

THE RESCUE OF IASI CITY LANDSCAPE, HOMAGE TO G. M. CANTACUZINO

SALVAREA PEISAJULUI CITADIN IEȘEAN, OMAGIU LUI G. M. CANTACUZINO

*DASCĂLU Doina Mira*¹, *DASCĂLU V.*², *COJOCARIU Mirela*¹
e-mail: doinamira@yahoo.com

Abstract. *Great architect and a type of Renaissance personality "Homo Universalis", G. M. Cantacuzino placed his mark on Iași mainly through his writings full of a special love for this city. Apparently a city that had nothing to impresses travelers, Iași city managed however to reveal to G. M. Cantacuzino his subtle charm. Shortly before his death, worried about the gloomy post-war future which was expected for Iași urban environment, the architect pleaded for the salvation of the city landscape in his conferences in 1955 and 1958, titled "Iași City, a landscape". His alarm signal related to what could be saved from the historical built ensemble of old Iași was ignored at that time. Shortly after these conferences, in the old Iași started the destruction and the urban renovation, as happened with many of the historic cities of Romania.*

Key words: city landscape, history, rescue

Rezumat. *Mare arhitect și personalitate de tip renescentist "Homo Universalis", G. M. Cantacuzino a amprentat Iașul mai ales prin scrierile sale pline de o iubire specială pentru acest oraș. Aparent un oraș care nu putea impresiona călătorii dornici de peisaje construite fastuoase, Iașul a reușit totuși să-i dezvăluie lui G. M. Cantacuzino farmecul său subtil. Puțin înainte de moartea sa, îngrijorat de viitorul postbelic sumbru care se preconiza pentru cadrul urban ieșean, arhitectul a pledat pentru salvarea peisajului citadin în conferințele sale din 1955 și 1958, intitulate "Orașul Iași un peisagiu". Semnalul său de alarmă legat de ceea ce se mai putea salva din ansamblul istoric al vechiului Iași a fost ignorat la acea vreme. La scurt timp după aceste conferințe în vechiul Iași a început distrugerea și renovarea urbană, așa cum s-a întâmplat cu multe din orașele istorice din România.*

Cuvinte cheie: peisaj citadin, istorie, salvare

INTRODUCTION

A great architect and complex personality, like renaissance "Homo Universalis", G.M. Cantacuzino considered himself in 1947 as one of those architects who "think it is necessary to find a balance, without disregarding any of the modern themes and without turning back from the tradition " (Teodorovici,

¹University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Iasi, Romania

²"Gh. Asachi" Technical College, Iasi, Romania

2016). Passionate for history, Cantacuzino managed an original synthesis between modernism, the architectural traditions of Romania and classicism. Because of his views, always sincerely exposed about the history of human culture and civilization, he was treated with aggressiveness, both by fascists and communists. Following a missed attempt to flee the country and to support students' revolt anticommunist movements, he was condemned to jail and forced labor, put under scrutiny, having a ban on leaving the country. Considering the epoch of the extremes experienced painfully by him, the way he had the courage to preserve his intellectual integrity is remarkable. Iasi was the only city that received him in 1957, entrusting him with the important project of the two palaces within the metropolitan enclosure. This work motivated and kept him alive until his unexpected death in 1960.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The paper focuses on G.M. Cantacuzino passion for the landscape and on the fact that the landscape of Moldova and especially of Iasi marked his life. A few years before his death, worried about the gloomy post-war future expected for the historic city of Iasi, the architect advocated for the salvation of the city's landscape in his conferences, in 1955 and 1958, with the theme "The city of Iași - a landscape". At that time, and also later, his alarm signal related to what could be saved from the historical ensemble of old Iasi was ignored. Shortly after these conferences, in the old areas of Iasi began urban destruction and renovation, as happened in many of the historical cities of Romania.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

During the design of the twin palaces of Iași Metropolitan Ensemble (1957-1960), G.M. Cantacuzino lived austere like a monk in a cell of the Metropolia, designing, drawing relentlessly and supervising the works on the site. Partly refreshed by this project, the architect felt an intense need to continue his memoirs in his diary called "Letters to Simon." Many evokes are from Moldova, from his grandparents places, memories through which he managed to convey feelings and impressions of both childhood and maturity. Many of them reveal that his classic attitude (through which the architect succeeded in linking modernism to tradition and aesthetics of ethics) was impregnated by a huge passion for the landscape.

In this context, we can say that the landscape played a very important role in the life of G. M. Cantacuzino.

