

ANNALS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CRAIOVA

ANALELE
UNIVERSITĂȚII
DIN CRAIOVA

ISTORIE / HISTORY

Bi-Annually Journal

Year XX, No. 2(28)/2015

November



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The Journal is published bi-annually

ISSN – L: 1224 – 5704

ISSN Online: 2393 – 3682

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Analele Universității din Craiova. Istorie (Annals of the University of Craiova. History) is indexed in:



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<http://www.scimagojr.com/journalsearch.php?q=21100285469&tip=sid&clean=0>



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STUDIES AND ARTICLES

THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF JITIANU MONASTERY

Alexandrina Bădescu (Pădurețu), Veronica Gheorghiu***

Abstract

The historical monuments with religious items are, essentially, a spiritual and material portion for every nation. They highlight the artistic skills and present certification of social, historical, political, economic and religious life. Every monastery and historical monument highlights the past, and offers in present, the acknowledgement of the founders and events of that time.

The monasteries aren't just a place for pray, but a shrine, of a high spiritual value that contributes to creation and cultivation of national culture of a nation, where are the highest national ideals and the finest traditions.

Jitianu Monastery is one of the oldest monasteries of county Dolj, which now has a valuable collection of religious art, various genders, painting on wood, painting on glass, sculpture, silverware, embroideries of old Romanian artistic creations and traditional art, this collection being the fruit of the action of Oltenia Metropolitan Firmilian Marin, Teoctist Arăpaș and Nestor Vornicescu.

Key words: *Jitianu Monastery, Oltenia, architectural elements, collection of icons, church*

The history of monasteries in Oltenia

Oltenia land nowadays has a strong historical burden, ruled by important events that marked historical, social and economic development of collectivity. This thing is confirmed by testimonies that are “from the ages of Dacian and Dacian-Roman settlements, from Dierna and Drobeta, to Sucidava on Danube, to Pelendava, on Jiu, then, towards the sunrise, to Romula, Buridava, Acidava”.¹ All of these settlements highlight the ancient origin of human in these places and along with the art and religious culture monuments become testimonies of millenary spiritual life and of an intense cultural preoccupation.

As they residences were built, some modest and some more imposing, people also have built nearby a place of worship, at first from wood, then stone and brick. They beautified them architecturally, they painted them, decorated with religious items and then hallowed them. Some of those values were kept almost untouched, other need the hand of the restorer specialist, but all, generally, talk about the existence of their ancients.²

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¹ Teodora Voinescu, *Comori de artă bisericească*, Craiova, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Craiovei, 1980, p. 17.

² Radu Constantinescu, Mircea Sfirlea, *Monumente religioase, biserici și mănăstiri celebre din România*, București, Editura Editis, 1994, p. 15.

Monasteries are not just a place where national culture is preserved, but a place where the authentic national culture was created.¹ It is noted that, over the time, monasteries have played multiple roles in the Romanian society, from religious establishments, cult sanctuaries and places of prayer, teaching and working, to places of exile and punishment for the guilty ones, fulfilling the functions of prison or reformatory penitentiary.²

Each of the monasteries “has a legend, but free of it a true history, highlighted by researches of archaeologist, historians and specialists in the art and culture field”.³ This fact can be seen to the monasteries from Oltenia: Vodița, Tismana, Polovragi, Lainici, Cozia, Topolnița etc. and implicitly, to the representative monasteries from county Dolj: Sadova, Coșuna, Popânzălești, Maglavit, Cârcea, Jitianu.

Sadova monastery is founded by aristocrats of Craiova. The first church, with the titular saint St. Nicholas, was made of wood, at the end of the XVth century, being documentary reminded on 1530 and rebuilt by Matei Basarab in 1633 from stone.⁴ In the rebuilding moment were built cells for monks and next to them a little church with brick wall, present nowadays, named “bolniță”, serving for the service made over the week. Around the monastery, it was built a defensive wall of brick⁵, today remained only the ruins. Over the centuries, more ample restorations of the monastery took place in the years of 1702, 1852 and 1903.

Coșuna Bucovăț monastery dating from 1843 has the titular saint St. Nicholas. It was restored in the years 1571-1572 by the great ban Ștefan and his son Pârnu. Architecturally, the church is of high value, its frontages being made of brick and coating, disposed in panels. The internal frescos are since 1554 and they are among the most valuable paintings from Muntenia in that century. The painting was affected after an earthquake, fin 1873, when the church was repainted and became parochial church. It was changed back into monastery, after the 1st World War. The monasteries Popânzălești, Maglavit, Cârcea were founded in XXth century.

