

Iasi town and the “residential culture” in 18th century

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Summary

We may say that in Iasi, new capital of old Moldavia Land in the 17th century, the concern for culture and the cultural information flow greatly influenced the residential aspirations of many of the upper and middle social class representatives. This fact is transparent in the transformations that the 18th century brought in the structure of Iasi dwellings. The town of Iasi gradually formed, based on various ways, a proper « residential culture » transmitted and enriched from one generation to another. Being the capital of Moldavia and important trade crossroads junction, Iasi town brought together in its public spaces people of various origins, belonging to a wide world not limited only to their familiar horizons. Its streets and squares were a place of gathering and exchange of much oral and written cultural information.

Keywords: Iasi urban culture, residential culture, 18th century, cultural information.

1. INTRODUCTION

We may say that in Iasi, new capital of old Moldavia Land in the 17th century, the concern for culture and the cultural information flow greatly influenced the residential aspirations of many of the upper and middle social class representatives. This fact is transparent in the transformations that the 18th century brought in the structure of Iasi dwellings [1].

Generally, a city can be regarded as an area of manifestation of the creative spirit of its inhabitants, of their social ambition, of their desire to promotion and the need of hierarchy, consequently being a place of concentration and operation with material, spiritual and cultural values. Regarding the culture of the city, it can be regarded as a reality built on two fundamental dimensions: spatial and temporal, linked by a proper rhythm of setting up. If we refer to the city built between emotion and reason we may notice that its fundamental material element is represented by architecture, as an embodiment of a culture history and as a sign of city evolution. Culturally, the old city can be regarded as “cultural asset”, the result of a gradual and dynamic selection of the cultural, economic, political, social



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features, based on criteria like historical, architectural, urbanistic and memorial-emotional criteria.

Regarding the cultural approach, it should be appropriate to make clear **the way** the representatives of various wealthier social categories of Iasi gradually gathered a cultural outfit. Learning this knowledge, that generally influenced the urban dwelling and the peculiarities of their houses, accounts for some general features of culture [2]. Generally, the culture has the quality to be **transmittable**, e.g. not being the appanage of one individual, but of a group member and, finally, of the respective group. An important feature of culture refers also to its quality of being « **learned** » [2]. In the surveyed époque, the most available ways the culture could be assimilated seem to be **observation, hearing and interaction**, making it to bring together the members of a social category, giving them a common, transmissible experience [3].

2. IASI TOWN AND THE “RESIDENTIAL CULTURE” IN 18TH CENTURY

Iasi town, the capital of Moldavia and important trade crossroads junction, brought together in its public spaces people of various origins, belonging to a world not limited only to their familiar horizons: its streets and squares were a place of gathering and exchange of some **oral and written cultural information**.

We may say that the “orally” circulating information was not only the most used way, but also the most stimulating way of spreading the residential models, especially at the level of less culturally emancipated classes.

Deeply integrated in community life, the written or printed text underlines the cultural life of Iasi since before the 18th century. Since the 16th century, we may speak about education development and the diffusion of books in Iasi borough, the maecenate actions of Prince Lapusneanu are well-known – its court library, canticle school, Slavonian school and law study, sending the Iasi youth to study in Poland [4].

It seems that starting from the 17th century, information regarding engineering and architecture were more and more accessible, due to its printing and circulation throughout Europe. The European Baroque and Renaissance styles came also by some « Italian printed materials ». These architecture books and handbooks [5] reached in various ways also by the cultural striving nobility of Moldavia, e.g. of Iasi, stimulating their aspiration and longing for a new way of life, and also of dwelling. Many of the old and new nobility representatives of Iasi were great scholars, many of the Moldavian princes were surrounded by the most selected scholars of the age.



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Moreover, touched by the culture significance, by its nobleness but also by its efficiency, some princes brilliantly handled the pen and ink – such as Vasile Lupu and Dimitrie Cantemir [6] – they founded schools, they printed and gathered printed volumes, making up monastery collection or libraries even in their houses [1], enhancing the general process of cultural information transmission and facilitating the flow of some residential models.

Information regarding residential models circulated also due to the transmission of traveling records in neighboring countries of influence, countries with which Moldavia had political and economical relationships and cultural exchanges – Walachia, Transylvania, Poland, Bohemia and Moravia, Russia – sometimes even further, in Western Europe [1].

