

## ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS REGARDING THE ACTIVITY OF ARCHITECT ETTI-ROZA (ROZALIA) SPIRER DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD



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### Archival Documents Regarding the Activity of Architect Etti-Roza (Rozalia) Spirer During the Soviet Period

**Abstract.** The first female architect from Bessarabia, Etti-Roza (Rozalia) Spirer has a special page in the culture of our country. As a graduate of the Higher School of Architecture in Bucharest, she worked in the Technical Department of the Town Hall of Bălți from 1932 to 1940, dealing with the design and construction of residential buildings, educational institutions, public interest buildings, etc. This architect put into practice the Romanian modernist style, creating valuable architectural works, which still do honor to the town of Bălți today. Since 1944 another stage in the biography of the architect can be seen. In the immediate post-war years, R. Spirer was responsible for the reconstruction of valuable buildings in Chişinău, destroyed during the World War II: the former "Suisse" hotel, the former building of the Land Administration, the Palace of Culture, the "Odeon" cinema, the building of the former Boys' Gymnasium No. 3, etc. Until 1971 this architect designed the residential blocks, hospitals, polyclinics, clubs, kindergartens, shopping centers and various types of facilities for the capital of the Moldavian SSR. For the first time the authors introduce a series of archival documents relating to the architect's activity during the Soviet period.

**Keywords:** Etti-Roza (Rozalia) Spirer, architecture, Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, Chişinău, reconstruction, construction, design.

### Documentele de arhivă privind activitatea arhitectei Etti-Roza (Rozalia) Spirer în perioada sovietică

**Rezumat.** Prima femeie arhitect din Basarabia, Etti-Roza (Rozalia) Spirer are o pagină aparte în cultura țării noastre. Absolventă a Școlii Superioare de Arhitectură din București, ea a activat în anii 1932-1940 în cadrul Secției Tehnice a Primăriei orașului Bălți, ocupându-se cu proiectarea și construcția clădirilor de locuit, instituțiilor de învățământ, edificiilor de interes public ș.a. Arhitecta a pus în practică stilul modernist românesc, creând opere arhitecturale de valoare, care și astăzi fac cinste orașului Bălți. Din 1944 începe o altă etapă în biografia arhitectei. În anii imediat postbelici R. Spirer se ocupă de reconstrucția unor imobile de valoare din Chişinău, distruse în timpul celui de-al Doilea Război Mondial: fostul hotel „Suisse”, fosta clădire a Administrației Funciare, Palatul Culturii, cinematograful „Odeon”, clădirea fostului Gimnaziu pentru băieți nr. 3 ș.a. Până în 1971 arhitecta a proiectat blocuri rezidențiale, spitale, policlinici, cluburi, grădinițe de copii, centre comerciale și diferite tipuri de dotări pentru capitala RSS Moldovenești. Autorii introduc în premieră o serie de documente de arhivă referitoare la activitatea arhitectei în perioada sovietică.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Etti-Roza (Rozalia) Spirer, arhitectură, Republica Sovietică Socialistă Moldovenească, Chişinău, reconstrucție, construcție, proiectare.

Etti-Roza Spirer, the first female representative from Bessarabia to embrace the profession of architect, had fruitful creative activity both in the interwar and Soviet periods (Fig. 1).

She was born on April 16, 1900, in the town of Galați, Covurlui County, into the Jewish family of estate administrator Leizer (Ludvig) Spirer and housewife Betti Ghelbert. In 1907 she began her studies at the primary school in Galați, but in 1910 the family settled in Bucharest. In 1919, after finishing high school, Etti-Roza entered the Higher School of Architecture in Bucharest, from which she graduated on May 30, 1925 (architect's diploma number 114 of June 15, 1925) [1] (Fig. 2).

