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The Participation of Russian Architects and Sculptors in Making the Art Deco Architecture in Serbia

At the beginning of the 20th century, under the influence of the Wiener Werkstätte and Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a modern decorative art was developed, which resulted in highly stylized ornaments covering previously smooth surfaces of façades and interiors. Its peak was reached during the "roaring twenties" when the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* opened in Paris in 1925, which gave its name to Art Deco style in 1966 [2, p. 16]¹. Denying the value and role of ornamentation, the theoretical work by Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier² set Art Deco and Functionalism on the opposite ends of modern architecture. The post-war predominance of Functionalism delayed the evaluation of Art Deco, ignoring the significance of this global trend. Foreshadowed in the nineties [29], then further specified [17], presented internationally [49], and more thoroughly researched [50], Art Deco is still underrepresented as an issue in Serbian historiography. Therefore, although studies of the Russian emigration in Serbia strongly influenced the Serbian historiography since the 1990s, the relationship of the Russian emigration and Art Deco style has not been discussed.

The emergence of Art Deco is the dominant phenomenon in the Serbian architecture of the interwar period. It developed in favourable conditions as Belgrade was named the capital of the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes³, followed by a quadruple increase in population between 1914 and 1940 — from 90.000 to 350.000 [37, p. 178]. A great number of monumental public buildings and new private residences reflected the need for the self-presentation of the emancipated civic identity. The investors' taste and individual artistic aspirations of the builders were oriented toward the central European classical academic concepts [24], exploring the national style inspired by Serbian medieval architecture and forms of folklore heritage [21], as well as modern architectural expression [5].

The arts in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were under a strong influence of French culture which was supported by education of students in high schools and universities in France [9].

As a stylistic definition, the term 'Art Deco' appeared in 1966, in the exhibition *Les Années 25: Art Déco/ Bauhaus/Stijl/Esprit Nouveau*, dedicated to the art of the year 1925 [33, p. 10].

The term 'Art Deco' was first used by Le Corbusier in a pejorative critical comment describing decorative tendencies in architecture that marked the exhibition of 1925, driven by Loos's treatise *Ornament and Crime*, which Le Corbusier translated into French in 1920.

³ The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, established in 1918, changed its name in 1929 to The Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The peak of French influence was experienced after the Paris exhibition of 1925, at which the young kingdom was presented in its national pavilion [8; 39]. The Parisian 'New Age' spirit reflected the early reception of Art Deco style in Belgrade, expressed in specific forms of façade decoration in residential architecture, born out of patrons' desire to own unique architectural creations. Striving toward modern design and functionality of space, on the one hand, and decorative forms, on the other, Art Deco offered a type of communicative modern architecture, in comparison with the uncompromising functionalist attitude.

The diversity of individual creative approaches and the sense of modern elegance of Art Deco style were favourable for both designers and clients, who avoided the abstract surfaces of puristic discourse. This architecture emerged in order to create the image of an emancipated civil society, whose self-presentation sought to unite luxury and modernity [4]. The builders, aiming at the effects of form and composition of the façade, often used decorative sculptural elements, primarily reliefs and ornaments, stained glass and wrought iron. The fertile production of reliefs embraced contemporary topics: music, sports, entertainment, and displayed symbols of the modern era — the industry, cars and aircrafts, success, communication, as well as allegories of fertility, family and motherhood, historical and mythological themes, and heroes of World War I. Accepted in public and private spheres, Serbian Art Deco architecture moved in both national and international directions, passing early (1920–1927), mature (1928–1934) and late (1935–1941) phases of development, typologically expressed in sculptural and ornamental motifs [49, p. 200].

At the time of primary adoption of the Art Deco style in the early 1920s, several hundred engineers and architects fled to Serbia, after the end of the civil war in Russia [16; 18], and were mostly well received both in the higher state structures and by private investors. Russian builders wanted to preserve their national identity, expressing it in the architectural design of the House of Russian Emperor Nikolaĭ II, the Russian Church at Tašmajdan, the Iverska Chapel, and the tomb of Russian imperial deputy Nikolaĭ Henrikovič Hartwig, both at the New Cemetery [48].

