

MATERIAL CULTURE AND REINTERPRETED TRADITIONS

THE *CULA* FROM LUPOAIA, GORJ COUNTY*

Ileana CIOAREC**

Abstract: Since medieval times, in the area of Oltenia, several tower-dwellings were preserved, which remind, by their structure and construction system, of the Byzantine ones or of those from the Balkan world. They are called, by a term of Turkish origin, *cula/ă* (*cule* for plural = tower, turret).

In Gorj County, there were quite a few *cule*, most of them on Gilort and Motru rivers valleys. Their placement and the construction site indicate their identity and functionality: watch-tower and signalling *cule*, refuge and defence *cule*, or dwellings.

Such a request was also answered by the *cula* from Lupoiaia, built by the members of Săvoiu family. It was built by Costache Săvoiu, called Surcel, towards the end of the eighteenth century and had, at first, the role of refuge and defense. Later, after stoves were built inside the *cule*, it began to be used as a permanent dwelling as well. The *cula* had a rectangular shape and three levels (one ground floor and two floors).

Keywords: *cula*, Lupoiaia, family Săvoiu, a shape, building.

Since medieval times, in the area of Oltenia, several tower-dwellings were preserved, which remind, by their structure and construction system, of the Byzantine ones or of those from the Balkan world. They are called, with a term of Turkish origin, *cula/ă* (*cule* for plural = tower, turret). They are a type of constructions representative only for the Oltenia area, with specific architectural elements such as the watch-tower supported by pillars, and double functionality: dwelling house and defense place.

In Gorj County, there were quite a few *cule*, most of them on Gilort and Motru rivers valleys. Their placement and the construction site indicate their identity and functionality: watch-tower and signalling *cule*, refuge and defence *cule*, or dwellings.

Such a request was also answered by the *cula* from Lupoiaia, built by the members of Săvoiu family. They were attested at the beginning of the 18th century, when the documents mention Constantin and Nicolae Săvoiu as owners of Lupoiaia estate¹.

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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 Lavinia Popica, *Familia Săvoiu*, in “Litua. Studii și cercetări”, IX, 2003, p. 299.

Săvoiu family owned the estates in Gorj and Mehedinți counties. Significant for their history is also Lupoia estate. This is mentioned in a charter issued between October 1593 and September 12, 1594 when Michael the Brave acknowledged Dragotă's inherited land in Lupoia "as much as it scattered, from the field and the mountain, on the river to the Furca Poeniței and from Dealul Roșii" which he had bought from Stoiana, The Daughter of Bucată with 600 silver coins². Lupoia Estate came into the possession of Săvoiu family on May 30, 1748, when Constantin and Nicolae, sons of Stamatie Săvoiu, bought it from Magistrate Milco Lupoianu, son of Milco from Baia de Aramă together with "the vineyard and the houses, the church and the ford from the mill that is on Motru water and with all their income from border to border"³, with 400 thalers. In 1749, on June 15, the voivode Grigorie II Ghica acknowledged Constantin and Nicolae's dominion over this estate⁴. On May 27, 1776, Maria and Stanca, the widows of Constantin and Nicolae Săvoiu, addressed lord Alexandru Ipsilanti claiming that the third part of the estate in Lupoia had been taken from them by their brothers-in-law, Mihai and Nicolae Săvoiu. The latter claimed to have lent Nicolae and Constantin money, in 1748, when they had bought Lupoia estate. Since almost thirty years had passed and they had not recovered their money, Mihai and Nicolae seized the third part of this property. The ruler of the country, Alexandru Ipsilanti judging the case, ruled for the benefit of Maria and Stanca⁵. The suit between the two parties continued into the following period. On June 10, the same year, Mihai and Nicolae Săvoiu, the sons-in-law of Pană Săvoiu, addressed Alexandru Ipsilanti claiming that they had witnesses to confess that they had lent Constantin and Nicolae money, in 1748⁶. On January 5, 1777, the ruler of Wallachia appointed the cavalry commanders Istrate Crețulescu and Nicoli to go on the spot and investigate the complaint⁷. On March 21, 1777, Badea Știrbei vel magistrate, Radu Slătineanu vel Lord Steward and Dumitrache Varlaam vel cup-bearer, members of the Princely Council, judging the cause, decided that the third part of Lupoia estate to remain in the possession of Maria and Stanca Săvoiu⁸. In 1831 as owners of this estate are mentioned "Gheorghe i brat ego Ioan and their cousin Costandin Săvoiu"⁹.

² *Documenta Romaniae Historica, B, Țara Românească*, vol. XI (1593–1600), Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1975, pp. 2–3.

³ Virgil Mărășescu, *Ctitorii și anul zidirii bisericii din parohia Lupoia*, in "Mitropolia Olteniei", year XXVI, 1974, no. 11–12, p. 999.