In her student years, but also in the following years, she participated in the design of various constructions within private architectural offices. The National Archives Agency of the Republic of Moldova has preserved the certificate for November 1, 1927, signed by E. Van Saaren-Algi, an architect diplomat of the French Government, confirming that E.-R. Spirer worked from April 1, 1926 to October 1927 in his architectural offices [2] (Fig. 3). E. Van Saaren-Algi was pleased with the activity of the young specialist: "Miss R. Spirer has shown a lot of conscience, diligence and skill in her profession during this time". In her autobiography E.-R. Spirer noted: "I worked with the architect Cristofe Cerchez and studied the details necessary for the construction of the Franco-Romanian Bank Palace and various branches of the same bank in the province" [3]. However, due



to the economic crisis, she was unable to find a permanent job in the capital, being forced to leave Bucharest in 1929. In December of 1931 E.-R. Spirer was employed as an architect in the Municipal Technical Service of the Bălți Town Hall [4]. She began her career as a simple architect, later becoming an ordinary architect of the 3rd class, an ordinary architect of the 2nd class and then deputy head of the Technical Service (together with engineer Valeriu Joludev) [5, p. 194-196]. She was responsible for all the design works of civil constructions commissioned by the Bălți Town Hall for the town and the county of Bălți, being the only specialist in the town with higher education in the field. Her personal file from the National Archives Agency in Chișinău contains memoirs signed by the architect, documents related to vacations, applications for promotion, sanctions, etc. [6].

The Qualification Sheet for 1933 mentions that E.-R. Spirer "knows her job very well", "is very capable and manages her job with great skill", "being very diligent and conscientious, leaving nothing to be desired", and her conduct towards civil servants and the public "is irre-

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Наименование организации Союза архитекторов СССР  
Союз архитекторов СССР

1. Фамилия Спирер Роза Львовна Имя Роза Отчество Львовна

2. Пол Жен. Год, число и м.ч. рождения 16.04.1900

3. Место рождения Галац, Буковина

4. Национальность Еврейка

5. Партия ЛПР

6. Квалификация Архитектор

Время работы в организации и ее подразделениях	Функции или должности	Год начала работы	Год окончания работы	Время отпусков (в годах)	Время отпусков (в годах)
<u>Вместе с мамой Архитектурное бюро в Бухаресте</u>		<u>1919</u>	<u>1925</u>		

7. Какие иностранные языки владеете (на каком языке объясняетесь) Французский, немецкий, русский

8. Ученая степень, ученое звание нет

9. Почетные звания (почетный архитектор, заслуженный архитектор, заслуженный строитель, заслуженный деятель науки и техники, заслуженный деятель искусств и др.) нет

Fig. 1. Etti-Roza (Rozalia) Spirer (a) ([https://www.baltigraphia.me/2015/02/blog-post\\_15.html](https://www.baltigraphia.me/2015/02/blog-post_15.html)); the archival documents regarding the activity of R. Spirer (b) (NAA).

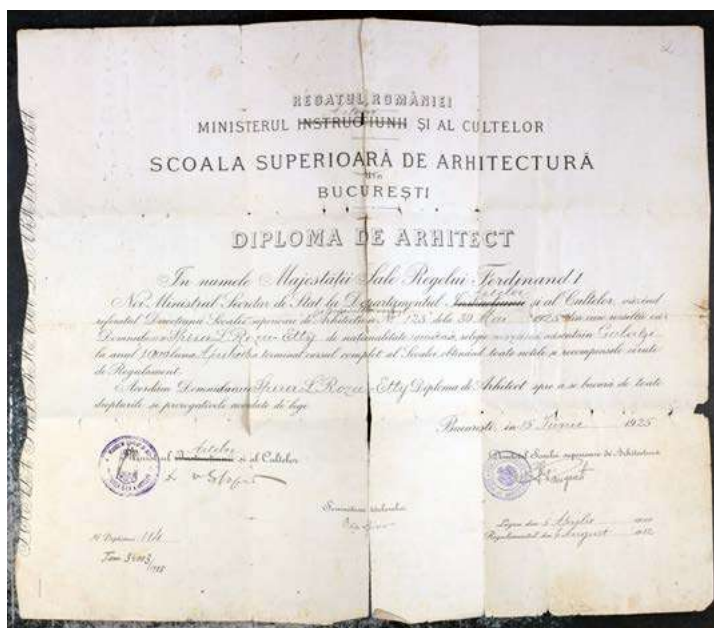


Fig. 2. E.-R. Spirer's architect's diploma (NAA).

