

Urban features specific to Iasi city in 17th and 18th centuries

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Summary

In a general glance on the urban evolution of Iasi, in 17th and 18th centuries, we could notice that some specific features of Iasi were resulted from its belonging to the political, economical, cultural and spiritual area of South-East Europe, but mainly from its genesis conditioning, from its development and its way of managing.

Keywords: urban history, specific urban features, urban development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Iasi can be placed among the spontaneous type of urban settlements, having forms and partial irregular street texture, settlements that organically are suited to the relief and climate conditions, their general aspect being often diffuse just by the lack of rigor of the general composition and of placing major silhouettes in urban space [1]. In forming and evolution of the Iasi city, concurred a series of specific filter-factor such as: adjustment to existing situation, site, climate, local materials-natural resources, functional features-deviations of the theme of in force urban and architectural models, execution features of the built frame, financial possibilities, financiers and community, official imposed external influences, regional external influences, potential self-regulation, time factor. Iasi was a place where specific features and deviations of the in force model theme were influenced by the contamination with urban and architectural information coming in time on different channels.

2. SPECIFIC URBAN FEATURES IN 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The belonging of Romanian Principalities to the irradiation area of Byzantine civilization was the generator for a series of features that lead to a differentiation in relation to the Western medieval cities. Without being deliberately taken over, *some features of the Byzantine city* are found in Iasi, like in many other



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Moldavian and Walachian cities [2], which can be explained doing some comparative analysis.

- The similitude of religious and state organization, as well as the relationships between political and religious power, the two fundamental institutions of the medieval state [3].
- The royal property right (the imperial property right in the case of Byzantium) on city territory; the lands can be donated to high officials and to the monasteries or may be leased, on their turn, like the reign, officials and monasteries lease them to the inhabitants in exchange of a “copyholder” or tax;
- The introduction in the Romanian Principalities, beginning with the 18th century, of some urban right elements of Byzantine origin [2].
- The fact that for a long time, the important architectural landmarks of Iasi are the royal court, monasteries and its churches, can be related to the above mentioned double nature of the power.
- Similar to the Byzantine model, the territory of Iasi borough is structured on quarters like the parish organization. In the Byzantine city, each quarter usually had a proper nucleus grouped around the parish church and comprising endowments of local interest like: the inn, the school, public bath, shops, workshops etc. In Iasi, only in some parishes of the old borough it may be felt a vague tendency of crystallization of a nucleus of local interests, like Mahalaua Boierilor, being located in the Alba parish church where Scoala Vasiliana and the Feredeul were located, created by Vasile Lupu or like the parishes of Sf. Sava or Barnovschi that had a monastic inn (or an own inn) and a school, together with the shops in the area.
- Another Byzantine feature of Iasi borough would be the lack of urban zonal evidence based on social criteria – the houses of the upper and lower nobility are presented as some alveoli in the middle of the urban texture, densely formed of small shops and the houses of the middle class. The only area with a larger number of boyar houses was located between Ciubotareasca alley or the Feredeulor alley and the Domneasca alley or the main street, the residences were grouped in the 17th century around the White-Old Metropolitan church.
- Regarding the street network, we may mention a resemblance with the Byzantine cities, related to the fact that the texture is defined mainly by



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the land configuration and the functional relations. However, here, the particularities of the city interfere because, besides these definitions, the major directions of the alley texture of Iasi evidently follow the direction of the main road network crossing the city, also taking over on certain routes the flow direction of the two rivers of Iasi – Bahlui River and Cacaia Creek. The last feature has very old roots: since the transhumance period, the roads followed the course of water flows [4]

Besides the resemblances and variations mentioned above, the filtering and adaptation of the Byzantine model to the local conditions of Iasi – mainly and of Romanian Principalities – in general, generated a series of important differences creating local specificity, among:

- Iasi presents a general typology common for the early Slavic medieval space – a bi-nuclear structure, the two major components being the proper city and the residence of the ruler; in Moldavia, Iasi and Suceava obviously present this characteristic, having the Royal Court adjacent to the city [5]
- The absence of a fortified courtyard leads to its replacement with other defensive systems, namely – fortified monasteries, strategically displayed either inside or at the outskirts of the boroughs, later gradually incorporated, the fortified monasteries placed around the borough on the Iasi hills, as well as the underground tunnel network of Iasi;
- Lacking an urban limit, created by a fortification belt, the borough extension was restricted by a legislated “border”; it is important to mention here that fact that Iasi had some limits marked by defensive works like surrounding ditches and earth walls, which traces were discovered by archeological digging – these have marked, in time, consecutively, the borders of the Old Borough, The Lower Boroughs and respectively the Upper Borough; for example, as we already mentioned before, the “bordering” of the Upper Borough was named “hindichi” and dated from the 17th century.
- The limits of the borough were frequently extended by absorbing some new built areas of the outskirts, generally, on the way of the main access routes – in the early urban stage of Iasi, these absorbed areas were composed either of ethnical nuclei or by gatherings of craftsmen grouped on various crafts, to which the reign leased lands; later, the borough extension should be made both by leasing various un-built



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areas within the “borders” or at the its edge, areas belonging to royal and monastic estates, as well as by crystallization at outskirts and then incorporating some big squares or commercial fair called “vacant land”; also, in the 18th century, the extension would be made by gradually incorporation of some rural settlements – such as the villages of Munteni, Rufeni, Tătărași, Târgușorul Nicolina also called Barnovschi and Cișmeaua of Păcurar.

