

THE ROLE OF GHEORGHE POPOVICI IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF SADOVA CROWN DOMAIN (1898-1942)

Narcisa Maria MITU*

Abstract: For 44 years, Gheorghe Popovici, managed Sadova Crown Domain, a period in which he was preoccupied with the development of Sadova Domain, from all the points of view: organisational, economic and cultural. During the entire period of time, his main purpose was to stop the phenomenon of desertification, by fixing the sand with locust trees and vineyards, in order to make useful as much farm land as possible. So that to successfully accomplish this desire, he gathered around him a collective of young people, chief farmers and sylviculturists, graduates of the higher, prestigious agriculture schools, from Romania and from abroad. He did not neglect either the relations with the villagers, the main manpower from the Domain. For his activity, he was rewarded by the Kings of Romania with plenty of gratitude and honours.

Key words: Gheorghe Popovici, Sadova Crown Domain, 1898-1942, manager, sylviculturist.

Gheorghe Popovici was born on the 25th of March 1865 at Caransebeș. He finished high-school in 1885. Graduate of the School of Sylviculture from Schennitz, Austro-Hungary, he worked, during 1891-1892 as probationer ranger at the Wealth Community from Caransebeș. His responsibility was the forest planning. In 1893, he entered in the service of the Crown Domain, where he stayed until the end of his activity. In April 1893, he was appointed sylviculturist – assistant in the forest department of Mălini Crown Domain – Borca. Two years later, he was promoted chief-sylviculturist and transferred to Sadova Crown Domain. He held this position for three years, later taking the leading position of this Department (1898). For 28 years, he obtained all the degrees of the forest department of the state, attaining, on the 1st of January 1927, the position of counsellor forest engineer¹. His activity as the head of the department, at Sadova Crown Domain ended in 1942. Starting with this year, Gheorghe Popovici appears in the documents as a counsellor.

* 3rd Degree Scientific Researcher, PhD., “C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor” Institute for Research in Social Studies and Humanities from Craiova, of the Romanian Academy; Email: narcisa_mitu@yahoo.com

¹ Dolj County Department of the National Archives, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 5/1940, f. 171 (further cited as SJAN Dolj); *Ibidem*, file no. 43/1946, f. 1.

Throughout the military occupation, during World War I, he had to leave Sadova Department, period in which the Domain was administrated by a German High-Command (10th of November – 15th of October 1918). For a short period of time, at the end of World War I, Gheorghe Popovici also leded Segarcea Domain, along with the head of the Department, Eremia Medianu². He also managed the Domains: Bușteni (1920-1940), Cocioc-Gherghița (1920-1941) and, only for two years, Rușețu (1920-1922).

In order to understand the role that Gheorghe Popovici played in the organisation and the development of Sadova Domain, it is necessary to find which were the attributions of the head of Department. The head of such a Department was the most important person in the circumscription, having the role to maintain the connection with the central administration, and to put into practice the dispositions of the general administrator. The forestry or the agricultural expert was a graduate of a higher school from Romania, or abroad. Among their responsibilities there were: the organisation and the controlling, so that the production on the Domain would increase, the maintenance of the administrated goods; growing and maintaining the farm to the aspect and the result of a “Model Farm”, along with the rational distribution of the attribution and works: ensuring of a decent and disciplined environment, dignity, honesty and good faith in justice, the establishing of the working timetable; the drawing-up of the budget project for the Department; the controlling of the good execution of the budget; the commercialisation of the products, according to the best conditions, norms and prices established by the Central Department; the employment or the sanctioning, or sacking of staff; the carrying out on time of the administrative and accounting responsibilities, which had been established by the Central Department; the payment based of justifying documents, for works that had been approved either through budget, or the special dispositions of the Central Department³.