proachable” [7]. In the Qualification Sheet for 1935 it is written that “Ms. Ety-Roza Spirer, in her professional activity during 1935, demonstrated exceptional skill both in drawing up projects and in organizing the construction site... The entrusted works were always executed with great zeal, conscientiousness and energy... Ms. Architect Ety-Roza Spirer is a valuable element...” [8].

Etti-Roza Spirer was the author of several projects for the reconstruction of existing buildings. This is the case in the redevelopment of the private house of the president of the local administration, Hadji Marcarov, to become the headquarters the Bălți Town Hall. The exterior of the building shows influences of Russian architecture and early modernism. In 1936-1938, the interiors of this building were adapted by Etti-Roza Spirer for the headquarters of the city administration. Today, the building belongs to the Bălțeanca factory and houses its company store. Her work is also seen in the restoration of the individual house of the imperial councilor Alexandru Bodescu, son of the boyar Constantin Bodescu, one of the last owners of the settlement of Bălți and the adjacent lands. In 1914, after the death of Alexandru Bodescu, the building was purchased by the town authorities and given to the Zemstvo of the town of Bălți. In 1934, according to the project “Enhancement

of the Bodescu House for the Headquarters of the Prefecture”, this attractive construction of eclectic inspiration changed its destiny. Today the historical building houses the Civil Registry Office of the town of Bălți.

Etti-Roza Spirer put into practice the Romanian modernist style, creating valuable architectural works that still do honor to the town



Fig. 3. Certificate, signed by the architect E. Van-Saagen Algi (NAA).

of Bălți today. The square – the central hall and the pavilion for the jubilee exhibition of 1933 are worth attention [5, p. 199].

She also dealt with the design and renovation of educational institutions, the construction of residential houses, etc. An example of valuable interwar architecture is the building of the Theoretical High School for Girls “Domnița Ileana” (1936–1938), one of the first buildings in Bessarabia built in the functionalist spirit. Today, this is the headquarters of the Rectorate of the Pedagogical University “Alecă Russo”, block I. Other examples of the architectural educational programs created by E.-R. Spîrîr are the building of the “Ion Creangă” Theoretical High School for Boys (1937–1938) (today block IV of the “Alecă Russo” Pedagogical University) and the building of the Industrial High School for Girls (reconstructed in 1937) (today block II of the “Alecă Russo” Pedagogical University). At that time, the works in the field of residential architecture were also distinguished by their quality. E.-R. Spîrîr is the author of the projects of several residential houses in Bălți.

In 1936, the architect was awarded the “Reward for Labor for School Constructions” medal, first class, for her prodigious activity in the field of school building designs. Her creation was highly appreciated by the Romanian Architects’ Corps.

In February 1938, King Carol II issued an order excluding Jewish architects from the General Association of Engineers of Romania (A.G.I.R.). For E.-R. Spîrîr, a specialist with an impeccable reputation, the suspension from service meant a real tragedy – she tried to commit suicide by poisoning herself with Veronal, but was found by the owner of the house where she lived and saved by doctors [5, p. 200]. Here is what the “Gazeta Bessarabiei” wrote at the beginning of February 1938: “This morning, Ms. Roza Spîrîr, an architect from the Technical Service of the Bălți Town Hall, tried to end her life by swallowing a strong dose of Veronal. In Ms. Spîrîr’s purse, an address from the Town Hall was found, informing her that she had been fired from her job, as well as a newspaper clipping about the expulsion of Jewish architects from A.G.I.R.” [5, p. 200]. However, archival documents attest that the architect continued to work at the Town Hall of Bălți until June 28, 1940 [9, 10], and on November 22, 1938 she was even promoted to the rank of ordinary architect, class I [11].

