

Pretext for the text
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Every person beats around, has errands to run, here and there. Most of the times, he doesn't pay attention around, „can't see where he's going“, but still the information is gathering, the retina takes snapshots and the brain stores. Unusual. A huge stock is stored, which we later always carry with us. Even though all of us live with the sensation that only the holidays and the travels provide new cultural experiences, the closest to us is still our own city. Culturally, it loads us the most and represents also the binder and the mediator of knowledge for other objectives which we encounter during a lifetime.

The writers are those who know this and take advantage from the dimension of *topoi* in order to find infinitely many times a pretext for the text: they take the road and write their impressions from the route, to which they also attach the cultural luggage they possess; or choose objectives that would serve them as a physical, spatial frame for their literary works; not a few of the literary characters are people who really lived and their stories are transmitted to us; other times, an event with a powerful historical importance is worth to be used as a theme for a novel or a spectacular story becomes an interesting subject etc.

Sometimes, the reverse: a place from a city charges with cultural, symbolical significance, because of a writer; he is the one who gives it proportions and charm. This is what Mateiu Caragiale did with the historical part of Bucharest, where there was the Princely Court, in his novel *Craii de Curtea Veche*. There, now live his fabulous characters, and the story of a past period and time. When you read *Craii...*, you try to imagine the characters, the place and the customs from that time. Afterwards, you go to that place and discover what is left now, probably transformed into a beautiful museum in which the curiosity pushes you to enter. It's all up to you to revive the past and get into the story.

One of the theories that were – and still are – debated, is that Bucharest is a *mythologem*, that it isn't a beautiful and coherent city from an architectural point of view, that it lives only through what has been written about it, that it is a bookish construct, that we perceive it as fascinating because the writers chose it for their works, thus charging it with a charm that, in fact, it doesn't possess. That people know, actually, a Bucharest mediated through the cultural discourse and don't see an authentic, real Bucharest. That is also right. But, once it is so frequently used in literature – it almost became a character itself – (it was written a lot, there are hundreds of books about Bucharest) it means that it is a city with a special charm, atypical from all points of view, apparently without an own or single formula, a fact that actually makes it special. This diversity which it is always talked about makes it alive and interesting. And the stories and the masks, which its tumultuous history let it as legacy, make it up like a mannequin dressed in countless changes of clothes and in whose every pocket you can find letters with the stories of the people who passed through it.

During the communism, it was a kind of martyr city, the same as Budapest, for instance, and the red flame burnt many of its valuable layers, over which it laid impersonal colossus.

Nowadays it isn't quite a moment of stability, now it is only building and it is changing a lot and in a great hurry, so that every map drawn now won't look like what will be tomorrow. Another reason to mention everything there can be mentioned.

As a place, the old city is the most stable from this point of view. Therefore I propose a walk through the oldest area of Bucharest, a kind of first physiognomy of the city. Also, there can be seen there the area of the first commercial streets, Lipscani.

The route begins with Manuc's Inn, on Franceză Street, actually a halting place. It goes through the streets of the old craftsmen, who now begin to come to live again, Șelari, Covaci, Gabroveni, Șepcari, Blănari, Băcani. We stop to Stavropoleos Church. Then, we walk on the street with a distinguished name: Doamnei/Lady's Street. And we arrive at I.C. Brătianu Boulevard.

Tudor Arghezi, *Cu bastonul prin București/With the Walking Stick in Bucharest* (Minerva Publishing House, 1972)

„This Bucharest of words “

Tudor Arghezi, Romanian poet and prose writer, often walked in Bucharest, trying to discover unusual places and episodes that he could use as a pretext for writing.

The origin of the name Bucharest (pages 9-10) is described with a lot of humor, a double discourse in which, beyond the sharp irony and the intellectual refinement, it can be seen the candor towards the city of Bucharest and its streets.

„Regarding the origin of the name *Bucharest*, I would have searched to find out precisely, but even the specialist scholars couldn't make it clear and, instead of a derivative imagination, they also adopted the legend of the shepherd, at least for its beauty. Come from nowhere, in the middle of a sheep herd, with his donkeys and dogs, leading it over the Danube to the Sea, Bucur improvised a wood church, on the shore of a marshy Dîmbovița, and around it a city, as he would have foreseen the Telephone Palace and the Opera and Ballet Theatre...

The settlement of the herd on a hill is very similar to *Miorița* and to Manole's *Curtea de Argeș* (the two Romanian ballads, *a.n.*). The legend must be always taken for granted, because, as it is not scientific, it blends with poetry.

Taking the walking stick in the city, I also carried it to all the far corners of the country...”