It is well known that the monastery is a place to pray, where is commitment, the volition is whipped and the faith is harden, where conviction is burnished, the sin is banished and the personality is harden, as well as spiritual oasis where a lot of life pilgrims found mental strength and peace of mind.⁶

The historical development of Jitianu Monastery

Jitianu Monastery is 10 km from Craiova, on the road to Calafat, in the locality of Braniște, county Dolj. Tradition says that this monastery is built on shrines of blood of heroes. A big part of historians placed here the Rovine, meaning that marshy place where

¹ P.F. Christodoulos, Athens Archbishop and All Elada, *Monahismul și lumea*, in “Revista Mitropolia Olteniei”, no. 5-8/2003, p. 47.

² Cristina Ilie Goga, *The Transformation of Detention in Romania: From Exile to Main Punishment*, in “International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences”, no. 56/2015, p. 59.

³ Radu Constantinescu, Mircea Sfirlea, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

⁵ Alexandru Toma Fireșcu, Ionuț Adrian Pătularu, *Biserici și așezări doljene*, Craiova, Editura Mitropolia Olteniei, 2005, p. 241.

⁶ Theoharis M. Provatakis, *Meteora – Istoria mănăstirilor și monahismului*, Atena, Editura Michalis Toubis, 1998, p. 7.

the ruler Mircea cel Bătrân had the famous fight in 1394, when he conquered the Turkish lead by Baiazid Fulgerul padishah.

According to the same tradition, on the highest place where the monastery is built now, as a gratitude to God for the received help, the ruler Mircea cel Bătrân built a church of wood, with titular saint St. Dimitrie Izvorătorul de mir, a military saint that helped Christians many times in their fights against Turkish, a saint whereat the ruler had a great devoutness and whom he asked the intermediation to God before some tough attempts that Romanians got through.¹

About Jitianu monastery was few written, that because of the lack of documents. The charters, documents and its books were probably taken by Greeks that left it in 1864, in the event of impropration, the monastery being bowed to Saint Paul Apostle from Athos Mountain.²

There also were in its history other circumstances of afflictions that contributed to the extinction of the documents: so as, from a documentary mention, on 22nd of February 1779, it comes up that “the holy monastery Jitianu had estate books since period when riot fell in Bistrița monastery in the cave, as they have fallen in many monasteries and aristocrats, as all Craiovești aristocrats and Bistrița abbot know, that thieves were in that cave”.³ The mentioned document refers to the period of approximately 20 years when Wallachia was claimed as negotiation price in the conflict of Ottoman, Habsburg and Czarist Empire.

In the year of 1718, by peace from Passarowitz, Oltenia and Banat fell under Austrian domination until year of 1739, when Oltenia came back to Wallachia by peace from Belgrad. Because of these conflicts, the monastery’s archive was partially indemnified in the cave from Bistrița monastery.

Another document, dated 7th of October 1782, which represents an application of Dionisie abbot from Jitianu for Caragea ruler, shows that “in war periods, it happened that the Turkish took the books”.⁴ Those said probably refer to what was left from the archive in the monastery.

So, we can conclude that the historical news about Jitianu Monastery are largely missing because they were stolen when they were at Bistrița Monastery, either they were taken by Turkish either by the Greek monks. We still find a few documents in State archives.

Regarding the founders of Jitianu Monastery, some historians accredited the idea that the settlement “was built by Madame Bălașa, the wife of Constantin Basarab, in 1654-1658”⁵, other considered that the founder is “Vicar Novac, during reign of Mihai Viteazul”⁶, or that “it is another foundation of Craiovești, built by wall with enclosure

¹ *Monografia Sfintei Mănăstiri Jitianu*, Craiova, Editura MJM, 2008, p. 8.

² T.G. Bulat, *Știri noi despre Mănăstirea Jitianu (Dolj)*, in “Revista Mitropolia Olteniei”, no. 5-6/1967, p. 430.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ T.G. Bulat, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

⁵ Protosinghel Theofil S. Niculescu, *Sfintele Monastiri și schituri din România: ctitorite de vlădici, călugări și preoți, boieri, negustori și săteni*, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Editura Mănăstirea Vodița, 2002, p. 108.

⁶ Nicolae Stoicescu, *Bibliografia localităților și monumentelor feudale din România. I – Țara Românească (Muntenia, Oltenia și Dobrogea)*, vol. I, A-L, Craiova, Editura Mitropolia Olteniei, 1970, p. 392.

and settled in a grove”¹ that, according to tradition, they built it “in the place of a church of wood founded by Mircea cel Bătrân after the victory from Rovine, where the soldiers of Mircea cel Bătrân gave a good hiding to the Turkish that came to rob the country, facing them in the marshes around Jiu”².