At the same time, they looked for jobs and sought to adapt themselves to the Serbian society, by fitting into the already formed stylistic trends. The positions of Russian immigrant artists in Serbia and the ways, in which they were accepted and highly regarded, are evidenced by the fact that only Yugoslav citizens and Russian architects could participate in public competitions. To reflect this afirmative position, the Yugoslav Pavilion at the 1925 exhibition in Paris presented Nikolaĭ Vasilyevich Vasilyev's design for the Palace of the Ministry of Forestry and Mining [14], and Andrei Vasilyevich Papkov's project for a Monument to Fallen Heroes, as well as a sketch for Kalamegdan terrace [39, p. 240].

Well noticed in the Yugoslav Pavilion was the work of Vladimir Pavlovich Zagorodnjuk, whose theatre designs for the drama *The Death of Jugovic's Mother* (1924) won the third prize at the Exhibition [52, pp. 308]. Zagorodnjuk was born in Odessa in 1889; from 1910 to 1914, he studied painting and sculpture in the studio of Antonin Mercie at the École Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris⁴; since 1921, he was employed as stage designer of the National Theatre

⁴ An insight into the biography of Vladimir Pavlovich Zagorodnjuk has been provided by his family, to whom I am deeply grateful.



Fig. 1. Architect V. F. von Baumgarten and sculptor V. P. Zagorodnjuk. The State Mortgage Bank in Valjevo, 1939. Miloš Jurišić colection



Fig. 2. J. Kozinsky. Apartment building in Pop Lukina 17 in Belgrade. 1931. Milan Prosen documentation

in Belgrade, opened a sculpture studio, and became one of the most important creators of decorative reliefs in Serbian Art Deco architecture.

Together with architect Viktor Viktorovich Lukomski [22] who at that time took part in designing the Royal Palace in Dedinje (1925–1929) [13, pp. 180–181], Vladimir Zagorodnjuk was engaged in designing the State Hotel on Avala mountain, built in 1928–1931. The clear-cut smooth cubic mass of the hotel rises in terraces in a steep mountain terrain. In front of it stands a sphinx as a symbol of strength and wisdom. The iconography of the relief and sculptural images discreetly placed on the capitals of the porch, above the entrance, and at the base of the stairs is related to ancient art. The sphinx, Pan, satyrs, centaurs, images of numerous forest deities, lake and river spirits are represented in archaic stylization, which was intended for the interpretation of the Yugoslav identity [13, p. 205], indicating the building as a temple located in the South-Slavic Arcadia.

Romantic emotions inspired by the richness of Serbian folklore and medieval heritage, led to the creation of the national variety of Art Deco style that culminated in the Palace of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church [19], built in 1933-1935 upon the project of Lukomski, with reliefs executed by Zagorodnjuk (Ill. 157). The mass of the edifice is graded with two lower lateral avant-corps, and the vertical axis is underlined by the arched entrance and dome which tops the apse of the chapel. The monumentality of the palace is highlighted by rows of pillars with stylized neo-Byzantine capitals. The decorative ensemble of the Patriarchate is complemented by the façade mosaic, the sculptural décor of the staircase in the entrance hall, and antique ornamental inscriptions on the capitals marking the entrance. Standing in the midst of delicate wrought iron decoration are lamp bearers in the form of stylized griffins, such as those in Serbian medieval manuscripts. Zagorodnjuk represents two angels in high relief that carry the emblem of the Serbian Orthodox Church above the main entrance, symbols of the four Evangelists in the round medallions between the arches, four heads of angels carrying the semi-dome of the chapel, a bull — symbol of fertility, the Lamb of God with a lily — symbol of innocence, an archer symbol of love, a shepherd — symbol of salvation, a fawn — symbol of chastity, and a lion with a flower — symbol of resurrection and regained Heaven [51, pp. 81–82; 30, p. 257].

Zagorodnjuk cooperated with the leading Serbian architects of this period, engaged in the sculptural decoration of King Alexander Home for War Invalids in Belgrade designed by Dimitrije M. Leko (1933–1934), the Mortage Bank in Sarajevo designed by Milan Zloković (1928–1931), and the Mortgage Bank in Banja Luka — the work of architect Miodrag Vasić (1935), with whom Zagorodnjuk also collaborated in a residential building in Molerova 78 in Belgrade (1938) [47, pp. 85–86].

