

The culas in Oltenia

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DEFINITIONS

Balș is the architect who provides an eloquent definition of the cula:

Cula, a characteristic building for Oltenia is a fortified dwelling. The cula is related with similar types of architecture at the south of Danube, but has its own Romanian features. It all begun at the end of the XVII century and maintained for one hundred years, meanwhile spreading exclusively in Oltenia and in the north-west part of Muntenia (Balș 1954, 83).

Ghika-Budești's definition is adding some specification to Balș's rough description:

They are fortified rural dwellings, having several floors, locked entrance, secured with an oak girder, sometimes having ramparts. The first floor is the cellar, the upper levels are used for habitation. At the last floor there is a

veranda and an arcade gallery with pillars from where the owners could either enjoy the view or use it in defence purposes (Ghika-Budești 1936, 114).

Also Janeke has another distinctive feature of the culas to mention:

The fortress like towers added by the boyars to their countryside establishments were called cule, a distinct species of the Romanian architecture (Janeke 1932, 75).

THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

In the last century in Roumania a lot of brief articles, reviews and debates were published. Only three general books on the cula theme were published: Crețianu (1969), Atanasescu & Grama (1974) and Godea (2006). The first two books were written by architects and are very well structured but also very short. The last one, written by an ethnographer, gathers most of the previously published information printed all together but does not carry on with the features that were not detailed before.

A very relevant approach to the subject is the book published by the Austrian engineer Janeke (1932). He makes very good points on the subject and is the only author who makes a comparison between the peasant's habitations in the fields or hills, the boyard's mansions at the countryside and in the city and the cula in Wallachia. He is also the only one who



Figure 1
Picture of the cula from Groșerea (Voinescu 1908, Figure 8)

published construction details of the culas in Curtișoara and Groșerea.

Professor Gheorghiu's (1985) book has a chapter about the culas. There is information about the culas that were built in already existing establishments with fortified walls and the author also explains how the regular mansions begun to be fortified.

Medrea's book in 1969 is maybe the only publication found until now that has a plan of the land on which the cula from Măldărești belongs to. Voinescu's book published in 1908 is the only one researched until now that has a distant photo of the cula in Groșerea.

The following chapters were not detailed until now by the authors preoccupied on this subject: a parallel between the Romanian culas and the culas from the Balkans, comparison with the peasant's habitation and with the masonry of the local churches, analysis of the constructive details, maps with visibility and precise localisation of the culas, at region scale and at local scale, the study of the domains and establishments they used to belong to, also furnishing and natural lighting, heating elements, decorations, classification by volume type and an approach of the annexed tower.

THE ETYMOLOGY

Pușcariu states that the word «cula originates in the vulgar Latin cubula, derived from the Latin cuba, cuib used as nest», in Romanian cuib (Pușcariu 1904, 251). «In Portuguese the correspondent would be caio – retreat, concealment» (Pușcariu 1904, 251). In the folk's legend collection published by Rădulescu-Codin (1910) the term cula «is used with the meaning of a place where a treasure was hidden» or with the meaning «of a place where the Jews buried their money». The second meaning of the word cula in the Balkan countries is that of a tower, bastion, fortress or habitation outside the village or city and it was certified by two important Romanian linguists (Pușcariu 1904; Șaineanu 1900).

THE HISTORY

During the XVII century several pashalics from the South of the Danube were out of control and they

were making short intrusions towards the north of the Danube, in small groups of riders that were very aggressive. These groups of robbers came from the pashalics Silistra, Rusciuc and Vidin. The locals tried to survive the attacks by their own means. The poor took their families and cattle and run into the woods. The rich had built fortified walls around monasteries, they «hardened their manors by primitive defence means» and this is how they faced the groups of outlaws that detained powerful fire weapons (Balș 1954). Not only the Turks represented a threat to the local boyards, but sometimes the rebelled peasants who were having a very difficult life throughout the century. Also there were trying to protect from the wild dangerous animals living nearby and from time to time the boyards used to have fights between each other as well.

During the XVIII century The Principality of Wallachia was one of the few tributary states to the Ottoman Empire and was ruled by Greek lords from Fanar – a neighbourhood in Constantinople.

From all the defensive architecture that was developed on the Romanian ground between the Xiv century to the beginning of the Xix century, the cula is the most modest. It is assumed that there weren't culas any earlier than the XVII th century, when the first solid manors that prefigured the origins of the culas were built (Janeke 1934; Balș 1954).

