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**A REPERTORY OF ROMANIAN MASONRY CHURCHES
OF THE
MARAMUREŞ AND SATU MARE COUNTIES
FROM THE 17th – 19th CENTURIES
PhD THESIS
-ABSTRACT-**

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ABSTRACT

My cultural and editorial activity over fifteen years within the Orthodox Bishopric of Maramures and Satmar has brought me in contact with the elements of the religious and cultural patrimony of the two above mentioned counties. The knowledge of the administrative territory, the access to archival information, and also the monographic studies of my colleagues parish-priests, have all imposed the idea that the most representative testimony of religious life between the 17th and 19th centuries are the masonry churches. I particularly became interested in these objectives, realizing that the buildings in question are less known and researched in specialty works.

The come into being of a “*Repertory of Romanian Masonry Churches of the Maramures and Satu Mare Counties from the 17th – 19th Centuries*” was, first and foremost, a possibility to locate and acknowledge the ecclesiastic cultural patrimony of the North-West of Romania, from a geographical point of view, over an area complex from a confessional and historical perspective, which was not sufficiently researched outside the Transylvanian context. As a whole, it was desired to achieve a study, which, through its contents, structure, methods and procedures, would contribute not only to taking these buildings out of anonymity but would also present them, in a structured reportorial catalogue, in the form they have today.

Secondly, we started from the necessity of retrieving and introducing into the scientific circuit of ecclesiastic-cultural information that correspond to the area of the two counties, to comprise and systematize a cultural issue which so far has not been researched in a unitary way.

The central concepts of the research that was carried out were linked to creating a repertory of masonry churches within a well-defined administrative area, and extending the investigation and analysis around them, trying to give the paper an analytical profile in its final form, oriented towards the history of arts and an architectural study. The research is evidently perfectible and far from complete and, without being exhaustive, we have set out to build an image that encompasses a frequently neglected patrimony that was created in the crucible of the cultural and social church life of the Maramures and Satu Mare Romanian communities over three centuries.

The drafting of the entire repertory was extensively based on the information gathered in the field, many of the fundamental documents, by which I mean surveys, inventories, build-outs, monographs and correspondence, having been found in the parish archives. According to the

measurements taken by telemetry, drawings were made for the missing coordinates and dimensions where there was no survey for the church. Also, the interior and exterior pictures for each church constituted the basis of representation in the technical layout of all the inventoried buildings. We counted heavily upon the archive funds of the Maramures and Satmar Orthodox Bishopric, of the Metropolitan Office of Cluj, Maramures and Salaj, of the eparchial Archpriests' Parishes, of the Maramures County National Archives and of the Maramures History and Archaeology Museum.

Thus, the first chapter of the paper is dedicated to the presentation of the natural landscape of the catalogued territory, with the aim of differentiating the area from the other regions of the country through the features of the geographical positioning of the two neighboring counties. Thematically, the territory is circumscribed to a geographical area of 10,560 square kilometers, representing 4% of the surface of Romania, of which 6,215 square kilometers belong to Maramures county and 4,345 square kilometers to Satu Mare county. The north-western region of Romania, thus defined by the two counties, is characterized by a variety of forms of relief, by a surface like an amphitheater laid out over mountains, hills, depressions and plains. These lands have favoured, through their climactic conditions and their natural riches, the presence and the permanence of man from the most ancient times. Through the permanent inter-conditioning of the natural factors and the human component, the area is densely populated, and by several ethnic groups, and is characterized by a strong multiculturalism, by the creation of specific habitats and by the nuancing of several ethnographic mental spaces.

The second chapter, entitled *Territorial-Administrative Organization and Evolution* presents and clarifies the geographical overlapping of several administrative units. In establishing the limits of the researched area, we took into account, on the one hand, the present administrative division, and the paper settled for the research of two counties: Maramures and Satu Mare. Over the territory already defined, if we report ourselves to the time when the churches were built, we can talk of counties or parts thereof – as administrative regions for the researched period. Maramures County, for example, has a clearly delimited territory with its own spatial, social and economic features, yet made up of ethnographically distinct zones, often named by ethnologists and historians “lands”: (The Chioar Land, The Lapus, The Maramures Land or The Codru Land). Yet, from an administrative point of view, the greatest part of the current area is made up of the counties of Maramures, Satmar, Solnoc Dabaca, Salaj and Ugocea in the 17th-19th centuries, and the repertory is mindful of these administrative structures.

