

Churches and monasteries in Botoșani county

(The XVth – XVIIIth centuries)

- summary -

The Romanian researches have borrowed the term *heritage* from the French historiography, term that is used to describe all the vestiges a society has accumulated throughout its history. In other words, it is the cultural treasure that belongs to a community. In this category, we can also find the *historical monument*. This type of treasure, regardless of how it presents itself, is investigated in strong connection with the mentality of the era it was built in.

The religious buildings, being considered places of worship for families and communities, accommodate some of the characteristics which underlie various aspects of the social, political, economical and religious life. The churches were of great significance in people's lives but, due to them being made of perishable materials, few of them have resisted until today. Therefore, these places of worship require a monographic research because they could deteriorate and a part of a community's history would be lost. What is more, the national artistic treasure would also suffer losses.

We have focused our attention on the religious monuments in Botoșani county. Here, the recent records allowed us to carry out a less conventional study regarding the history of each monument. The research conducted on churches and monasteries in the current Botoșani county, that date back to the XVth – XVIIIth centuries, contributes to the monographic reconstitution of the historical and architectural plans of religious edifices. Even though our main focus is set on XV – XVIII centuries, we have not used the old name – *The Lands of Dorohoi, Hârlău and Botoșani*. Instead, we chose to name it *the current Botoșani county* because the religious monuments were our main target, and not the towns they were built in. To track down the history of these towns, the amount of work would have increased and the time would have been too short for an analysis. Thus, our attention was centered on the monument and not on the place it was built and, as a result, we chose the aforementioned phrase.

The structure of the present research was based on the information we had at our disposal – not only the old documents that were preserved since back then but also the ones found in the archive files. It was, therefore, necessary to consult a large amount of documents and obtain accurate information regarding the historical and architectural past of the

monument. The architectural and historical evidences were the basis of this thesis. From the beginning, the main focus was to fill up the gaps in our theme's historiography. The information we disposed of contributed to the composition of some chapters that were more or less consistent.

We divided the thesis into three chapters. The first one comprises the general frame of wooden and stone wall ecclesiastical architecture from XV-XVIII centuries. The next ones focus on the micro-monographies of these two types of buildings. In the annexes, we have also attached the architectural plans of the religious edifices, plans drawn as a result of our fieldwork. Pictures of the churches covered in our research are also included.

Our starting point was the fact that an analysis of the ecclesiastical architecture of Moldavia of XV-XVIII centuries is necessary because such a theme needs to be included in the general typology, so that all its particularities and analogies are analyzed. We have also taken into consideration a presentation of architectural elements found on the entire Romanian land. This helped us to highlight not only the main typologies in Moldavia but also, the ones that were borrowed from the other geographical Romanian areas and thus, specifying the level of unity. Even though each area has a particular type of architecture, there are still some common features that lead to the unity of the buildings. Starting with the XVth century and concluding with the last years of the XVIIIth century, we captured the main points in the evolution of wooden and stone wall church architecture in the Romanian lands.

The wooden churches, whose architectural plan resembles the folk houses, are the central point of the second chapter. The sources of reference helped us not only to describe the interior and the exterior design of the religious edifices, but also to follow the historical thread of the monument, since its early stages until the present. Moreover, we have drawn the architectural plan for each church during our work field. Wooden folk architecture has developed in time, in strong connection with the social, economical and political contexts thus, highlighting the artistic skills of the local craftsmen. The wooden churches are of a great significance not only because they withstood the harsh times, but also because they were considered landmarks for communities.

The connections between the wooden and the stone wall churches take us to the last chapter that has the same structure as the second one. It comprises a few micro-monographies of the monuments. Some of the historical monuments included in this research are considered as key elements in the development of the ecclesiastical stone wall architecture in Moldavia. Therefore, the buildings of Stephen the Great were decisive for the entire Moldavian stone

wall architecture, until the end of the XVIIIth century. This last chapter, beside architecture, also includes the iconographic program that is still preserved in some constructions. Moreover, we have closely followed the historical thread of the monument since its early stages until today. Even though some churches are part of the constructions dedicated to the feudal art in Moldavia, we haven't just collected descriptive information. The places of worship were also included in the specific era they were built in.

After analyzing the site investigation and the documentary sources, we managed to find a number of features of churches. Nine out of the twenty three religious wooden monuments still have an inscription on the porch framing, on the dividing wall built between the nave and the narthex or on the iconostasis frontispiece. When it comes to the stone wall churches, five of them have such inscriptions. Another important feature is linked to the founder of the religious edifice. The churches in our research were built by princes, chancellors, their wives, abbots or locals. The most common architectural plan for the churches in Botoșani, specific for the Moldavian area, is the rectangular one with three and five sides, followed by the trefoil and the hall plans. The last one was borrowed from Ukraine.

Typically, the traditional ecclesiastical architecture is characterized by simplicity. Thus, most of the times, the roofs of the churches were made of shingle and they had two crosses at both ends. However, in this area, as everywhere else, we find churches that have one tower above the nave. During this research, we have also analyzed the dimensions of the churches. They are approximately 15 meters long and 7 meters wide. The smallest dimensions were registered for the *Sfântul Dumitru* church from Ionășeni village and the largest ones were established at *Sfinții Voievozi* church from Cotârgaci village.

The community in the Middle Ages was by definition a faithful one. Therefore, in order to strengthen the connection between the church and the people, the religious edifices were built in the centre of the town or village, as most of the churches included in this study are. However, they can also be found in the centre of the cemetery, usually placed on the outskirts of the towns. The Dedication Day of the church was established by the founder, depending on the piety he would have towards a saint, on the holiday that would approach or based on the thoughts that determined him to build the monument. The most common patron of churches in Botoșani is *Saint Nicholas*, met at eight historical monuments, followed by *The Dormition of the Virgin Mary* and *the Holy Archangels* at six and five churches respectively.

Since the XVth century, the churches were built without a porch, however, starting with the XVIIIth century, a great number of religious edifices have this annex added. The porch was attached in order to enlarge the place or to protect the construction. These are the

reasons for which, the majority of the religious monuments have such a room. Because invasions or fires, some of them were affected. For instance, after the Polish's and Cossack's army invasion, church *Saint Nicholas* of Coșula was robbed. The church of *The Dormition of the Virgin Mary* of Botoșani is another example. After the fire in 1887, it suffered external damages.

The data comprised in the documentary sources, the archives, the narrative sources and the field work helped us succeed in recovering the monographies of the monuments and their stories since when they were built and until today. We have also conducted a detailed research regarding their artistry and architecture.

To sum up, the present study proposes an analysis of the monument, based not only on the documentary sources, but also on the inspection of its architecture and painting in order to include the edifice in the iconography and architecture of the period it was built in. Furthermore, we have also focused on the monument's place in the ecclesiastical Moldavian architecture to establish the analogies and the particularities that exist between the places of worship in Botoșani county and the ones in other geographical areas of Romania. We have measured the interior and the exterior of the building in order to draw the architectural plan, one of the most significant topics in this thesis. We conclude that the churches in Botoșani county, built between XV-XVIII centuries, are included in the typology of the ecclesiastical Moldavian architecture.