

Aristocratic mansion house in 18th century and beginning of 20th century

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SUMMARY:

First available information about noble mansions in Moldova, can be found starting with XIVth century. Based on this information, historian Al. Gonta concludes that in early Middle Ages, mansions, named in that times „dom”, were complex institutions materializing military, administrative, juridical and economic purposes, organized in a similar manner with the models from Western Europe and Transilvania.

The function complexity of the noble mansion persisted in time, and was confirmed by the configuration of architectural and urban developments that have been preserved until now.

Key words: mansion houses, history of architecture, boyar life style

1. INTRODUCTION

In Neculce’s Chronicle[1] and in other historical writings references are made to the fortified mansion houses in 17th century and the beginning of 18th century. Virgil Vătășianu outlines the surprising fact of existence at the beginning of 19th century of some fortified aristocratic mansion houses, mentioning some of them that partly are still present: Stolniceni (after 1800), Pașcani (about 1807), Gugești (first decade of 19th century). „It is worth to mention that the first years of 19th century witness beside the emergence of the new style, the sporadic and anachronistic re-flourishing of fortified aristocratic mansion houses on estates, sometimes placed in a neoclassical décor, more unexpectedly next to the bulwarks and defensive towers”[2].

Virgil Vătășianu also makes clear this quite new situation for the modern epoch. „Among the causes which have lead to a revival of fortified mansion houses, we have to take into account the frequent wars between Russians, Turks and Austrians that affected Moldavia, the peasant movements, the raids of outlaw groups, the general insecurity of the times”[2].



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In the enclosures studied in Iasi County area, there are preserved, more or less ruined, the wall enclosed mansions of Ceplenița, Deleni and Maxut. Both at Deleni and at Maxut the mansions are presently located close to the enclosure wall sides. At the mansion house of Deleni, the house is fully integrated in the enclosure, the eastern façade being on the wall line, oriented towards the park area on the slope. At Maxut, the northern façade is on the wall line, and the building is erected outside the enclosure, surrounded by the other three sides by the mansion's park. The difference of location of the house in relation to the enclosure is determined by functional needs of different epochs. In the first case, the defense enclosure is preserved of 17th and 18th century, and in the second case, the walls divide the reception yard, bordered by additional buildings, by the estate park. At Ceplenița, there are still preserved the ruined walls of the northern side of the enclosure and entrance gate, which, similar to the Maxut and Deleni mansions, is a construction dating from 19th century. At the remaining studied enclosures, traces of fortifications are not preserved, if they existed, and we did not find any information in this respect.

In spite of the „insecurity of the times” or maybe because of this, most of the Moldavian boyars preferred the countryside life.

In this respect, Sir Robert Wilkinson, consul of England, wrote down in 1812: „« [...] Similar to those of Wallachia, the Moldavian boyars are the real big landlords: but they are making more efforts and they spare no time to take care of their estates, which is their main source of wealth. [...]»”[3]

„D’Hauterive [French diplomat at the end of 18th century] on his turn remarked this parallel, stating that the Moldavian boyars are generally richer and more industrious than those of Wallachia that they enjoy countryside life, preferring to live an easy and patriarchal life like absolute owners of villages, instead of living a servant life at the princely court.”[3]

Eugène Poujade, the former consul of France in Bucharest, married with the daughter of the ban C. Ghica, edited after his stay a book with precious memoirs, where he talks also about the way of living of Moldavian boyars: „He likes the boyars, living in the countryside, gathering an income four times higher than the Wallachians: there is in them «something proud and feudal», so that the prince is only primus inter pares. They are not eager to live at the court. Towards the foreigners, they have neither empressement, nor obséquiosité [...]”[4]

We could not accurately find out how it looked in this period a boyar mansion house in Moldavia, because we couldn't find plans or other graphic images of such arrangements and any information about archeological investigations. The site research can not provide sufficient data, because the mansion houses preserved in Iasi area are those that remained functional until the moment of nationalization in



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1949, even though they were built in the 18th century, some of them maybe earlier, were subjected to changes in time.

Based on the written information about boyar enclosures of the surveyed period (18th century – beginning of 20th century) and based on site research, we delimited two categories of boyar mansion houses differentiating by the way of construction characteristic to the epoch in which they were erected:

First category includes archaic-medieval type mansion houses that existed in 18th century and the first half of 19th century;

Second type contains the Modern type mansion houses that are erected beginning with the second half of 19th century, more precisely since the Organic Statute period, until the beginning of 20th century.

2. THE BOYAR MANSION HOUSE IN 18TH CENTURY AND FIRST HALF OF 19TH CENTURY. STRUCTURE OF BOYAR MANSION HOUSE

The only information about the structure of a boyar mansion house in Moldavia in 18th century we found in written works.