The natural, historical or modern landscape was present not only in everything he wrote but also in his paintings. The way he describes the landscapes is inimitable, yet he is extremely eloquent but also overwhelmingly charming (Dascălu, 2006). In Cantacuzino's Third Letter, he recounted how he perceived in his childhood the natural setting in Hoisești (at his grandmother's mansion in Moldova) when he first arrived in the country from abroad: "The country road rushed in lazy curves along those hills always seen. To get into the general harmony of the sunset, the horses were advancing without any hurry. Everything

was swollen in this view without straight lines." (Cantacuzino, 1993). This waved landscape clearly reminds us of Blaga and the relief of the valley-hill-valley of its "mioritic/pastoral" space (Mitican, 2007). At the same time, in a walk with his grandfather, he received an important lesson about the significance of the Moldavian landscape: "We came to a place where the gaze contained all the sight. There was a lonely bank, which my grandfather sat down and, taking me on his lap, began to tell me about the *meaning of the landscape*. Caring this significance deep in his soul, G.M. Cantacuzino confessed: "The poetry of Moldova, as well as that of the sea, have been, throughout my life, generous springs, which have spread to my memory, creating a special moment of my inner life." (Cantacuzino, 1993). In the last years of life, the architect passionately worked in his austere cell: "I do not see anyone anymore and I get my dinner in a hurry. Stood up early, drawing late at night. I have not worked so much and with so much zeal, so much optimism, for I have not had such a long and grateful project in my hands ... Caught up by enthusiasm I could not see, feel or be interested but of my work." (Cantacuzino, 1993). In a letter to his wife, he described these projects as having the purpose of "improving the urban landscape of Iasi" (Teodorovici, 2016). He designed a square in front of the monumental steps of access to the pavilions. The opening of this square, which could not be never realized, would have highlighted the classical beauty of the pavilions (fig. 1), having as background perspective the entrance to the Metropolitan Church.



Fig. 1. Classical beauty of pavilions

<http://ansamblulmitropolitaniasi.ro/cladirea-administrativa/cancelaria-mitopolitana>

Feeling tired, in order to relax in the late evening or at night, he often started to walk on the old and beloved streets of Iasi. Apparently a settlement that could not impress by grandiose constructions, Iasi city managed to reveal to G.M. Cantacuzino the alchemy and subtle beauty of the historical landscape. The description of his trails is full of the flavor and the charm of the places, a charm that only he could evoke with his prodigious talent. "In the tower of Golia and in Tătărași the bells were ringing in the evening...The violet shadows waved the streets, while the sunset scattered the last rubies on a corner of a wall or on the curve of a dome...In one of the last nights, before it started to snow, I went out to stretch up. I have been drawing for a long time, my eyes were burning, and I felt

sleep was still distant. It was long past midnight. Starting from the Metropolis, I headed for Golia and Barboi. The dark and close sky seemed to be carried by the bell towers, which, in their gloomy verticality, strived to prevent, in a desperate effort, that the vault of the air would crush the city. Here and there a city lamp shaken by the wind casts shadows and lights on the old walls” (Cantacuzino, 1993). In his wanderings, he always revealed with the same satisfaction that "the profiles of the walls and the towers of Iasi corresponded with a certain harmony that I have not found elsewhere". In relation to the landscape, he makes a tremendous confession in his Fourth Letter: "Romanian generosity, when it is not darkened by a false education, gives to the Romanian landscapes a nobility not seen in other places" (Cantacuzino, 1993).

The subtle charm of Iasi intensified his desire to do something real helpful, a public pleading for preserving the historical and ambiental values of the city specific landscape. The first conference was in Bucharest in 1955, followed in 1958 by the one at University of Iasi held at the invitation of the Architects Union of Romania. He courageously highlighted in these lectures the historical magnificence of Iasi and the real fact that after the union of 1859 the city was transformed into a province town. He spoke about the danger of the communist tendency of replacing the historical urban tissue, pointing out that their supreme argument and their last solution was the pick-tool.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite his precarious health, refusing to be a victim of the communist system, architect G.M. Cantacuzino pleaded with dignity and courage to save the Iasi historical landscape in his conferences. Underlining the existence of many valuable monuments, G. M. Cantacuzino asked the authorities to classify the historical center of Iași as a protected historical area. His message, a strong alarm signal, was obviously ignored and could not save the old Iasi. Even in the year of his death, in 1960, many historical buildings, in the area adjacent to the Union Square, were demolished without arguments in order to create a modern area. Nowadays, his message about the preservation of Romanian historical centers constitutes valuable and precious lessons for all.

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