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**Princely Monastery *Saint Nicholas* Popăuți  
An Important Foundation from Moldavia dedicated to the  
Patriarchate of Antioch**

**Summary of The Doctoral Thesis**

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### **Key words**

Botoșani, princely courts, new first documented mentions, Alexander I of Moldavia, Stephen the Great, the Church “Saint Nicholas” Popăuți, architecture, painting, exterior painting, theological considerations, bell tower, Patriarchate of Antioch, dedication, Patriarch Sylvester, Constantin Racoviță, Gheorghe Cantacuzino-Deleanu, estates, villages, Popăuți, Tătărași, Ciușmeaua, Răchiți, Teasc, Vaslui, Boțoaia, Băloșești, Negrilești, Childești, Bessarabia, Duruitoarea, Inochentie Iliupoleos, Veniamin Costache, Greek abbots, Monastery Popăuți, restoration, re-foundation, abbots.

### **Summary**

This doctoral thesis, titled “Princely Monastery *Saint Nicholas* Popăuți, an Important Foundation from Moldavia dedicated to the Patriarchate of Antioch”, presents itself as a monographic approach that deals with the history of the archaeological, historical and art site from Popăuți, extended over a period of over six hundred years, which implied an excursion through several areas of research, such as: theological, church history, history of arts, political history, archeology, restoration, cyrillic paleography, numismatics, epigraphy, demography and toponymy.

The reason why we stopped on this theme is entirely justified by the lack of a monographic work for this historical monument, of major importance for the Romanian and universal culture, the involvement of the author in a period of about twenty years in the restoration, re-foundation and protection of the entire cultural patrimony of the place and the desire to make this cultural objective worthwhile through this research and by publishing its results.

Taking into consideration that in the historical period of existence of the historical site mentioned, it has fulfilled various administrative functions, the paper was structured into three distinct sections. The first of these, dedicated to the Church “Saint Nicholas”, as the sacred edifice of the former princely courts in Botoșani, was divided into three chapters in which the subject of these medieval edifices was dealt with, the church and the bell tower were described and the history of these architectural and art pieces was exposed from their beginnings to the present days.

The second section, reserved for the period 1750-1863, when the princely church met the status of the monastery, was divided into five chapters, where the topic was developed under the following titles: The Relations of the Patriarchate of Antioch with the Romanian Countries during 1578-1753, Turning the Church into a Monastery, Its Allotment and Dedication to this Patriarchate, The Minimography of the Monastery Popăuți’s Villages and Monasteries, Abbots of the Monastery and Bishop Inochentie Iliupoleos, as Obvious Personality of the Time.

The third section of the paper dedicated to the history of the Church “Saint Nicholas” Popăuți, during 1863-2017, was divided into two chapters, dealing with the church staff from 1863-1996 and the re-established monastery from nowadays.

As far as the stage of research is concerned, our predecessors in this area of research have had incomplete approaches: in the case of the princely courts, they were limited to assumptions about their beginning and location, the historical and art monument were included only in synthesis papers, the subject of the Syrian-Romanian relations was not deepened, the presentation of the relations of the bourgeois from Botoșani with Popăuți Monastery, from some synthesis papers, lacks objectivity, and in the case of Bishop Inochentie, the subject is also dealt with incompletely. All these topics have been deepened here within the boundaries of a monograph, and the others announced are at their first approach.

Therefore, we can mention that in the first chapter of the first section we addressed the subject of the Princely Court in Botoșani, in whose approach, having the advantage of personal involvement in the archaeological research carried out in 2000-2001 by the archaeologist Voica

Maria Pușcașu, we have reasoned the hypothesis of the existence of these edifices since the early fifteenth century, with archaeological testimonies and political and economic evidence.