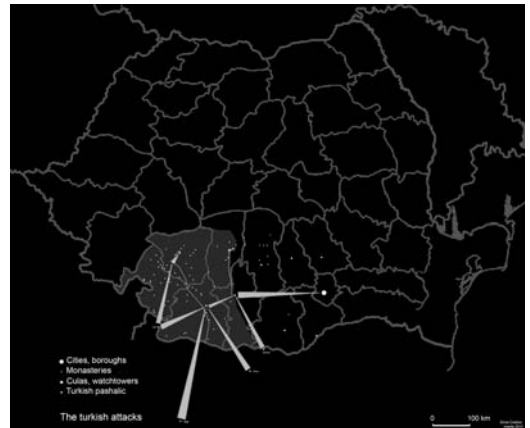


Figure 2

The map of Romania with the historical culas and the turkish attack lines. Map illustrated with Adobe Photoshop by Silvia Costiuc, using the refrence list.

It is very difficult to establish the building year since there are no inscriptions. Seems like the ones from Curtisoara, Măldărești, Pojogeni, Rovinari and Șuici were built in the beginning of the XVIII century but it is likely that by archaeological means they would discover that the culas are older (Crețeanu, 1969).

THE GEOGRAPHY. EMPLACEMENT. STRATEGY

There are culas as well in the Balkan region - Bulgaria, Macedonia - Albania and Serbia. The differences between the Romanian culas and the ones from the south of the Danube are the following: the walls are not plastered usually, in Romania there is only one cula from the approximately 100 found in the bibliography - that does not have plaster - in Bujoreni. Another difference is that the culas from the Balkans do not have a veranda at the last level, the roof is much more flat than the narrow ones in Romania and in the Balkans the culas can be found in numbers in the same locality. In Romania they are isolated and solitary near the settlement guarding sometimes up to 20 km away to the south and 20 kilometers to the north. Also the proportions are quite different.

During the interrupted Austrian occupation of Oltenia, between 1718-1839, the peasants in Oltenia were not stable like in Germany, they used to live spreaded into small hamlets of 3 up to 5 houses primitively built. In the fields regions there were villages (Janeke 1934, 33).

The culas in Romania are located on a hill with optimal visibility, the lands have been stubbed out

downhill in front of the most important elevation of the cula, to the south. (Ionescu 1986; Atanasescu 1974). In the Figure 8 (Voinescu 1908) it is obvious that there were no trees to obstruct the view from the cula in Groșerea to the south. At the north side of the cula, most of the times there is a forest. By placing all the culas on the map of the region it became obvious that there was a strategic network of culas. (Atanasescu & Grama 1974) The distances between two culas or between a cula and a monastery tower or a tower built by the boyards associated - are of about 20 km.

Most of the culas from the The Principality of Wallachia were situated in Oltenia or in the north-west part of Muntenia. All these culas are in the proximity of the river Jiu, Olt or their affluents.

Because of the common threat the boyards cultivated friendly relations among themselves. They used to be prepared and armed at anytime for a new invasion and they were using a signalisation system between culas in case of danger. «In daytime they were burning humid fabrics that produce dense fog and they were sending intermittent signals. At night they were burning a torch and moved it rapidly for the people in the village to see and also the owner of the cula up north» (Ionescu 1986, 164).

Sometimes the culas are situated near old Thracian or Roman ruins (Ionescu 1986, Atanasescu & Grama 1974; Crețianu 1969) but this is a hypothesis still to be verified, so far only a small number of them are situated near ancient ruins and anyway the strategic interest was different.



Figure 3
Visibility map illustrated with Adobe Photoshop by Silvia Costiuc, using the reference list and Google Earth. For the visibility areas with yellow the source was Atanasescu & Grama (1974)



Figure 4
Synthesis of the culas positioning study. Map illustrated with Adobe Photoshop by Silvia Costiuc, using the reference list and Google Earth. For the visibility areas the source was Atanasescu & Grama (1974)

FROM WHAT TYPE OF ARCHITECTURE THE CULA DERIVES

In the beginning of the XX Th Century the magazine *Convorbiri literare* (Antonescu 1907) and an art historian (Tzigara-Samurcaș 1909) published an argument about the origins of the cula. Antonescu insists that the cula is a national product, because since ancient architecture to the medieval towers Romanians used to have similar constructions in their territory. He asserts that the Roman Towers guarding the Roman Empire border used to have similar proportions with the cula. Apparently the Thracian Towers of habitation had similar proportions. Several authors mention that the Thracian towers that belonged to the kings from Sarmisegetuza are to be found on the Trajan's Column in Rome (Antonescu 1907, 495; Ionescu 1986, 151-2).

