

CULA CUȚUI FROM THE VILLAGE OF BROȘTENI, MEHEDIȚI COUNTY*

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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 Mehedinți County, there were quite a few cule, most of them are located in the Motru river valley. 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 Broșteni, built by the members of Săvoiu family. It was built by Gheorghe Cuțui, 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 two levels (one ground floor and one floor).

Keywords: cula, Broșteni, family Cuțui, a shape, building.

Since the medieval period, several tower-dwellings have been preserved in the area of Oltenia, reminiscent by their structure and construction system of the Byzantine or Balkan world. They are called, with a term of Turkish origin, cula (pl. cule = tower). They form a type of construction representative only for the Oltenia area, with specific architectural elements such as the watch-tower with pillars, and double functionality: residential house and defence place.

In Mehedinți County, there were several cule, most of them being in the Motru valley. Their location and construction arrangements specify their identity and functionality: watch and signalling cule, refuge and defence or living cule.

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Such a requirement was answered by the cula from Broșteni, built by the members of the Cuțui family. They are mentioned in two court documents, one from 25 September 1763 and another from 30 March 1764. In the two documents, it is mentioned that Preda Cuțui had a lawsuit with the Orbesti landowners for “a meander area near Orbesti, which destroyed by the water of Motru, where their land was starting”¹.

Most likely, during this period as well, the members of the Cuțui family became the owners of the Broșteni estate. In 1819, Broșteni village, with 63 families, was located on the estate of the boyars Cuțui². The Public Catagraphy of Wallachia from 1831 mentions that Broșteni village, located on the Megieș estate, having the same name, was owned jointly by three elderly and Dinu, the son of Nicolicea Cuțui³. In 1840 Mihalache Cuțui, son of Dinu Cuțui, is mentioned as owner of the estate. In 1845, Broșteni, with 40 families, owned partly by boyar Ioniță Cuțui, and partly by boyar Mihalache Cuțui. The estate remained in the possession of the Cuțui family until 1948, when it was nationalized and passed into state ownership.

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The name of the Cuțui family is linked to a very important architectural monument in Broșteni village, Cuțui cula. It was built in 1815, by Gheorghe Cuțui (called Nicolicea)⁴, son of Ioan Cuțui. The legend says that this cula was built by

¹ Gheorghe N. Crăciun, *Monografia comunei Broșteni din județul Mehedinți*, Bucharest, 1932, p. 13.

² Ioana Constantinescu, *Structuri socio-fiscale în județul Mehedinți după Catagrafia din decembrie 1819*, in “Mehedinți – istorie și cultură”, vol. I, 1978, p. 198.

³ Ion Donat, Ion Pătroi, Dinică Ciobotea. *Catagrafia Obștească a Țării Românești din 1831*, Craiova, Helios Press, 1999, p. 12.

⁴ Gheorghe Cuțui was captain of Pandurs during the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–1812. On his way to Bucharest, Tudor Vladimirescu stopped, on January 27, 1821, at Cula of Ghiță Cuțui. The latter also joined “with a small army” the captain of the Pandurs. During his retreat to Pitești and then to Golești, Ghiță Cuțui refused, together with Ioan Urdăreanu, Iancu Enescu and Ioan Oarcă, to write to Tudor Vladimirescu that they would be responsible for the irregularities committed by the Pandurs under their leadership. Disobeying, Ioan Urdăreanu and Iancu Enescu were executed by the captain of pandurs. By hiding, Ghiță Cuțui managed to save his life. After the defeat of the revolution of 1821, together with some of the Pandurs he took refuge in Transylvania, and then in Banat. In 1826, together with Simion Mehedințeanu, tried to start a new revolution. After issuing a proclamation, they crossed the mountains and, along with other Pandurs, they confronted the forces of the reign at Orșova, near the Motru River and at the Hermitage of Topolnița (where they had made a fortified base). After the place was isolated, they could no longer get supplies, Ghiță Cuțui and Simion Mehedințeanu reached an agreement with the former head of Cloșani, Strâmbeanu. They pledged to stop the rebellion and apologize

Gheorghe Cuțui to defend his family from the attacks of the Turkish troops, who often crossed the Danube and burned the localities they passed by. His wife had been ravished by a group of Turks from Ada-Kaleh and for her ransom he had to sell her share of the Broșteni estate that she owned. From the remaining money, Ghiță Cuțui raised the cula from Broșteni.