Within the archaeological testimonies invoked we can count: the existence of a necropolis before the founding of the church, with buried since the reign of Alexander I of Moldavia, fact proved by Moldavian epigraphic coins, the discovery of the funerary stone of the Vornic from Botoșani, Nurod, dead before 1496, the finding of important tombs with an archaeological inventory of precious objects a.s.o. Because of the major importance of the tombstone mentioned above, as well as to some inaccurate approaches belonging to certain researchers, we considered that, as an eyewitness and member of the archaeological research team, it is necessary to describe in detail this exceptional lapidary piece, both aesthetically, epigraphically and formally, as well as from the perspective of its theological content.

Between the political and economic testimonies we counted: the opening of the Pontic Moldavian trade route, also called *via moldavica*, between 1377-1378, which was passing through Botoșani, where, exactly to the north of the Princely Courts from here and, obviously, the Princely Church, intersecting with the European trade route, then, the trade development policies on the Moldavian route, proposed by Petru I of Moldavia, Alexander I of Moldavia and Stephen the Great, as well as the presence of the Armenians in Botoșani, along with the emergence of this important trade center.

In our effort to find written documents of interest on this topic, on the basis of some Armenian documents, we have come to register *a new first documented mention for the city of Botoșani*, namely August 18, 1388, the Gramata issued by Teodoros II, the Catholicos of Sis, from Asia Minor, by which he accredits Iohannes, as Bishop of Liov, also indicating the Armenian communities in the diaspora, between which Botoșani was also remembered, called in the Armenian folk *Btiny*. Also in this chapter, we registered *a new first documented mention for the curțile princely courts of Botoșani* for *March 15, 1601, the first princely priest, for 1608* and we highlighted the historical circumstances in which these edifices functioned. Also, based on historical documents we have proved that the location of the former princely courts is surely identified with the present premises of the monastery and with the whole archaeological space in the surroundings, their royal palace being located on the east part of the church, where today the space is occupied by Hatman Arbore Street and the neighboring houses.

In *the second chapter* of this part, we compiled in a descriptive manner information about the architectural pieces preserved from the former princely courts, founded in the period of maximum creativity of the Moldavian style and that meet all the features of this style, the church being part of the second group of foundations built during the period 1490-1497 for the princely courts, in this category being the churches: “Saint John” - Vaslui (1490), “Precista” - Bacău (1491), “Saint George” - Hârlău (1492), “Princely Saint Nicholas” - Iași (1493), “Saint Nicholas” - Dorohoi (1495) and “Princely Saint Nicholas” Popăuți - Botoșani (1496). Except for the one in Hârlău, these churches differ from all the other foundations of Stephen, firstly, because they have an oversized pronaos, with a special funeral destination for royal dignitaries at court and, secondly, in that they have an external, and even internal, enamelled ceramic ornamentation, in the case of the one in Popăuți, reaching its peak. These two characteristics are undeniable evidence that these churches were part of a set of princely courts, raised by the great ruler, either by rebuilding the oldest, or by building new ones.

As for the Popăuți establishment, which concludes this group of churches, we have emphasized that it is individualized between these foundations by the way of the narthex’s vaulting, with a dome decorated with ceramic ribs, in the form of a cross and that today it remained the only one in this category with interior painting from the founder and among the very few vintage foundations of Stephen with painting on the entire surface of its classic rooms. It represents the fully evolved style of the Moldavian architecture of the epoch. Through this church, Stephen the Great’s masterminds completed the development of a fully-styled type of ecclesiastical architecture.

After fitting our edifice among the other foundations of Stephen, we described in detail the inner and outer architecture of the church, as well as that of the bell tower, arguing that it was

painted on the outside, at least in the form of a votive picture, similar to the one at the Monastery Bistrița-Neamț.

Also in this chapter was re-evaluated, based on the last restoration, the interior painting, bringing new arguments in terms of its dating, and its aesthetic, structural and technical importance, and, while we fully reconstituted the iconographic forefront of the entire wall assembly. On this occasion were presented in notes also the titles in Slavonic of the scenes from nave and narthex and it was revealed that, in the case of the Passions and the life of St. Nicholas, the painters transposed the images according to manuscript texts.