From July 1, 1940 to July 5, 1941, she worked in the Municipal Communal Household (*Gorkomhoz*) of the town of Bălți [12]. The archival documents kept at the National Archives Agency in the city of Chișinău [10] testify that in 1941 the architect Etti-Roza Spîrîr (Rozalia



Fig. 4. Diploma of participation of Rozalia L. Spîrîr at the First Union Exhibition of Architectural and Scientific Works of Women Architects from the Soviet Union, Moscow, 1948 (NAA).



Fig. 5. R. Spirer with the academician Alexei Victorovich Shchusev and his colleagues (the second from the right) (<https://locals.md/2017/pervaya-zhenshhina-arhitektor-bessarabii-rozaliya-spirer/>).

Ludvigovna Spirer) evacuated to the Russian Federation. In 1941–1942 she was employed as an accountant at a dairy farm in the rural settlement of Razvilnoe, Rostov region. Later, she left for Uzbekistan. From January 1942 to June 15, 1942, she worked in the design office of the Silk Factory in the town of Margilan, Fergana region. Then she arrived in the city of Fergana, where from June 1942 to October 1944 she worked as a construction site manager in the Capital Construction Department of the Textile Combine. At the end of 1944 she was invited to Chişinău and hired as a senior architect in the “Moldavstroiproiect” trust, later renamed the “Moldgiproselhozstroï” Institute, and later the “Moldgiprostroï” Institute. The architect was responsible for designing residential buildings, schools, medical and sanitary institutions and other buildings of public interest. She advanced from senior architect to chief project architect.

In the Archives of Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova, in the collection of the Union of Architects of the Moldavian SSR, correspondence from 1946 regarding the reconstruction of the destroyed neighborhoods of Chişinău during the war is preserved. Within this correspondence appears information about the need to organize exhibitions on the occasion of the meetings of the Union of

Architects of the Moldavian SSR [13]. Among the organizers of the exhibition inaugurated on October 9, 1946, architect Spirer appears alongside architects Ragulin, Gulavski, Chelnokova, Shulga-Nesterenko, etc.

During April 10-15, 1948, Rozalia Ludvigovna Spirer participated in the First Union Exhibition of Architectural and Scientific Works of Women Architects of the Soviet Union [14] (Fig. 4). She was esteemed and highly appreciated by the renowned Soviet architect, who was originally from Chişinău, Academician Alexei Victorovich Shchiusev (Fig. 5). Guided by Shchiusev, she reconstructed the destroyed building of the former “Suisse” hotel in 1946 (Fig. 6). Here is what Gheorghii Remenco, vice-president of the Presidium of the Moldavian Society for the Protection of Monuments of History and Culture, wrote: “The building was destroyed by fire and the land had to be cleared for the new construction. But A.V. Shchiusev came to the defense of the “veteran”. He considered it one of the most beautiful buildings in the city, built in the tradition of Russian classicism. He noticed its connection with the Cathedral and convinced others that the building should be rebuilt. It was required to make very accurate measurements of the walls, extract fallen decorative elements from the garbage heaps, and



Fig. 6. The reconstructed building of the former “Suisse” hotel, Chișinău (the author of reconstruction R. Spirer, the consultant A.V. Shchusev) (<http://wikimapia.org/9478216/Librarie-Biblioteca-B-P-Hajdeu-Fostul-Hotel-Suisse-Chi%C5%9Fin%C4%83u#/photo/7634652>).

examined the issue of building a new foundation. All these works were carried out in a very short time by the architects R.E. Kurtș and F.P. Naumov, both emeritus in arts of the MSSR at the time, as well as by the architect R.L. Spirer” [15]. Today the historical building is occupied by the “Bogdan Petriceicu-Hasdeu” municipal library, a pharmacy and various commercial units.