Before the end of the period, in 1939, the State Mortgage Bank was erected in a small Serbian town of Valjevo, designed by prominent Russian émigré architect Vasilij Fjodorovich von Baumgarten [47]. (Fig. 1) The building reflects the monumentalism and classical sources of inspiration for the entablature and sculptural decoration by Zagorodnjuk. The classical architectural canons Baumgarten used during his career, were now treated in a modern artistic way, with rather abstract entablature crowning twin graded ionic pilasters, and two-dimensional visual motifs combined with modernist orthogonal network set on the broad monumentalized frame. Three stylistic tendencies present in this period: academicism, monumentalism and late modernism, were synthesized in Baumgarten's design for the last significant achievement of Art Deco architecture in Serbia.

The moderate, classical, and lyrical style of Zagorodnjuk stands against the monumental heroism and sculptural expression of architect and sculptor Roman Nikolayevich Verhovskoy [23]. He graduated from the Imperial Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg, and arrived in Serbia in 1920 as a decorated war hero. His sculptural orientation was presented in national press in 1928, when his project of the Ossuary for 3.000 Heroes was published [1]. The sculpturally decorated conical shape of the temple with carved ornaments and two seated statues of 'guards' placed in front, put forward associations with the archaic and primordial, merged with the expected Christian aspect recognized in the figures of winged angels and crosses. The whole ensemble was complemented by a Romano-Byzantine portal associated with national medieval architecture. Verhovskoy's expressive style and his paraphrases of the antique theme as attributes of strength and power are shown in the round medallions with representations of Athina and Mercury on the building of the officers' apartments in Belgrade (1928), as well as in his monumental sculpture *Hercules* made for a fountain in Topchider park in 1931 [38].

Roman Verhovskoy created the Memorial Ossuary of Russian Soldiers killed in World War I at the New Cemetery in Belgrade where, on May 24, 1935, the remains of the fallen were solemnly laid [48, pp. 220–221; 35] (Ill. 158). The context of a military memorial is expressed in the bullet-like form of the monument. At the top of it, a winged figure of Archangel Michael is set. His sword with cruciform hilt pierces the snake — a symbol of evil, while in his second, extended arm the Archangel holds broken chains, symbols of the future triumph that will justify the martyrdom of the fallen soldiers. The powerful expressive stylization of the sculpted figure and formal associations of the monument classify it as a top example of the late monumental Art Deco phase in Serbian art.

In addition to its strong presence in public buildings and monuments, Art Deco style marked the private architectural production, too. Democratization and manufacturing of decorative elements applied in architecture, made Art Deco wide-spread in Serbia, expressed in ornamental décor that specifically characterized the Serbian adoption of the style. Modern molded ornaments were used to create artistic "covers" for buildings, often complemented



Fig. 3. A. Medvedev. The Labour Market Building in Niš. 1936–1937. Mihajlo Medvedev documentation



Fig. 4. A. V. Papkov. Apartment building Kneza Miloša 95 in Belgrade. 1937. Milan Prosen documentation

with reliefs. This tendency can be noted in a residential building in Pop Lukina 17, designed by Jakov Kozinsky in 1931 (Fig. 2), and in the apartment building at the corner of Kneza Miloša 53 and Vojvode Milenka Street, erected in 1932 upon the plan signed by architect Hrisanf Vinogradov⁵. Expressive architectural forms enriched with Art Deco elements, such as those on the Labour Market Building (1936–1937) (Fig. 3), are found in the work of Alexander Medvedev who, after his studies in Belgrade in 1922–1929, left a significant architectural footprint in the South Serbian city of Niš [34].

Architect Valery Vladimirovich Staševski [10; 27], born and educated in St. Petersburg, worked in Belgrade in the 1920s and 1930s, where he created hundreds of objects, and produced the largest single oeuvre of interwar architecture. His inclination toward the ornamental Art Deco and the application of reliefs, as is shown on the façade in Marsala Birjuzova 21 (1931–1932). Staševski had a highly inventive approach to design, which quite often comprised several different versions of façade projects for one building, a feature typical for the architectural aesthetization of this period, which emerged in the interaction between investors and builders.