Tzigara-Samurcaș (1909) declines the local historical evolution and asserts that the culas are a Balkans importation, exactly like the etymology of the word and that it has its origins into the Roman Empire watch towers, copied by the Ottoman Empire. In response, Antonescu (1907, 1208) states that «the Balkan influence on the Romanian cula will be proven only when a cula with an open veranda will be found in the Balkans¹⁷⁵». Also, Drăguț (2000, 325) notes that «in the XVIII century some workers of Aromanian origins that had some sort of facilities from the Turkish authorities and they came into the Balkan countries disseminating construction techniques and Ottoman decorations». The Crețianu couple (1969, 12) writes that probably the culas in Oltenia developed in parallel with the ones from the other side of the Danube, starting from the boyard's mansions with the skillful local workers, a «unique and profoundly original» type of architecture was born.

Some other architecture historians (Balș 1954; Ionescu 1986) also consider that there is an obvious relation between the culas from the north and south of the Danube but it is very difficult to judge which side was more influential. Since the population in the north of the river was invaded and in the south there were internal conflicts it is logic to deduce that the ones from the north were constrained to develop a more efficient fortified architecture and strategic networks inspired by the local masters.

Only ten years latter after the romantic argue between Tzigara-Samurcaș (1909) and Antonescu

(1907) the Austrian officer Janeke (1932) who published the same book in German first in 1918, made a concise description of the peasant's habitation from the hill side and from the depression and also of the manors and the winter residences of the boyards in the urban areas. He mentions that the peasant's habitations are influenced by the Germanic traditions that came with the colonisers in the Meridional Carpathians since the year 1150. He also recons that the clerical architecture is of Asian and Byzantine origins in The Principality of Wallachia. Beside the veranda or pinnacle similarities between culas and the peasant house in the region, there are similar constructive details at the woodworks.

VILLAGES, PEASANTS AND BOYARDS ESTABLISHMENTS, DOMAINS AND CHURCHES

The communities around the culas where sometimes formed by the landlord. In Aninoasa a boyard wanted to start an agricultural exploitation, so he first bought some land even if the area was not populated. Than he found and convinced people from nearby to move to his domain, giving them a small piece of land to build a house and offering some other facilities. This was the case in Aninoasa township, where the Groșerea village and cula is (Janeke 1932, 40).

The establishment in the hills villages of the rich peasants and small and middle boyars were in a shape of a horseshoe, with the house in the back, at the sides having annexes of the house, stables and other all surrounded by a wooden strong fence and an enormous locker fortress like. The fortress look was even more obvious when inside the courtyard was a habitation tower with a very sharp sloped roof.

In the mountains and hills all the regular houses had the cellar as the socle of the house. Because of the practical use of space this distribution was also adopted in the plain houses as well. The cellar was used as stable, food deposit and others. Nevertheless the house up the socle had a more beautiful view, it was more safe and could have been better used as defence because usually the basement was made in stone. The floor above it was made of wood plastered with clay. Another new element in the configuration of the regular traditional house in the hills of Oltenia is the pinnacle, eccentric from a basic rectangle. This pinnacle is the joint between the stair and the porch,

resulting in an airy sunless space where the peasant used to make their routine works in the summer. Also the entrance in the cellar is under this pinnacle. The flooring of the cellar is left in earth as it is, because they used to dig potatoes and other into the earth to keep them fresh for long (Janeke 1932).

The manor in the countryside are usually located at the side of the village, the establishment is similar with the peasant's, only that they are larger and more carefully handcrafted. The manor courtyards also include barns, stables and accommodations for the servants. The manor is made in red bricks, it is massive, located in the back of the courtyard having a huge garden on the other side. The plan is usually square, it has the alleyway in the middle that usually ends into the porch in enfilade or into the pinnacle. The first floor has the same use as in the regular house but sometimes it is used for accommodation for the administrator of the domain – like in Potlogi and Mogoșoaia.