The third chapter sets out to present, starting from extant sources, the first historical and judicial documentary testimonies of Romanian church life in Voivodal Maramures, Chioar, Lapus and

Satmar. Thus, in the light of the Maramures nobility diplomas, we discover toponymies of places of Christian origins, the names of several priests in the 13th-15th centuries, as well as the existence of churches and monasteries, all these indicating a Romanian church organization in Maramures and Satmar.

Between the 17th and the 19th centuries, the period taken into account for our research paper, there were some major events that changed the religious life of these places. Firstly the abolition of the Orthodox Bishopric of Maramures, the religious belonging of many Romanians to the United Bishopric of Munkacevo, which became united with Rome together with the other bishoprics of Galitia. On the other hand, the middle of the 19th century is noted for the important organizational mutations inside the Transylvanian Greek Catholic church, the enlargement of its jurisdiction through the founding of two new bishoprics, beside the existing ones of Fagaras and Oradea, namely Lugoj and Gherla, with the annexation of the Greek Catholic parishes of Maramures, Satmar, Lapus and Chioar to the latter.

Another chapter, which makes the transition to the actual theme of the paper, is dedicated to the four masonry churches that were built prior to the studied period, about which we have direct and indirect historical testimony. These are the churches of Giulesti, Sarasau, Cuhea-Bogdan Voda and Peri- today Khrushovo (Ukraine). The chapter concludes that alongside the rural religious architecture, mostly in wood, the fortress-cities/voivodal headquarters, such as Sighet, Hust, Apsa, Bedeu, Biserica Alba, etc., sported stone churches that were dated prior to the oldest wooden churches that we have today, and which belong to the 17th century.

The typological classification of the architectural elements is presented in a vast chapter which in turn is structured in subchapters that, according to the archive documents, bibliographical and field information, make a typological classification according to planimetrics, vaulting system, belfry location, natural lighting, as well as building materials used.

It was intended to identify the characteristic features of the churches constructed in the two counties and integrating them into the general architectural styles of the Transylvanian religious constructions. We have followed defining architectural elements and building techniques: the church layout, interior partitioning, constructive features of the walls; solutions to the load-bearing structure of some churches – pillars, arches, towers, exterior decoration of facades and artistic elements, where available.

A first group-family that almost entirely comprises the supposedly oldest forms, is characterized by the fact that the nave does not integrate with the altar apse. Since the diameter of the

apse is smaller than the width of the naos, this results in a detachment which is very small in some churches. Insofar as the curvature of the apse arches, there are four distinct typologies:

a) the first planimetric variant includes the churches whose altar arch is in full centering, opening in an 180 degrees semi-circle;

b) the second planimetric variant includes the churches whose apse arch ends at 180 degrees are over elongated.

c) the third planimetric variant comprises the churches whose apse arches are below 180 degrees (sub-centered). These arches generally have an opening of ± 150 degrees. As an interesting particularity, we also mention that the churches of this sub-group do not generally have a detached altar, or where this exists, it is extremely reduced. With few exceptions, they are dated as the oldest. As to their location, they can be found particularly around the cities of Baia Mare and Baia Sprie, in the area known as Fisculas, in the Lapus region – the former county of Interior Solnoc as well as in the areas of Codru and Satmar.

d) the fourth variant comprises the churches whose semi-circular apses are undetached. This type, with only one exception is to be found only with triconque planimetry churches. The Moisei church is the only one whose planimetrics consists of a hall with undetached altar.

The second group comprises the churches whose apse walls have several sides. Except for the Valea Morii church, whose apse has seven sides, all the other churches of this category have five sides in their polygonal apses. There are however variations of the ratio of these sides, as they do not always come in a semi-circle, thus creating three planimetric variants.

- a) detached polygonal apses whose equal sides are inscribed in a circle (the churches of Miresu Mare, Barsana, Danesti, Piscolt, Sighet, etc.)
- b) detached polygonal apses whose sides that form the detachment are shorter (churches of Ghegea, Iadara, Durusa, etc.)
- c) detached polygonal apses whose central side is smaller (the churches of Sarauad, Satu Mic, Irina, etc.)

With the first two variants, the angle of the apse polygonal walls are in a ± 135 degree-ratio with each other while for the apses whose central side is reduced, the ratio is of ± 130 degrees. In as far as location is concerned, this type of polygonal apse can be found frequently with the churches of the former domain of Cetatea de Piatra and those of the Carei region, and it must be noted that the polygonal apse can be found with two of the oldest churches, namely those of Coas (1730) and Copalnic Surduc (1731).