Andrej Vasiljevich Papkov [7] graduated in Belgrade in 1925, and opened his studio in 1932. He contributed to the development of the ornamental Art Deco, creating an amalgam of decorative forms derived from historical styles, and applied to modernist structural solutions. He used paraphrases of Renaissance rustic, Baroque portals and windows, and Romanesque arcade friezes, seen on the façade of the apartment building in Kneza Milosha Street 95 (Fig. 4). He covered the façade of the building in Makedonska 15 (1937) with orthogonal network, and arrays of vertical spiral colonettes completed with abstract rounded capitals, covered with red tiles and diamond-shaped blocks, thus creating a unique decorative composition. Before the

Kozinsky was educated at Emperor Alexander II Polytechnic School in Kiev, and Vinogradov studied at the Emperor Nikolaĭ Engineering College at the Military Academy in St. Petersburg [31, pp. XXIV and XVIII].

outbreak of World War II, on the façade of the building in Princess Ljubica Street 8 (1940–1941), Papkov layered the surface by applying strong verticals that pass through the center of the façade canvas, defining its completion. The balcony balustrades, the ground floor, and the mezzanine are decorated with diamond quaders, gables and vases. Papkov visually emphasizes the entrance to the building: the portal is decorated with stylized rosettes and twisted "rope" made of artificial stone, wrought-iron doors repeat the motifs of the façade, the floor of the entrance hall is covered with mosaic tiles, and the walls are coated in cream white and black stripes of artificial marble, highlighted against a green background (III. 159).

In the oeuvre of architect Grigory Ivanovich Samoilov who graduated in Belgrade in 1930 [42; 45, no. 24; 46], a significant number of projects and realized buildings turned to ornamental Art Deco, above all his masterpiece Nišava Palace erected in 1936, at the corner of Prijezdina and Oblačića Rada streets in Niš [46, pp. 38]. Considered to be one of the first modernist buildings in Niš, the palace follows the principle of symmetry, with accentuated corners, and attic pierced by segmented pilasters and topped by a flagpole. Under the roof cornice, the attic is decorated with an alphabetic inscription and perforated with oculi. In order to harmonize the vertical accents created by pilasters, windows are placed in horizontal bands of colored plaster, which emphasize the angular form and expressiveness of the object.

In the building of Luka Ćelović Foundation, erected in 1938–1939 at the corner of Andrićev Venac and Kneza Miloša streets in Belgrade [44, pp. 54–56], Samoilov expressed the concept of Art Deco as a modern, decorative and luxurious style. The façade cladding is done in stone of pastel shades, discreetly ornamented with a horizontal carved border on the level of the fourth floor. The entrance to the building is accentuated by an elaborate Art Deco portal, topped by the inscription devoted to the foundation. Above the front door there is a rectangular bronze plaque with the figures of donators, set into a decorative grille with geometric ornaments made of wrought iron and chrome. Above the porch, on the level of the first floor, Samojlov placed two reliefs with personifications of Mining — a woman kneeling next to a man with a lantern and a hack — and Enlightenment — a woman with an olive branch and an oil lamp, and a man with books. The reliefs are executed by sculptor Marko Brežanin. The entrance hall is luxurious, lined with marble, and ornamented with a decorative relief wreath of stylized flowers at the top of the walls. The vault is coffered, and floors are decorated with mosaics.

In accordance with the idea of the synthesis of arts, Art Deco architecture gave stimulus to multidisciplinary creators and their mutual cooperation [40, pp. 45]. Along with designing buildings, architects practiced interior design, furniture design, façade decoration, design of sculptures and reliefs, metalwork and wrought iron. Decorative fresco compositions, stained glass, mosaics and stucco decorations were made after their ideas. An exclusive example of such multidisciplinary cooperation is Cinema Belgrade, which was officially opened on October 24, 1940, in the centre of the Yugoslav capital [43]. The pompous opening was attended by about a thousand guests, including members of the diplomatic corps and the royal government. The Belgraders praised the imposing character of the building and its luxuriously equipped modern interiors. The cinema as a public space represented a contemporary temple of modern life [53]. Hollywood glamour and seductive magic of imagination announced at the entrance by a flashing neon sign with a sailing boat, attracted visitors into a space ruled by

water, fish, nymphs, seaweed and starfish, swans and fantastic sea horses, revived in interior decoration culminating with a relief tapestry of the staircase cupola (Fig. 5).

