

THE BĂLĂCEANU COURT AT TĂTĂRĂȘTII DE SUS, THE LATEST REPRESENTATION OF THE FORTIFIED BOYAR'S MANOR TYPE OF ARCHITECTURE IN WALAHIA

Abstract: În centrul satului Tătărăștii de Sus, la jumătatea drumului dintre Pitești și Dunăre, panorama râului Teleorman este și azi dominată de ruinele impozante, numite de localnici „La Ziduri”, ale curților boierești Bălăceanu, ridicate în ultimele decenii ale sec. al XVIII-lea. Este cel mai reprezentativ exemplu de curte boierească întărită târzie, atât în concepția arhitectonică de ansamblu cât mai ales în ceea ce privește funcția și mijloacele de apărare. Formată din două incinte, prima, cea mare, în formă de patruleter, a doua, cea mică, poligonală, această reședință de țară ocupă o suprafață de o jumătate de hectar. Din falnicul ansamblu s-au mai păstrat turnul clopotniță de la poartă, pivnițele locuinței și amprente în zid ale grajdurilor și magaziilor, părți din zidurile înalte de peste 8 m cu un turn de colț și ruina bisericii, spoliată în întregime de acoperiș.

Keywords: Tătărăștii de Sus, curte boierească, ansamblu arhitectonic, apărare

Half the way between Pitești and the Danube, in the centre of Tătărăștii de Sus village, the landscape of Teleorman River is dominated even today by the impressive ruins, locally called “to the walls”, of the Bălăceanu court. It was built in the last decades of the 18th century and it is considered the most representative example of late fortified manor as general structure as well as means of protection.

The medieval settlement from Tătărăști was documentary attested for the first time in 1538, but mentions of the family name, Bălăceanu, came later, in 1777 when landowner was Ioniță “șetrar”, son of Hrizea Bălăceanu “vel pitar”, who died at that date and was considered, by the family tradition, to start the building of this residence.

It is a certain fact that Zoița Bălăceanu finished the ensemble of Tătărăști court before 1798 when her husband was buried into the chapel, according to the inscription on the gravestone. Later, in 1817, in a moment of weakness, she donated this property to Ștefan Bellu “biv vel logofăt” on two conditions, that its income to be used to support the church as well as her by giving “1000 of taleri, for as long as she should live”. Bellu didn't respect the terms of the agreement and left

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the impressive construction to turn into a ruin, in spite of all the efforts of Zoe and her heirs.¹

The boyar's court, in town or in village, was a genuine fortress, at the end of the 18th century and in the first two decades of the 19th century, those insecure times forcing the landowners to restore its previously abandoned defensive nature, consisted of a typical architectural configuration. This conception prevails at Tătăraștii de Sus and totally submits the basic functions, even the representation one. While in the cases of usual boyar's court the house remains the dominant element, here, the specific needs pushed it to a side location, in a row with the annexes. Although it is stylistically typical to the epoch and it has similarities with some manors from Walachia such as the one at Golești and from Moldavia (Pașcani, Stolniceni-Prăjești, Tupilați, Gugești), the court from Tătăraștii de Sus presents an unique structure, raised on a perfectly axial plan which gathers the dwelling place and the annexes as well as the chapel and the bell tower. The area of the two precincts has almost 5400 m², over half of a hectare, and it is defended by a progressive system that begins with the gate and ends with the chapel.

The first precinct represents a square with a 62,5 m side, surrounded by a 0,5 m wide brick wall with the maximum height of 7 m, each corner being flanked by a circular tower with crenels. The main defensive element is the gate bell tower which was raised on 3 unequal levels and it has been preserving at the second level the trace of a double-sloping roof of a wooden surveillance balcony. On both sides over the two lateral rooms start two long rampart ways that pass over the walls and whose fires criss-cross exactly in the middle of the gate. In addition to that, a hard wooden girder was sliding behind the big heavy doors, blocking them.

The allotment of the buildings follows a symmetrical structure inside the precinct, in relation to the longitudinal axis of the ensemble. The small house of the landowner is located on the southern side and has a simple plan with a cellar limited with a vault sustained on arches. The access in the corner tower, which represents in this case the defensive element that was incorporated to the dwelling place, was made through a long and narrow passage with a vault above the entrance and is butted to the eastern wall of the main precinct. On the same side, toward west, in extension to the residence there was a warehouse covered with a semicircular vault. The stables that were filling 2/3 of the length of the construction were located on the north side. Their openings might have served as crenels, when necessary. A second warehouse² that included a large room with a horn might have been functioning as a kitchen and was placed in extension to the building.

