

SILVIA
COLFESCU

BUCHAREST guide

English translation by
Alistair Ian Blyth

English version – fourth edition
Edited, revised & updated by **SARAH GRANT**



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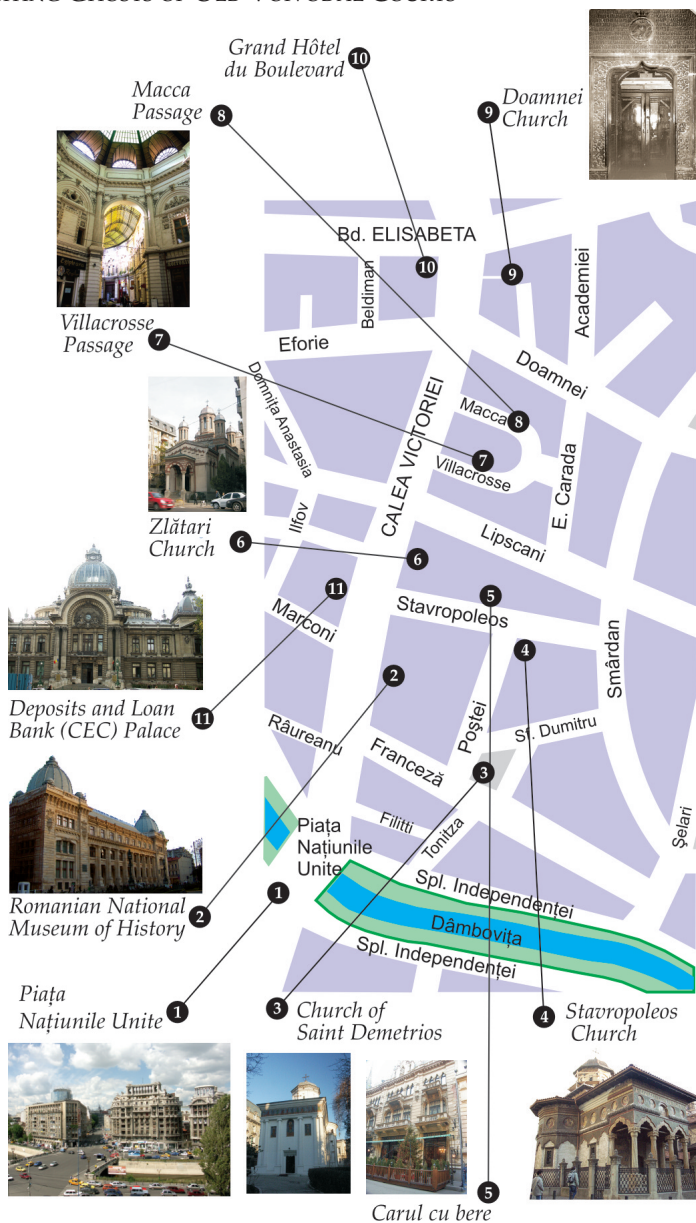
I would also like to thank both Alistair Ian Blyth for his original English translation and Sarah Grant for editing, revising and updating this new edition.

A beholden thought goes to Grigore Ionescu: his books, particularly his Bucharest guide published in 1938, inspired me in my effort to show the world the real countenance of my beloved city, Bucharest.

Silvia Colfescu

1. Along Calea Victoriei, from the Dâmbovița to bd. Regina Elisabeta and back

VISITING GHOSTS OF OLD VOIVODAL COURTS



PIAȚA NAȚIUNILE UNITE (UNITED NATIONS' SQUARE), CALEA VICTORIEI, MUZEUL NAȚIONAL DE ISTORIE A ROMÂNIEI (THE ROMANIAN NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM), THE CHURCH OF SAINT DEMETRIOS, BISERICA STAVROPOLEOS (STAVROPOLEOS CHURCH), CARUL CU BERE (THE BEER CART), BISERICA ZLĂTARI (THE GOLDSMITHS' CHURCH), BISERICA DOAMNEI (DOAMNEI CHURCH), GRAND HÔTEL DU BOULEVARD, PALATUL C.E.C (THE NATIONAL SAVINGS BANK – C.E.C PALACE)

At the intersection of Calea Victoriei and Splaiul Independenței, *Piața Națiunile Unite* (United Nations' Square) is dominated by the awkward silhouette of a seventeen-storey tower block built on the site where, three hundred years ago, the palace of Constantin Brâncoveanu's children once stood. The lands of the Cantacuzinos, which have passed into other hands over the centuries, stretched from here to what is now bd. Regina Elisabeta.

