

BĂBEANU CULA FROM BĂBENII DE OLTEȚ, VÂLCEA COUNTY*

Ileana CIOAREC**

Abstract: Originating from the locality of Băbeni, where the family took their name, Băbeanu boyars are attested for the first time at the end of the 15th century, when the documents mention a certain Staie. Significant for the history of Băbeanu family is also Băbeni estate located by Olteț river, or Băbeni-Oltețu.

The name of this family is related to an impressive architectural monument from the village of Băbeni-Oltețu, a ‘cula’-a semi-fortified building, which, unfortunately, has not been preserved. The date for the construction is not known precisely, because there are not sufficient documentary proofs for drawing-up the complete history of Băbeanu family. It is very possible that the 18th century was the period when the building of the cula began.

Initially, the cula had a rectangular shape, a 12m height to the roof, and four levels (a ground-floor and three floors).

Keyword: Băbeanu cula, Vâlcea county, rectangular shape, Băbeanu family, burnt brick.

Originating from the locality of Băbeni, where the family took their name, Băbeanu boyars are attested for the first time at the end of the 15th century, when the documents mention a certain Staie¹. The attestation of this person, shortly after Wallachia had obtained its independence, determines our consideration that this family would have existed since the beginning of the state that was spreading in the southern region of the Carpathians.

Significant for the history of Băbeanu family is also Băbeni estate located by Olteț river, or Băbeni-Oltețu. At the end of the 15th century, half of it was owned by Staie, who, in 1531, during the reign of Vlad the Monk lost it “due to mischievous circumstances”². The voivode donated the estate to the Ban of

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

¹ Oliver Velescu, *Mihai Băbeanu, logofătul de taină*, in “București. Materiale de istorie și muzeografie”, XVII, 2003, p. 505.

² Ion Donat, *Domeniul domnesc în Țara Românească (sec. XIV–XVI)*, edition supervised by Gheorghe Lazăr, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing, 1996, p. 164.

Craiova, Barbu, for “rightful and faithful service”³. In the muniment, it was mentioned that Staie, in his attempt to make amends with Vlad the Monk, “agreed with Ban Barbu to make peace with Voivode Vlad, to donate the estate of Staie, half of Băbeni, and master Barbu immediately bought that half from Staie, for over 1,000 silver coins”⁴. It is not known precisely the moment when Băbeni estate reentered in the ownership of Băbeanu family, but it happened before 1625. That year, the Voivode Alexandru Iliăș reconfirmed to chancellor Zaharia from Băbeni the proprietorship over the village of Băbeni⁵.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Băbeanu family started to sell parts from Băbeni estate. In 1812, Ilinca, the wife of Costandin Băbeanu, sold to archpriest Cârstea 12 ½ fathoms of Băbeni estate, for 24 thalers⁶. On the 12th of July 1812, Anica, the granddaughter of Preda Otetelișanu bought from baker Matei Dobriceanu 167 ½ fathoms in the eastern side of Băbeni estate, 172 ½ from the middle 177 ½ fathoms in the western side⁷. On the 15th of February 1813, Andrei Băbeanu, Ion and Șerban from Băbeni sold to Bănică, son of Răducan Băbeanu, 35 fathoms of estate, within Băbeni estate, with 20 thalers⁸. On the 10th of July 1813, Drăghici Băbeanu sold to archbishop Cârstea Diculescu 5 fathoms of Băbeni estate for 21 thalers. Drăghici Băbeanu had inherited the share from his uncle, Șerban Băbeanu⁹. On the 20th of July 1813, Răducan Băbeanu sold to Ioniță Zătoreanu 10 fathoms of the state, within Băbeni property, for 17 thalers a fathom¹⁰. In 1831, among the owners of Băbeni estate, there is also Băbeanu family¹¹. In 1906, Constantin C. Băbeanu is mentioned as proprietor¹². Băbeanu family owned the estate until 1910, when Barbu Băbeanu gave it to his daughter, Adela, at her marriage with doctor Iordăchescu.

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³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

⁵ Constanța Badea, Mihai Pârâianu, Petronela Badea, *Pătăienii Valahiei*, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Intol Press, 2017, p. 96.

⁶ ANSJ Vâlcea, Vâlcea County Court, file 475/1837, f. 20 v.