Rozalia Spirer was the author of the reconstruction project of the Palace of Culture (1945), built largely in the interwar period (the Palace of Culture of the Union) and later transformed into the Moldavian Musical-Drama Theater

“A.S. Pushkin” (the current National Theater “Mihai Eminescu”) (Fig. 7). Thus, from the archival documents of May 17, 1945, regarding the examination of the technical condition of the Palace of Culture project, we learn that the following specialists were present at the meeting: chief architect of the city Robert Kurtș, head of the State Control in the field of Architecture and Construction Izrail Shmurun, from the Design Department Agasi Ambartsumean, expert Piotr Ragulin, expert David Palatnik, project architect Rozalia Spirer, senior engineer of the “Moldavstroiproiect” V. Leass and others [16]. Spirer



Fig. 7. The building of the current “Mihai Eminescu” National Theater, Chișinău (the author of reconstruction R. Spirer) (after Fișier: Teatrul Național “Mihai Eminescu”).



Fig. 8. The reconstructed building of the “Odeon” cinema, Chişinău (the author of reconstruction R. Spirer) (after BACU).

was to take into account a series of objections raised by architects and engineers, in particular the completion of the project documentation with the general plan, the improvement of the rear facade, the creation of sections through the stairs and the plan of the basement rooms showing the ceilings, etc. It was mentioned that the following problems remained unresolved: soundproofing of the service offices, visibility in the performance hall, arrangement of side accesses to the building, widening of the openings in the ground floor vestibule, replanning of the fire service rooms, changing the material of the partition wall above the stage portal, etc. The exterior decoration of the building was to be improved and a terrace was to be arranged in place of the exhibition hall under the dome. Finally, it was decided that the proposed project would be presented for approval to the Soviet of People’s Commissars of the MSSR [17]. According to the sketches of the architect Rozalia Spirer, the “Odeon” cinema was restored (1947–1948) [18], renamed in the Soviet period into the “Biruința” cinema (Fig. 8). The building of the former Land Administration was reconstructed, which became the Party School after the war, which increased in height by one level (1949–1951) [18]. Since 1964, it has become the central block of the “Sergei Lazo” Polytechnic Institute, today the Technical University of Moldova (Fig. 9). For

1949–1950, according to the specialist’s project, the building of the former Boys’ Gymnasium No. 3 on the current str. A. Mateevici was reconstructed [18], which during the Soviet period first housed the Soviet of Ministers of the MSSR, and later the “Mihail Frunze” State Agricultural Institute. Today, the study block of the Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts is located here.

The archives of the Republic of Moldova preserve a series of materials from the architect’s file at the Union of Architects of the MSSR [19]. These materials were prepared by the architect David Palatnik. Here is the biography and creative activity of Rozalia Spirer until her retirement briefly reflected. Among the known foreign languages are pointed Romanian, French and German. The nationality is indicated as Jewish. The architect was not married and had no children. After the Second World War she lived in the city of Chişinău on Ion Creangă Street, number 7, ap. 41, current George Coşbuc Street. The documents confirmed that she traveled to Romania in 1955, 1959, 1962, 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1973 to visit her relatives. She was a member of the leadership of the Union of Architects of the Moldavian SSR (1950-1954) and a member of the Revision Commission of the same organization (1954–1959) [20].

From the archival documents we learn that most of the buildings designed by R. Spirer were



Fig. 9. The main building of the Technical University of Moldova, Chişinău (the author of reconstruction R. Spirer).



Fig. 10. Dental clinic at Bd. Negruzzi, Chişinău (the author R. Spirer) (the photo of Mariana Şlapac).

built in the city of Chişinău. Thus, in 1947–1948 the project of school number 9 on Puşkin Street was developed, and in 1955 was made the polyclinic on Toma Ciorba Street. In the following years a series of new projects appeared such as the residential block for the workers of the State Bank with the built-in kindergarten on Bd. Tineretului (1954–1955); the residential block for 156 apartments on Bd. Negruzzi (1957–1958, in collaboration); the dental polyclinic and a shop on the ground floor on Bd. Negruzzi (1957–1958) (Fig. 10); the residential blocks for the workers of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the MSSR on Ion Creangă Street no. 24 and no. 26 (1957–1958) and the residential block for workers of the Soviet of Ministers on Pirogov Street, corner with 28 June Street (1958). In 1958 two projects of model hospitals for the capital of the republic were also developed the first for 35 beds, and the other is for 50 beds. In 1961–1962 the architect designed a typical club building for 255 seats with a canteen for 35 seats (for the city of Chişinău), and an experimental three-section residential building for workers of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the MSSR in 1963; an experimental four-section residential building for workers of the Soviet of Ministers of the MSSR; four cooperative buildings with five floors and four sections for repeated use. In the same year