The pinnacle to the north used to be open because most of the boyards only used to spend their summer at the countryside. The ceiling was done with oblique matching boards. The column are in brick sometimes rounded (Janeke 1932).

In the XVII Century some manors were built with their vaulted cellars elevated above ground level – before it used to be half into the ground, this is the case in Glogova, that was modified in the XVII Century and was added with a defence chamber and ramparts guarding the entrance. Other manors modified like this are in Crainici, Vlădaia and Budeasa (Ionescu 1986, 148-9).

Sometimes the same boyards who built manors or culas used to be the founders of the churches nearby. Sometimes the same workers had built the manor and the Church – like in Curtișoara, where the Church and the cula have the same type of arches at the veranda. The corbels for candles in the culas is like the ones from the churches. The churches architecture influenced the boyard's architecture (Janeke 1932).

ABOUT THE OWNERS AND THEIR WAY OF LIFE. PERMANENT OR TEMPORARY HABITATION

In the XVII the Century the agrarians class develops. During the Fanariot Reigns from the XVIII Century in The Principality of Wallachia - the court from Bucharest had flourished and became the boyards favourite residence for the winter. During the summer at the countryside the boyards used to eat at the same table with the servants, but in Bucharest they became «Parisians». In Bucharest the architecture had French influences already (Janeke 1932, 55-56).

The culas belong to the middle and lower class landlords, the high boyards moved permanently to Bucharest, where they had full time guards and armed stuff. In some of the villages «the landlords had to built fortified courts and therefore they no longer needed culas» (Ionescu 1986, 164). Also the peasants did not need to build culas because they did not have a fortune to defend. Still some of them had built wooden culas.

TYPOLGY

Because 3 quarters of the culas found in the bibliography no longer exists, the study was limited on the tipology of the 23 culas that still exist today as historical monuments. Some of them had to be eliminated from the study because they had been dramatically modified.

By the number of levels there are culas with two floors and culas with three floors. The culas with two floors are: peasant culas – with wooden pillars at the veranda or even a wooden structure – like the ones from Cerneți – Nistor, Runcurel and Larga; composed plan – not a simple rectangle close to a square plan – Șuici and Zătreni and the last ones are Retevoiești,



Figure 5
The Church (1774 – 1790) near the cula in Măldărești. Foto taken in 03.10.2010 by Silvia Costiuc

Broșteni and Cerneți – T. Vladimirescu, the three have an almost square plan. The culas with three floors are the big ones, with composed plan – Măldărești and with a rectangular plan – Curțișoara and Măldărești – Buca. The small ones with three floors are without a veranda – Mioveni and with veranda: Șiacu, Groșerea, Cernătești, Brabova. There are two exceptions, the cula from Bujoreni – the only one that has an exterior stair and no plaster, also the veranda is missing and there is the exception of Cartianu house. In this case the historians don't know yet if it is a modified cula that used to be opaque and it was open on all sides after the danger times passed or if it was from the beginning like that.

CONSTRUCTION DETAILS

Masonry- ramparts, columns, graduation of the depth of the wall

The walls are made of red bricks sometimes mixed with rocks and sometimes just in rocks / like in the case of Bujoreni and the north wall of cula Greceanu in Măldărești. It is hard to guess the composition since all of them except one are plastered. The masonry walls have 65 cm up to 100 cm in depth.

It is interesting that the culas have no basement, there were not found any surveys or research regarding how deep the walls go under the ground. Another interesting feature of the walls of the culas is that they become thinner each floor up. There are no papers on the netting of the brick inside the wall, but there are some hypothesis considering the ancient bricks dimension and the depth of each wall on every floor. The bricks from Curțișoara have 5 x 11 x 23 cm and the ones in Groșerea have 5,5x13x27 cm approximate.

The ground floor is opaque and sometimes even the next floor, the walls only have some ramparts but which are not covering all the angles of approach.

Changing the disposal of the brick inside the wall each course, the masons built the huge decorative cartouches and also the small ones at the exterior of the Groșerea cula. The arches at the veranda from the last floor are the result of a skillful combination between wooden and masonry architecture. Some bricks were profiled for certain needs – like near the main entrance or the round columns at the veranda.