Underpinned to the lateral walls, these constructions had simple roofs, with the drains orientated on the inside of the court. Two half of a gable lean against the

¹ Between 1817 and 1819, Zoița Bălăceanu and her daughter's son in law, Iancu Carabelea, were litigating in vain with Șt. Bellu for the property from Tătăraștii de Sus

² Although they are completely ruined today, the plans and the sizes of these constructions can be retraced due to the impresses of the vaults' bases, the girders' spaces and the partition walls between the rooms

façade walls and the corner tower for better protection and are similar to those from the tower that doubled the staircase and the observation room.

The visible difference between the smaller sizes of the dwelling place in comparison with the wider area occupied by the annexes determined reconsideration of the theory that the main source of boyar's income was the cultivation of land, that being the livestock, especially sheep³.

The same principle of symmetry can be noticed at the second precinct as well, smaller and polygonal shaped on the east. The access from the previous precinct used to be made through a small gate on the longitudinal axis, having the same kind of defensive system with a wooden gable, as its impression is still visible. The high walls were fortified on the inside by a row of 12 abutments embedded in a special way, only at the upper ends⁴.

A larger building with a length of 12 m and a width of 8 m, which has an opening on the outside and another one on the first precinct, is located in the southwestern corner of the smaller enclosure. Opposite to it, in the northwestern corner, there used to be another building whose function is yet unknown. The chapel, the main factor of this precinct, matches the same longitudinal axis that crosses both enclosures, has a rectangular plan with the sizes of 23, 25 x 8, 66 m, a semicircular altar apse and an open church porch. Compelled by the special defensive system of the ensemble, the chapel presents dominant horizontal features, emphasized by the lack of tower⁵.

The altar apse preserves the traditional shape, semicircular on the inside and polygonal on the outside, showing a marked extension of the northern wall due to the spacious niche of the proscomidia and a second smaller one. The altar is illuminated by two windows placed on the central apse and the proscomidia.

The nave matches a rectangular plan and it is separated from the altar through the iconostasis wall, whose door openings finish in accolade arches; it also has two windows, one on the northern wall and the other one on the southern wall. The access from the nave to the narthex is by arches finished in broken braces, supported by two brick columns with square sections.

The rectangular narthex has its side walls pierced by two windows. The church porch, also rectangular, is open on all three sides and has semicircular arcades. Those two columns that flank the entrance sustain the one in the middle, which is the narrowest. The other arcades, frontal and lateral, lean on engaged columns. The plastered brick columns are not high and their bases have the same width as all the other walls. They have square bases with plain capitals, the abacus being attached to the shaft by a concave surface. The entrance into the chapel was

³ Small animal breeding – sheep and goat – was the main activity at the boyar's courts until the Adrianople Treaty, when freedom of commerce in the Principles was guaranteed, generating a rapid development of the agriculture

⁴ The construction of the abutments had begun when the wall had already been raised at a certain height, reason for which they are only tangent with the wall at the lower part.

⁵ This type of church, without tower, is out spread, especially in the hill and mountain regions, but also in the plain region.

equipped with a heavy wooden door with a girder on the inside and is surrounded by a frame of processed but plain stone.

The church's façade, all plastered, is covered with a very simple outer decoration, consisted of rectangular panels placed between the base that has a profile of bricks with semicircular edges and the string course beneath a narrow upper tier. All the eight buttresses that support the chapel's walls are built in the same technique as the defensive wall's buttresses: attached to the wall in the lower parts and embedded in the upper part. It leads to the conclusion that if it wasn't another phase of construction then there must have been at least two stages of building.

Out of the fresco-painting that used to decorate the church there only remained a few traces much too wiped off to let the iconography be recognized, the only identifiable images being the ones on the pillars that separate the nave from the narthex. There could be seen the pale portraits of the patron saints in the porch until recently.

The only proof that this chapel had been functioning are two icons that were transferred to the village's church the moment it was abandoned. They represent Jesus Christ Almighty and the Holly Virgin with the Infant⁶.

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⁶ The icons are now being held at the Teleorman Diocesan store of clerical patrimony



Fig.1. General view with the bell tower.



Fig. 2. View of the second precinct and the church.