*** Calea Victoriei

Calea Victoriei covers 2,700 metres between Piața Națiunile Unite at one end and Piața Victoriei at the other.

Podul Mogoșoaiei (today Calea Victoriei) was inaugurated in 1692 by Voievode Constantin Brâncoveanu (*Voievode* = voivode/governor of a province) of Walachia and led directly from his houses to his estate at Mogoșoaia.

The section between Piața Națiunile Unite and bd. Regina Elisabeta was known as the High Street to Sărindar, because it led to Sărindar Church on the site of

what is now *Cercul Militar Național* (the National Military Club). From there, it was *Drumul Brașovului* (Brașov Road), then *Podul Mogoșoaiei* (*pod* = “bridge” or “deck” since main streets were decked with wooden planks). In 1878, the Romanian Army, victorious in the War of Independence, entered the capital along this street which then received the name it bears today.



From the front of the high-rise, a view of Calea Victoriei begins with the two elegant blocks on the right once belonging to the *Adriatica* (architect: Petre Smărandescu) and *Agricola Fonciera* (architect: Petre Antonescu) companies, both dating from 1926. Outside the high-rise, cross a bridge over the new river bed of the Dâmbovița. Beneath this false concrete trough constructed in 1982-86 during the Ceaușescu regime flows the real Dâmbovița, infested with the city's sewage.

Arriving on the other side of the riverbank, keep going along *Calea Victoriei* via the right-hand pavement passing str. *Filitti*. The next road is str. *Franceză*.

In the eighteenth century, str. *Franceză* was *Ulița Domnească* (Voivodal Lane – the old voivodal court was in the perimeter of Șelari, Gabroveni, Franceză and Șepcari), then, in the early nineteenth, *Ulița Ișlicarilor* after the craftsmen here who made tall fur caps (*ișlic*) with forms and sizes indicative of the wearer's rank and social status.

Later, when the French consulate moved to the street, it was known as *Ulița Franceză*. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was baptised for King Carol, and so it remained until the communists changed it to str. 30 Decembrie. Now it has gone back to str. Franceză again, after having honoured the politician Iuliu Maniu for a short period.



Noble man with *ișlic*
(Scarlat Miclescu)



Strada Franceză – balcony

*** Muzeul Național de Istorie a României

THE ROMANIAN NATIONAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Calea Victoriei, n° 12, Sector 3; tel. +40 21 315 8207; www.mnir.ro; metro: Universitate, Piața Unirii; opening times: summer – Thurs.-Sun., 10-18, winter – Thurs.-Sun., 9-17; closed Mon., Tues. and national holidays; entrance free each last Friday of the month.



The former *Palat al Poștelor* (General Post Office Palace) inspired by the Palace of Federal Post in Geneva has housed *Muzeul Național de Istorie a României* (The Romanian National History Museum) since 1972. This stunning neoclassical building was constructed in 1894-1900 (architect Al. Săvulescu), at the tremendous cost of four million gold lei.

The palace's vast portico supported by ten Doric columns with massive pilasters features carvings by sculptors Carol and Frederick Storck.