The building and the interiors of the cinema were designed in 1937–1938 by architect Grigory Ivanovich Samoilov, while the interior reliefs were made by sculptor Risto Stijovic in 1939 [43, pp. 183–193]. Zagorodnjuk's *Dancing Couple* relief set above the cinema entrance emphasized the theme of dance as one of the leitmotifs of Art Deco. It symbolically marked the end of the golden age of Serbian architecture and decorative arts, the time of 'les années folles' when Belgrade adopted the spirit of Hollywood and Paris, and was placed on the map of the world along with New York, Madrid, Casablanca, Havana, and Mumbai.

In the oeuvre of Russian architects who worked in Serbia between two world wars, one can notice a large variety of typical Art Deco motifs. Either contemporary or originating from classical, national, religious or mythological art, they are always transformed in accordance with contemporary spirit without direct application of topical templates. Already pres-



Fig. 5. Architect G. I. Samoilov, sculptor R. Stijović. Interior decoration of Cinema Belgrade, Terazije 29, Belgrade. 1939.
Milan Prosen documentation

ent at the early, initial phase of the style (1920–1927), related to *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, held in Paris in 1925, Russian architects and sculptors strongly reflected the new style in the mature stage of its development (1928–1934), adopting both ornamental and sculptural forms of Art Deco. In the 1930s, their involvement in public and private architecture alike intertwined with the activities of local builders, with whom they equally participated in winning markets and personal self-fulfilment. In the late stages of the Art Deco style, which in Serbian architecture developed in the period of 1935–1941, the Russian builders expressed the *'joie de vivre'* spirit characteristic of the Art Deco style, which became the most explicit form of the positive, creative global connectivity, bringing to life some highlights of Serbian architecture.

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to present the participation of Russian artists in the emergence and development of the Art Deco style in Serbian architecture, the style that marked the period between two world wars. In emanations of this style in Serbia, Russian architects and sculptors were of great importance, though their role was not discussed in historiography as a separate phenomenon.

The decorative attitude made this essentially modern style more accessible to the refined artistic taste of Serbian social elite, which made Art Deco part of the image of its representative identity. In this period, Belgrade engaged architects arriving from Russia, who followed the local artistic demands, oriented toward decorative but also modern architectural form, and produced significant artistic oeuvre. Art Deco in Serbia was based on the modernization of constructions and building forms, nevertheless focused on façade decoration, enriched with ornaments, stylized reliefs, sculptures and fine-detailed ironwork.

Architect and sculptor Roman Verhovskoj interpolated elements of the Art Deco style in an expressive and powerful way. Vladimir Zagorodnjuk decorated many public and apartment buildings with reliefs. Viktor

Lukomski as the architect of the Yugoslav government designed the Palace of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the State Hotel on Avala mountain. Architects Aleksander Medvedev, Valerij Stashevski, Andrej Papkov and Grigorij Samojlov embraced the style of softened, rhythmical, ornamentally enriched architecture, and developed a specific line of ornamental Art Deco. Creating the elaborate Art Deco interior of Cinema Belgrade, the most elite movie theater in Yugoslav capital, architect Grigorij Samojlov brought the spirit of Hollywood to Belgrade. The interwar development of the city and the quadruple increase in population were followed by the creation of its architectural identity, decisively marked by the modernity of Art Deco, following global trends that put it close to Paris, New York, Madrid, Casablanca, Havana, and Mumbai.

In the oeuvre of Russian architects who worked in Serbia between two world wars, we notice a large variety of typical Art Deco motifs. Either contemporary or originating from classical, national, religious or mythological art, they are always transformed in accordance with contemporary modern spirit without direct application of topical templates. Already present in the early, initial phase of the style (1920–1927), related to *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, held in Paris in 1925, Russian architects and sculptors strongly reflected the new style in the mature stage of its development (1928–1934), adopting both ornamental and sculptural forms of Art Deco. In the 1930s, their involvement in public and private architecture alike intertwined with the activities of local builders, with whom they equally participated in winning markets and personal self-fulfillment. In the late stages of Art Deco style, which in Serbian architecture developed in the period of 1935–1941, the Russian builders expressed the "joie de vivre" spirit characteristic of Art Deco, which became the most explicit form of the positive, creative global connectivity bringing to life some highlights of Serbian architecture.