The rectangular layout with the undetached semi-circular apse is represented by the planimetrics of the Moisei church, one of its kind, where the altar apse is the same body as the nave. In this case, we have a fully centered semi-circular apse whose semi-circular wall is on the same plane as the lateral walls of the nave. The Coas church has a singularity in the entire repertoire. The construction is among the few churches that have a tripartite programme concerning the distribution of the interior space. The narthex is divided from the naos by a masonry wall that has three openings. The western facade is made up of three sides, with the segments situated at the extremities in a 45-degree angle and includes the narthex in an original typology that is specific of the wooden architecture. Upon careful analysis one can notice a symmetry in the ratio of the polygonal sides of the narthex to those of the altar apse, these being disposed in the same angle to the longitudinal axis of the church.

The tri-lobe or triconque layout is given by the presence of the two lateral apses of the naos and the apse of the altar. From the point of view of resistance, this form of construction is considered by specialists as a more resistant structure since apses take over part of the transversal loads of the vault. Churches with this layout have their special features. The Sisesti church has semi-cylindrical lateral apses and the apse that originates the altar is prolonged beyond the undetached nave. The Ferneziu church, originally had a nave-type planimetrics, but between 1958 and 1960, after repairs and extensions, had supplementary lateral rectangular apses. Two other edifices are in the same situation: the Buciumi church that showcases a new planimetrics after alterations made to it, an enhanced altar, semi-cylindrical and undetached, and two semi-cylindrical lateral apses. The church of Tulghes, was also extended in the year 1979, with two supplementary lateral polygonal apses that are similar to the altar one, yet heightened above the nave.

With few exceptions, the lateral apses that appear today in the planimetrics of some churches are subsequent additions belonging to the 20th century as a result of some changes made to broaden the indoor space. The churches that originally had a triconque layout are few, reminiscences of the Brancoveanu building interventions in the 17th century in Transylvania, and for the next century, due to the traditional connections with the Orthodox Church in Moldavia, churches that still keep the belfry which is so present in the structure of the church-halls from Transylvania.

Taking a closer look at the typological problems, it is noted the way in which the craftsmen, often inexperienced, have conceived the built environment. What has to be noticed from the beginning is the complete consistency between the sketch plan of the churches and their development in space. The order of the religious premises along the east-west longitudinal axis is found in the vaulting system, which highlights it gradually. The constructors understood that the semi-cylinder vault developed longitudinally, which is very often met even with the wooden churches built before

the 17th century, is the most appropriate to give due solemnity to the aisle, marking in this way the major direction of the liturgical space to the altar. The atrium, which in the case of our inventoried churches is usually shorter in height, clearly shows it is an introductory space. In the primary Christian tradition, the symbolism and utility of the atrium was conceived as an adjacent room, but outside the church itself because the catechumen, that is the ones not baptized were just future members of the church. Subsequently, the atrium became a space exclusively for women. But this spatial programme, as far as the typology of the studied churches, that most of the times do not have an atrium, is concerned, is usually suggested in a conventional manner by the perimeter below the rostrum, marked usually by the colonnades of the rostrum. The lack of the atrium brings about a major change in the arrangement of the parish. The northern half of the aisle becomes the place reserved for women in accordance with the placement of the *Royal Icon Of Our Virgin Mary* from the iconostasis, and the southern half is for men in accordance with *The Royal Icon Of Jesus Christ*.

There is a pretty wide range of the covering systems of the aisle. The most frequently met is the semi-cylinder vault with some ramifications: *a vault with full arch bonds* which can be found in 22 of the churches, a vault with *semi arch bonds* in 38 of the churches, and the flattened one (“the basket handle” vault) in 14 of them. There are a number of 26 churches without vaults, some of them having beveled edges.

Another category of vaults are the ones structured on several units in which every bay is determined by 4 supporting points. Typologically we can group them into:

Cross vaults with apparent edge, where the dome originating from the intersection of 2 semi-cylinder vaults, with equal diameters, intersects in a right angle making up lower edges. For example, the nave of the church from Ferneziu is made up of 4 cross-vaults on the east-west axis demarcated by 5 double arches in order to increase the resistance to tension. The frontal projection of these arches makes up a semi-circle and the diagonal arches are in half-ellipses.