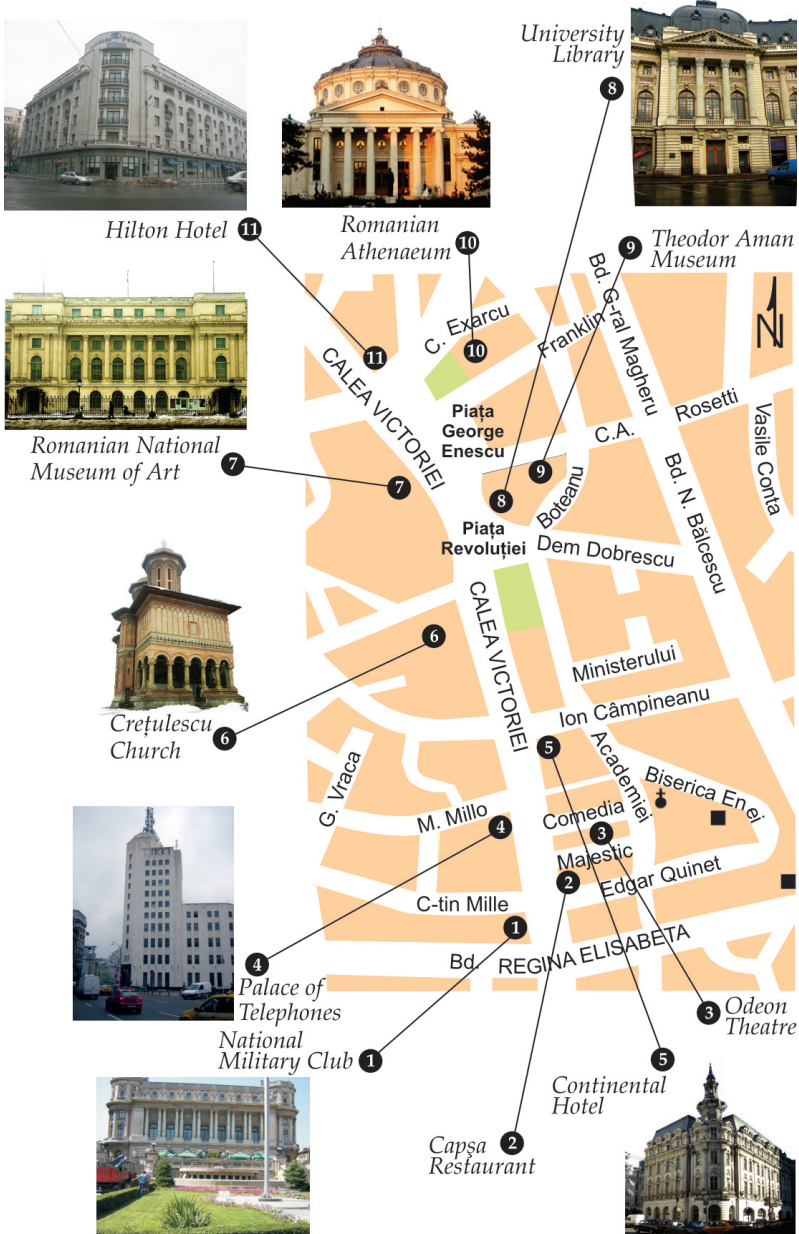
Long ago, this land belonged to the great Bălăceanu family whose estate lay between what is now Calea Victoriei and the streets of Franțează, Smârdan and Stavropoleos. Constantin Brâncoveanu, deeply associated with the history of Bucharest, also influenced the Bălăceanu family's fate. He hated the Aga Constantin Bălăceanu (his relative by marriage and Chief of Police) who was son-in-law of Voivode Șerban Cantacuzino, uncle and great enemy of Brâncoveanu. After Aga Constantin was slain in the Battle of Zărnești, Brâncoveanu demolished his houses and ordered that his head be

chopped off, impaled on a stake, brought to Bucharest and set above the ruins. For over a year three centuries ago, the great Aga's severed head lingered in broad view of what is now *Muzeul Național de Istorie a României*. Brâncoveanu took ownership of the estate on which he built an inn known as *hanul lui Constantin Vodă* (the Inn of Constantin Vodă) – the splendid cellars still survive today.

Like all inns of this period, it was solidly built and fortified. It not only had guestrooms for visitors to the city, but all kinds of shops, too. It endured until 1856 when it was demolished. In its place, concert

2. Along Calea Victoriei, from Bd. Regina Elisabeta to Piața Revoluției

AUDITORIUMS OLD AND NEW



CERCUL MILITAR (THE NATIONAL MILITARY CLUB), CAPȘA RESTAURANT, PALATUL TELEFOANELOR (THE TELEPHONE PALACE), THE CONTINENTAL HÔTEL, BISERICA KRETZULESCU (KRETZULESCU CHURCH), PALATUL REGAL (THE ROYAL PALACE), THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY – FUNDAȚIA CAROL I (THE CAROL I UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION), MUZEUL AMAN (THE THEODOR AMAN MUSEUM), ATENEUL ROMÂN (THE ROMANIAN ATHENAEUM), THE ATHENÉE PALACE HÔTEL

With your back to the Dâmbovița, set off from the intersection of Calea Victoriei and the boulevard which today bears the name of *Regina Elisabeta* (Queen Elisabeta) once again, just as it did on the day of its inauguration. On 30 December 1947, it was baptised “6th March” (the date the communist regime first seized power in Romania) and from 1965 it bore the name of communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej.