- Unlike the Byzantine cities where the ethnic groups had their own quarters, in the case of Iasi, we may mention distinct ethnic nuclei only in the beginnings, when the ethnic groups receive each an area from the outskirts of the borough – while, by extending, the city slums should get a poly-ethnic structure.
- In the case of Iasi, we may notice the opposite of a frequently met situation in which the Byzantine cities, where the main streets regularly lead to the center of the city, the polarizing space of urban life in Iasi, from the very beginning, the intersection of the main roads that crossed the city, intersection that favored the development of the borough from many points of view, attracts the placing in the very vicinity of the a feudal court and then of the royal court and of the square in front it – they should become later obvious polarizing points of the urban interest.

Regarding the Central European urban space, it can be considered as an important element of relationing between spaces around it, one of its features penetrating through various ways the Romanian Principalities [6]. From the states of this space – Austria, Bohemia and Moravia, Hungary, Poland – having political, commercial, cultural relation with Moldavia, the significant manifestations of the Reformation Movement and Counter Reformation Movement, of Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque and Classicism, would directly or indirectly contaminate Moldavia and Iasi. Reaching the north of Moldavia, carrying European urban models, the German colonization played a particular role in the urban development of some borough, contributing to the spreading of the above mentioned movements.

In this respect, the situation of the Western type of settlements, is slightly different compared to that of the Romanian Principalities – mainly to Moldavia, and particularly to Iasi borough: it is about the property right on lands – with the consequences incurred, but mostly the way of urban development and structuring. In the borough of Iasi we may notice a series of aspects, differing more or less, from case to case:



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* In the case of Western settlements we may mention the existence of individual property on land, as a consequence of some royal rights conferred to the communities – in the case of Iasi, like in all Moldavia, the reign has the property right one the city territory.

* Compared to the presence of certain defensive belts of walled fortifications, limiting for the Central-European settlement territory – Iasi city has successive belts created by surrounding ditches and earth walls; in the pre-urban phase, it seems that it existed also wooden palisades, similar to many Western cities from early Middle Ages.

* The structure of the Western settlements is centered on church and civilian/commercial market – In Iasi, only in the early urban phase, the road crossing for transit and the Aulic/multi-functional market played an obvious monopolizing role, but, after the extension of the borough, although the Royal Court shall keep its magnetism, the center of gravity of the city would become the body of the old commercial hearth, e.g. the entire old area with its markets and churches.

* In the Central-European space, there is a quite clear zoning of dwelling, not only based on craft criteria, but also on social and ethnical criteria – here the situation is more different as the urban structure of Iasi, obviously, is not segregated based on these criteria.

* The development of the Central-European cities is carried out also by internal population increase, generally at the entrance gates to the courtyard, merchants/craftsmen gatherings are formed, being periodically incorporated in to the city, through a new belt of fortification – in its urban evolution stages, Iasi had the same way of development, the difference consisting only in lack of fortifications; obviously, we may notice how the city limits, by those successive “hidichi”, extended, gradually incorporating these marginal nuclei.

* The incorporation of some villages within the city is a less frequent phenomenon in the Middle Age West, because it would imply granting of some liberties – and here the situation differs because, by its extension, Iasi incorporated adjacent villages surrounding the city, beginning with the 18th century.

* The Western type of settlements usually presents a dense built mass and with continuous fronts – although denser in the area of old hearth/heart of the city or borough “carriage”, the urban texture of Iasi is generally rarefied, the most of the built fronts are discontinuous due to many construction groupings to the



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background of the yards and due to the alveoli of the boyar courts interrupting, from place to place, the row of narrow lots.

Together with other Moldavian boroughs, Iasi presents a series of general features, common to the Central-European area, such as:

* The existence of some spatial dominant factors underlining the borough hearth – these are created by the Royal Court and by some monastery/church ensembles; they were mentioned by many foreign travelers.

* The presence of some defensive architectures, places in strategic points, inside, at the outskirts or around Iasi – we are talking about the fortified monastery ensembles of Iasi (Sf. Nicolai Domnesc, Trei Ierarhi, Metropolitan Church, Sf. Vineri, Barnovschi, Sf. Sava, Bărboi, Golia, Sf. Spiridon, Galata, Balica (Frumoasa), Cetatuia, Socola and Bârnova).

* The presence of a quite orderly street texture in the area of the Old Borough;

* The formation of some squares or square ensembles, leading to important commercial streets – the square ensemble joined in the 16th century by extending of Sf. Vineri alley, composed of Royal Square, Sf. Vineri vacant land, Vămii și Chervăsăriei square, Great Borough; other square ensembles such as Golia vacant lands, Targu Fainei, Targu Nou; some squares such as Majilor vacant lands and old Olaria.

* The ranking of the urban system formed of alleys and squares does not imply a strict segregation of urban functions, generating the co-existence in the same spaces of a large number of functions and architectures cooperating and allowing multiple adaptations to the later urban frame.

There are also major differences compared to the Western Middle Age cities, regarding mainly the constructive details and architectures styles, the space and urban frame images and the general urban silhouette of Iasi.

The overall image of Western cities is very dynamic, due to the verticality of the accents of some multiple special architectural pieces that furnishes the squares or the square ensembles and that are detached from the rest of the built mass (campanilas, towers or palace, castle or cathedral spires). Their urban spaces seldom comprise a network in which the center or the centers are detaching through the functional complexity, but also by volume.

Unlike them, Iasi has impressed the travelers by its urban silhouette, looked from distance, when the multitude of its church spires gave it an aura of



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greatness. Inside the urban texture, the pleasant impressions appeared due to some distinguished architectural pieces, churches and palaces, spread in the middle of a diffuse mass of modest houses.

3. CONCLUSION

In this general glance on the urban evolution of Iasi, in 17th and 18th centuries, we could notice that some specific features of Iasi resulted from its belonging to the political, economical, cultural and spiritual area of South-East Europe, but mainly from its genesis conditioning, from its development and its way of managing.

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