Once with his appointing at the leadership of Sadova Department, Gheorghe Popovici created a team made of young people, the farming executives and the sylviculturists, who were trained in the field, being graduates of prestigious higher sylviculture schools from Romania (Herăstrău) and abroad. The deputy-executives were also graduates of higher or vocational agriculture schools. The apprentices were supported, by the Crown Domain Administration, in vocational schools from the country, or in those within the domains.

After two decades, the team from his subordination was made of: a helper, an accountant, an assistant accountant, an archivist and a storekeeper, 6 branch managers, 2 deputy branch managers, 2 trainees, 6 farming supervisors, 1 sylviculturist, 2 forest keepers; an auxiliary (inferior) staff: deputy bailiffs, guards, farm hands, foresters, according to the dimension and the needs of the

² Idem, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file 17/1918, ff. 16-21.

³ Narcisa Maria Mitu, *Organizarea și administrarea Domeniilor Coroanei*, in “Analele Universității din Craiova”, no. 1(19)/2011, Craiova, Universitaria Publishing House, p. 304.

department, servants etc⁴. In 1921, the staff employed on Sadova Domain included 135 people, and in 1944, consistent with playlists, drawn-up in July, the staff of Sadova Domain would have 53 people, to which there was added a physician and 15 pensioners⁵.

With the staff recruited and selected under the direct supervision of Sadova Domain's administrator, based on some analytical studies, numerous field works stated, along with the exploitation of the land, which constituted the estate of the Domain. The mission was a difficult one, considering the quality of the land and their pre-establishing for the agricultural use. The fertile land was alternating with the sandy ones, without any economic value, reason for which there was imposed the conceiving of a plan that would increase the usefulness of the rich soils from the Water-Meadow, on one side, and the stopping of desertification, by fixing the sand with locust trees and vineyards, on the other side. Moreover, for obtaining fertile lands that would be appropriate for farming, there were taken measures for the sanitation and draining, through a circuit of open canals, of the water that was stagnated, during the summer in the Meadow of Jiu, in a place called "Balta Liștevei". For the same purpose, there were done deforestations of the tree clusters, outside the perimeter of the forest, and the flow of the waters was changed Jieț⁶.

For a better administration, the Domain was divided in square kilometres, each having four strips of 25 ha. Each square kilometre was surrounded by two roads of 12 m, and other two, of 16 m wide, having a locust tree planted at 1 m distance from each other. In only few years, there were planted 500 linear kilometres on the side of the roads, apart from the boundary of the estate, approximately 500 linear kilometres were planted with 3-5 rows of locust trees, forming, in this way a defending belt. The farms were also surrounded by locust trees belts, organised on 10 rows, works that finished in 1907⁷.

During 1902-1903, there was conceived an economic plan, based on which Sadova Crown Domain was structured on agricultural and silvic department. Until 1908, Sadova Domain was divided in 8 agricultural departments, varying between 1,000 and 2,800 ha: Sadova, Pisc, Ogrin, Daina, Odaia, Coclitu, Ocolna, Înșiratele, a viticultural one and a silvic one⁸. From 1902, there were adopted 2 systems of crop rotation: one for 4 years, extensively, and the other for 5 years, intensively.

For the exploitation of the Domain, Gheorghe Popovici concluded agreements with the villagers from the domain, but also with the dwellers from the neighbouring villages: Dăbuleni, Amărăști, Daneți, Mârșani, Dobrotești. The

⁴ Gheorghe Popovici, *Monografia Domeniului Coroanei Sadova*, Bucharest, 1906, pp. 34-35, 54.

⁵ SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 33/1944, f. 16.

⁶ Narcisa Maria Mitu, *Organizarea și exploatarea Domeniului Sadova în perioada 1884-1919*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane «C.S. Nicolăescu Ploșșor»", no. X/2009, Craiova, Aius Publishing House, p. 312.

⁷ SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 1/1882, f. 10.

⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 7.

following year, the Domain had 1,200 workers, who owned 5,000 draught cattle and 1,000 iron ploughs, bought by the Administration, but paid by the peasants, through their work. A worker would cultivate between 3 and 6 ha on the domain and 2 to 4 ha, on his property. Until 1907, the crop rotation was applied only on the surfaces cultivated on the Central Department. Starting with the following year, the system was extended to the sharecropped lands⁹.

For the diversification of the cereal categories that were cultivated in the area, taking into account the land specificity and the ability to be productive, experimental fields, with plants that would later be widely grown. We mention on this respect: the wheat from Banat, rye from Schlanstedt, Petcov and Debry, "Ligovo" oat, and as artificial forage, beside the lucerne, the vetch, sowed and mixed with the autumn barley¹⁰.

As regarding the forests, at his arrival at Sadova Central Department, Gheorghe Popovici found a disorganised and old forest, made of different types of trees: ash trees, oaks, elm trees, common maple trees, lime trees, nu trees, cornel trees, hornbeam trees, poplars, willows, mulberry trees, reason for which there were necessary rapid measures for the regeneration. The following measures were taken, in order to solve the problem: the grazing into the woods was forbidden, trees were planted in the glens, oaks on the sandy areas, under the protection of the locust trees there were built communication roads and bridges within the forests.

The threaten, represented by the sand storms, determined the head of the Central Department to take the necessary measures for fixing them. Therefore, the Administration decided, by also offering the necessary amounts of money, to plant the sandy areas with locus trees, on a surface of 800 ha¹¹. The planting proved to be extremely beneficial: first, in order to fix the sandy lands that were representing the largest part of the surface, and then, because those trees could be exploited in their early stage, unlike the oak or the whitewood forests, which needed over 80 years. In 1890, there were made attempts to fix the sand with scots and black pine trees, but, because they could not adapt themselves to the climate, these types were not used anymore.

For obtaining the necessary seedling, he founded several mobile nurseries of locust trees, the first being created in 1894, in Ocolna, and, for the oaks and other types of trees, a nursery in Jiu River Meadow.

For a better exploitation, he divided the oak forest from the Meadow in 7 areas, of approximately 100 ha each. The regime was that of the permanent forest. The regeneration was made by timber and artificial impregnation. The locust trees plantations were divided in 5 series: Daina, Ocolna, Dăbuleni, Ogrin and Visa

⁹ Narcisa Maria Mitu, *Forța de muncă utilizată la lucrările agricole de pe Domeniul Coroanei Sadova (1884-1948)* in "Arhivele Olteniei", New Series, no. 26/2012, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, pp. 204-205.

¹⁰ Idem, *Domeniile Coroanei Regale (1884-1948)*, Craiova, Aius Publishing House, 2011, p. 83.

¹¹ Gheorghe Popovici, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Bădălaie. As an exploitation regime, there was adopted that of the simple thicket, with a 20-25 year revolution. These locust trees forests were designed for the obtaining the wood for constructions and fire.

The works for fixing the moving sand, through the construction of protecting belts, but also the drainage from the line of river Jiu and the changing of the flow for Jieț, permitted the Central Department of Sadova to give to exploitation almost 1,000 ha of land that, in 1921, was expropriated to the dwellers of that area. If, at the beginning, the forest domain of Sadova had a surface of 2,493 ha, being made of the forests from the meadow of Jiu River (1,676.1 ha) and the plantations from the sandy lands (816.9 ha), in 1916, the proportion inversed, the surface of the forest from the Meadow reaching 728 ha, and that of the locust trees 1,600 ha¹². The refusal of the dwellers to take the sandy lands during the expropriations from 1919, determined Gheorghe Popovici to intensify the forestation with locust trees. Thus, immediately after the end of war, the activity for the forestation of the sandy land was restarted, leading to, in 1935, a situation in which the locust trees plantation to occupy a total surface of 3,300 ha¹³. The increase of the forested surface, transformed the Central Department of Sadova in a preponderantly forest domain.

