

General aspects of dwelling evolution in 18th century Iasi town

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Summary

During the 18th century, the Iasi nobility invests more and more capital in real estates. The century, called Phanariote, brings in the foreground a new element: the individual affective investment made by each owner in its house. This fact confers to the house also a symbolic character. Consequently, the dwelling becomes a more and more personalized space. The Iasi dwelling characteristics in the 18th century reflect the requirements of a new generation of inhabitants. The indoor and outdoor aspects of some residential edifices of Iasi prove the fact that many owners place their dwelling on the top of their personal value hierarchy. The value attached to the residential space, implies more and more cultural and material aspects. The dimension of the dwelling space constitutes a more important factor, in this century than the previous ones, in determining the residential satisfaction degree. The close relation between the need of space, residential satisfaction and financial power is emphasized by the amplified dimensions and complex planimetric compositions.

Keywords: urban history, dwelling evolution, 18th century.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aspirations manage to take Iasi people out of known and familiar residential patterns, encouraging them to experience new ways of dwelling. Let's not forget that, at the same time, the aspirations are also the drive of all the fast rises on social hierarchy, frequently encountered in the history of Iasi and Moldavia.

In 15th and 16th century « the dwelling house ... was similar to a friar house » because there were many « hard times » and only « short moments of rest between two wars... » [2]. During the transition period from 16th century to 17th century, the dwelling house also has « an archaic look » although „the style is a bit freer ... but the defensive character of the dwelling is still present... the aspect is more austere, more bashful, expression of sturdier times, with all their artistic concerns » [2]. However, in the 17th century the war turmoil was not so frequent, offering more often the necessary rest of a peaceful dwelling. This situation triggers the aspirations and encourages the change of living way. Together with these elements,



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in the case of Iasi, we should mention also the fact that the princely and noblemen interest for a higher level dwelling was stimulated by the emergence, at the end of 16th century, of the great royal palace of Galata of Petru Schiopul. Not accidentally, during this time, two of the noblemen stone houses of Iasi belong to a rich high official very influent in this period, Nestor Ureche, great personality of Moldavia, the father of the Grigore Ureche chronicler.

In a whole historical retrospection, from Stefan Voda to Vasile Lupu, the influence of princely aspirations can be felt on the Moldavian building frame: « Stephen the Great erects churches and monasteries in order to complete his state action and to place the princely sign on the faith's foundations...aiming to be the head of the Christianity threatening by Islam », while Vasile Lupu « with hands full of rubies and emeralds, covered with heavy brocades and with his mind full of royal thoughts » has « the concern of beauty for beauty and of art as an end target » [3].

As we mentioned above, the function of representation of residential aulic architecture started to captivate the interest of Moldavian rulers since the end of the 16th century by Petru Schiopul, but Vasile Lupu distinguishes himself in a special way, exceeding all the previous attempts. The ambitions, the vast culture and fabulous fortune, supported him in an indefatigable construction activity, its foundations imposed both by their stylistic genuineness and also by the richness of ornaments. The modernization and extension of the Iasi royal court represent the most significant episode of Iasi residential architecture history in the 17th century, reflecting a certain transformation of the mentalities of the époque. The fact that in the 17th century, Moldavia goes on new ways in the field of architectural plastic searches, is proved not only by the differences between the two famous churches founded by Vasile Lupu in Iasi, but also that they are different compared to other constructions of the same century. The architecture, totally new compared to the previous one, oscillates at Three Hierarchs Church between the features of the Moldavian traditional architecture, the reminiscences of the Gothic-Renaissance Western art elements and the Turkish-Persian Oriental influences, while at Golia a new style specific to the contemporary époque, the Baroque, is imposed. [4].

It is obvious the fact that the city of Iasi, which became the capital city of Moldavia under Vasile Lupu's rule, the interest for a quality residential architecture is mainly under the influence of its personality.

Some aristocratic edifices influence this evolution in the 17th century in Moldavia: Cantacuzino Mansion of Serbesti, the Bals-Rosetti Mansion of Pribesti, Bals Palace from the Golia Lane of Iasi.

