

FROM OLD TO NEW – THE CITY OF CRAIOVA

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Abstract

Romania has a lot of cities and each one has an interesting history that led to the construction of picturesque buildings, monuments, churches and museums. If we take a look in the south of Romania, we find a large city that has become the capital of the region/ district of Dolj. The name of this city is Craiova and it ranks on the seventh place as the largest city from Romania. Craiova stands out not only through its size but also through its captivating history. We should have to keep in mind that there were several historical moments that contributed to the foundation of this city. These historical moments date back to ancient times – first hints of some human settlements in the area, go to the medieval period which was characterized by numerous battles related to the sovereignty of this place and conclude with the first written evidence that proof the existence of the city of Craiova. The name of Craiova was mentioned for the first time in the year 1475 and since then the city has become an important poll of influence for Romania. The development of the city was gradual and Craiova, the city that we have today is a mixture of old and modern architecture. The buildings from the city are a reflection of the way Craiova evolved and almost each construction belongs to a different period that has marked the development of this urban area.

Key words: old, new, history, Craiova, development, buildings

Rezumat

România are multe orașe și fiecare dintre ele are o istorie interesantă care a condus la construcția de clădiri pitorești, monumente, biserici și muzee. Dacă ne uităm în sudul României, vom găsi un oraș mare care a devenit capitala județului Dolj. Numele orașului este Craiova și ocupă locul 7 ca fiind cel mai mare oraș din România. Craiova iese în evidență nu numai prin dimensiunea sa dar și prin istoria captivantă. Noi ar trebui să ținem seama de faptul că au existat câteva momente istorice care au contribuit la fondarea acestui oraș. Aceste momente istorice datează din timpurile străvechi – primele indici ale unor așezări omenești în zonă, se duc spre perioada medievală care a fost caracterizată de bătălii numeroase legate de suveranitatea acestui loc și se termină cu primele dovezi scrise care dovedesc existența orașului

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Craiova. Numele de Craiova a fost prima dată menționat în anul 1475 și de atunci orașul a devenit un pol important de influență în România. Dezvoltarea orașului s-a făcut gradat și orașul Craiova pe care îl avem azi este o combinație de arhitectură veche și nouă. Clădirile din oraș reflectă felul în care Craiova a evoluat și aproape fiecare clădire aparține unei perioade diferite marcând dezvoltarea acestei zone urbane.

Cuvinte cheie: vechi, nou, istorie, Craiova, dezvoltare, clădiri.

The most ancient human settlements that were found in the district of Dolj by archaeologists belong to the Neolithic period (around 6000 -2500 B.C). Moving on, during the Iron Age (around 350 B.C -101/102 AD), on the left bank of the river Jiu there were geto-dacian settlements. During the Roman Empire, in the area surrounding Craiova the first roads appeared and we encounter a settlement named ***Pelendava*** – which was part of ***Bucovăț*** fortress. *Oltenia* is the southern region of Romania and it hosts the city of Craiova. This southern region was called Wallachia and it “... is the historical and geographical unit that forms the south of the present-day Romania, and around which modern Romania was created. Approaching in an easterly direction, we come first to Oltenia, the region framed by the Carpathians, the Danube and its tributary, the Olt.” (Boia, 2001:16)

On 1st June 1475 the city of Craiova is mentioned for the first time by *Laiotă Basarab*. Although it was an indirect reference – the document spoke about a boyar named Neagoe from Craiova. This indirect reference confirms the fact that Craiova was the delimitation of a specific place/ area.

In 1491, Craiova became the official residence of *Marii Băni* (it was the second most important political institution after the central political rule). Later, in 1546 – Craiova – is mentioned for the first time as a city in an official document. The city of Craiova started to be more politically involved in the Romanian political life – *Stroe Buzescu* and *Radu Florescu* were important personalities from this southern area and they were involved in the reign of *Michael the Brave (Mihai Viteazul)*. Another important family from this area was the Craiovești family. They were well known for their influence that stretched from the 15th century until late 17th century. Personalities related to Craiova were: Matei Basarab, Constantin Șerban Basarab and Constantin Brâncoveanu. All of them contributed to the local and national Romanian governance.



A major event from 1770 placed Craiova in the position of taking the role of capital for the region of *Oltenia*, fact which gave the city a strategic role in coordinating the political and administrative decisions from that time. Even if that role was temporary, Craiova proved its influence through its powerful noble families that had connections with the Ottoman Empire. There were several famous battles between the Romanians and the Ottomans in which the southern area of Romania was directly involved. During one of these battles, the city of Craiova was plundered and burnt down. Despite this massive destruction, the nobles and the important families from the city rebuilt Craiova and kept it as an essential area for trade and governance decisions. The city had important trade connections with merchants from Transylvania, Italy and the Ottoman Empire. The trade involved diverse handicrafts and agricultural products. Despite” ...the Ottomans’ conquests south of the Danube, which brought the incorporation of the Bulgarian and Serbian medieval states into the very structures of their empire. The Romanians preserved their institutions and social structure and over time exercised greater or lesser degrees of administrative autonomy.” (Hitchins, 2014:2)

During those uncertain times in Craiova and around Craiova appeared monasteries that have special architecture: *Coșuna – Bucovăț* monastery and *Jitianu* monastery.