„The countryside mansions [in 18th century] were usually located in the center of a rectangular enclosure, on which sides the outbuildings were placed. In close vicinity, or in a smaller adjoining enclosure, the court church was located.”[2]

Radu Rosetti describes, based on information received from his grandmother and from childhood memories, “the old court” of Bohotin, the one built in 18th century by the “ban’s wife Maria Roset”: “The yard was surrounded by a boulder wall pretty high, with bulwarks [...]. Along the wall, there were and still are, but increased and enlarged, the outhouses. Then, like today, the kitchen was located near the wall, so that, in any weather, the dishes before reaching the masters’ table had to cross the entire mansion court.”[5]

Also from the memories volume of Radu Rosetti, we have information about another fortified mansion house of the beginning of 18th century, “in the second reign of Neculai Mavrocordat”[1711-1725].

„The High Steward Ștefan Ruset, son of Manolache, lived at the Bacău gates, in the mansion house of Mărgineni that, at the time, was surrounded by a strong wall.” (R. Rosetti Memories pg. 27)

This type of structure is similar to the one of Wallachian mansion houses of 18th century, mansion houses about which there is a richer documentary material.



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„The taking over and the using of land unevenness in order to provide a more efficient defense often lead to carrying out some irregular shaped enclosures observed in the plan, contours on which are placed constructions forming the mansion house complex. [...] the constructions forming the court – the house, the servant dwellings, the kitchen, various other utility buildings – are arranged on the enclosure wall contour, oriented to the interior space that it bounds”.[6]

There is a drawing of the Brâncoveni mansion house of 18th century illustrating this structure.[6]

For both Romanian Principalities, certain resemblances can be set between the construction way of 18th century boyar mansion houses and the monastery enclosures.

Surveying the boyar mansion houses covered in the present study in this perspective, the mansion house of Deleni is rendered within this pattern. We considered the fact that the existence of this mansion house is attested in the 18th century as well as the existence of the stonework masonry enclosure characteristic to the epoch that is conserved even now. We did not find information about the exact structure of the enclosure of the 18th century and consequently, we can not know how it was shaped, because it remained functional until the Second World War, time period in which works of adapting to the epoch necessities were made.

From the documentary material we consulted and from the surveyed cases, resulted that, in many situations, within the 18th century fortified enclosure in Moldavia, the mansion was located on the side border of the “house holding yard”, as it was preserved at Deleni. In this way, the “court” is spatially displayed in front of the boyar residence, being a functional extension of it, because in the yard, a significant part of the domestic trades were carried out. Over here the kitchen, the storerooms and the laundries were located, so that the level of the house occupied by boyars did house only their representative and living rooms. In this period, the mansion and the “court” coexisted in a close functional unit. The resemblance with the traditional peasant household is obvious. “But the Romanian dwelling should be solidarily surveyed with its entire household. We have to mention that a medium peasant household is a small whole and totally isolated farm. [...] we could object that these constructions [additional buildings] are not dwellings, but they complete dwelling. While in some Western countries, the peasants group everything under the same roof, in our country, our Romanian man, poor or rich, keeps his house only as a rest place.”[7]

In the boyar mansion house there are also barns, stables and various workshops where those at the service of the boyar were manufacturing everything needed for the household and its people.



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The enumeration of those providing services offers us an image on the activity of the court organized in such a manner that it had provided an autonomy regarding the indispensable articles production. Only the luxury objects were procured from merchants that brought them from abroad.

The „vatrași” gypsies were „[...] ordinary lads, fiddlers, cooks of all kinds, bakers, pastry cooks, coachmen, postillions, gardeners, maids, snack bar boys, ostlers at the court, at the stables, at the bakery. Others were used to various trades: ironsmiths, blacksmiths, locksmiths, carpenters, woodcutters, cartwrights, blanket makers, quilt makers, shoemakers, tailors (for servants), stonecutters, brick masons, lime burners, brick makers and many others”[5]

In an adjoining enclosure, like in Wallachia, it was located the mansion house chapel, used, at the same time, as a confession place and as a necropolis for masters.

From the description of the mansion house in that time, it resulted that there is no special concern for their aspect. According to the memoirs of Efrosina Roset, written down by her nephew, Radu Rosetti, the Bohotin estate had at Răducăneni a ”poor and sad court, without vegetation around”.

General Langeron, guest at the Moldavian residences at the end of 18th century, describes the same austere image: “The boyars erected stone houses and the mansion house is «very large but with few ornaments».”[4]

From the house verandah, the boyar was supervising the activity in the yard, a space rather utilitarian than representative. The set of poor houses where the mansion house slaves lived was far from making up a harmonious image. For this reason, Alecu Sturdza, when he was adorning the mansion house of Miclăușeni at the half of 19th century, a first measure he took was to move away these houses in the vicinity of the mansion and the church.