On this background, the 18th century comes with a new image, contrasting to the one of the previous centuries: "the white houses, with ornaments...the rooms wisely displaced...easier to live in than the most modern houses...Cubical and often heavy...the relation between solids and hollows is in favor of the solids...The



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door's windows of the ground floor are opened on a terraces that continues through a garden with roses and artesian fountains...A portal for cab arriving...a large hall and monumental stairs...the sweet laziness of the large rooms following each other" [5].

How these new inside and outside details were made?

2. DWELLING EVOLUTION IN 18TH CENTURY IASI TOWN

During the 18th century, the Iasi nobility invests more and more capital in real estates. The century, called Phanariote, brings in the foreground a new element: the individual affective investment made by each owner in its house. This fact confers to the house also a symbolic character. Consequently, the dwelling becomes a more and more personalized space. The big Iasi noble families, running from the urban hearth agglomeration, bought in the previous century lands in the Higher Borough and beyond it. Now, they are building here houses and palaces illustrating the new tastes, needs and aspirations.

Beginning with the 18th century, the indoor and outdoor aspects of some residential edifices of Iasi prove the fact that many owners place their dwelling on the top of their personal value hierarchy. The value attached to the residential space, implies more and more cultural and material aspects. The dimension of the dwelling space constitutes a more important factor, in this century than the previous ones, in determining the residential satisfaction degree. The close relation between the need of space, residential satisfaction and financial power is emphasized by the amplified dimensions and complex planimetric compositions.

The Iasi dwelling characteristics in the 18th century reflect the requirements of a new generation of inhabitants, belonging both to upper class and middle class. Significant optional differences appear between various owner group that modify consequently the external and internal aspect of their houses [1]. The differences are determined mainly by the economical state. The aristocracy is detached from the rest of the population by its aspirations, by the need of representativeness regarding the house, concretized either by the transforming the old houses or by erecting large palaces with many indoor spaces destined to various intimate or public activities.

During the urban development stages of the city, the Iasi houses gradually evolved from the point of view of indoor organization, construction structure, interior and exterior aspect.



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The houses of the first half of the 18th century continue the residential models crystallized in the 17th century [1]:

- Houses with simple ground floor, a bit higher in relation with the ground level;
- Houses with administrative ground floor and the upper floor for living.

At one story houses, the ground floor and the underground floors are still destined for administration functions. The ground floor was of a less height than the first floor; the dwelling was located at the first level, the access to it was carried out by an external staircase sheltered on a picturesque belfry. Both types still had a cellar with one or two levels, provided with access to the network of urban defensive tunnels under the medieval area of the city. The cellar occupied either the entire surface or a great part of the underground space. We should mention here the fact that, during the 18th century, an involution of the cellar program takes place, the cellars being reduced to a third or even to a quarter of the space under the house. At the end of the century, they completely disappear in some of the new edifices.

Compared to the 17th century, the aristocratic and high nobility dwelling of Iasi erected in the first half of the 18th century are more spacious and made of durable materials [1], stone and bricks. The difference is felt also in the size of the dimensions, in the variety of spatial organizations and in the appetite for new decorations. Many of the details of these houses of Iasi remind the influence of renaissance and baroque that crossed the Moldavian space in previous centuries, but prove also the gradual infusion of European classicism came either by north through Transylvania and Poland or by the presence of Russians and Austrians during the four wars between 1716-1812, either through the Phanariot connection contaminated by classicism.

During the 18th century, especially the aristocratic residential architecture manages to gain coherence by the logics of designing the indoor space bearing the obvious impression of the application of planimetric and volumetric order regulations, thinking type that will make a long walk of life also in the 19th century.