a typical project of a shopping center for 3,000–4,000 inhabitants (in collaboration with other architects) appeared, and a typical project of a shopping center for 7 000–8 000 inhabitants in 1963–1962 (in collaboration too).

R. Spirer appears as the author of the following projects for the city of Chişinău: a series of standard projects for individual houses with 1-2 floors (early 1960s); a series of standard projects for shops, facilities and second-category pharmacies attached to the sides of residential buildings (1964); a project for a residential building for workers of the “Partizdat” Publishing House on Tineretului Bd. (1964); standard projects for built-in shops, facilities and a pharmacy on the sides of standard residential buildings (1964); a standard project for a partially built-in cafe, partially attached to a residential building for 100 seats (1964); a residential building for workers of the Printing House of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the MSSR with a built-in shop on Tineretului Bd. (1964–1965); the standard design of the Service Plant for 25 jobs (1966); the standard design of the school for 30 classes with walls made of cut limestone blocks (1969, in collaboration with D. Palatnik) and the standard designs of dormitories for 410 and 243 people as part of the 102 series (1970, in collaboration with D. Palatnik). According to the project of architect L. Spirer,

in Chişinău, the 11-storey residential building on Novo-Izmailovskaia Street, now Pantelimon Halipa Street (1968–1972), was built using the sliding formwork technique. Another project carried out by L. Spirer together with D. Palatnik is the nine-storey residential building on Kuibyshev Street, now Calea Ieşilor Street, with an adjacent culinary shop, also executed using the sliding formwork technique (1968–1972). Among the last projects developed by the two architects is the standard project of the 40-class school made of panel casing (1971).

Other achievements of the architect during the Soviet period are the reconstruction of the Boys' Gymnasium in the town of Bălţi (1941–1961); two variants of the reconstruction project of the Drama Theater in Tiraspol (they remained only on paper) (early 1950s, in collaboration); the dormitory for students of the Pedagogical Institute in Tiraspol (1953–1954); the Palace of Soviets in Cahul (1952–1954), later transformed into the “A.S. Makarenko” Pedagogical College, today the “B.P. Hasdeu” State University; the residential building with the pharmacy built on 25 Octombrie Street in



Fig. 11. The funerary monument of the Architect R. Spirer at the “St. Lazar” Cemetery, Chişinău (the photo of Mariana Şlapac).

Tiraspol (1953–1954) and the 220-bed hospital in Ctriuleni (1954–1955).

For her successes in the field of architecture and construction, R. Spirer was awarded the Diploma of the Presidium of the Soviet of Ministers of the MSSR of October 25, 1949, the Honorary Diploma of the Council of National Economy of the MSSR (*Sovnarkhoz*) of August 10, 1958, and the Honorary Diploma of the “Moldgiprostroï” Institute of March 8, 1964 [21].

The architect retired from the “Moldgiprostroï” Institute in November 1971. Rozalia Spirer passed away on March 30, 1990, being buried in the 142nd quarter of the “Sf. Lazar” Cemetery in Chişinău, not far from the church (Fig. 11). On the vertical slab of the funerary monument one can read the inscription (in Russian): “Architect Spirer Roza Ludvigovna 26/IV 1900 – 30/III 1990”. However, the date of birth according to the documents is April 16, 1900. The photo is missing on her monument.

It is worth noting that the name of this personality has a special place in the culture of our country. That is why we propose to install a commemorative plaque in honor of the architect on a representative building designed by Etti-Roza (Rozalia) Spirer.

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