Architect Iancu Atanasescu, taking into consideration the information provided by the inhabitants of the area as well, claimed that the Cuțui family had another house on Locei Hill, built of beams, plastered and whitewashed, which was also known as the “white house”. Since it was easily noticeable, it was attacked many times by thieves and Turkish troops. This determined the Cuțui family to move their house to the meadow of Motru, on the place called “lair”. The same opinion was shared by Radu Crețeanu⁵. The newly chosen place did not protect the construction either, from the attack of the bands of Turks that devastated Oltenia at the beginning of the 19th century. Tudor Vladimirescu was hosted in the cula from Cuțui, when he passed through this village on January 27, 1821, on his way to Bucharest⁶.

After Gheorghe Cuțui’s death in 1826, the cula passed into the property of his son Constantin and then of his grandson Mihalache. In the 20th century, until 1948, Iordache and Constantin Cuțui are mentioned as owners. In 1948, the cula was nationalized and passed into state ownership. After December 1989, Georgeta Cuțui and then her daughter Oana Socol claimed the building.

The construction was severely damaged by the attack of German troops in the summer of 1916, the outer walls suffering great damage, and the entrance doors to the cula and cellar disappeared⁷. The owners, instead of repairing the damages, preferred to abandon it.

Cula remained in a state of ruin until early 1947. In May 1947, Constantin I. Cuțui and Ioana Cuțui, wishing to restore the cula, approached the Commission of Historical Monuments asking for an architect to be appointed to draw up the estimate of the works that were needed. The architect V. Moisescu was appointed. According to the estimate, the cost of restoration works of the building amounted to 800,000,000 lei. They wanted to restore the roof, replace the rotten wood from

to the ruler of the land. In Bucharest, however, the two were sentenced to death by hanging (Daniel Dieaconu, *Panduri, arnăuți, haiduci și tâlhari la 1821*, in “Muzeul Național”, XXVI, 2014, p. 55).

⁵ Radu Crețeanu, Sarmiza Crețeanu, *Culele din România*, Bucharest, Meridiane Press, 1969, p. 36.

⁶ Dan Berindei, Traian Mutașcu, *Aspecte militare ale mișcării revoluționare din 1821*, second edition, revised, Bucharest, Editura Militară, 1973, p. 55.

⁷ Radu Crețeanu, *Culele și casele întărite de pe Valea Motrului*, in “Buletinul Monumente și Muzeu”, year I, no. I, p. 99.

the roof with a new one made of carved fir tree, the floors that were to be nailed on pubescent oak beams, along with the damaged windows and doors. According to the estimate, repairs were to be made to both the interior and exterior walls. After the completion of the works, the interior of the construction was to be whitewashed with lime. Although the necessary documentation was drawn up, the restoration of the cula was not carried out⁸. During the winter of 1953-1954, due to snow, the roof and ceilings of the building collapsed⁹.

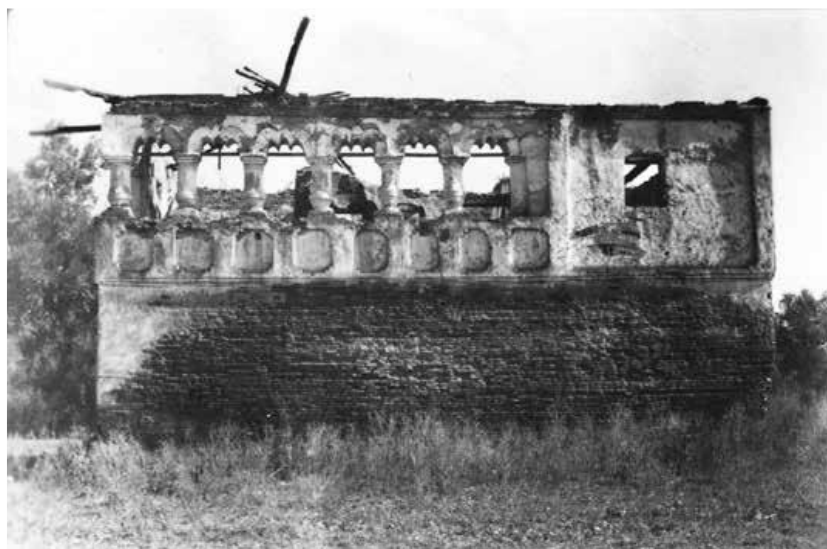


Fig. 1. Cula de la Broșteni before the restoration of 1965.

Source: apud Cristina Mănciulescu, Ștefan Mănciulescu, *Arhitect Rodica Mănciulescu. 100 de ani de la naștere*, in "Revista Monumentelor Istorice", no. 1/2017, p. 156.

Cula remained in ruins until 1963, when Iancu Atanasescu, chief architect of Oltenia Region, started the restoration project. Starting with 1965, the project was taken over by architect Rodica Mănciulescu. The restoration work was completed in 1968. They aimed at completing the masonry with brick, executing a reinforced concrete floor over the floor, except for the watch-tower, whose floor was made of solid wood apparently preserved, restoring the roof with wood tiles, and oak carpentry work, introducing electric light¹⁰.