The spirit transmitted by family education and also the studies carried out in both Western and Eastern schools contributed to the opening of young noblemen mind of Moldavia, both to Eastern culture and Western culture: the Movilesti family, among them Barnovschi, the important Moldavian scholars like Grigore Ureche, Miron and Neculai Costin – have studied in Poland; Moscow and Kiev educated Varlaam, the Metropolitan Bishop of Moldavia, and Petru Movila, the Metropolitan Bishop of Kiev; the Cantacuzins have studied in Italy; the commander Nicolae Milescu studied both in Istanbul and in Italy; Dimitrie Cantemir and Ghiculesti family have completed their studies at the Great School of Constantinople. They spread the fame of Moldavian culture beyond its borders. Dimitrie Cantemir relates his name to residential architecture by an original detail – the palace he built in Constantinople. It seems that this Moldavian prince significantly contributed, due to its architectural knowledge, to the design of this palace [7].

An important element connected to the evolution of residential architecture of that time, was also the strengthening of the culture unity of the three Romanian provinces, in spite of some short political disputed and of taste differences and cultural options. Important cultural personalities run their activities in all three provinces, became friends and contributed to the cultural information flow: the Moldavian Milescu and the Transylvanian Teodor Corbea, who was also linked with Walachia, Miron Costin and Constantin Cantacuzino traveling in all three Romanian provinces or the friendship between Walachian Udriste Nasturel and the Moldavian metropolitan bishops Varlaam and Petru Movila.

Another way of transmitting this information in the aristocratic world, sometimes also in the middle classes, was also by the builders working both for several princes and for some boyars, sharing their experience and influencing sometimes the residential “vision” of the latter [8].

In this respect, we may say that the Iasi city gradually formed its own « residential culture » by these means, transmitted and enriched from one generation to another.



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Another important cultural feature, closely related to the residential transformations of the 18th century, is connected to a certain feature of culture, e.g. to be **symbolic**. The symbolic feature conferred to the dwelling, closely related to emotional side, opposed to the practical and purely functional attitude, is of primary importance [3]. It contributes to individual adapting to various surrounding environments and conferring them a feeling of emotional security, confidence, familiarity and continuity in their usual living, but also gives birth to the desire of experiencing new ways of life. Since the 17th century, the nobility of Moldavia's capital gradually begins to symbolically express their social success, their richness and their leadership in society, by external signs, from the daily wear to civil and ecclesiastic buildings [1]. Generally, the architecture significance, its role it begins to play in expressing social and economic power of old and new nobility, stimulates the evolution of residential architecture.

In the city of Iasi, the culture influence is obvious from the aulic level to that of great scholar boyars, to the level of small clergy, small boyars, official employees and craftsmen.

The middle class representatives, the low nobility and the wealthy merchants manifest a strong desire to intellectual emancipation – some of their sons studied in schools of Iasi, Suceava, Siret or Baia, and others were sent even at the universities where these schools were sending their graduates – Vienna, Prague, Krakow and Lvov [8]. Many of the educated youth are among those ascending the ranks, some of them became part of the new nobility and others even climbing to the princely throne (such as Constantin Cantemir, father of Dimitrie Cantemir). The large population of the borough – composed of merchants and craftsmen of a medium economic level – generally, has the necessary education for practicing a craft, fact that permits the access to cultural information [1].

The intellectual emulation, present in the families of some middle class representatives, is the one that permitted the circulation of aristocratic models at their level, explaining also their capacity to adapt and transform these models. Many examples of Iasi houses, belonging to the middle class, prove this fact by variations of their way of internal arrangement.

As for the rural model, the city obviously represents the results of some successive accumulations. Each city permanently has a collector of demographical sources from the rural area. Always, the city was receiving population belonging to the traditional/popular oral culture perpetuating this model.

Taxes imposed by the princes have impoverished the large part of the population; the people could not remake or maintain their old houses, or built small houses, with reduced means, looking poorly. In the areas of the poor and gypsies, shanties and half-shanties are still used. The lowest class still grasps by its representatives to surpass their living level. This fact is obvious by this class tendency to be taken



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into account, to group itself in an organized form – thus appearing “starostia miseilor” (in Romanian) the guild of the poorest stratum, having also a leader.

We may say that the grasping force certainly is felt also at this lowest living level, many of these poorest people leaving their shanties for half-shanties, and then for modest houses built above ground, made of clay and wood.

Information circulation within the middle class and within the lowest class was mainly through oral form, by observing and hearing, many of their grasps were transmitted by the interaction of various representatives of these classes in the hustle of the public spaces of Iasi.

3. CONCLUSION

In this respect, we may say that the town of Iasi gradually formed, based on various ways, a proper « **residential culture** » transmitted and enriched from one generation to another.

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