The gradual transformation of the internal spatial structure can be noticed: from the arrangement of some rooms along symmetry axis, to a new composition, much more complex, characterized by the arrangement of a higher number of rooms. The preference for the symmetrical arrangement type of rooms is noticed on both sides of an ordering median space, which from a 4 m width reaches till about 8-10 m, becoming a large parlor. The amplified planimetric proportions are also volumetrically sensed. The facades lose their play of irregular gaps, picturesquely specific to previous centuries where the gaps were grouped depending on the varied distribution of the rooms according to needs. The façade plastics are marked now by the wide application of order and symmetry principles. The house representativeness, a necessity of the new times, is felt mostly by the personal



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particularizing of the details, by plastics and by the materials of internal and external facing decorations.

Especially from the second half of the 18th century, the needs of a new high life of Iasi resulted in the freeing of the ground floor from the administrative spaces that were sheltered till then [1]. The ground floor is transformed, becomes habitable, gains also in height, in order to shelter the representation and reception activities, luxurious meetings and parties. The first floor remains reserved, generally, to the private family life, segregated in its turn in parlors and spaces specially designed for various members of the family. The staircase is built inside and the belfry is transformed into a protection porch of the entrance or in a vault where the cabs were stationed. At the same time with these transformations, many Iasi residences of the high and low nobility still keep the access to the first floor like in the preceding époques, even till the first half of the 19th century [1]. In these cases, the access is still carried out by an external staircase protected by the wide eave of the high roof or by the belfry usually erected above the cellar's opening. Thus, the belfry remains so for many years, the piece of reception still present in the house arrangement.

Radu Rosetti remembers his old Iasi house of the 18th century, the one on Golia lane (street), inherited by his grandfather, Raducanu Roset from his father Lascarache Ruset [6]. The writer describes the aspect of the house and of the yard in 1806, when the house still had the wooden veranda that sheltered the external staircase and in the back, the large garden still existed: "My grandfather spent the winter time in parental house of Iasi, on Golia street – had in front a quite wide veranda, with wood pillars, many large rooms: my grandmother had enough room for reception" [6].

In the 18th century also, important changes appear related to the arrangement of the houses towards the street. Trying to expose their beauty, the houses are gradually approaching the lane, renouncing to the intimacy of courtyards and finally becoming important point of interests from the lane front. The last quarter of the 18th century marks significant transformations of edifices by classicistic details of the facade, as well as gables, framings and varied decorated cornices, various jutties or external outings of the house, the walled-up belfries or cab vaults, as well as the eave that became narrower. The simple solutions, with square or rectangular plane, are renounced either for one or more timid outings of small dimensions or for more ample "prominences" or "pulling", remind the Cantacuzino house of Pascani or the mansion of Trifesti, [7]. „Prominences" of Iasi whose existence are successfully extended to the end of the 19th century, sometimes have rectangular shapes in plane, sometimes have a round or polygonal shape [8].

Some Iasi noble initiatives are individualized by the amplitude of organizations and arrangements, both internal and external, destined, on one hand to "peace and



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pastime”, and on the other hand to high life [9]. The new way of living of the nobility in the 18th century, decisively favoring the adoption of the new classicist trend and transformation of Iasi houses, is commented in various documents. The writer Radu Rosetti mentions that the influence of Russian officers in Iasi, started in 1739. He mentions the way of “taking roots” in Iasi of a high life with receptions, visits and numerous balls with western dances. “The high nobility adopted then, as much as possible, the usual way and forms of living of the high society of Western states, a change partly prepared by immigrants of France, who took refuge in our country following the French revolution in the position of teachers, governesses, hairdressers and cooks. The Russian armies contributed also to this evolution of the nobility life”[10].

In 1788, Prince Charles Joseph de Ligne, a former commander of Austrian and Russian armies, is impressed by the Iasi upper class life and, especially, by the balls whose fashion was spreading. These balls are described by the most Russian and Austrian officers, as well as by other travelers, hosted in Iasi noble houses during the second half of the 18th century [11]. To the end of the century, doctor Andreas Wolf notices the pomp of nobility life of Iasi, mainly the huge expenses they were made for receiving in their houses of at least 50 persons: “the noblemen were spending their fortune on luxury, buying cabs, clothes, horses, jewels, table sets for 20-50 persons of porcelain, with Danzig majolica” [12].