⁴ Nicolae Chipurici, *Oltenia medievală de vest. Catalog de documente (1374–1820)*, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Tipo Radical Publishing House, 2016, p. 301.

⁵ Lavinia Popica, *op. cit.*, pp. 299–300.

⁶ *Acte judiciare din Țara Românească 1775–1781*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1973, p. 313.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 314.

⁹ Ion Donat, Ion Pătroi, Dinică Ciobotea, *Catagrafia Obștească a Țării Românești din 1831*, Craiova, Helios Publishing House, 1999, p. 14.

In 1864, Lupoiaia estate was owned by Costache Săvoiu¹⁰. In the spring of 1865, 165 socmen from this estate approached the authorities, claiming that they had been removed from the “most fruitful strips of land” and forced to displace their homes. The villagers who agreed to stay on Lupoiaia estate were forced by Costache Săvoiu to pay him “one napoleon per year rent”¹¹. At the beginning of the 20th century, 750 ha of Lupoiaia estate were owned by Mihai C. Săvoiu and the remaining 215 ha by the villagers¹². This estate remained in the property of Săvoiu family until 1945, when it was nationalized and transferred to the state's possession.

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The name of this family is related to a very important architectural monument in the village of Lupoiaia, Săvoiu cula.

It was built by Costache Săvoiu, called Surcel, towards the end of the eighteenth century and had, at first, the role of refuge and defense¹³. Later, after stoves were built inside the cule, it began to be used as a permanent dwelling as well¹⁴. The construction was severely affected by the earthquake of 1838, the wall from the south-east collapsed. Subsequently, it was rebuilt from brick, glued with earthen mortar, by Constantin Săvoiu and his wife Anette Sarah von Guma.

Cula was inhabited until the years of 1860-1870, when Costache Săvoiu built the new mansion near it¹⁵. Temporarily, it was also used, as Sarmiza Cretzianu confesses, to accommodate the guests who came in large numbers to visit Săvoiu family: “the guests hosted here, when there was no place in the house, enjoyed the distant view through its lattice windows and the soft beds covered with homemade duvets, from the whitewashed rooms, decorated with stripped carpets. An emancipated, old, deaf and dumb gypsy, who had not left his master's court, carried the keys to his waist, and had no other job but to look after it”¹⁶. At the end of the 19th century, the descendants of Constantine Săvoiu, called Surcel, used the cula as grain warehouse and shelter for animals¹⁷.

¹⁰ Ion Ionescu de la Brad, *Agricultura română din județul Mehedinți*, Bucharest, 1868, pp. 441–442.

¹¹ Ion Pătroi, *La cumpăna a două epoci 1849–1877*, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc Publishing House, 1983, p. 138.

¹² Gabriel Croitoru, *Proprietatea asupra pământului în județul Mehedinți la începutul secolului al XX-lea*, in “Arhivele Olteniei”, New Series, no. 16, 2002, p. 91.

¹³ Elena Popescu, *Culele. Tipologii ale locuinței fortificate boierești*, in “Caiete de arte și design”, no. 6/2018, p. 91; Vasile Godea, *Culele din România: tezaur de arhitectură europeană*, Timișoara, Western Publishing House, 2006, p. 33.

¹⁴ ANSJ Dolj, the Historical Monument Commission, file 28 cule, f. 1; Liviu Brătuleanu, *Les koulas de Roumanie, XVI-ème-XVIII-ème siècle*, in “Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice”, year IX, 1998, no. 3–4, p. 20.

¹⁵ Radu Crețeanu, *Culele și casele întărite de pe Valea Motrului*, in “Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice. Seria Monumente și Muzee”, I, 1958, p. 109; Iulian Cămuș, *Culele din Gorj*, in “Litua. Studii și cercetări”, II, 1982, p. 340.

¹⁶ Sarmiza Cretzianu, *Cronica Stăicului*, Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 1984, p. 88.

¹⁷ ANSJ Dolj, the Historical Monument Commission, file 28 cule, f. 1; Sarmiza Cretzianu, *De pe Valea Motrului. Povești cu boieri, panduri și mirese codane*, 3rd edition, Bucharest, Corint Publishing House, 205, p. 15.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the construction was abandoned, Săvoiu family moving to Borăscu commune. No longer maintained, the cula gradually degraded and the wall on the south-eastern side, which had been restored after the earthquake of 1838, collapsed. In the early 40s of the 20th century, the construction was almost a ruin, menacing to collapse at any time. In 1945, the mayor and prefect of Mehedinți County, trying to save the cula, addressed the president of the Commission for Historical Monuments, asking him to intervene with the Minister of Arts, Mihai Ralea, to declare the construction in Lupoia a historical monument and to allocate the necessary funds for its restoration¹⁸. The steps taken by the management of the Historical Monuments Commission did not remain without result. In April 1946, King Carol II signed the royal decree by which Săvoiu cula was declared a historical monument¹⁹. It was published in the Official Gazette no. 93 of 18 April 1946²⁰.



