

BOOK REVIEW

**Iulia Floriana Ciangă, 2016, *Peisajul urban în vedutismul transilvan*
(*The Urban Landscape in the Transylvanian Vedutism*),
Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca, 442 p.**

In the already very long series of PhD theses defended at the Faculty of Geography in Cluj-Napoca, only a few has been remarked for the unusual subject approached and the connections between Geography and other fields of sciences and arts. Others became known due to the use of new and brave approaching techniques of analysis and representation. One of such works – Iulia Floriana Ciangă's "*The Urban Landscape in the Transylvanian Vedutism*" – makes a lasting impression because of the unprecedented subject approached but also, in my opinion, because it connects Geography to Arts and especially visual arts, like painting and graphics. This fact provides a touch of beauty and warmth, as it was „compelled” to break the geographical long-standing and repetitive standards (although it is a sum of several sciences!).

The author is passionate about the artistic representations of human settlements, of what we call *veduta* – cityscapes or panoramas, and the phenomenon – *vedutism*. She is a graduate of Graphical Arts (2003) at Cluj-Napoca University of Arts and Design and she has a Master Degree in the History of Arts (2005) at “Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca. She received mobility grants for research and specialization at the University of Vienna, at the *Institut für Osteuropäische Geschichte* (Institute of Eastern

European History), and in Rome at the Faculty of Architecture. Her complex interdisciplinary study concerning the Transylvanian urban landscape as reflected in the vedutas of the 17th to 19th centuries, is the fruit of thorough research and of exceptional archive, documentary and bibliographical investigations which materialized in this book, her PhD thesis in Geography defended in 2013. The large volume of 442 pages, richly illustrated, is structured in two parts. The first part, "*The city and the urban landscape in Transylvania*", presents the emergence and the specific characteristics of the Transylvanian urban network. The second part, "*Urban landscapes in Transylvania reflected in vedutas, 17th to 19th centuries*", highlights the representations of the Transylvanian urban landscapes by means of vedutas and their complex analysis.

The work starts with an "*Introduction*", in which the author demonstrates that diverse urban strata are superimposed in the complex process of the urban evolution. Each of them has its own specificities and personality, and together they finally provide an urban landscape. As an integrating element, the urban landscape is changing permanently, is in a continuous transformation, in the case of sustainable development. The paintings and graphics that

have an urban subject appeared in the eve of the Renaissance (13th and 14th centuries) in Italy. Called “vedutas”, meaning “views”, they were subsequently disseminated throughout Europe and in the world. They immortalized the image of the city as perceived by the illustrating artists. Transylvania, a Romanian geographical-historical province, entered the framework of Central and Western European values earlier than the other Romanian provinces – the Danube principalities. Transylvania was therefore visited more frequently by many travelers and artists who wanted to illustrate what they have seen. As Transylvania has an ancient urban network, its cities and some of the noblemen manors constituted the main subjects for the foreign and domestic artists and engravers. A whole set of “vedutas” – views resulted. They were created in different times and places and provide a proof of the geographical evolution of Transylvanian cities, highlighting their structural and functional transformations. They are important documents from this geographical perspective.

The first chapter – “*Theoretical and methodological aspects*” – includes the description of the methods to approach the subject, the principles of analysis that are specific for the geographical manner of approaching. From the very beginning, the author clarifies the conceptual frameworks: the city and the urban environment, in the light of some well-known authors, who studied the Romanian and foreign urban phenomenon. Naturally, more attention has been given to terms like “*cultural landscape*”, “*urban landscape*”, “*urban image*”, with pertinent references to authors and geographical schools in this field of research. These subjects belong to the second chapter, “*The concept of urban landscape*”.

The third chapter, “*The Transylvanian city and urban landscape*”, is very consistent and concerns “*the genesis and evolution of the Transylvanian cities*”. Cities represent the subject of many vedutas which the author analyzed in the second part of the book, a fact which explains the investigation of this subject, materialized and illustrated with the help of many maps, diagrams, tables and suggestive images.

The genesis and evolution of the Transylvanian cities, focusing on generations of cities, and happily supplemented by maps and synthetic tables, reflects the author’s exceptional research in the archives. The same geographical manner is used in the presentation and analysis of the numerical evolution and national structure of the Transylvanian urban population, including its classification and ranking (represented also graphically and in tables at different characteristic moments) and its functional and typological structure (on altitude levels and landforms). In the subchapter 3.3.5., “*Types of evolution and development significant for the Transylvanian urban landscape*”, the author diversifies the analysis and enlarges the study by including architectural and urban elements like fortresses (either royal, noblemen or peasant ones) and their elements (dungeons, curtains, towers). Many of them have been built by powerful guilds whose number increased significantly over time.

Another architecture and heritage-related element that has a high visual impact is represented by the churches and other religious buildings “*with landscape impact and visibility*” which left a print of identity for Transylvanian cities. The chapter ends with a synthesis of the territorial evolution of 23 Transylvanian cities since the Middle Ages until the modern age (the 19th century). They are true case studies,

illustrated with plans, sketches, old and new images (the new ones belonging to the author), recasts, which together render suggestively the evolution of the cities.