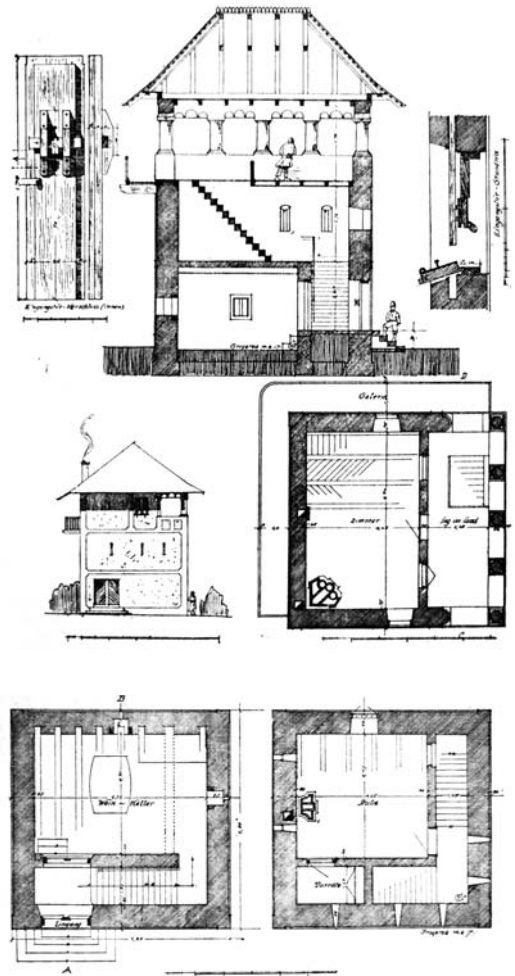


Figure 6 and 7
Plans, section and constructive details of the cula in Groșerea (Janeke 1932, 64-65)

The ramparts at the first levels or even at the last floor have a masonry arch or a very strong wooden lintel. At Măldărești - Greceanu cula, the small openings were closed on the interior by a stone triforium with a local late Renaissance like drawing characteristic during the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu.

Some of the culas have masonry domes as ceilings like Almăj, Hotărani and others.

Brickworks Groșerea

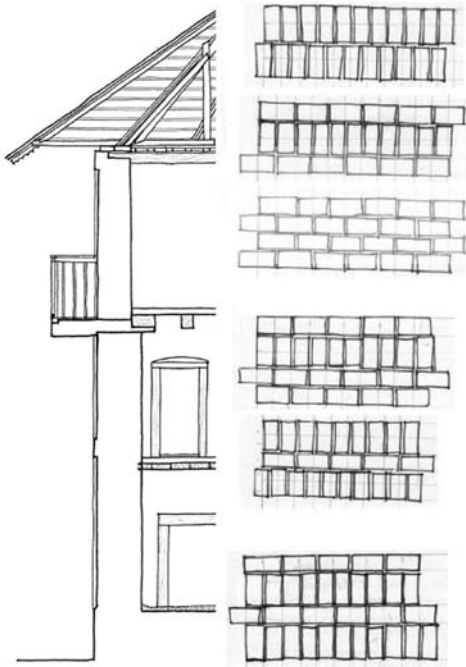


Figure 8

Drawings made by the students during the French-Romanian workshop, 2010-2011, an academical restoration project Culas from Oltenia, between the West University of Timișoara and the School of Chaillot, Paris. Project coordinated by Ștefan Mănciulescu chief architect of Historical Monuments for the Corrèze, Haute, Loire Departament

Groșerea

Last platform under the roof detail

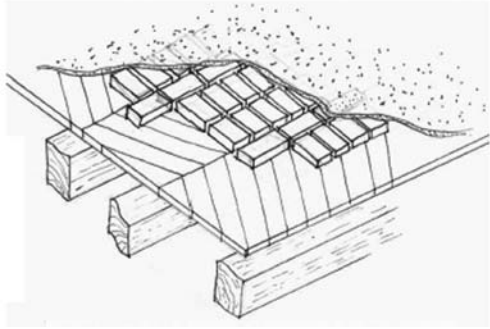


Figure 10

Drawings made by the students during the French-Romanian Workshop, 2010-2011, an academical restoration project Culas from Oltenia, between the West University of Timișoara and the School of Chaillot, Paris. Project coordinated by Ștefan Mănciulescu chief architect of Historical Monuments for the Corrèze, Haute, Loire Departament

Carpentry – entrance, windows, floors, platforms, stairs and trap doors, timber support and shingle

The main entrance was secured by a long girder that entered the whole way into the wall. Sometimes the door has two leafs, and sometimes three – the one from the middle having a mechanism that permits its extraction in case they needed to operate with big barrels. Otherwise it has a structural role. The wooden planks have at least 5 cm depth and at some culas the planks are coated with metal strips fixed by hobnails. Another very interesting aspect of the entrance mechanism is some observation in Groșerea, that the fixed part of the woodwork is cleverly joint with the masonry. Meaning that the profile of the pillar that holds the opening at the side is not rectangular but it has a T shape and it is incarcerated into the wall.

