

Mneme and Lethe in Eco-Cultural Landscapes: The Văcărescu and Ghica Domains in Romania

Silviu Marian Miloiu

Valahia University of Târgoviște, Târgoviște, Romania

e-mail: silviu.miloiu@valahia.ro

Located near Târgoviște, the medieval capital of Wallachia, the Văcărescu and Ghica domains represent two significant eco-cultural landscapes associated with prominent Romanian aristocratic families. As assemblages of natural environments, architectural remains, cultural practices, historical narratives, and collective memories, they illustrate the complex relationships through which landscapes generate meaning, continuity, and identity. Despite their comparable historical significance, the two estates have followed markedly different trajectories in the contemporary period. Drawing on cultural landscape theory and critical heritage studies, this paper introduces the concept of anti-memory, defined as the gradual production of forgetting through neglect, abandonment, and the weakening of a site's commemorative, social, and interpretive functions.

Using a comparative qualitative case-study approach that combines heritage analysis, archaeological evidence, documentary research, and landscape interpretation, the study explores how differing models of stewardship shape the capacity of historic landscapes to sustain memory and belonging. The Văcărescu domain, associated with one of Romania's most distinguished noble and literary lineages, preserves significant architectural and ecological features, including sixteenth-century vaulted cellars, a nineteenth-century mansion, a family chapel, and a historic park. Yet prolonged deterioration has diminished both its material integrity and its presence in public consciousness. By contrast, the Ghica domain has undergone in the last decade restoration and adaptive reuse through active stewardship, cultural programming, and public engagement, transforming the estate into a living site of cultural transmission and community participation. The comparison demonstrates that eco-cultural heritage is not merely the inheritance of monuments, landscapes, and traditions, but a dynamic system of relationships linking communities, memory, and environment. While the Văcărescu domain exemplifies the production of anti-memory, the Ghica domain illustrates the regeneration of cultural memory through active stewardship. The paper argues that eco-cultural identity emerges from the continuous interaction between people and the ecological and cultural landscapes they inhabit. By examining these contrasting trajectories, the study contributes to emerging European and global debates on eco-cultural heritage, demonstrating how governance and stewardship shape not only the preservation of heritage assets but also the capacity of historic landscapes to sustain belonging, cultural continuity, and meaning across generations.

