

# THE GARDEN IN THE EVOLUTION OF MOLDAVIAN MANORS

## GRĂDINA ÎN EVOLUȚIA CURȚII BOIEREȘTI DIN ZONA MOLDOVEI

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**Abstract:** *The challenging theme of Moldavian manor houses is paradoxically almost untouched in the research of Romanian architectural history. In remote places, on forgotten roads, in villages less connected with the advantages of the civilized world and almost hidden, one can find most of the Moldavian manor houses. The beauty of the landscape they inhabit contrasts in most cases to the stark image of the actual run-down or perished manor houses. Between these relics, often fated to extinction due to systematic demolition or facing devastating unseasonable interventions and ignorance, one can find exceptions of very high value, which include both the building and the exterior arrangements – the estate parks. Along with the architecture style, these parks prove the cultural synchronicity of the Moldavian aristocrats with the European civilization.*

**Keywords:** *Moldova manor houses, architectural heritage, landscape design*

**Rezumat:** *Subiectul de real interes al curților boierești de pe teritoriul Moldovei a rămas în mod paradoxal aproape neatins în cercetarea istoriei arhitecturii românești. Majoritatea reședințelor boierești din Moldova se găsesc în locuri retrase, pe drumuri uitate, ascunse în sate care par rupte de civilizația contemporană. Pitorescul peisajelor naturale înconjurătoare apare adesea în contrast cu imaginea dezolantă a conacelor devastate sau complet dispărute. Multe din aceste vestigii au fost condamnate la dispariție prin demantelare efectivă sau prin intervenții devastatoare prin prost gust și ignoranță. Există însă și fericite excepții în care se păstrează atât edificiul istoric, cât și fragmente de amenajări exterioare, și anume din parcurile marilor domenii. Pe lângă stilul arhitectural al clădirilor, acestea reprezintă o dovadă a sincronismului cultural al boierilor din Moldova cu civilizația europeană a epocii.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *conace boierești moldovenești, patrimoniu arhitectural, design peisager*

### INTRODUCTION

Between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the Moldavian territory there were built many boyar dwellings with manors, additional buildings and gardens, ensembles of historical, architectural and landscape design significance. Due to the political changes of the communist period and the poor preoccupation for the heritage which followed, many of these buildings were inadequately changed, deserted or even destroyed. The danger of the complete loss of this cultural heritage imposes some studies that would

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analyse the value of such ensembles and prove the importance of their preservation.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study is based on the sketches left from different periods and the written documents (travel notes made by European personalities, writings by Romanian authors, history and genealogy works, architectural history works, archive documents, monographs) on field research of 23 boyar manors in Moldavia from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study highlights two categories of boyar manors, differentiated by the specific of their layout, according to the building period.

**A. Archaic-medieval manors**, built between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century;

**B. Modern-type manors**, which were built starting from the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely during the regulation period, until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Archaic manors

The descriptions made for the buildings from that period show that the aesthetic aspect was of no particular concern. According to Efrolina Rosetti's memoirs, written by her grandson, Radu Rosetti, the Bohotin estate, in Raducaneni had a "poor and sad yard, with no plants around it".

General Langeron, a guest in the Moldavian manors at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century describes the same austere image: „The boyars made stone houses and the yard «is very large, but little adorned».” (Iorga, 1981)

The organisation was mainly of a practical character, probably due to the insecure times which did not leave the necessary free time to take care of the aesthetic part.

“The aspect on the whole is rather severe, less daring, an expression of the times which in spite of all their artistic preoccupations were rather tough” (Cantacuzino, 1977)

“The usual boyar dwellings organised a working environment with vegetable gardens, fruit trees, buildings for the numerous staff, yards and stables. I can imagine such a dwelling looking more like a patriarchal farm rather than a park. Maybe the house was surrounded by flowers, the orchard must have been looked after, the walking paths cleaned, but all these do not imply the art of gardening.” (Cantacuzino, 1977)

Radu Rosetti remembers that the park from the Raducaneni manor was arranged only after the times had settled down.

Having placed the house on the outskirts of the whole estate, the living room having a view on the orchard compensated the owners for the lack of an aesthetic form of the garden.

### **Modern-type manors**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the boyar estates went through a series of changes as a result of the modernisation taking place on the whole of the Moldavian society as it had opened up to the west European civilization. An important change in the precinct from this period is the design of gardens and parks inside the estates.

The first information about the parks designed in the Moldavian boyar estates date from the 18th century when the princes coming from Constantinople brought along the fashion of the gardens, so precious for the rich dwellings in the Ottoman Empire.

Prince de Ligne said about the gardens from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: „«ç'étaient de beaux jardins romantiques», while G. M. Cantacuzino, who quoted him, added: ”probably the gardens were designed following the eastern model, with abundant vegetation, pavilions lost at the back of the paths, ponds with heavy boats floating. Maybe a ceramic statue was coming out of the bushes, a wooden bridge lay above running water and marble vases brought from Italy added a western hue to our civilization of kaftans and Turkish pipes.” (Cantacuzino, 1977)

Nevertheless, the boyar gardens from Moldavia were mostly similar to those from the 18th century in Bohotin, ”poor and sad, with no green parts around it”. When the second wife of hetman Răducanu Roset, ”a young lady from Tsarigrad”, „[...] raised in Fanar, namely one of the most refined places in the world”, was in charge she promised that she would not live there unless ”a garden had been planted there to cheer up the view” (Cantacuzino, 1977).