Most of the historians reached the conclusion that Madame Bălașa built, in Jitianu, a new place for the monastery. Located in the middle of a forest and surrounded by a lake, in the period when the monastery was visited by Paul from Alep, “the new church was under construction, the current one, the building of the decedent Madame Bălașa of Constantin Șerban ruler”³. Despite this information, it is generally considered that “its founders are others, namely the Craiovești aristocrats that built this monastery by the spirit of devoutness, but also with the thought of defending, especially against Islamic, they were having a Christian politics”⁴.

An argumentation that Jitianu Monastery was built on these lands is the successive care that had for it, first Radu Voda Serban – 1602-1610, then son of Constantin by his wife Madame Bălașa, followed by Șerban Cantacuzino Vodă, nephew of daughter of Radu Vodă Șerban, Constantin Vodă Brâncoveanu, even Ștefan Cantacuzino.

There are historical documents that attest the existence of Jitianu Monastery before the building of its halidom by Madame Bălașa: “The Charters of decedent Pătrașco Voevod – March 1554 – December 1557, the son of Radu Voievod “from the year of 7066 for half of village Jamnic that is bowed to Jatian Monastery”. This would be the first written testimony that mentions the existence of the monastery in the XVIth century, so not far from the glory period of the Craiovești”⁵.

In conclusion, “based on those news and hypothesis, it can be said that Jitianu monastery was built by Craiovești aristocrats, on the land that can be linked by the name of Jitianu High Steward, who was part of the council of Neagoe Basarab, next to Barbu, the great ban, and others”⁶.

In an old inscription, it is mentioned that “this Holly Jitian Monastery, slipped after a time and the monks didn’t have where to go, that is why the vicar Luca Egumenul from St. Agora began to build but it remained callow, that is why Petre Obedeianu vel arm, end it, beautifying it with paintings, adding cells in the days of Mr. Io Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanul”⁷.

Restorations of the monastery took place in the year of 1701 when the monarchist enclosure was finalized, adding up a few cells, and to the church was added a close porch that was also painted. This porch became a kind of close narthex for the current church. The bell tower, sticked directly to the mentioned porch, was added later, in 1787. It is a

¹ Constantin Șerban, Victoria Șerban, *Orașul Craiova și împrejurimile sale, după un manuscris german inedit din sec. al XVIII-lea*, in Muzeul Olteniei Craiova, *Oltenia studii și comunicări – Istorie, etnografie, științele naturii*, Craiova, 1981, p. 41.

² Zaharia Garău, *Noi argumente privind localizarea bătăliei de la Rovine, lângă Craiova. O ipoteză de lucru*, in Muzeul Olteniei Craiova, *Oltenia studii și comunicări – Istorie, etnografie, științele naturii*, Craiova, 1981, p. 32.

³ Radu Crețeanu, *Monumente istorice din cuprinsul Mitropoliei Olteniei în lumina relatării lui Paul de Alep*, in “Revista Mitropolia Olteniei”, no. 11-12/1967, p. 921.

⁴ T.G. Bulat, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 433.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 441.

⁷ Protosinghel Theofil S. Niculescu, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

massive construction because it had a strategic role too. It was the period when the Turkish came from the south of the Danube in small bands/crews by 10-20 people, having a lot of robberies. To their attack could have been successfully opposed a construction enough fortified. This is why the bell tower looks disproportionate among the church, being a warehouse of goods and defence tower, with double walls; in the year of 1812, the archimandrite Dorotei Craioveanul won his right to be among the painters, doing the first big restoration of the whole sanctuary, church and cells, according to an inscription that unfortunately does not exist in the present. Major restorations took place in the years of 1852 and 1932, when it took the appearance of today.¹

In the period of the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza, after the impropriation, the Jitianu monastery, practically, stopped existing. The monks were sent in other parts and the sanctuary was given to the neighboring locality Balta Verde that had no church, receiving the status of parochial church. In the cells of the monastery, it had been organized the first High School of Agriculture (1864-1873), then it was moved to Herăstrău, where it exists nowadays the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine from Bucharest (the former Agronomic Institute Nicolae Bălcescu). From this period, at the entrance remained the didactic meadow of mulberries, which is almost 150 years old and is a monument of nature.