* Cercul Militar – The National Military Club

On the left-hand corner of the intersection opposite *Grand Hôtel du Boulevard*, the grandiose French neoclassical *Cercul Militar* (The National Military Club) was built in 1912 by architects Dimitrie Maimarolu, Victor Stăphănescu and Ernest Doneaud as a social, educational and cultural centre for the Romanian army.

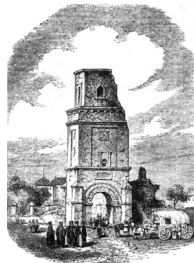


** Biserica Colțea – Colțea Church

Biserica Colțea (Colțea Church) was built by Mihail Cantacuzino on the site of an older wooden church founded by Colțea Doicescu. With an elaborately carved exterior (columns, window settings, portal, the porch balustrade), large parts of the original murals have survived almost unscathed. The porch, supported by ten columns with richly ornamented capitals, boasts a parapet formed of sculpted stone rosettes probably mounted here in around 1900 and originating, perhaps, from *biserica Caimata* (Caimata Church) demolished in 1890 to make way for bd. Carol I. The façades are decorated with a band of cable moulding with blind, many-lobed arches in the upper and lower registers. Framed by two Neo-Corinthian columns supporting a cornice sculpted in Italian Renaissance style, the portal opens in the form of a three-lobed arch. The columns' pedestals embellished with alto-relief depict the four Evangelists, while the capitals host animal motifs. This porch is sanctuary to large sections of murals, particularly in the two domes that cover it and the pendentives upon which they rest.

Past *biserica Colțea* leaving Piața Universității behind on the left, bd. Carol I, a main artery of Bucharest, was laid out after the demolition of *biserica Sf. Sava* (St. Sava Church). It runs east and is continued by bd. Pake Protopopescu named after the dedicated mayor of the capital who did so much to modernise the city.

This was also the site of one of the best known monuments in Bucharest, *turnul Colței* (Colțea Tower), today remembered only by a plaque. Built by the church's founder Mi-



hail Cantacuzino and demolished in 1888, the tower was the tallest structure in the capital, and stood guard at the entrance to the walled complex of the church.



Further on, the boulevard opens out to form a square named after Constantin A. Rosetti (1816-1885), a writer and Liberal politician. The centrepiece, a statue to him sculpted by V. Hegel in 1903, represents the statesman sitting on a chair in pensive pose. He played a key role in the Proclamations of the Union of the Principalities (24 January 1859) and of Independence (9 May 1877).

* Biserica Luterană – The Lutheran Church

Str. Luterană n° 2

On str. Știrbey Vodă towards *Ateneul Român* one falls upon *Luterană, Biserica Reformată* (the Lutheran Reformed Church) on the left of the crossroads with str. Luterană.

Begun in 1751 during the reign of Grigore Ghica and finished in 1774 under Alexander Ipsilanti, it was reconstructed in its current form in 1912 (architects E. Schmidt and H. Seewald) following a fire.

The church is the heart of community life for the capital's small but active Lutheran minority.



* Catedrala Romano-Catolică Sfântul Iosif – The Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Joseph

Str. Gen. Berthelot n° 19

Walking up the slight incline of str. Luterană to str. General Berthelot, *Catedrala Romano-Catolică Sfântul Iosif* (the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Joseph) towers on the corner.



This impressive basilica was built in 1884 by architect Carol Beni during the mission of Ignace Paoli, the first Roman Catholic archbishop to be sent to Bucharest by the Vatican.

Architectural elements of both Neo-Romanic (Romanesque) and Neo-Gothic styles blend together beautifully in this place of worship.

Inside, images on bronze leaf adorning the walls and the stained-glass windows from Munich particularly warrant admiration.

The Palace of the Roman Catholic Archbishopric next door was designed by architect Ferdinand Hoeflich.

Despite vocal protests from Bucharest's Roman Catholic community, civic society and international forums, construction work began in 2006 on an immense block right beside the cathedral which not only mars the urban landscape but endangers the sanctuary's very foundations.

Artists' workshops and *Universitatea Națională de Arte* (The National Arts University) stand opposite the cathedral.