Also, describing the current iconostasis of the church, restored in the last period, It was possible to ascertain, on the basis on the notes left by painters on some icons and on the stand of the iconostasis, that it was realized in three phases, namely in 1752, 1767 and during 1925-1927.

Also in connection with the painting of the church, we presented at some conferencies, but also in this work, the reasons for the existence of an external iconographic ensemble on the facades of the Church "Princely Saint Nicholas" Popăuți, done in 1533, at the command of Petru Rareș, which is chronologically the third, painted after Hârlău (1530) and Probota (1532).

After the formal and external description of the architecture, painting and iconostasis of the church, we stopped in a subchapter on some theological considerations about this edifice of aesthetic, historical and liturgical importance, revealing the mystagogical and liturgical content of architecture and painting, through which historical and eternal realities are transposed, and not legends imagined by someone, proving at the same time, the actual presence of Saint Nicholas at the First Ecumenical Synod, challenged by some art historians.

In the third chapter and the last of this first section reserved, as it was natural, to the history of the monumental pieces from Popăuți, we tried to find out what the interventions and the restorations were during their existence. Thus, we have brought evidence of the reorganization of the church "Saint Nicholas" and its raising to a monastery rank in 1750-1752, about the regrettable removal of the medial wall between the nave and the narthex in the immediate period after 1821, because of the damage caused by the janissaries, - proving that this has happened then and not in 1752, as it has been said without foundation - and the transformation of the southern window of the narthex into door in 1865, and the closing of the initial access on the northern side. We also presented, following careful research during the roof restoration, in what was the condemnable intervention of the architect Alexandru Baicoianu during the period 1897-1906 and we highlighted the contribution of archpriest Alexandru Simionescu, parish priest of the Parish "Saint Nicholas" Popăuți, to the "cleaning" of the interior painting, financed only by Botoșani believers. Finally, we have reactivated the historical memory in terms of minor damage during the Second World War, caused to the voivodal church, ending this chapter with a synthesis of the last restoration of the ensemble, to return with a more detailed presentation of this last aspect in the penultimate chapter of the paper, in order to observe a timeline of events.

*In the second section of the paper, in the first chapter* we presented the relations of the Patriarchate of Antioch with the Romanian Countries during the period 1578-1753, updating and adding information about visits of the patriarchs Joachim V Daw, Macarius III Zaim and Athanasius III Dabbas, and deepening the substance relations of Patriarch Silvestru the Cypriot. Thus we have reported the tense atmosphere of the Levantine territories and especially the cities of Damascus and Aleppo, in the context of the Antiochian schism caused by the Catholic missionary supporters of Cyril Tanas, the self-titled Patriarch of Antioch under the name of Cyril VI. We have also identified twelve presences of Sylvester of Antioch in the Romanian Countries, which resulted in the printing of some books for the defense of the Orthodox Faith, edited in Iași and Bucharest, the establishment of the first Lebanese orthodox book printing workshop and the dedication of two monasteries to this patriarchy. In this context, on the basis of unused sources of predecessors, we outlined the personality of this patriarch, emphasizing that the major support given by the Romanians to the Syrian Patriarchy was primarily due to Sylvester of Antioch.

*In the second chapter* in this section, we presented for the first time - having as background the previous presentation and, as important foundations, historical documents from the national and

foreign archives, as well as a correspondence maintained by the Patriarch with the princes from the North-Danubian countries, with their ladies and princesses, and also with the most influential people next to the princely courts - preparation, landing and raising the monastery of the Church "Saint Nicholas" from Botoșani and then its dedication by Constantin Cehan Racoviță, Prince of Moldavia, to the Patriarchate of Antioch. We also described, according to the contents of the chrisoaves, the development of properties from Botoșani during 1750-1863, highlighting the documents for strengthening or modifying their surfaces as a result of the litigations of the dedicated monastery with the trade fairs from Botoșani. Then, we presented the properties of Vaslui merged, according to the ownership charters, in two estates known as Boțoaia and Băloșești.