Bohemian or avela vaults as we can see for example in the church from Bargau, where the system of supporting structure is made up of a range of 3 suspended domes, inscribed in a semi-calotte sphere, from which there have been removed the parts that stay outside the vertical planes. Both the frontal and the lateral arches are circle segments supported on massive pilasters engaged in the lateral walls of the nave. Out of 56 churches whose vaulting system is structured on several units of vaults, 2 have cross vaults and the rest 54 have bohemian/avela vaults.

An important element in the elevation of a church is the tower – a relatively late appearance in the religious architecture in Transylvania. As an archetypal model we may consider the tower with a square basis and the body, a rectangular prism, more or less tall, closed by an open

simple gallery over which the 2 piece helmet is placed: a basic one in frustum pyramid with square basis from which there rises an octagonal pyramidal cone with the cross at the top. This is the model which we can find in almost all wooden churches from Transylvania. In old churches the belfry is connected to the nave, which is specific to the Transylvanian churches. Having a simple gazebo and a small fleche, the belfry is situated above the porch. Enclosed in an architectural style the over-raised towers are of western origin, in a gothic style brought in Transylvania by the Saxons. They are not just loan items; they fulfill the practical need to shelter in a high place the bell so that its sound could be heard from the distance. It is certain that for the 17th and 18th century, as far as the architectural line of the towers is concerned, we can speak of a certain influence from the part of the church and cathedral constructors from the cities, which will bring about variety in the superior part and the shape of the cover. In many of the inventoried churches the towers have been built after the church, sometimes even decades later. This is due mainly to the lack of financial and material resources that many of the rural parishes were struggling with at that time. Once built, these towers followed the same typology: with a square plane section, with thick walls and as elevation, they were structured on 2, 3, or rarely 4 levels, closed with a more or less profiled cornice.

A first classification of the towers can be established according to how they are connected to the nave of the church. All churches, without exception, have the belfry on the main facade which faces, as a rule, west.

Architectural structures which are part from the nave, i.e. the towers, give it a part from the structure resistance necessary for the vaulting system. In these situations we speak about churches whose towers are engaged (totally or partially) in the nave so that their western facade overlaps in longitudinal section with the wall of its facade.

Another category is made up of churches whose towers are bonded to the main facade as structures independent from the nave. The location of these towers bonded to the wall of the nave does not have an important role for the elements of resistance of the building. As for the old churches from the 18th century, the appearance of the location of the tower is identical to those of the wooden churches and the tower is nothing more than a metallic structure placed above the choir stand, like in the churches from Baia Sprie, Berinta, Boiu Mare, Cetatele, Coas and Hurezu Mare.

The exterior decoration of the studied churches falls into the patterns of the Transylvanian churches from the rural areas with simple facades of the walls. A sober line of the ornamentation can be found only in the flanges that usually divide the lateral walls of the nave in several registers. Occasionally there can be found flanges under the cornice, or the one that surrounds the median part of the towers. The bases are made at the lower part of the wall, the elevations, continuing practically the

foundation built above the walking level. They are made from the masonry and are thicker than the rest of the wall. In some of the inventoried churches the transition from the width of the foundation built at the elevation proper is made by successive footings in the shape of the ring surface.

In these 2 counties there have been identified 2 churches that are from the end of the 17th century (with uncertain dating), 13 churches from the 18th century and 132 churches from the 19th century. Being built at the request of the parishes, the priest together with the Parish Council were taking the necessary steps in getting the authorizations at the Deanery office in which there were given arguments regarding the necessity to build a new church, the funds or the financial incomes which will sustain the expenses of the construction and the Archdiocesan Council analyzed these requests. The constructors of these churches, who were most of the time anonymous, left the testimony of their competence and skill in the small-scale achievements but which incorporate technical and sometimes artistic elements comparable to the monuments representative to that time.

For the villages from Maramures and Satmar from the 17th - 19th century, these masonry churches were monumental constructions. Building them imposed material and human efforts bigger than for the wooden churches. In order to construct them they needed technical knowledge that only the specialized teams led by foremen who knew all the building techniques, learnt on other sites, from generation to generation. In their architectural simplicity they are a very important part of the Romanian cultural heritage.

We consider that the documentary, monographic information, the presentation of the plans, the detailed and overall picture, at the outside and inside, of all the monuments from this period will allow the specialists in the history of arts and architecture, a more profound analysis of the construction of the masonry churches from the area.

The paper is completed by the bibliography used, the annexes that include surveys, the map of Maramures and Satu Mare counties in which the inventoried churches are situated, the maps of the 5 historic counties, photos and documents.