Keywords: Russian emigrant architects and sculptors; Art Deco architecture; Art Deco reliefs; Serbian architecture in the 1920s and 1930s.

Название статьи. Роль русских архитекторов и скульпторов в создании стиля ар-деко в архитектуре Сербии.

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Аннотация. Цель статьи — представить роль русских архитекторов и скульпторов в возникновении и развитии в архитектуре Сербии стиля ар-деко — одного из доминирующих направлений в период между двумя мировыми войнами. Хотя их значение в этом отношении была весьма велико, оно до сих пор не получило должного освещения в историографии.

Декоративность этого, по сути, модернового стиля предопределила его востребованность сербской социальной элитой с ее рафинированным вкусом, которая использовала его как средство саморепрезентации. В это время в Белграде работали архитекторы из России, которые, отзываясь на местные художественные запросы, ориентировались на декоративную, но современную интерпретацию архитектуры. Ар-деко в Сербии было основано на модернизации конструкции и строительных форм, но все же акцентировано оформление фасадов, непременно обогащенных орнаментами, стилизованными рельефами, скульптурами и великолепными литыми решетками.

Архитектор и скульптор Роман Верховской включал в свои произведения элементы ар-деко, подчеркивая их острую выразительность. Владимир Загороднюк дополнил рельефами декор многих общественных и жилых зданий. Виктор Лукомский, будучи архитектором правительства Югославии, создал дворец патриархии Сербской православной церкви и отель на горе Авале. Архитекторы Александр Медведев, Валерий Сташевский, Андрей Папков и Григорий Самойлов — приверженцы стиля лиричной ритмизованной архитектуры — развили своеобразную версию орнаментального ардеко. Создавая интерьер кинотеатра «Белград», самого элитного в югославской столице, архитектор Григорий Самойлов привнес в него атмосферу Голливуда. Бурное развитие Белграда в период между двумя мировыми войнами, интенсивный рост его населения сопровождались созданием узнаваемого архитектурного образа города, решительно отмеченного вслед за мировыми тенденциями современными чертами ар-деко, — новое место Белграда на архитектурной карте мира было сопоставимо по важности с Парижем, Нью-Йорком, Мадридом, Касабланкой и Мумбаи.

В наследии русских архитекторов, работавших тогда в Сербии, различимо большое разнообразие типичных мотивов ар-деко. Современные либо восходящие к классическому, национальному, религиозному или мифологическому искусству, они всегда трансформируются в соответствии с духом современности, без прямой отсылки к источникам. Русские архитекторы и скульпторы проявили себя уже на ранней стадии развития стиля (1920–1927), связанной с *Exposition Internationale des Arts*

Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes в Париже в 1925 г., а затем с большой силой выразили природу ар-деко в зрелой фазе его развития (1928–1934), восприняв как его орнаментальные, так и скульптурные формы. В 1930-е гг. их строительная деятельность переплеталась с работой местных зодчих, с которыми они конкурировали за заказы. На позднем этапе развития стиля, который в Сербии приходится на 1936–1941 гг., русские архитекторы воплотили в своих творениях дух *'joie de vivre'*, столь характерный для ар-деко, ставшего самой открытой формой позитивных творческих международных связей и вызвавшего к жизни многие из замечательных достижений сербской архитектуры.

Ключевые слова: русские архитекторы и скульпторы из числа эмигрантов; ар-деко в архитектуре; рельефы в стиле Ар-деко; сербская архитектура 1920–1930-х гг.

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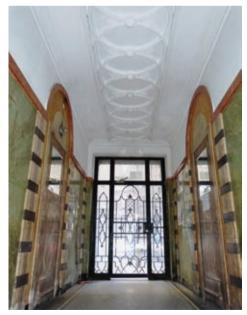
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