The wooden beams are impressively huge, in Curtișoara there is one beam at the ground floor that has 10 m in length and 40 cm wide and about 65 cm in elevation. The ones from Groșerea are massive as well considering the openings, and most of the beams are manually cut with the drawing knife. Atanasescu



Figure 9

Foto of the cula in Groșerea, by Silvia Costiuc 05.10.2011



Figure 11
Foto of the cula in Groșerea, by Silvia Costiuc 05.10.2011

(1974) states that the wooden beams have a conic profile so that they could not be extracted from the exterior of the cula.

There is a special care to the structural and defensive joints between wood and masonry. The stairs are made out of planks with a rectangular profile very well attached to the masonry. Most of the culas have a wooden hatch at the end of the stair.

The secured main entrance into the cula has side

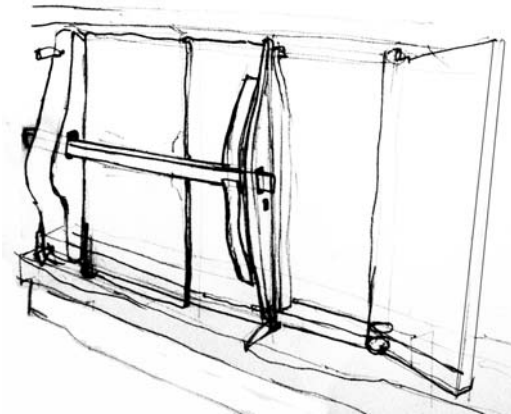


Figure 12
Detail of a traditional house basement door. Drawing made by the students during the French-Romanian Workshop, 2010-2011, an academical restoration project Culas from Oltenia, between the West University of Timișoara and the School of Chaillot, Paris. Project coordinated by Ștefan Mănciulescu chief architect of Historical Monuments for the Corrèze, Haute, Loire Departament

ramparts and it is locked by a girder that has a tunnel inside the wall and it can be slided to hold the door planks. Not only that this girder can slide and it is very resistant but it could also be rotated and get into a blocked position so that it is impossible to move it from its place from the outside.

Sometimes there is the presence of a fake door – much more sophisticated and decorated leading only to the stables or to the food depository and to a room that has no connection to the rest of the house. The two side planks from the exterior door in Groșerea had a massive mechanism in wood that permitted the rotation, like in the following picture. The third plank, it is mobile but it also holds the lift from the above wall.

The stairs are on the exterior only in the exceptional case of Bujoreni, some other culas that no longer exist, like the one from Pojogeni used to have a mobile stair linking the ground floor with the first floor and this stair was elevated through the hatch up to the next level in case of danger (Ionescu 1986).

The cula from Cerneți is the only one that has wooden sculptural pillars at the veranda under the roof.

The rafters are most of the times rare, but this makes the roof become curved and gives it a pleasant aspect. The shingle is 15 cm long and disposed starting from the overhang, each row covering 10 cm out of the previous row (Janeke 1932, 45).

Veranda

Antonescu (1907, 497) states that «the veranda was a late addition» to the architectural object. Ionescu (1986) stresses the fact that the veranda is the greatest difference between the Balkan culas and the ones from the Romanian territory. He also points out that the veranda is the follow up of the pinnacle from the regular houses that used to make the junction between the stair and the porch. At the culas, the pinnacle rectangle blends with the porch surface, and becomes a very pleasant place for spending summer afternoons, watching the great view in peaceful times or watching for the enemies in times of danger. The specific veranda could also have been inspired by the interior galleries from the monasteries. Probably that the porch lacks from the culas in the balkan region

and the slope of the roof is not that sharp as well because of the climatic differences.