„Bucharest must be treated as an individuality and as a character “ (p. 42)

„Bucharest changes at every crossroads, and every ten meters it keeps for the traveler a surprise, a jewel and a reward.“ (p. 47)

Bucharest the old city

Route, the map

Franceză Street (Manuc Inn) — Poștei Street — Stavropoleos — Smîrdan — Șelari — Lipscani — Doamnei — Academiei — University — I.C. Brătianu Boulevard (Șuțu Palace, the City Museum of Bucharest) — Blănari (Bulgărească) — Zărafi — Gabroveni — The French Arcade — Covaci — Franceză Street (Manuc Inn)

Unirii Plaza is a vast square, set up between 1987 and 1989, a combination between public gardens, promenade alleys with artesian wells, but it also represents a central point of communication to all directions (subway stations with underground passage, bus stations). It is bordered by many shops, together with the biggest shopping complex from Romania, „Unirea Shopping Center“. You arrive here with any means of transport, in order to have easy access to the Manuc Inn - Curtea veche area.

MANUC INN is situated in the historical center of Bucharest and it is the only inn that survived over the centuries.

The inn was installed between 1806 and 1808 by the Armenian prince *Mirzaian Manuc*, in the south – western wing of the Princely Court, which was out of function in 1798. In the neighborhood of the Manuc Inn there are two important tourist objectives of the old Bucharest.

The French Ulysse de Marsillac wrote, in 1869, about the “inns and caravanserais” of Bucharest: „Ah! These are Oriental and deserve to be visited. Imagine some big yards, surrounded by buildings with one store or two, very similar to our monasteries. Following the wooden corridors, which are

everywhere, you reach large stairs, with balustrade. Along these corridors there are small rooms, like in a honeycomb ... Unfortunately, the inns of the world are civilizing“.

Manuc Inn was restored between 1970 and 1979, being similar to its original shape, from 1812. Here, you can live in a Balkan-Oriental atmosphere, specific to the 19th century. The entrance is from 62-64 Franceză Street, through a passage whose pavement is made of wood, as all the main streets of Bucharest in 1812. After this, we enter an interior yard, spacious and friendly. Here there are access ways to all the services of the inn: to the cellars where there is the “Princely Wine Cellar”, where one can eat traditional Romanian food; a restaurant, “The Princely Hall”. At the first floor there are rooms to let, bars and a cafeteria. In the summer, the interior yard has a very animated terrace (250 places).

About Manuc Inn everyone wrote a lot. As the stories say, Manuc was really a character during his life, with a tumultuous biography and a short and agitated life.



The Princely Palace „Curtea Veche“ Museum. 27-31 Franceză Street. It is the only place in Bucharest where one can visit a fragment from the medieval citadel of the city, actually the ruins of the Royal Court. Within the museum’s precincts, there are preserved walls from the 14th and 15th centuries, from the palace built by Vlad Țepeș (the emperor nicknamed Draculea or Vlad Dracul; the legends say that he was very harsh and used to kill the prisoners or the malevolent by impaling them; he was the "guilty" one for the rising of the Dracula myth, related to Romania).

The preserved ruins from the museum belonged to the palace built between 1690 and 1714 by the prince Constantin Brâncoveanu. For three hundred years, this has been the place from where Walachia was ruled. In the museum's courtyard, there can be also visited funerary stones, and column heads from the 18th and 19th century.



The Church of the Old Court is situated in the historical center of Bucharest, in the neighborhood of Manuc Inn and of the Princely Palace „Curtea Veche“ Museum. The Church „Buna Vestire“ – Curtea Veche is the oldest church from Bucharest. Here, between the 16th and the 18th century, the Walachia’s princes were crowned and took part in the divine services. During the Middle Ages, this church was the most important religious edifice from Bucharest. The church inscription, right above the entrance, dates from 1715; parts of the painting of the 18th century can still be seen in the niches from the right and from the left of the entrance in the church. „Buna Vestire“ Church, in its original shape, which is not preserved, was built between 1556 and 1559 by the prince Mircea Ciobanul and was destroyed several times by the tartars and the Turks; the original architecture was rebuilt during the general restorations undertaken between 1928 and 1935.



The Royal Prison. Near the entrance in the courtyard of Manuc Inn, in the middle of a parking area, the place where there used to be the Royal Prison and its little church, „Sf. Anton“, is marked by a cross. Both edifices were built during the 16th century and were destroyed by a big fire on March 23, 1847.

Lipscani and the merchants' streets

Passing to Franceză Street, one can visit some tourist points: Curtea Veche Church (16th century), Manuc Inn (1808); Curtea Veche Museum. The Royal Palace (ruins from the 17th and 18th centuries).