For the industrialisation and the commercialisation of the logs, it was built, on the Domain, a small frame factory. Destroyed during World War I, there were taken measures for repairing and moving it in another part of the Domain, the land on which it had been built, being expropriated¹⁴. It was built in 1924, and inaugurated in 1925, discharging lots of materials for the local needs: oak boards, of different lengths and thicknesses, planks (beams, rafters, poles), board fence, stakes, edge boards and materials for cooperage, oak and ash tree lumber. The factory was reconstructed in 1936, but it was destroyed by a fire on the 24th of May 1945. In the yard of the factory, there were two warehouses for logs and frame, along with the building for the people who were working there¹⁵.

The huge quantities of wood were being transported over the Danube, by barge, and commercialised in the harbour of Brăila. The quality of the lumber obtained from the forest of Sadova Domain was proved by the request for export, of some wood products, made there. There were highly demanded the oak staves and friezes. In 1932, there were sent to England approximately 1,000 m³ of oak friezes of 25½ mm thick and of different lengths and widths, the first quality. In March 1934, there were sold 2 railway carriages of staves in Turkey and 5-6 carriages were ready for being sent to Malaysia. One year later, 25 carriages were expected to go to Spain¹⁶.

¹² SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 1/1882, f. 7.

¹³ *Ibidem*, file no. 1/1935, f. 49.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, file no. 7/1920, f. 13.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, file no. 16/1945, f. 41.

¹⁶ Narcisa Maria Mitu, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

The remaking of the vineyards and the extension of their surfaces, also represented a major preoccupation for the administrator of Sadova Domain. By planting the vineyards, the administration considered the rendering valuable of some useless, sandy lands, influenced by the wind. He chose the indigenous vines, resistant to the sandy lands, and also to phylloxera. There were brought grafting vines, but they were planted in a small share. From the 500 ha for the culture of vines, until 1906, there was planted only a surface of 115.7ha, in the departments of Ogrin and at Pisc Farm. During the military occupation, from 1916-1918, the vineyards were abandoned, fact that led to a reduction in the viticultural surface, to 90.80 ha. The moment when Gheorghe Popovici gave his seat, from Sadova Central Department, to his successor, engineer *Iosif Rossman*, he left behind him vineyards on a surface of 50.95 ha. The reason for the shrinkage of the surface was determined by different factors: being very scarce, it was renounced, first to 20 ha, then 2.78 ha, destroyed by phylloxera; later, owing to the Decree from the 14th of October 1940, which led to the annulment of the privileges obtained through the law that founded the Domain, and the expensiveness of manpower, material, and even high demands of the staff, there were lost other 10.51 ha, of not very productive vineyards¹⁷.

The wine making was performed with modern devices, based on scientific knowledge. The wine was generally a high quality one, extremely appreciated, being mostly commercialised in the locality, in the towns around and, especially in the wine store from Bucharest. The best wines were also put on the table of the royal family.

Considering the existence of wide surfaces, occupied by pastures (3,381.5 ha of pastures and 21.2 ha of underwood for grazing), and the interest of the administration to make them useful, the Administration of the Domain gave a special importance to cattle rising. After the investments performed for this area, Sadova Department had, at the end of 1905, 1,169 livestock units: 494 cattle and 7 buffalos; 72 livestock units of horses, 230 pigs and 819 sheep. The cattle were kept in Piscu, and were raised for producing oxen for the future works. They were often part of the Moldovan breed. The horses were kept at Ocolna, and were used for the local regeneration of the Arabian breed, being chosen the Mura breed for working, and English-Arabian one for services. The pigsties were at Daina, it was raised the breed called "Mangalitza swine". As regarding the sheep, they were raised at Ogrin, being preferred the breed called "Țigaie alba-prime wool breed of sheep"¹⁸.

The investments from this field led to the significant raise of the number of animals, and, in April 1916, on Sadova Domain, there could be inventoried: 1,177 cattle, 253 horses, approx. 1,000 swine and 3,205 sheep. The menacing of the occupation army in November, determined the evacuation of the animals in

¹⁷ Idem, *Evoluția social-economică a Domeniului Coroanei Sadova după reforma agrară din 1921*, in "Arhivele Olteniei", New Series, no. 25/2011, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 117.