The organization had a mainly practical character, likely also because of troubled times, not providing the necessary peace for concerns regarding esthetical arrangement.

„The entire look is more severe, more timid, expression of the times that, with all their artistic concerns, were harder”[7]

„Around the usual boyar houses, a household life was organized with orchards, vegetable gardens, and yards for the numerous personnel, and yards for stables. I imagine such a household resembling with a patriarchal farm rather than a park. Around the house there were maybe plenty of flowers, the orchard would be neat, the alleys would be well kept, but all these do not represent an art of gardening.”[7]

Radu Rosetti lets us know that at Răducăneni, only after the times were more peaceful, they started to arrange the park of the mansion.



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The placement of the house at the side of the household enclosure, with the parlor oriented towards the orchard or towards a nice overview was compensating the owners for the lack of court esthetics.

At that time, the owner of the estate had a less peaceful life in summertime, because he was directly involved in administration and organization of the entire activity of the mansion house. "An occupation that took a great part of time of a big boyar was the everyday reception and listening to complaints, to quarrels and the needs of the household people, dictation to the copyists of intervention letters in their favor, counseling them on various or certain house interests." [7]

The estate was in fact a big property; the mansion house was its administrative-economic center and the owner, a great master ruling over all. In his work, "Life of Mihai Eminescu", G. Călinescu [8], stated: "The Balș family a lordly life, like great feudal lords, the Dumbrăveni family had property large as a principality, including outbuildings, forest and fourteen villages and hamlets, and the mansion house had a numerous personnel."

The enclosure of the boyar mansion house was made up of a set of buildings and various endowments in which all its activities were carried out. The spatial organization was arranged so that to provide the most judicial way of living according to the patterns of the time.

Among all the surveyed enclosures, the ones of Deleni, Maxut, Scheia and Țibănești villages preserve something from the look specific to 18th century. The additional buildings still existing are adjacently placed to the property limits, at some distance from the boyar house.

3. LIFE AT BOYAR MANSION HOUSE

The patriarchal living way characteristic to this epoch was described with an endearing irony by Radu Rosetti in his book of memoirs. Like the most of the Moldavian boyars, the author's grandfather, hetman Răducanu Roset, enjoyed to spend the summertime in countryside together with his family and the numerous societies of friends.

„The grandfather spent wintertime in the parent house in Iasi, on Golia street, and summertime and autumn in Bohotin [...]”. [5]

„[...] When the court was leaving Iasi for Bohotin [...], an entire camp of carriages, Brasov type coaches and large vehicles was starting from the yard” in which the boyars, children together with their teachers, servants and the “caboodle” were embarked. They did not forget the music too”. [5]



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„Rarely they were without guests” says the author, reminding the proverbial hospitality of Moldavian boyars, hospitality that provided them a numerous entourage for spending the time. “All the people were up early in the morning. The hunters, when there was hunting time, e.g. almost the whole year according to the habits of the time, left at dawn, and taking a copious lunch with them.”[5] The others stayed at home lazing and “chatting” between having coffees, preserves, hookahs and water pipes. It was enough to clap their hands and many servants were running to serve them.

„After lunch, [...] the madams, whenever the weather was fine, went out for a walk in coaches, and few of the boyars accompanied them. On return, they went to have a rest in the garden where they stayed till dark and where the boyars accompanied them.

As soon as the sun set, the playing card tables were laid down, where boyars and madams sat, and those not playing cards were chatting again. My grandfather rarely participated to a préférence, and my grandmother was playing “stoss” or “ghiardum”.

Around ten o’clock, dinner was served, not less copious than lunch, then some of them went to bed, others still chatting till late or playing cards.”[5]

4. CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious that at that time, the life at residences of the estates mostly went following the model of the Levantine wealthy class, which was observed at the end of 18th century also by Langeron, French immigrant and general in the Russian army that wrote about Moldavian boyars. „«Some of these Moldavian boyars are very rich and have some cottages in countryside similar to the Polish, where they live a pretty luxurious life, in a pleasant mix of European and Asian fashion, close to the latter [...]»”[3].

The Englishman Thomas Thorton, merchant, former consul in Odessa, travelled in Turkish provinces in the last years of 18th century, noticing personally observed aspects: „About boyars he talks without sympathy, but admits that he was welcomed in their countryside houses.”[4]

Radu Rosetti concludes: „The great luxury of the countryside consisted at the time in horses, coaches and mostly the rich meals [...]”[5]. Long time intervals of for relaxation of the ladies were interrupted by the household duties [5] during which the boyars were talking about politics.[5]



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