Barbu Craiovescu made the *Houses of Bănie*; they were later rebuilt in by Constantin Brâncoveanu in 1966. *The Church Saint Dumitru* was built by Matei Basarab in 1652. Years later, the educational system of Craiova welcomed its first school – *Obedeanu School* in 1775. The turning point for Craiova was represented by the introduction of public electricity in 1854 – first with rapeseed oil lamps and later with kerosene lamps. New buildings continued to appear and most of them used traditional Romanian architecture with French influences. The local aristocracy was competing in building grandiose and elegant houses because they were a direct reflection of each family’s power and wealth.

In Paris in the year 1900, *Bibescu Park* (in nowadays Romanescu Park) from Craiova obtained the golden medal at the Universal Exposition. The mayor of that time – Nicolae P. Romanescu donated the land and the French architect E. Redant landscaped the park.



Going back to education, the schools from Craiova formed a lot of important personalities who became famous on a national and international level. Among these personalities some names can be mentioned: *Constantin Brâncuși*, *Alexandru Macedonski*, *Theodor Aman*, *Henri Coandă*, *Nicolae Titulescu*, *Gheorghe Țițeica*, *Ion Țuculescu*, etc. The region of Oltenia also had important publications in which the latest local news was presented to the public, literary articles and essays were included. Such publications were: *Ramuri*, *Scrisul Românesc* and *Arhivele Olteniei*.

Therefore, the city of Craiova was not only marked by different historical events but it was also a place where education formed big personalities. Another proof that education played an important role in Craiova is represented by the fact that during the interwar period: “ In the Citadel of Bănie, genuine schools of painters and specialists in various artistic crafts were formed (Diaconescu, Firescu. 1975: 30)

Here are some the most important buildings with exquisite architecture from the city of Craiova: the former *Minerva hotel* (built in the Neo-Moorish style – oriental, Arab influences), *Jean Mihail Palace* (hosts the Museum of Art at the moment. It was built with Beau- Arts influences), *the school for Girls Madona Dudu* (hosts *Oltenia* museum – the history and archaeology section – at the moment), the building of the County Council (built at the beginning of the XXth century in a neoclassic style with eclectic influences), *Elena Cuza National College* (it is one of the oldest and most prestigious schools for girls from Romania; it was founded in 1833), *Saint Gheorghe Nou church* (built around 1760), *the Courthouse from Craiova* (built in a neoclassic style at the end of the XIXth century). The list can continue with: *Craiova's City Hall* (this is an historical building established in 1916 – at that time it was the headquarters of an important bank, was built in the neo-Romanian architectural style and it was embellished with Venetian mosaics and stained glass windows), *Madona Dudu Church* (it was built around 1750 in the Neo-Byzantine style) , the first apartment building from Craiova – named *Casa Albă* (it was built after the First World War, around 1920 and it is an emblematic building for the city, situated in the centre of the city across English Park).

Carol I National Highschool – situated also in the city centre (was founded in 1864 during Carol I of Romania reign). Before that: “On the site



of this building once stood the Central School, the temporary headquarters of the 1848 revolutionary government. Here, in 1857, the *Hora Unirii* was performed” (Diaconescu, Firescu. 1975: 35)

Of course, the list of important and historical building can continue as Craiova is a city that blends old architecture with new architecture. Each building has its own history and some even carry local legends.

Moving on, after the Second World War, the political power changed in Romania. Since 1947 when king Mihai I was forced to abdicate and to leave Romania, at the head of the country came they communists. They had a different ideology and they started the industrialization of the whole country.

During those times, the city of Craiova went through a lot of changes – meaning that state factories started to appear: *Electroputere* factory where Craiova repaired and produced locomotives, *the Airplane Factory* located near Craiova, the *Chemical industrial complex*, the *Greenhouses* from Ișalnița, the *Clothing factory*, etc. Moreover, at that time, many demolitions took place, and entire streets of apartment buildings were constructed. These changes also brought modifications to the way parts of the city were architecturally reshaped.

After the communism, more precisely since 1989, the city of Craiova went through other changes. New and modern buildings appeared and some of the old ones changed their destination or were demolished.

Conclusions

The city of Craiova is in a continuous evolution. From old to new, some buildings represent a mark of history, some were recently rebuilt and some have disappeared to make way for new constructions. Those who want to visit the city should know that there is a Christmas Market in Craiova; in 2025-2026 it was designated the most beautiful market in Europe. Each year this Christmas Market from Craiova hosts a different theme and it is followed by the Easter Market which takes place in Romanescu Park.

These markets, especially the Christmas market, have managed to attract tourists from all over Romania as well as from abroad. The popularity of the Christmas market from Craiova has increased every year, even though it is not a market with a very long tradition. Those who come



to see the Christmas and Easter markets also discover the buildings from the city. The way in which Craiova blends the past with the present is highlighted through the architecture of its buildings.

To conclude, this article was meant to offer a brief description of the city of Craiova, of the transformations it has undergone and of the fact that it has remained a city where old/ historical buildings coexist with the new ones.

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