

THE GARDENS OF PELEȘ CASTLE – HISTORY, INTENTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

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Abstract: Since the start of their construction in the late 19th century, the terraced gardens of the Peleş castle underwent, over time, various stages of transformation starting with their architectural image, iconographic programs and vegetal composition. By these means, this study will analyse their past, a number of intended consolidation projects that were never implemented and also some historical plans for the construction of new terraces, and will offer a series of principles and possible ways of restoring the landscaping complex so as to highlight and upgrade this important part of the Romanian national immovable heritage.¹

Rezumat: Începute de regele Carol I încă de la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, grădinile terasate de la castelul Peleş au trecut de-a lungul timpului prin numeroase etape de transformare a imaginii arhitecturale, a programelor iconografice și a compoziției vegetale. Pe această cale, prezentul studiu urmează să analizeze trecutul acestora, proiectele istorice de consolidare și chiar cele de construcție a unor noi terase, precum și să ofere o serie de principii și posibile direcții de restaurare peisagistică care să repună în valoare un patrimoniu imobil de importanță națională.

Peleş castle in the history of the Kingdom of Romania

After several visits to the Sinaia Monastery, Carol I decided, in the early 1870s, to build a private residence in the heart of the Bucegi mountains. The new building was to be made in accordance with the European trends of the mid and late nineteenth century since it was to be used for leisure but more importantly it would represent a symbol of the birth of a new dynasty.²

Many architects and decorators were hired during the construction process of the castle. The first one was renowned architect Wilhelm von Doderer whose projects were too ambitious to match the budget allocated by Carol I. Immediately after his dismissal in 1876, Johannes Schulz was hired. The architect built a monarchic edifice bearing a great resemblance to a Swiss *chalet*, but after Romania won its State Independence in 1877-1878, Carol I employed Czech architect Karel Liman and French architect André Lecomte du Noüy in 1890 to remodel the building so that its new image and architectural form would match the new political, cultural, military and economic status of the Romanian kingdom. Thus beginning with 1890 and up until 1914, the year King Carol I died, the two architects remodelled and expanded the castle and turned it into a dynastic symbol.

Also, in this short period of time, the main terraced gardens of the castle were designed, the image of which complemented and enriched the range of symbols that Peleş had been invested with.

A brief history of the terraces

The history of the terraced gardens of the Peleş castle follows an architectural program which was politically and symbolically meant to certify and legitimize the young German monarchy in the political and geographical space of both Romania and Europe. The landscaping principles and concepts of Peleş are anchored in the symbolic construction philosophies specific to the European Modernity,³ and the image resulting from their eclectic composition served the aims and aspirations of the royal family. The terraces' history is quite complex, but vaguely described in the historical monographs of the castle. On another hand, the study of the plans and archive images as well as of the memories and notes of the members of the Royal

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² Popa *et alii* 1995, p. 5.

³ We will define the European Modernity as an historical epoch between Renaissance and the late 18th century. In accordance with: Scully 1991; Turner 2005; Iliescu 2014.