Franceză Street appeared starting with the 17th century and, since then, have had significant names: the Lane that leads to the upper gate of the Royal Court (17th century), the Royal lane (18th century), the Lane of the işlic-crafters (the “işlic” was an expensive fur or cloth cap, a sign of high rank) (the beginning of the 19th century). Later, it was called: Franceză Street (starting with 1830), Carol I Street (at the end of the 19th century); 30 Decembrie Street (starting with 1948). Nowadays, it has taken again the name from 1830, Franceză Street.

The buildings on this street belong to the 19th century and many of them are of neoclassic style for the first part of the 19th century, or of eclectic style, with romanticist but also academic influence, for the second part of the 19th century.

Today, one can find here small shops, second hand bookshops, beer houses, restaurants.

Şepcari Street connects I.C. Brătianu Boulevard with Franceză Street; it is one of the streets that leads to the old city. In the Middle Ages, this street was inside the Royal Court, and in its neighborhood there was the Royal Prison. Nevertheless, the buildings on Şepcari street belong to the 19th century and were raised on a part of the Royal Court foundations in the 18th century. Its name comes from the workhouses where there were produces caps, until 1950; starting with 1798, the street was part of the Curtea Veche suburb.

Smîrdan Street was an old lane of the Bucharest fair. Nevertheless, in the Middle Ages, soon after 1830, it was called „German lane “, a name given due to the shops whose articles were brought from the German space. Starting with 1878, its name was given after the place of a Romanian victorious battle against the ottomans, in the nowadays Bulgaria: Smîrdan village.

Moving on along Smîrdan Street, there can be seen several buildings dating from the 19th century, which host shops and workhouses.

During the 16th and the 17th centuries, Smîrdan Street was part of Bălăceanu suburb and later of Constantin Vodă suburb (18th century) and of Sf. Dumitru Poştă suburb (19th century).

It can be reached from Stavropoleos Street.

Stavropoleos Street and Monastery.

Stavropoleos Street appeared during the 16th century, in the middle of Tîrgul de Sus (Upper Fair), which was mostly populated by crafters. Starting with the 17th century, a Greek community settled there and built a church and an inn called „Ghiorma banul“. During the 18th century, on that spot it was built Stavropoleos monastery, around which the Stavropoleos suburb emerged. Stavropoleos Monastery was built in 1724, on the expense of the Greek archimandrite Ioanichie, (who later became metropolitan of Stavropola), in the courtyard of the inn that he had previously built. In 1730, the church was extended by adding lateral apses, a stoop and by increasing the length of the altar. The French traveler Émile Guimet considered it, in the second half of the 19th century, “a veritable jewel of the Walachia architecture”. The monument was restored in 1904 by the architect Ion Mincu (1852-1912), who rendered its original form. On this occasion, the tower on the nave, which had fallen in the mid 19th century, was also restored. Later it was built also the parochial house, with a bell tower, and the porch that surrounds the courtyard of the church.

In the church there are reserved the original armchairs of the founders, as well as the tomb of Ioanichie Stratonikeas, from 1743.

In the courtyard of the church there is a funerary room with pieces recovered from various churches from Bucharest, which were demolished by communists.

Poștei Street. It is situated close to Stavropoleos Street. On this street it can be seen the church Sf. Dumitru-Poștă. The nowadays edifice was built in 1819 on the place of a ruined church, founded by the Bălăceanu family in the 16th century. The wall painting was made by Carol Popp de Szathmary.

Lipscani Street with Sf. Nicolae Church - „Șelari“

Lipscani Street developed starting with the 16th century and, for three centuries, the “Great Lane” used to border the northern wall of the Princely Court. Around 1750 it received the nowadays name, inspired from the name of the “lipscani” merchants, who brought their merchandise from the yearly fair from Leipzig and who had their shops on the “Great Lane” of the fair.

On Lipscani Street there is the **National Bank Palace**, built starting with 1884, in neo-classic French style, after the blueprints of the architects Albert Galleron (1846-?) and Cassian Bernard (1848-?), assisted by the Romanian architects Grigore P. Cerkez (1850-1927) and Constantin Băicoianu (1859-?). In 1948, the National Bank of Romania became State Bank, being organized as autonomous institutions in 1955. Starting with 1990, it regained its original name and function.

On Lipscani there are shops, art galleries, headquarters of institutions, all of them hosted by buildings dating from the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.