⁷ *Ibidem*, file 860/1834, f. 62 v.

⁸ *Ibidem*, file 475/1837, f. 28.

⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 21.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ Ion Donat, Ion Pătroiu, Dinică Ciobotea, *Catagrafia Obștească a Țării Românești din 1831*, Craiova, Helios Press, 1999, p. 34; Sabina Cenușe, Dinică Ciobotea, *Proprietatea asupra pământului în județul Vâlcea (1722–1912)*, in “Istorie și societate”, coord. Marusia Cârstea, Sorin Liviu Damean, Doru Liciu, Bucharest, Mica Valahie Press, 2004, p. 112

¹² *Ibidem*.

family. It is very possible that the 18th century was the period when the building of the cula began. This assertion derives from comparing the data with those of the other cula constructions, according to all the authors so far, they were imagined as special architectural accomplishments in the context of the social life insecurity, from the 18th century, when, under the Phanariot rulers, there were abolished the traditional military structures. They were constituting a means of facing/defencing before the Turkish groups that started to raid Oltenia.

In 1801, the *pasvangii* troops led by Pasvantoglu attacked and burned the cula from Băbeni. It remained a ruin until the 1806–1812 period, when it was reconditioned by Radu Băbeanu. The moment the building was restored, it was completed with a watch-tower¹³. In the period 1903–1908, the building was consolidated by Barbu Băbeanu¹⁴. It remained the property of Băbeanu family until 1910, when Barbu Băbeanu gave it as dowry to his daughter Adela, for her marriage with doctor Iordăchescu. In 1930, the new owners, with the help of the Italian architect Firavanti Candoni, renovated the construction again, especially accentuating the ground-floor¹⁵. Adela Băbeanu and her husband kept the cula until the March 7th 1949. At that date, the building was nationalised and became the state property. Not being dwelt anymore, the cula degraded. In 1960, the Local Council of Diclești Commune, instead of refurbishing it, disposed its demolishing. Through the demolishing of the cula from Băbeni, along with other constructions of this type, it was caused, as Radu Crețeanu was also mentioning, a significant prejudice to the historic patrimony of the country.¹⁶

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The former monument known as the “Cula of Băbeni” belongs to a category of edifices that can be met only within the area that spreads over the region of Oltenia and the east side of Olt River, in the counties of Argeș, Teleorman and Olt. Similar to the other cula constructions, the one from Băbeni had a shape adequate for defence, the walls ending in crenels that could be used for rifle or pistol shooting, in state of siege. These crenels were present in the western and northern parts, where the ground was lower, not being necessary on the other sides, where the defence was facilitated by the nearby hill. Its positioning on the edge of the hill reflects the building purposes, merging the elements of fortification with the conditions provided by the relief. From the cula of Băbeni-Oltețu, there could be supervised the entire area that spread between the streams of Oltețu and Cerna.

¹³ ANSJ Dolj, Historical Monument Commission, file 31, f. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, ff. 17–18.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, ff. 17–18; Radu Crețeanu, Sarmiza Crețeanu, *Culele din Oltenia*, Bucharest, Meridiane Press, 1969, p. 40.



The framing in the region of the cula from Băbeni-Oltețu
(ANSJ Dolj, The Historical Monuments Commission, file 31, f. 14).

Initially, the cula had a rectangular shape, a 12m height to the roof, and four levels (a ground-floor and three floors)¹⁷.



The plan of the cula from Băbeni-Oltețu before the year of 1890 (reconstruction)
(ANSJ Dolj, The Historical Monuments Commission, file 31, f. 11).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 2.

In 1890, from still unknown reasons, the members of Băbeanu family reduced the dimensions of the cula significantly, choosing to preserve only the ground and the first floors.



The plan of the cula from Băbenii-Oltet after the year of 1890 (reconstruction)
(ANSJ Dolj, The Historical Monuments Commission, file 31, f. 11).

At first, the cula was built of burnt brick, having the exterior wall of approximately a metre thick, in the years of 1806–1812, when it was rebuilt by Radu Băbeanu, the walls were built of small-dimension brick, joined with mortar that, according to the confessions made by Adelei Iordăchescu, the last owner of the cula, was “prepared with slaked lime, on the same day”¹⁸.