After finishing the geographical analysis, the author exclusively consecrates the second part of the book to the Transylvanian urban landscapes as reflected in the vedutas, between the 17th and the 19th centuries. Initially, she reviews the terminology and the meaning of the terms belonging to the family of words related to the neologism "vedutism". The author briefly describes the artistic techniques used to perform the vedutas, as well as the iconographic premises of their emergence. Iconographic examples of the most frequent and popular engraving techniques would have been useful. The author makes an interesting foray in the evolution of the urban image, graphically exemplified, from the first representations of cities as centers located on certain routes, as scenographic sites for the development of certain religious events or facts, to urban portraits, finally, whose practice developed on the European continent as a result of the intensification of the "Grand Tour" practice, initiated by the English aristocracy. In Great Britain, such travels represented an integrated part of the education. This phenomenon scattered across the continent later on, gradually reaching its eastern parts, including the Romanian lands. The author limits herself to present the "Romanian routes" of the Grand Tours, especially because they were located on the terrestrial trade ways to Constantinople, as illustrated on a suggestive map. Also, the author highlights the contribution of the Italian and Flemish painting schools and their most notable contributions. She does not ignore the similar artistic achievements in the United Kingdom, France or Germany but stress is laid on the Venice school of vedu-

tism, among the most prestigious ones, proving the development and importance of the Venice Republic between the 13th and the 19th centuries.

For an "education to look" at the vedutas and for the research of the urban landscape by their means, the author appeals to methods operated by the Italian urban planning school, briefly presented, sometimes by using her own sketches and representations!

Chapter VI, "*Transylvanian urban landscapes reflected in vedutas, 17th to 19th centuries*", represents the core of the book, naturally flowing from the preceding preparing chapters which familiarize the less specialized readers with the Transylvanian urban landscape, on one hand, and the veduta-type representations which emerged and spread across Europe. The author presents the vedutas of Transylvanian cities, identified as a result of hard work research in the archives, from edited and unedited, primary and secondary sources. The chapter is richly illustrated with images, sketches, figures, maps, integrating synthetic tables, which prove the professional processing and analysis of Transylvanian vedutas. The author includes the phenomenon of Transylvanian vedutism in the European context and makes reference to the age of vedutism. She also publishes the titles of the albums and map collections which comprise representations of Transylvanian cities, focusing on those belonging to the period between the 17th and 19th centuries. She points out their features: the historical, often "Hunnic", attitude; the emergence of city portraits; the realistic and documentary-type urban landscape subjects; the "inventory" of space during the "picturesque" travels, mentioning the foreign and domestic authors who are most famous in the field. She makes a typological classification of European vedutas. The

round vedutas are the most early ones, performed “*as the crow flies*” (“*a volo d’uccello*”) in the 16th century. The profile vedutas are also from the 16th century; the topographical vedutas and the partial vedutas emerged later, in the 18th century.

For the Transylvanian geographical space, the author classified the vedutas according to the composition criterion, in: portrait vedutas; general (or global) vedutas; partial vedutas; and mixed vedutas. They all have different weights in the total number of 338 vedutas that have been identified and studied. The data statistic processing allowed the identification of the cities represented in the vedutas, their frequency and weight, the author selecting the following classification: cities with 1 to 5 vedutas; with 6 to 10 vedutas; with 11 to 50 vedutas; with 51 to 70 vedutas; and above 70 vedutas – as the maximum number is 75, in the case of Sibiu! Analyzing the Transylvanian vedutas, the author uses the following criteria: chronology; exactity-veridicality – according to which some vedutas are really the result of fantasy; functionality, regarding the building they focus on; style, according to which vedutas may be gothic, renaissance, baroque, classical-romantic or realistic-romantic.

The vedutas are documents that provide clues to the evolution of cities, using the perspective of observation points. The vedutas of the most representative Transylvanian cities: Sibiu, Braşov, Alba Iulia, Cluj, Sighişoara and Târgu Mureş were the object of an analysis, comparing the historical situation and the present one. One may therefore follow the evolution of the city, the density and physiognomy of the buildings in the built-up area, the dimension of the transformation processes from a spatial and temporal perspective.

The conclusions reached by the author mark the possibility for a better knowledge of the stages of urban evolution, noticing the preservation or degradation of the architectural heritage throughout the times, the possibilities for capitalizing the architecture heritage by means of tourism and leisure, as a result of a continuous and heterogeneous multinational life which provides the charm, variety and identity of the Transylvanian urban network. One should also remark the English summary, including the titles of illustrations (maps and images), which gives the opportunity for foreign specialists to study the book. The bibliography includes 169 book references, as well as 20 websites. A special mention should be made of the “*Appendices*”. Thoroughly worked, they are true syntheses containing many pieces of important information, provided either in tables (appendices I, II, III and IV) or in images (the replicas of vedutas, in an order given by their frequency, suggested in the appendix IV).

This is a large and valuable book which brings to front a novel subject geographically speaking, that is largely searched for today, the veduta-type urban images. They are heritage documents and by their means, the local, regional and national communities assert, cultivate and promote their cultural and material identity. The Transylvanian cities, as a component part of a larger Romanian cultural space, are happily included in the evolution of the Central-European cultural space, as a consequence of a specific historical background. By these linking bridges, the Romanian identitarian space asserts itself in the European context, also by using this peculiar type of representation, the veduta.

In the future, escaping the straps of a PhD-type approach, the young researcher,

Iulia Floriana Ciangă may propose in a more relaxed way, creatively and in a personalized manner, an image excursion in the Romanian settlements. This is a vast subject, that lend itself to various analyses and approaches. The research field is also very vast but the author has the qualities for approaching it in a brave manner, to perform a *“beautiful geography”* or a *“poetical geography”*, as Georges Duhamel stated, pleading for a *“cordial geography, caligeography or beautiful geography”*, asserting that *“there is a cordial geography, meaning a poetical, sentimental, fanciful and imaginative geography”!* in this way, having more freedom, the author might sink into a series of *“house stories”*, so much enjoyed nowadays, after a half ofr century of egalitarian

darkness, with lots of words and few choices. They would link us deeper to the European stories...

The book addresses to a wide range of readers: from specialists in fields like cultural heritage, architecture, urban planning, landscape, history, geography, to the large and heterogeneous public who is animated by the curiosity of searching and finding the identity elements of places and their proper assertion.

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