Fig. 1. The Cula from Lupoia

Source: apud Iancu Atanasescu, Valeriu Grama, *Culele din România*, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc Press, 1974, p. 116.

¹⁸ See <https://arhivacomisiuniimonumentelor.ro>, site accessed on August 4, 2022.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ "Michael I, By the grace of God and the national will, king of Romania. To all present, I wish you good health. On the report of our Minister Secretary of State at the Department of Arts with no. 5.037 of 1946, having regard to Minutes no. 14 of 20 September 1945, of the Commission of Historical Monuments. Taking into account the provisions of art. 3 of the law for the conservation and restoration of historical monuments of July 29, 1919, based on the provisions of the high royal decree no. 1.626 of August 31, 1944, we hereby decreed and decree: Art. I. Cula of Săvoiu from Lupoia commune, Mehedinți county, is classified historical monument" ("The Official Gazette", no. 93/18 April 1946, p. 3.993).

In September 1946, Russo-Cruzescu, who held the position of secretary in the Ministry of Arts, asked the Commission for Historical Monuments to draw up an estimate of the works necessary for the restoration of the cula. The estimate was drawn up by the architect V. Moisescu. It was planned to restore the inner and outer walls that had collapsed into well-burnt brick glued with thick lime mortar and cement. The place of the wooden beams was to be taken by new ones, made of reinforced concrete. The old chimneys of the stoves were demolished and, in their place, there were built new ones of well-burnt brick glued with lime and cement mortar and enameled gutter-tiles. The roof of the cula was also restored from nailed wood tiles, “with special nails, on fir-tree planks”²¹. Instead of the old oak staircase that provided access to the upper floors, a new one was to be built, made of oak timber. The estimate also included the replacement of the floors, the interior doors and the windows²². The cost of all these works that were to be executed at the cula from Lupoiaia amounted to 21,000,000 lei. Although it was requested to draw up this estimate, the Ministry of Arts did not allocate the necessary funds for the restoration of the construction. In 1953, the mayor of Lupoiaia commune ordered the demolition of the cula from Lupoiaia, because it had degraded very badly, presenting the danger of imminent collapse²³.



Fig. 2. The Cula from Lupoiaia, before demolition

Source: apud Radu Crețeanu, *Culele și casele întărite de pe Valea Motrului*, in “Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice. Seria Monumente și Muzee”, I, 1958, p. 110.

²¹ See <https://arhivacomisiuniimonumentelor.ro>, site accessed on August 4, 2022.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ ANSJ Dolj, the Historical Monument Commission, file 28 cule, f. 12.

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The monument “Cula from Lupoiaia” falls into a category of edifices that are found only in the area that stretches over the Oltenia region and east of Olt, in the counties of Arges, Teleorman and Olt. It was a particular means that Moscu family used for confronting or defending against the Turkish bands, who often attacked and plundered Oltenia. It was part of the communication chain on Motru, from where the entire area that stretched from Broșteni to the top of Vâlcan Mountains could be supervised and signaled²⁴.

Like all the cule, the construction from Lupoiaia had a shape suitable for the defense, the walls having crenels through which one could shoot with the rifle and the pistol at the besiegers. These crenels were present in the parts where the terrain was lower, not necessary where the defense was facilitated by the nearby hill.

The cula had a rectangular shape (7.80×9.80 m) and three levels (one ground floor and two floors). It was built of brick of varying quality and size, with thick walls of almost one meter provided with numerous ramparts²⁵. The entire cula was covered with fir-tree wood tiles²⁶.

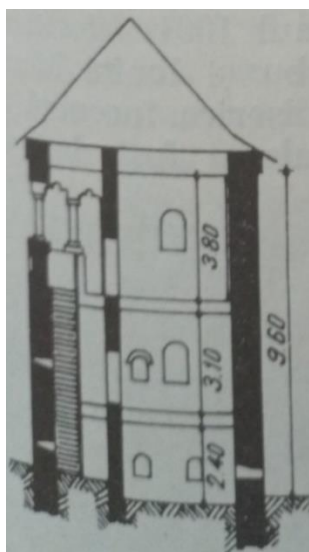


Fig. 3. The plan of the cula from Lupoiaia

Source: ANSJ Dolj, the Historical Monument Commission, file 28 cule, f. 10

²⁴ Iancu Atanasescu, Valeriu Grama, *Culele din Oltenia*, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc Publishing House, 1974, p. 115.