Sf. Nicoale-Șelari Church is situated on 16 **Blănari Street**. From Lipscani street you go through Șelari entrance and the first street on the right is Blănari. Sf. Nicolae-Șelari church was built between 1699 and 1700 and restored between 1860 and 1868; it was the church of the candle-crafters, cotton-crafters and barbers’ guilds. The name of “Șelari” comes from the guild of crafters who made the harness gears in the Middle Ages. If **Șelari Street** and **Blănari Street**, as their name specify, were the

center of small suburbs of crafter guilds starting from the 18th century, around them there were some other small suburbs of merchants, grouped along such streets as Băcani, Zarafi, Căldărari or **Gabroveni**. Last of them was populated by merchants who came from Gabrovo, a small town from nowadays Bulgaria. These streets and suburbs appeared starting with the end of the 18th century, and the buildings were raised in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

Gabroveni Street

Covaci Street



I.C. Brătianu Boulevard is the southern section of the Colțea Boulevard from the 19th century, modernized in 1905. The boulevard is bordered by University Square in the north and by Unirii Plaza in the south. Until 1947, I.C. Brătianu Boulevard was much broader, including the nowadays boulevards Nicolae Bălcescu and Gheorghe Magheru. *I.C. Brătianu Boulevard is the older part of the north-southern axis of Bucharest.* It was the starting point of the “Tîrgoviște route”, attested in 1681 (later Colțea Boulevard). I.C. Brătianu Boulevard cuts the old city into two parts. Not far from Unirii Plaza, on this boulevard there can be seen the catholic church of “Bărăția”; the first catholic church in Bucharest; the first church of “băraților” was built in the 16th century. The catholic priests were called “bărați” by the Romanians in the Middle Ages, thus giving the name of the church: “Bărăția”.

The Museum of the City of Bucharest. (3 I.C.Brătianu Boulevard). It is hosted in the palace built by the architects Johann Veit and Conrad Schwink in 1833 for the great boyar Costache Grigore Șuțu (1799-1875) in Sf. Sava suburb, across Colțea hospital and monastery. In 1863, the sculptor Karl Storck broke the three arcades that exists even nowadays in the central hall and created the monumental stair that separates into two branches at the middle of the store, also endowing the front

wall with a mirror brought from Murano. Above the mirror it is sculpted within a medallion the head of Irina Șuțu, the daughter in law of the owner. These modernizations were made due to Grigore Șuțu (1819-1893), the owner's son. During the same period, the palace was restored under the influence of Romanticism, and the ceiling was decorated in Pompeian style.

The Șuțu family reigned in Walachia during the first half of the 19th century. The palace preserves the princely marks of the family and became, starting with the second part of the 19th century, one of the most attended salons of the city. It hosted the most exquisite banquets, balls, artistic soirees, on music and literature, of the Bucharest's high society. It was the place that all the highly ranked people of Bucharest had to attend. The social acknowledgement was given according to the participation in these soirees. If you had access to Șuțu Palace, you belonged to the "high society".

The edifice was so central in Bucharest that it was sometimes looked up to with certain extravagance: in the 19th century it was surrounded with a garden designed in Western style, inhabited by exotic birds.

The palace of the Șuțu family was sold in 1932 to Crissoveloni Bank, which, after a short while, gave the building to the Bucharest Municipality. Starting with 1956, the Palace was chosen as headquarters for the Museum of the City of Bucharest; it was inaugurated on January 23, 1959.

The Museum of the City of Bucharest includes, at the first floor, a vast permanent exhibition that reflects the evolution of the city of Bucharest regarding the chronological phases, the evolution of mentalities, of the clothes, of the interior design. In the exhibition it is presented also the history of the local administration of Bucharest. The museum keeps the original distribution of the palace, and, at the ground floor, it is open for visiting the reception hall, with the paneled ceiling, with paintings dating from the mid 19th century. The entrance hall of the museum is hosting temporary exhibitions of painting, photography and maps.

Colței Street with Colțea Hospital and Church. On Colțea Street and I.C. Brătianu Boulevard there is an architectural and historical complex that bears the name of the 16th century owner, the boyar Colțea Stoicescu. He was the one who built the Colțea Church, between 1641 and 1642, restored between 1695 and 1698 by the sword bearer Mihai Cantacuzino. In the stoop of the church is the original painting is preserved, dating from the 17th century. Around the church there was the Colțea suburb, between the 17th and the 19th centuries. In the beginning of the 18th century (1704) it was raised, around the Colțea Church, the Colțea Hospital for the poor sick people; it was the first hospital from Bucharest. The Colțea Hospital was designed after the pattern of the old Venetian hospital institution "Ospedale di S.Lazzaro e Medicanti". From the very beginning, the Colțea Hospital had different halls for men and women. The nowadays edifice was built between 1867 and 1888 according the blueprints of the Dutch architect Josep Schiffler, in the place of other alternative, built between 1838 and 1842, according to the blueprints of the German architect Heinrich von Fausser. In the hospital's courtyard and in the neighborhood of the church, there is the statue of the sword bearer Mihai Cantacuzino, the work of the sculptor Karl Storck, created in 1869, of Carrara marble.