As Mendrea (1969) mentioned, the decorated verandas with trilobite arches makes the building look more recreational and peaceful rather than fortified architecture.

The veranda has an essential role in the defensive characteristics of the cula, most of them are facing south or at least downhill to a flowery field or to a white valley.

Interior fountains

The cula in Curtișoara used to have an interior fountain that was closed in the XXth Century when the landlords made a water and even hot water installation. There had been more other culas mentioned for having an internal fountain.

The back-room

The majority of the culas had a secret room, that used to be the last redoubt for the women and children. In some of the culas this secret hiding either for the treasures, either as a life saving place it is placed under the stairs and it has a blind wall – like in Groșerea. In Măldărești the hiding place is under the roof, it has a fireplace and a bed and it has a mobile stair. Also it was kept to our days «a board tied with a rope that was used for transporting food to the hidden persons» – the children, the women, while the



Figure 13
Foto of the cula in Măldărești, by Silvia Costiuc 03.10.2011

man kept fighting the attackers and the mobile stair was retracted (Zamora 2006, 32).

Furnishing

Del Chiaro, one of the narrative travellers of the time writes that even in Târgu Jiu in the XVIII Century they did not use chairs, only benches with a high back against the wall, covered with a cloth. The tables were placed in the corners, the beds were attached to the walls and they were layed only in the evening. Inside the rooms they used different aromatic herbs. They did not use any interior decorations except an icon which was placed on the eastern wall over a damask or brocade. (Ștefulescu 1906, 219-226). «Generally the furniture is very sobre, only the few rich owners of the culas did afford to have vaulted ceilings, stuck ornaments and paintings» (Janeke 1932, 79).

The annex tower

A significant number of the existing culas that we know of have an extra tower added to the north. Some said that the tower was used for religious purposes serving as an oratory maybe because some of them have a masonry dome similar with the domes from the orthodox churches. The towers are connected at the first floor with the culas through a gallery. Some said that it served the owners as a toilet. But Janeke (1932, 74) explains that one of the culas, from Șuici, has some kind of a tower only that it is higher than the habitation building so he states that the annex tower was a watchtower.

In the case of Curtișoara, the small tower is one floor lower than the cula and it is facing north. The cula was attacked sometimes from behind by local outlaws that used to live in the woods. And there is this hypothesis that the small tower was added later to the construction but there is no scientific proof (Janeke 1932).

HEATING

They had a stove with an oval door usually. The heat goes to one or two round or square tall clay tubes, and because the contact surface is big and the walls of the stove are thin the room heats up really quickly. (Ștefulescu 1906, 219)



Figure 14
Foto of the cula in Măldărești, by Silvia Costiuc 03.10.2011

DECORATIONS

The culas have been built with a big expence of money, the priority wasn't to decorate it, like it usually happens with the boyards mansions a the time. Still there are a few decorations. The exterior decorations at the cula from Groșerea are obtained only by the inventive brickworks. The cula from Măldărești has some elements that testify the characteristic architecture for the reign of C. Brâncoveanu.

OWNERSHIP

The culas and the domains that they belonged to were expropriated 60 years ago from the rich and became a state property. Now, some of them were requested in court by their natural owners and some were given

back their family cula - like in Curtișoara and Brabova. But most of them are a state property and are located in remote villages with bad infrastructure, no tourism at all and also placed on sharp hills – like Groșerea and they are difficult to use, not to mention that some of them have very small interior surface and poor natural lighting.

STATE OF CONSERVATION

Judging by the current pictures found on the Internet only the culas from Măldărești and casa Cartiu are in a relative good conservation estate. All the rest have major problems with the water infiltration trough the roof. Some have now even structural problems and most of them are in a pre collapse state. Unfortunately, all of them were carefully taken care of at the base with cement plastering back in the sixties.

Draghiceanu (1931, 108) in a report for the National Commission of the Historical Monuments writes that «the old woman who was been living there took well care of the building and kept the bullet marks on the facade on purpose».

Their current use is for some museums and the most of them are abandoned, yet they represent a specific type of fortified architecture, a testimony for a considerable amount of technical knowledge and only very few of them had been kept. After the Fanariot Reigns passed, there came the peace and the boyards no longer felt the need to live in poorly lighted spaces, humid conditions with 1 meter thick walls and climbing three floors to the bedroom, when each floor could have been of about 15 square meters - like in the case of Groșerea.

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