¹⁸ Idem, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 115, 117.

Moldova (approximately 1,700 cattle, 156 horses, approx. 2,000 swine, 3,000 sheep, captured at Râmnicul Sărat). Along the two years of occupation, the German administration produced to Sadova Department a loss representing 1,044 cattle, 150 horses, 132 swine and 2,369 sheep¹⁹.

The animal loss, suffered during World War I, along with the reduction of commons and pastures, the farming land too, as an effect of expropriation, resulted in the diminishing in the number of animals, as confronted to the pre-war period. In 1925, the Administration made the decision to liquidate the swine breeding farm, only a reduced number being further raised, for the needs of the Department²⁰.

The development of sericulture was also under the attention of the head of the Department, reason for which, there were planted 8,000 mulberry trees and, in 1912, there was founded a *weaving and housekeeping school*, liquidated in 1923, due to the lack of staff²¹. As regarding the beekeeping, it developed a lot in the period between the wars. If in 1918, the apiary had 129 good beehives, in 1933, it had 320 of productive beehives²².

Another priority was the endowment of Sadova Central Department with buildings and agricultural farming stock: houses for the staff, workshops, stables, storehouses, barns and shelters for the agricultural farming stock and machinery. The image of the farms was also very important. For this reason, in the park from Sadova, and in all the other departments, there were planted fruit trees, and the gardens, in front of the houses where the chief farmers were living, were nicely arranged. For making the orchards, and for offering the dwellers the chance to plant fruit trees in their own households, there were created two nurseries, one at Sărăceaua, and another at the monastery of Sadova.

Related to Gheorghe Popovici, it is also the renovation of the church from the old monastery of Sadova, built by Matei Basarab, the erecting of 4 schools, the theatre, 3 Town-Halls, several workshops, which, when the war broke out, in 1916, had awarded qualifications to over 150 peasant boys in different trades: farm mechanic, blacksmith, wheelwright, carpenter, cooper; he built a tiles factory, 5 mills, an oil factory, he founded "*Vasile Alecsandri*" People's Bank²³.

"*Vasile Alecsandri*" People's Bank was founded in 1900, with a social capital of 600 lei. Gheorghe Popovici was a founding member, along with Ion Kalinderu, who was the honorary president, A. Valsanachi, A. Angelescu and G. Socoteanu. Besides the Administrative Committee of the Bank, there was also a committee that dealt with the improvement of the cultural and moral condition of the people from the countryside²⁴. Gheorghe Popovici was also one of the subscribers of "Steaua" Society, whose president was also Ioan Kalinderu²⁵.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 4/1925, f. 23-24.

²¹ *Ibidem*, file 4/1921, f. 36; Narcisa Maria Mitu, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-292.

²² SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 24/1933, ff. 45-46.

²³ "Albina", no. 37/15 June 1908, pp. 1066-1070.

²⁴ SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 2/1910, f. 26; *Ibidem*, file no. 1/1882, f. 5.

²⁵ "Albina", no. 45-46/5-12 august 1901, pp. 1248-1249.

Moreover, he created a museum, in which there were exhibited: 7 stuffed birds, a board with the oak collection, the 95th edition, Basarabia; 78 boards with plants and buds; 18 stuffed birds: an eagle, 2 geese, 1 seagull, 5 bee eaters, 2 grey crows, 1 ciuhurez, 2 black milans, 4 pond birds²⁶.

He organised a library, whose fund of books reached, at the end on 1933, 104 works and magazines, estimated to 36,438.40 lei²⁷.

In the period when he was the head of Sadova Domain, Gheorghe Popovici participated with the Domain to many exhibitions. The most important was the jubilee exhibition from 1906, organised at Bucharest, where there were registered the departments: agriculture, viticulture and silviculture²⁸.