²⁵ Radu Crețeanu, *Culele și casele întărite de pe Valea Motrului*, in “Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice. Seria Monumente și Muzeu”, I, 1958, p. 109.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

The entrance to the cula was from the outside, through a massive oak wood door, built in a single folding, that was located on the south-eastern wall²⁷. On the ground floor, there was a narrow hall that housed the stairs leading into the cellar and the upper floors. The cellar was below the stepping level, the access to it being made through a wooden staircase with five steps²⁸. It had two ramparts, through which it could be fired with the rifle and the pistol when the cula was attacked.

The access to the upper floors was made through a wooden staircase with five steps.

On the first floor of a vestibule, one could enter the two living rooms²⁹. The rooms had oak hardwood, carved with a hatchet, and the ceiling was supported with apparent beams. The lighting of this floor was provided by two small windows arranged on the south-eastern wall of the rooms³⁰.

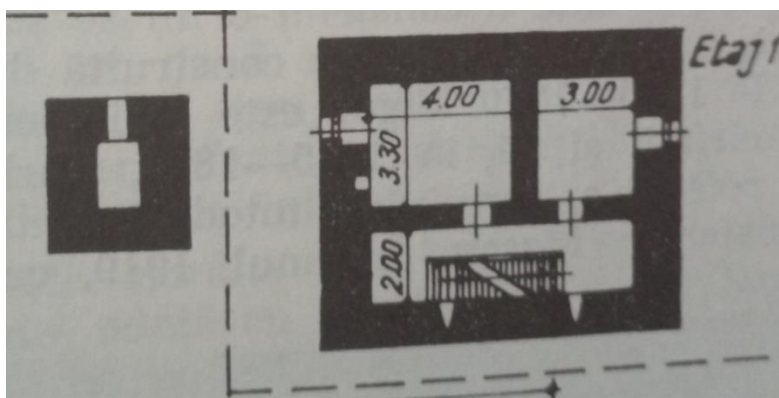


Fig. 4. The first-floor plan of the cula from Lupoaia

Source: ANSJ Dolj, the Historic Monuments Commission, file 28 cule, f. 10.

On the second floor, there was a spacious porch that had in front a colonnade with six bays, two bays on the sides, bordered by masonry short round pillars, with wider top and base, which supported trilobed arches³¹. The manner of decorating the porch has drawn the attention of all specialists who have dealt with the history of this monument. Radu Crețeanu and Vasile Godea, referring to it, claimed that it is one “of the most beautiful in Oltenia”³². From the end of the porch, along the north-western wall, there

²⁷ ANSJ Dolj, the Historical Monument Commission, file 28 cule, f. 1.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 2.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Radu Crețeanu, *Culele și casele întărite de pe Valea Motrului*, in “Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice. Seria Monumente și Muzeu”, I, 1958, p. 109.

³¹ ANSJ Dolj, the Historical Monument Commission, file 28 cule, f. 2.

³² Radu Crețeanu, Sarmiza Crețeanu, *Culele din România*, Bucharest, Meridiane Publishing House, 1969, p. 31.

started a wooden gallery that led to the latrine, built of stone, 5 m away from the cula³³. On the porch, there was the entrance into the two residential rooms. These had the floors made of oak planks, carved with a hatchet, and the ceilings supported by apparent beams.

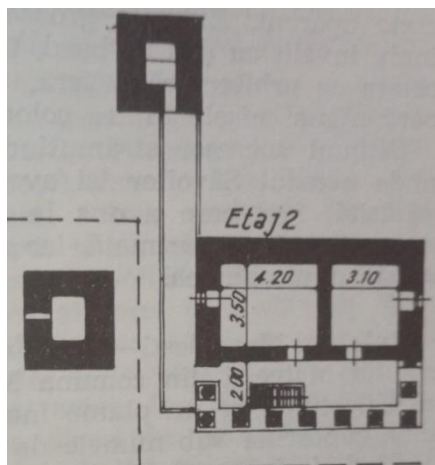


Fig. 5. The second-floor plan of the cula from Musculești

Source: ANSJ Dolj, the Historical Monuments CommissionC, file 28 cule, f. 10.

The cula de la Lupoia belonged to a category of singular buildings that had exterior decorative elements. The outer walls were divided into almost square panels, bordered by arches.

After Constantin Săvoiu built a new mansion in Lupoia, the cula began no longer to be inhabited. It was used for a while to host the guests who came in large numbers to Săvoiu family, and as a grain warehouse and animal shelter. At the beginning of the 20th century, it was abandoned for good, the descendants of Constantin Săvoiu moving to the commune of Borăscu. No longer being maintained, it gradually degraded. In the early 40s of the twentieth century, the construction was almost a ruin, under the permanent menace of collapse. This led the authorities of Lupoia commune to order its demolition in 1953.

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³³ Radu Crețeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

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