⁸ See <https://arhivacomisiuniimonumentelor.ro>, file 499/1947, site accessed on July 30, 2023.

⁹ Radu Crețeanu, Sarmiza Crețeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

¹⁰ Cristina Mănciulescu, Ștefan Mănciulescu, *Arhitect Rodica Mănciulescu. 100 de ani de la naștere*, in "Revista Monumentelor Istorice", 2017, no. 1, p. 156.



Fig. 2. Cula from Broșteni after restoration in 1965.

Source: apud Cristina Mănciulescu, Ștefan Mănciulescu, *Arhitect Rodica Mănciulescu. 100 de ani de la naștere*, in “Revista Monumentelor Istorice”, no. 1/2017, p. 156.

This year, an ethnographic museum was installed in the cula, which was preserved until 1990. The museum was equipped with exhibits from Broșteni commune and Motru area, and with a series of plates, made on glass, with information about the history of the settlement, the revolution of 1821 and the uprising of 1826¹¹.

After 1990, it was retroceded by Georgeta Cuțui, and her daughter Oana Socol. The new owners neglected the construction from Broșteni, its walls becoming severely affected by dampness. In 2010 the cula from Broșteni was visited by architect Pavel Popescu. Referring to the condition of the construction, the architect said that the building was affected by an advanced degree of dampness, being devoid of ditches to remove rainwater.

¹¹ C. A. Protopopescu, E. Jianu-Tutunaru, *Memoria caselor. Cula Cuțui din satul Broșteni – Mehedinți*, in *Studii și articole din istoria județelor Mehedinți și Gorj*, vol. II, Arad, Mirador Press, 2009, p. 216.

He believed that the replacement of the wood tile roof with a concrete tile one affected the beauty of the cula¹².



Fig. 3. The condition of the cula in 2010.

Source: Iancu Atanasescu, Pavel Popescu, *Culele din Oltenia cu evoluția lor până în 2010*, Craiova, f.e., 2012, p. 269.

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The monument “Cula Cuțui from Broșteni” falls into a category of edifices that are found only in the area that stretches over Oltenia, and the east of Olt in Argeș, Teleorman and Olt counties. It was a particular means of confrontation/defense of the Cuțui family against the bands of Turks who often attacked and plundered Oltenia. It was part of the communication chain on Motru,

¹² Iancu Atanasescu, Pavel Popescu, *Culele din Oltenia cu evoluția lor până în 2010*, Craiova, f.e., 2012, p. 268.

from where the entire area stretching from Broșteni to the top of the Vâlcan Mountains could be monitored and signaled¹³.



Fig. 4. The distribution area of the culas from Valea Motrului.

Source: apud ANSJ Dolj, Historical Monuments Commission, file 36 cule, f. 6.

Similar to all the cule, the construction from Broșteni had a form suitable for defense, the walls having battlements through which the rifle and the pistol could be fired at the besiegers. These battlements were present in the parts where the ground was lower.

The cula has a rectangular shape (14 × 9 m) and two levels (ground floor and first floor). The access to the cula was made from the outside through a massive oak door, located on the northwest side.

¹³ Iancu Atanasescu, Valeriu Grama, *Culele din Oltenia*, Craiova, Scrisul Românesc Press, 1974, p. 115.

On the ground floor, there was a cellar that was a massive construction, with walls over a meter thick, made of well-fired brick. The walls were supported by a cylindrical vault, held up on five double arches. The entrance to the cellar was made from the outside through an oak door, located in the southeastern part of the building. The cellar had no windows and no ramparts.

On this side, there was also the access staircase to the first floor. It was placed on the north wall and had 20 steps built of thick oak beams, carved and embedded in the masonry mass. Under the staircase, there was a small room that was also used as a hiding place. The access to it was made from the cellar. The staircase was covered by a cylindrical vault and had walls pierced by numerous ramparts.

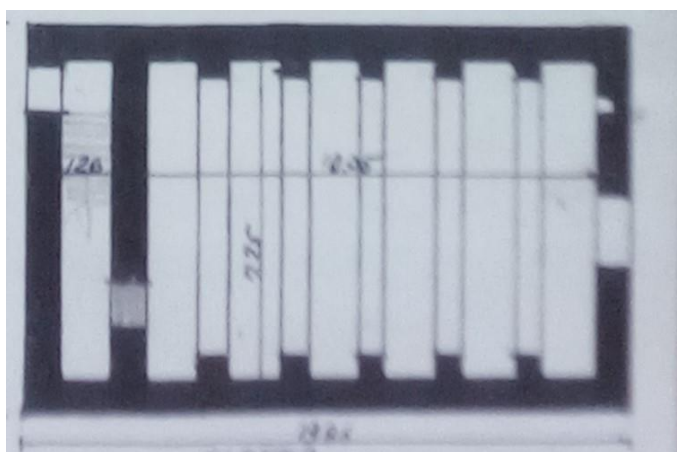


Fig. 5. The plan of the cellar.