Initially, it was covered with common oak shingles, which was replaced in the years of 1806–1812 with fir-tree shingles. In the period of 1903–1908, when the cula was renovated, the lead sheets replaced the fir-tree shingles¹⁹. The same sheets were used for covering it in 1930, when the constructed benefited by a new repairing²⁰.

The entrance in the cula was first done on the 1st floor, on a mobile ladder made of massive beams, which was then folded to the eaves, using interior-manoeuvred pulleys²¹. The entrance from the exterior was, as well, kept when the

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, ff. 17–18.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 3.

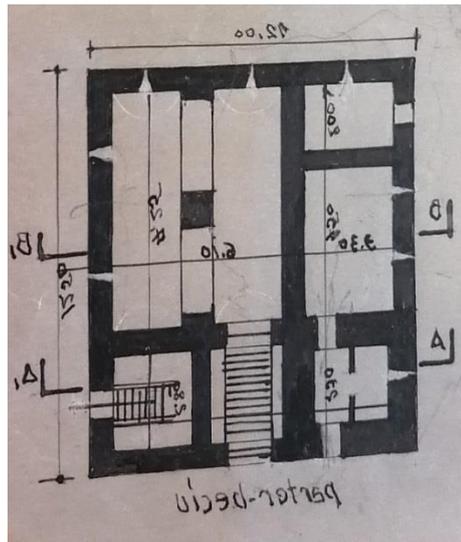
²⁰ *Ibidem*, ff. 17–18.

²¹ *Ibidem*, f. 3.

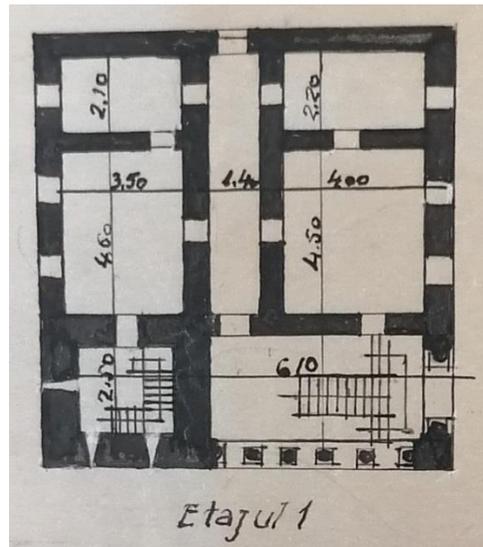
cula was restored in 1806–1812, but this time it was done through a staircase positioned in the living-room, which was situated on the ground-floor. In 1930, the architect Firavanti Candoni, on the request addressed by doctor Iordăchescu, demolished the eastern wall and opened an access door on the ground-floor, which used to be vaulted with two wooden bars²². It was made of oak wood, in one of the carpentry workshops from Râmnicu Vâlcea²³. A similar entrance system can be met at the cula from Radomir, built by Stoian Hagi Țolea.

It is not known how the interior of the cula looked before its reconstruction from 1806–1812, because there is no image kept from the period before. All the historians and the architects who analysed the construction from Băbeni-Oltețu, present its history and architecture subsequently to the moment of 1806–1812.

In the period 1812–1890, the inside of the cula was arranged as following. The ground-floor did not have a direct entrance from the outside, only the first floor did. It was also the entrance for the other floors too. The first and the second floors were made of a room and the staircase, and the third floor of a room and a balcony with round columns made of brick that supported some semi-circle archways²⁴.