Apart from this fashion from Tsarigrad, practiced by the people who had been raised there, towards the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the design and layout of gardens and parks after the western model became a habit. Once the *architecton* change the face of the manors, the boyars would also bring gardeners from the Austrian Empire to look after the parks.

„Digging beautiful gardens [...] dates from the regulation period, it was the work of a few talented German gardeners who replaced the orchards and meadows that used to surround the boyar yards” (Cantacuzino, 1977).

„There was hired a German gardener who planned and dug and planted around the yard, towards the east, a small but too beautiful garden *à la française*, including a nice fountain with running water. This garden seemed very soon much too small for grandmother. After 1830, when the surroundings got quieter, the western wall was brought down and there were laid the bases for an English garden and there was built a large flower house to host a great number of trees and other plants brought by grandmother from abroad.” (Cantacuzino, 1977).

The parks from Răducăneni left only a drawing (Ion, 2007) of the garden in front of the manor which was built at the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Lascarache Rosetti, son of hetman Răducănu Roset, and today some trees from the old plantation are still present.

The first information from Miclăușeni regarding the layout of the park is related to the works done by Dimitrie Sturdza, who brought "famous gardeners from Austria" especially to look after the park at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ion, 2007).

His son, Alexandru Sturdza Miclăușanul (1803-1845) arranged a park in the English style at Miclăușeni, „with a lake, an island and a tower surrounded by a wall” (Ion, 2007) and today there can still be seen a small part of it from the entrance towards the motorway. He also „widened the flower alleys, planted ornamental trees and by dismantling the peasant houses around the manor and the church, created the frame of a charming park” (Merișca, 1996).

Once the gothic palace was built, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, George Sturdza also rearranged the park which had reached the impressive area of 30 hectares. A photograph without a date (Ion, 2007), before the second world war catches the image of the garden in front of the main entrance, with palm trees and other exotic plants, proving once again the trend favouring this kind of vegetation during that time.

The estate from Ruginoasa was also surrounded by a huge park of 27 hectares. Going by the fashion, the Sturdza family hired a German gardener called Mehler who led the works of rearranging the park, designed wide paths and brought exotic plants, like the ones from Miclăușeni and Răducăneni. The park was devastated after the war and all the trees were cut. The present design was conceived during the restoration works from 1978.

There are visible signs from the manors in Deleni, Popești (fig.1), Maxut (fig. 2), Miroslava and Țibănești proving the layout of the former parks. There are kept some ruins of the basins and fountains, traces of the old paths that followed a geometric pattern which can be noticed on the ground. Many of the gardens under study have kept even today part of the tree vegetation, an element which gives the particularity of the place, making it visible from a great distance, due to the presence of decorative trees such as fir trees, pine trees, chestnuts and linden trees.

There are manors which lack any trace of vegetation whatsoever, although it had been sketched on the survey plans from 1975, such as Budești, Cornești, Griești, Hărpășești and Scheia. The poet Dimitrie Anghel makes a note about the garden from Cornești, which inspired many of his poems: "I chose the world of the flowers since it was in their world that I had spent my childhood. I could remember the wonderful garden where I stayed, the sound of the running water, the rustle of the trees, that waste of petals that were endlessly spread by the wind." (Anghel, 1998).



**Fig. 1** - Popesti Manor house Plan of the park and detail of former water fountain



**Fig. 2** - Maxut Manor House – image of the actual park

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting especially from the regulation period, the aspect of the precincts was changed, the aesthetic quality and the representative function of the garden became a priority. This new vision led to rigorous organization of the space. From that moment on, the widest surface was occupied by an English-style park, where the trees and bushes were mostly planted following a free-style design. It often surrounded the manor on several sides. In front of the main entrance there was usually designed a French garden, with symmetrical and geometrical beds of low vegetation, exotic flowers and bushes. The area of the workshops and warehouses was still kept in groups but on one side of the manor, as in the case of Dagăța, Hărpășești, Miclăușeni and Popești. The service area and the dwellings of the staff were organized in an additional building, built during that time, as it happened for Cozia, Dagăța, Maxut and Popești. In Cozia and Vânători, the additional building area is behind the manor, opposite the main entrance whereas in Deleni, Maxut and Scheia, the service yard was kept in front of the house, the aspect being enhanced by flower beds.

Among the estates under study, the parks from Cozia, Maxut, Miclăușeni and Miroslava are continued by small forests situated close by.

Obviously, many of these yards were drawn in medieval times, at the shade of the forests which covered the Moldavian hills at the time, but when the boyars turned from warriors into workers, the nature around the dwellings was changed

and the parks appeared as a sign of evolution from the status of camouflage to an object of aesthetic contemplation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the old boyar yards spread along the Moldavian territory is a complex and rather difficult endeavour due to the fact that the information sources are dispersed and many of the estates are in decay. The study clearly shows that there was a general concern for the design of parks of real aesthetic value on the boyar estates. These parks represent a heritage in itself, a valuable heritage which should be kept and restored.

The analysis of the boyar estates proves beyond doubt their value, a historical, architectural, landscape design value, clearly ranking the civilization of their époque in the same context of the European values from that time.

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