

THE GREAT INNS OF BUCHAREST. CHANGED SHAPES, LOST IMAGES*

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Keywords: inns of Bucharest, Constantin-Vodă Inn, Gabroveni Commercial Passage, Greci Inn, Hillel Manoach's Inn, Manuc's Inn, Stavropoleos Inn, Șerban-Vodă Inn, Zlătari Inn

Abstract: This study focuses on the great inns of Bucharest. Their volumes, details, the relation with the public space are explored following archive documents, sketches or descriptions made by the contemporaries. The resulted image, without subjective interpretations, completes the atmosphere of a city in which Oriental customs, so well rooted, get the alternative of Western ones. Major changes concerning the function, shape and architectural details are recorded, in an almost desperate attempt of the owners to preserve them along the line of new trends. Although the revitalization of those grand commercial ensembles was aimed at by those interested, toward the end of the 19th century only a few remained. Their disappearance resulted in difficulties to recompose their objective images, so common to the city for centuries.

Rezumat: Studiul prezentat are ca subiect central marile hanuri ale Bucureștiului. Volumele, detaliile, relația cu spațiul public sunt analizate urmărind documente de arhivă, schițe sau descrieri ale contemporanilor. Imaginea rezultată, lipsită de interpretări subiective, completează atmosfera unui oraș în care obiceiurile orientale, atât de bine împământenite, primesc alternativa celor occidentale. Sunt înregistrate schimbări importante care privesc funcțiunea, forma și detaliile arhitecturale, petrecute într-o încercare aproape disperată a proprietarilor de a le menține în linia noilor cerințe. Deși revitalizarea acestor mari ansambluri comerciale a fost dorită de cei interesați, către sfârșitul veacului al XIX-lea au rămas în ființă doar câteva. Dispariția acestora a determinat dificultăți în recompunerea unor imagini obiective, atât de comune orașului timp de secole.

The topic of the inns of Bucharest was explored over the time by several authors, starting with in a well-defined structure with Gheorghe Ionnescu-Gion and continuing later with George Potra, Nicolae Stoicescu, Constantin Giurescu or, more recently, Cezara Mucenic. Generally speaking, all those studies propose a chronology of main dates and events influencing the history of these inns, without dwelling in the configuration of shapes, sometimes so difficult to imagine.

Related to the image of inns in Bucharest as it could be seen in the preceding centuries, two stages are to be defined, each of them generating shapes and textures with visibly different characteristics. A first moment concerns the image of inns during the 18th century, when this programme reaches its peak development, and the second stage takes into account the early decades of the 19th century, an interval knowing profound changes at all levels of the society. The changes regard the exterior and the interior of these ensembles. Opaque walls which had been protecting the protecting merchants and their goods for so long start to “open up” to the street, while inside generous porches are closed with glazing, generating practically a negative of the previous shapes, typical to inns.

The architectural image seen from outside

Ion Ghica's descriptions,¹ and those by Ionnescu-Gion published in *Istoria Bucureștilor*, show ensembles surrounded by “thick and high walls as of a fortress”² penetrated by small openings, protected by massive oak doors, braced in iron. Since the protection of people and goods was paramount in an era when the armed conflicts or disasters were frequent, these links with the exterior world might have been absent altogether,³ leaving only the main access, always well-controlled. Later on, all those who have addressed the topic of inns, either through extensive works or by brief papers, have repeated one way or the other the content of these writings, in such a way that the general image is an extremely firmly built one, with not too many variations.

* The present contribution continues the research started in the article published in the previous issue of this journal, Caiete ARA 3, 2012, pp. 135-153.

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¹ Ghica (1863) 1959, p. 234. See also Mortu 2012, p. 136.

² Ionnescu-Gion 1899, p. 477.

³ *Ibidem*, loc. cit.