Ground-floor

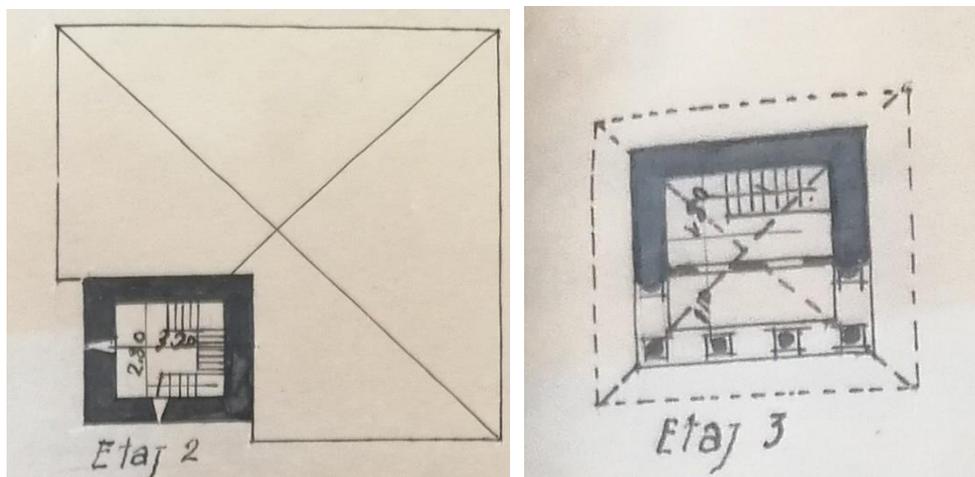


First floor

²² *Ibidem.*

²³ *Ibidem*, f. 1.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, f. 3.



Second floor

Third floor

The inside of the cula from Băbeni-Oltețu before the year of 1890 (reconstruction)
(ANSJ Dolj, The Historical Monuments Commission, file 31, f. 18).

In the year of 1890, from the entire cula, the owners decided to keep only the ground-floor, the first floor and the watch-tower. Then, the distribution of the ground-floor was displaying as: a cellar, a bathroom, a kitchen and a bedroom, which was heated by a stove. There, it was also positioned the ladder used for going up towards the next floor. On the first floor, there was a hallway, ended with a latrine, for sanitation being used water and lime sprinkles²⁵.

In 1930, doctor Iordăchescu, with the help of architect Firavanti Candoni, refurbished the cula, reconstructing the surrounding wall of the cellar, and adding decorative elements to the balcony polls. The inside of the cula remained unaltered.

The ground-floor bedroom, along with the four rooms from the 1st floor had wood beams on their ceilings²⁶.

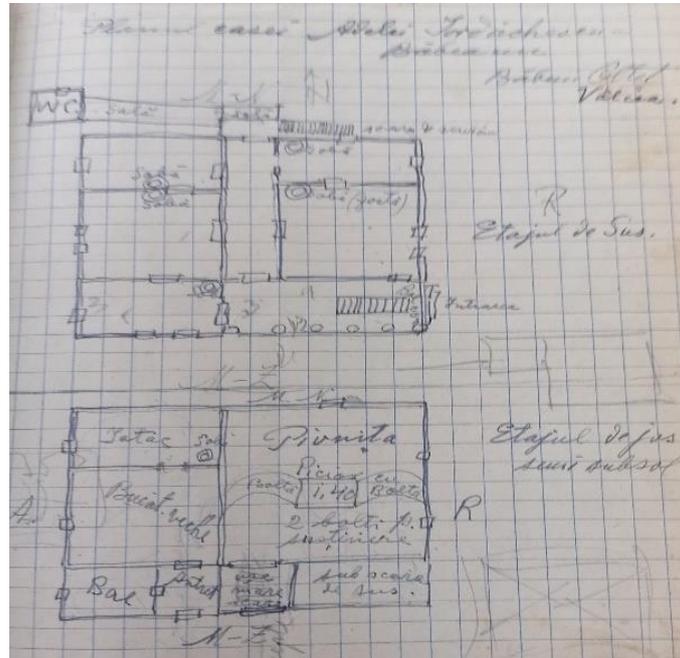
The natural lighting of the cula was ensured by windows that had two layers of window-panes. The first-floor windows were taken from the former ramparts, which, at the reparations done in 1903–1908, had been widened considerably²⁷.

Due to the fact that the cula does not exist anymore, and the reconstruction of its history was made based on the information offered by the family members of doctor Iordăchescu, the historians and the architects who analysed this type of constructions, could not say whether it also had an exterior decoration. Moreover, until present, it could not be established either the manner in which it was done the heating of the cula, or the existence of some elements that could individualise it, in relation to other constructions of this type.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, ff. 17–18.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 2.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 3.



The plan of the cula from Băbeni-Oltețu in 1930 (reconstruction)
 (ANSJ Dolj, The Historical Monuments Commission, file 31, f. 6).

Not being used anymore, the cula degraded. This process was accentuated especially after it was nationalised and became the property of the state. In 1960, the Local Council of Diculești commune disposed its demolishing. Through the demolishing of the cula from Băbeni, as much as of other similar constructions, there was caused a major prejudice to the historical patrimony of the country.