During the Independence War from 1877, the church of the monastery was used as warehouse of missile bodies, and the annexed buildings served as hospital for the Romanian soldiers and Turkish prisoners. As a consequence of some earthquakes that took place at the beginning of XX century, the church was damaged and hence, at the beginning of the 1st World War (1914), it had to be closed for religion because of the ruin status it was in.

In the year of 1952, the Queen Elena (the mother of the King Mihai) passed by train nearby the monastery towards the royal domains from Segarcea. Nicolae Iorga was part from her retainers, who was the president of Historical Monuments Committee. The learned politician informed the queen about the whole history of the monastery. Impressed, the queen wanted to visit it at her return, thing that actually happened. Seeing its condition, the queen asked Nicolae Iorga to make sure the sanctuary will be reopen as monastery of nuns.

The sanctification of the church took place in the year of 1932 by archimandrite Efrem Enachescu and was given back to the religion, as parochial church of the locality Balta Verde, county Dolj. In the summer of 1933, the Bishop Vartolemeiu re-founded the monastery sending the abbes Fevronia Miclaus with 8 monks to Jitianu, and starting with the year 1934, the current cells were built on the old foundations. With this occasion, inscriptions of old cells was found buried between ruins, and they were written on stone with the following content “those lines that are from the foundation with all the expense and diligence were made by the holly archimandrite vicar Kir Antim, St. Paul from the St. Mountain Prior Jitianu and for the eternal memory 1813”²

In the year of 1960, the monastery was dissolved, here remaining only the monarchy Valentia Ciurica, in order to keep it open and ensure a minimum guard. Its listening was

¹ Radu Constantinescu, Mircea Sfirlea, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

² Protosinghel Theofil S. Niculescu, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

related to the annexed housekeeping of Craiova Archiepiscopacy, founded here by Firmilian Metropolitan.

In the period, when he was the Metropolitan of Oltenia (1973-1977), the Teoctist Patriarch was also concerned about the fact that this monarchist enclosure not to remain with lack of religious life. He took the initiative to organize a museum there, which would shelter the icons collection of Craiova Archiepiscopacy. The existence of this collection could justify, theoretically around, a monachal parish with preparation of museum, guide and restorers of artworks. Unfortunately, the political regime of that period, hostile for the church, didn't allow that. Only in 2001, by initiative of the Metropolitan Teofan of Oltenia, the Jitianu monastery became monastery of nuns, until 2009, when the current Metropolitan of Oltenia Irineu changed it in monastery of monks.

Architectural elements of Jitianu Monastery

The church of the monastery, architecturally, has a triconic plan and a deep altar, with bays for anaphora and diaconicon, being separated by the rectangular aisle and the square narthex by a wall iconostasis. The altar is vaulted and has a semi-calotte elongated towards west. The aisle tower stands by the pendants on four arches and on pilasters that flank the lateral apses. In exterior, it has 12 sides. The aisle is separated by the narthex by a vaulted wall with a perfect calotte, standing on four pendants of building placed in the corners of the room.¹ The narthex supports an arch on pendants by the columns.

Ghika-Budești claimed that the pedants of the church are more massive that it used to be for the XVI century, claiming that the church is dated in the following century. The high area of the church is separated by the lower one by a "belt formed by a flanked tor with two strings of saw teeth surrounding the church, splitting the frontages in two registries. The report between the two registries with arches is of 3/1 (considering the pedestal and cornice). The niches between the two registries are flat and have feet and the space between arches of brick apparently left, they succeed with grace on the frontages".²

The side apses of the aisle are polygonal with five sides and it is not directly recorded to the rectangular of the church. Between those are interposed the corners of a kind of rhomb, having a similar function buttresses, met to a few moments from the second half of XVI century and the beginning of the XVII century, as for example St. Archangels – Târgoviște, Bălteni – county Ilfov, Comana – county Giurgiu, Strejeștii de Jos – county Olt, Călinești – county Prahova, Mihai Vodă – Bucharest (only towards west).³

"The pedestal is marked by a strong tor that turns back in a right angle on the former west frontage, as well as the cornice formed of two strings of tiny teeth, whose original part could be seen in the vault room of bell tower. Only the alcoves of the tower have the archivolts marked by two lines of teeth arches. The window frames, with the opening extremely narrow, dates from the restoration from 1928-1930, realized under the guidance of the Committee of Historical Monuments. The only original – lack of profile – seems to be the one from the south niche of the aisle".⁴

¹ Teresa Sinigalia, *Repertoriul arhitecturii în Țara Românească 1600-1680*, vol. I, București, Editura Vremea, 2002, p. 217.

² *Ibidem*, p. 218.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 219.