In *the agriculture department* he exhibited: a soil section, realised at 3 m deep; a graph indicating the quantity of nutritive substances and the physical composition of the soil from Sadova Domain; an economic plan, divided in sections; the model of Ocolna farm made of: corn barns, storehouses, car garages, stables, houses of the staff, with gardens, and surrounded by plantations. There were exhibited the miniatures of rack-waggons and carts, used for the transport of cereals, made in the workshops of Sadova Domain, the model of the wheelright's and smithy workshops, along with the mill from Ocolna; the economic and statistic plan of Sadova Domain, along with the departments of Odaia, Coclitu, Ocolna, Piscu; albums with the plans of the buildings constructed on Sadova Domain; the plan of the plantations from the sandy areas; a reproduction of the tiles factory, with patterns of tiles and roofs, showing the way in which they are covered.

The viticultural department was represented by varied white and black wines, produced at Sadova Central Department.

In the area of *silviculture*, there were presented different types of wood products: small oak barrels and butts, with iron rings, a miniature oak bath, an oak butt for wine, with a lid, for cleaning it, made in the cooperage from Sadova Domain; a locust tree log, from the sandy area of the Domain, sectioned from each metre; the study for the plan of Sadova Domain; different locust tree beams for construction, from the forest planted on the sandy area.

On the 25th of September 1928, he participated to the international fair of samples from Prague, with 21 samples of frame, of oak and ash tree, along with few wheelright's items, boards lumber, cleaned only with emery paper²⁹.

He did not neglect the relations with the villagers either, the main manpower from the Domain. He insisted on the good relations that the employees of the Domain had to maintain with villagers, both from the point of view of their attitude towards them, and their material and moral development. They were encouraged to

²⁶ SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 13/1928, unnumbered.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, file no. 24/1933, ff. 42-45.

²⁸ *Catalog – Administrația Domeniului Coroanei la expoziția generală română din București*, Bucharest, pp. 1906, pp. 61-62, 65, 74, 77, 86, 88, 92, 99, 115.

²⁹ SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 2/1928, ff. 87-88.

improve the breeds from the households, bringing, instead of their cattle, ones similar to those from the Department; to buy performant agricultural farming stock, to organise their households, according to the model of the Central Department.

Among the preoccupations of the administrator Gheorghe Popovici, there was also the writing. Starting with the first years, the heads of the departments were encouraged to write articles in the specialised magazines, the well-documented ones being financially recompensed. Thus, in 1906, there were printed 11 monographs, published by the heads of the departments, on the occasion of the manifestations that were celebrating the 40 years of ruling of Carol I. Gheorghe Popovici is the author of the work *Monografia Domeniului Sadova din județul Doljiu* (The Monograph of Sadova Domain, from Dolj County), Bucharest, 1906. Three decades later, he wrote *Istoricul plantațiilor de salcâm depe domeniul coroanei Sadova* (The history of locust tree plantations from Sadova Crown Domain), published in "Revista Pădurilor" (The magazines of the forests), issues 7 and 8, from 1936, along with a monograph of Sadova Domain, a manuscript, which refers to the period 1884-1936. The three works proved to be absolutely necessary, considering the fact that the archive of Sadova Domain was destroyed during World War I, when it was lost precious information on addressing the evolution of the Department, in the period before the war.

For the activity carried out along the 44 years on Sadova Domain, Gheorghe Popovici was rewarded by the kings of Romania with honours: the medal *The Star of Romania, in the rank of commander, Reward for the work in education, 1st degree; Reward for work at church; Agricultural Merit in rank of Knight/1933; Commercial and Industrial Merit, 1st class; Reward for 25 years working period; Faithful Service – in the rank of officer/1937, the medal, Centenary of King Carol I/1940*³⁰.

³⁰ SJAN Dolj, fund Sadova Crown Domain, file no. 5/1940, ff. 23-24.