Some descriptions attest that Iasi noblemen had either luxurious personal spaces (personalized depending on various preoccupations of the family members that now were spending more time at home compared to the previous century) or an increasing number of parlors for receptions and official banquets. Andreas Wolf in 1780 and Prince Charles de Ligne in 1788 narrate about the great palace Cantacuzino-Pascanu as being “one of the most brilliant and rich palace with large rooms that were opened in a large room, full of expensive furniture, golden chandeliers and sofas covered with fabrics and shawls woven with golden silver threads” [12].

Gradually, the transformations of the noble houses are assimilated by the low nobility and by the ascending urban patriciate, then being taken over as constructive information also by the middle social strata. More and more brickwork dwellings emerge of some middle social categories, ascending to the social-economical hierarchical scale: the civil and military servants of the state, priests, craftsmen and merchants. G. M. Cantacuzino describes images of the Moldavian boroughs, similar to Iasi, where the prevalent residential areas, populated by low nobility or by townsmen showed in the 18th century “many small houses with porches in colonnades, where quiet people were living surrounded by flowers ... each of them with their small particularities with their specific originality...” [13].



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The veranda is a permanent element of the house architecture in 18th century. When it will be replaced by the noble houses with porches or cab vaults, it shall continue its career mainly in the area of common townsmen till the middle of the 20th century. « Always, our houses had and still have verandas, either rustic or aristocratic. In other words, always, houses for noblemen were built by peasants, where the rustic elements were developed without losing their character. » [14]. He explains what the above mentioned porches with colonnades are: the traditional veranda supported gradual classicized transformations, obvious mainly to the Iasi townsmen houses.

G. M. Cantacuzino has some descriptions of these classical details of Moldavian old houses, details having obvious similarities with some Iasi houses kept intact in the 18th century [15]. In this way, a mansion near Husi «was framed in the landscape and in the village with all the other farmsteads and with the church», although by its aspect of a house that « belongs to the vast cycle of Moldavian dwellings, which tend to disappear and that were edified around the end of the 18th century. Under the large and rather low hat of a house lacking any ornamentation, there are some cool and large, varnished rooms...A light colonnade with an elegant veranda, where four stairs and a solid ramp descending to the garden, are the only title of nobility ». He marks «the diligence this house was made with, with classical reminiscences of the colonnades and of the small gable of the veranda... I admire the preoccupations to frame the windows by a slight retreated rectangular niche, the side wall divided in panels forming an agreeable parallelism and the massiveness of the roof corrected by a slightly noticeable curvature. » [16].

As for the great mass of poor Iasi population, they live in small houses, having an aspect of poor provisional state. The impressions of the travelers in the second half of the 18th century point out the contrast between aristocratic houses and the houses with poor, modest aspect of Iasi. The ambassador James Porter and the abbot R. G. Boscovich, notice in 1761 the emergence « here and there » among the « shabby houses » of some « large and nice houses of the nobility » [17]. Resmi Ahmed-Efendi notices in 1763 than in « the center of Iasi, occupied by the Royal Palace » there is « a number of stone houses », but, at the outskirts of the city there are « wooden rustic houses, covered with straws »

In the area where the paupers and gypsies live, the existence of earth huts and semi-earth huts are perpetuated from the previous centuries. Lord Baltimore describes also in 1763 these earth huts: « Most of the houses are earth huts – with one room, flattened to the ground and empty; there are similarities with the ones in the villages » [17].



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3. CONCLUSIONS

All these residential transformations of the 18th century announce the “modernizations” of the 19th century, after which few of the Iasi old buildings should keep something of the previous époque “clothes”. Because of this, many of the edifices considered nowadays as to belong to the 19th century are, in fact, houses of the 18th century, later modernized by introducing neoclassical forms to windows, by external carvings of the baroque columns, by application of decorative plastering, by the addition of balconies with wooden, masonry or cast iron balusters....All houses of Iasi are indissoluble connected to the historical past of the city.

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