz the major role played by the German-speaking community, within the multiplicity of the social components, created a homogeneous architectural landscape, with "some" national spots, visible but not prominent. The model was Vienna: the Herrengasse, the street with the most elegant cafés and the most important shops looked at the Viennese Graben. Building in Secession and Eclecticism styles made urban fabric totally Western, European and Viennese. The town had particular look also because it was really young, there wasn't a Gothic, Renaissance or Baroque historical core. Despite the first appearance of the name of the place in a record dated 1408, the place became officially a City in 1786, and grow specially in the second half of the XIXth century and in the beginning of XXth. Everything in Czernowitz played a role in this Viennese festival: street names, the building typology, the retail system, the new railway Station (built in 1905 in Secession style by Moritz Elling), the Volksgarten (close to the area where the officer of the Austrian administration and the wealthy German families lived in villas). The most Austrian elements were absolutely the

theatre and the Postal Saving Bank. The first one was built in 1905 in a neo-baroque/Secession style by Fellner & Hellmer, well-known theatre designers operating in the whole empire between 1871 and 1913; it was a copy of the theatre already built in Fürt (1902) and then was a reference for the following one in Klausenberg/Kolozsvár (today Cluj, Romania, 1906). Decorated by busts of German composers, and by the stuccoes depicting Wagner and Shakespeare (to mean the double function of the hall, for operas and plays), was faced by the Schiller's statue. The Postsparkasse, built in 1900-1901 by Hubert Gessner (1871-1943, student at the Wagnerschule from 1894 to 1898), was a clear example of Secession [Fig. 3, 4]. Gessner won the first prize of the competition against other colleagues from Czernowitz (Max Morgenstern, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize, author of the neobaroque Café Habsburg<sup>15</sup>) and Vienna (Viktor Fiala, living in Vienna but born in Czernowitz, with Oskar Laske, 3<sup>rd</sup> prize). The project was published on *Der Architekt* by Joseph August Lux, speaking of a "creative architect" <sup>16</sup>. Gessner – despite a conservative conceiving of the roofs, with a central part 'à la Mansart' like in a baroque palace – tried to get a modern goal, at the same time practical and artistic. According to Lux the building shows simplicity related to its character of a working place but at the same time clear attention to art, linking well architecture and applied art. Gessner gave particular attention to materials: iron for the entrance gate, marble and marble columns for the atrium, white stucco for the walls, mahogany for doors and panels at the first floor, coloured stained glasses for the windows according to the Secessionist representation of flowers and clouds. The main hall - on the first floor - receives light from windows but also from a glass ceiling. In the upper part of the front a mosaic depicts the twelve provinces of the empire, with Austria and Bucovina in the middle, work by Adolf Joseph Lange. Another important Secession building in Czernowitz should have been the Stock Exchange, designed by Oskar Marmorek (1863-1909). The building, conceived in 1904 for a competition, published on *Der Architekt* in

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted as "Max Monter in Czernowitz" or "in Brünn" on *Wiener Bauindustrie Zeitung* (1904, 21, I, p. 29-32; 22, II, p. 242-244).

<sup>16</sup> Joseph August Lux, "Das Sparkassengebäude in Czernowitz", *Der Architekt*, 9, 1903, p. 71-75; Id., "H. Gessner und die Wagnerschule", *Innen-Dekoration*, 13, December 1902, p. 296-298, 304-308. About the architect and the building see Markus Kristan, *Hubert Gessner. Architekt zwischen Kaiserreich und Sozialdemokratie 1871-1943*, Wien, Passagen Verlag, 2011, p. 46-50, and Anna Belkina, Irina Korotun, *Architectural features of the Museum of Art in Czernowitz*, in press.

the same year and on *Die Architektur des XX Jahrhunderts*<sup>17</sup> in 1907, was not built, but it shows the not secondary role of the Czernowitz architectural scene in the Empire. Oskar Marmorek was a prominent Jewish architect, late-historicist in his first works in Budapest but after he adopted a clear Secessionist Wagnerschule language, as in the Rüdigerhof in Vienna (1902) and in this drawings for Czernowitz. The Stock Exchange Hall was conceived as a part of a shopping mall, at the end of an internal courtyard. If these are the most important examples, the landmarks, all Czernowitz shows, within the historicist urban fabric, many examples of Art Nouveau buildings, often symbols of the updated – often Jewish - bourgeoisie of the town, as the commercial passage Matildenhof (1904) or the Goldene Dirne (1905)<sup>18</sup>.

At the end we can state that the Art Nouveau language in Czernowitz (absolutely Viennese and not related to other “versions” of Secession, like the Hungarian one, so eager to ‘speak’ Hungarian very loud) was a choice of a neutral, modern and super-national language. It’s not for chance that the theatre shows a big Secessionist three partitioned bay in the main front, as the new railway station, built demolishing the not so old previous neo-medieval eclectic building (as it happened in Lemberg). It’s a mark of this attitude the beautiful, modern and light Secessionist Postal Saving Bank too. How could a bank speak, in that area, only a specific language (against others) and how could a bank look not modern, safe and projected towards the future? The Jewish House too was involved in this movement: completely not Moorish or Oriental (as the Synagogue, on the contrary, was), it speaks<sup>19</sup> about the will of the Jewish community to be assimilated, to be “Austrian” thanks the Viennese Atlases of the main front, but at the same time - within in a general eclectic framework – about the will to be modern, thanks to the great Secessionist three partitioned bay of the side front.

### **3. Conclusion**

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<sup>17</sup> *Der Architekt*, 1904, 10, pl. 79, *Die Architektur des XX Jahrhunderts*, 1907, 62. See Markus Kristan, *Oskar Marmorek 1863-1909. Architekt un Zionist*, Wien-Köln-Weimar, Böhlau, 1996.

<sup>18</sup> *Wiener Bauindustrie Zeitung* (21, nr. 22, p. 176-180; 22, nr. 34, p. 242-244).

<sup>19</sup> About the architectural languages in the empire see: Anthony Alofsin, *When building speak. Architecture as a Language in the Habsburg Empire and Its Aftermath, 1867-1933*, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 2006.

In spite of the acceptance of diversities as a multiplicity and a richness, nevertheless the governance of these cities needed to unify their melting-pot citizens. In this aim as patronage adopted an architectural program to give a more stronger imprinting to the city. The administration would like to inspire the efficiency of the new way through a new language symbol of modernity.

The Art Nouveau was at that time around the Europe the new language of the architecture, breaking with the historicism and the past. As new form of art it seemed to be more flexible and more performing than others 'to speak' to everybody. As a new architectural style the Art Nouveau wasn't codified, so it was a sort of "neutral" tool helpful to embody a wide range of identities without focusing on the national style of the leading élites. In a way it was a political use of the architecture. Harbin and Czernowitz in their golden age adopted Art Nouveau to build their cultural identity of unified cities. They used this language in different way to represent public and common places.