Source: apud ANSJ Dolj, Historical Monuments Commission, file 36 cule, f. 6.

On the first floor, there was an open porch, which had in front a colonnade with six bays, and, on the sides a bay, bordered by round masonry pillars, thickened in the lower part, supporting trilobed arches. Through this vaulting system, the cula from Broșteni has similarities with the one from Șiacu village, Mehedinți County¹⁴.

¹⁴ Radu Crețeanu, *Culele și casele întărite de pe Valea Motrului*, p. 100.

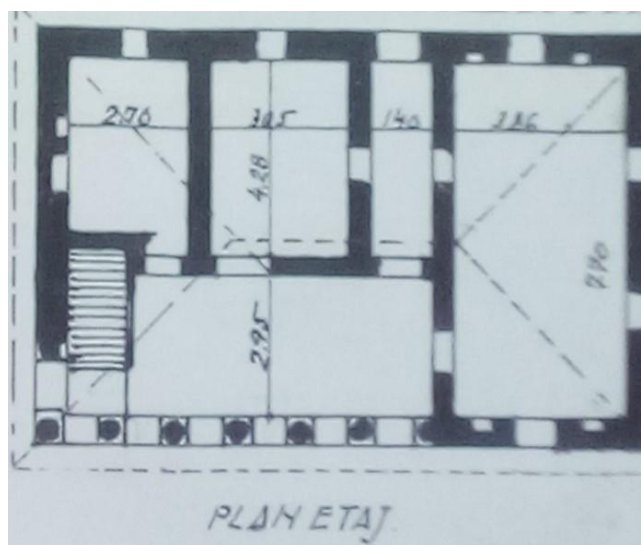


Fig. 6. The plan of the first floor.

Source: apud ANSJ Dolj, Historical Monuments Commission, file 36 cule, f. 6.

The parapet was provided with two shooting holes, in an oblique direction and downwards. From the porch, it started the hallway entrance. From there, one entered the three rooms: the bedroom, the living room and the kitchen, where there was a kitchen range, and several niches for cabinets in the wall. The lighting of the bedroom and kitchen was done through two windows arranged on the northwest wall. The living room was also lit by two windows that were placed on the southwest wall. At an unknown date, the partition wall between the bedroom and living room was torn down, and two new walls were added in its place. The first room was divided into a guest reception room and a smaller room. The second room was divided into two bedrooms. The heating of the two bedrooms was done from the stove in the kitchen by means of heating vents.

The rooms were floored with wide oak planks, and had the ceiling made of plastered beams. Almost all rooms, except the living room, had no décor. The living room was decorated with an embossed motif consisting of two concentric circles¹⁵.

At the end of the corridor, there was a door that allowed the access to either an adjacent latrine built later, or to a balcony that had a view of the Motru Valley, and served for vigil and alarm.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 99.

Outside, the cula had a simple decoration resulting from the thickening of the masonry borders and the delimitation of the panels next to the parapet. The facades on the first floor are decorated with small panels arranged irregularly, confronted by the arches, and large panels resulting from the thickening of the borders by 10 cm from the wall¹⁶.

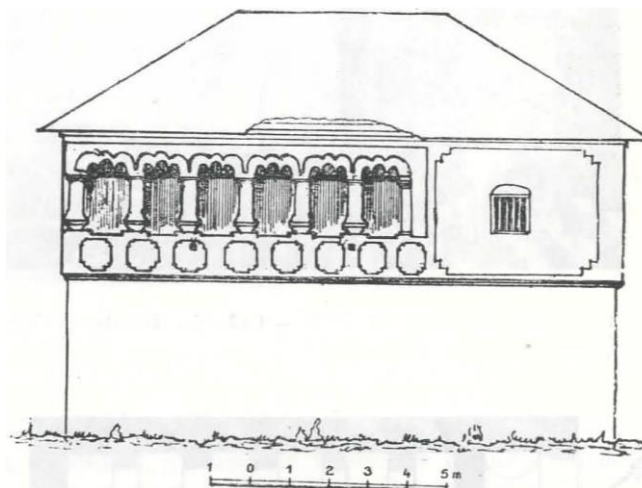


Fig. 7. Main faade

Source: apud Radu Creeanu, *Culele i casele ıntărite de pe Valea Motrului*, in "Monuments and Museums Bulletin", year I, no. I/1958, p. 98.

Currently, the cula in Broșteni village, Mehedini County is owned by Oana Socol.

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¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

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