We also identified in the person of Gheorghe Cantacuzino-Deleanu, the donor of the estate Stolniceni from Bessarabia, property with which the monastery made in 1803, an exchange, receiving instead from the hatman Costache Ghica, his estate Varaticul-Duruitoarea, also from the other side of Prut.

In *the third chapter of the second section*, I organized the mini-monographs of the villages and monasteries of the dedicated monastery. The villages around the city Botoșani were thus presented: Popăuți, Tătărași, Cișmeaua, Răchiți and Teasc, from Vaslui and from Bessarabia.

As for the village and the estate Popăuți, showing the evolution of this property, we have restored *a new documentary attestation for the date of October 5, 1598*. We described the demographic evolution of the settlement and at the same time we highlighted the historical moments that determined that parts of this old estate and the population of this village should become the property and the dominion of the monastery and how it took the name of this village at a certain moment. For the other four villages - Tătărași, Cișmeaua, Răchiți and Teasc, We presented the demographic evolution, and where was the case the evolution of the property. At the same time, for the dedication period, on the basis of the numerous existing documents, we have detailed the social relations and the atmosphere on these properties, as well as how agricultural land was worked, sown, harvested, and ultimately sold the products, ending the subject of the properties from Botoșani with an assessment of costs and revenues of the estate Popăuți, on the surface of which all these villages were located.

In the same manner, we presented the villages and estates in Vaslui - Boțoaia, Băloșești, Murgești and Negrilești, - as well as Duruitoarea, as village and estate from Bessarabia, underlining the distribution of income of these properties.

After the presentation of the properties and villages, so that the image of this period be complete, we stopped on the nine abbots who led the dedicated monastery with its properties during its existence. Of these, three were the archbishop: Anthim and Serafim, with the same honorary title, of *Edesis*, both Greeks, and Inochentie Iliupoleos, Romanian from Moldavia. To the latter, being present in a significant number of unpublished documents, we dedicated the next monographic chapter.

According to the documents, his personality was first outlined as a printer, confessor and great ecclesiarch of the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia, then, as the abbot of the Monastery Popăuți (1815-1840) and, at the same time, As the first Romanian who received the honorary nominal high priesthood under the title of the Metropolitan of the diocese Ilioupoli of Lebanon. Although he did not have a diocese, he performed all his ministry specific to his dignity, including church sanctifications. Besides, we have completed the profile of Inochentie's personality, based on the documentary information, and in terms of his quality as church authority of judgment, for both clerical and civilian personnel.

From the time of his abbotship, on the basis of the existing documents, we had the opportunity to identify the clerical and administrative staff of the dedicated monastery, as well as to describe the atmosphere specific to the first half of the nineteenth century, his relations with the trade fairs and some of the great boyars of Moldavia. We concluded the profile of this egumen by telling the moment of death and by describing in detail the important mobile heritage left to posterity, embodied in precious liturgical objects, painted church furniture and an important old book fund.

In *the third section* of the paper, dedicated to the last two periods in the history of the voivodal establishment from Popăuți, we identified and reviewed - *in the first chapter* - The church staff who managed its movable and immovable heritage since the secularization of the wealth of the dedicated monasteries (1863) and until 1996, highlighting the contribution and role of each, and in the last chapter of the paper we presented the recent history of the newly established monastery.

This history began with the commemoration of the five hundred years of existence of the church and the bell tower, and it had as main steps the restoration of the church architecture, the tower and the interior painting as the objective assumed by the new monastery leadership, then the reconstruction of the minimal material base of this monastery and the formation of a monastic community in a monastery in the urban area with a clear missionary purpose.

Therefore, we presented the subject of the restoration of the historical objective from here - as an extremely difficult task - as it was and how the history of this last intervention on the monument was written, about which the monastery's archive abounds in documents. On the basis of these can be observed the design and restoration phases, the interruptions of the works, the syncopated and non-fluent financing, the restoration in winter prohibited periods and the disinterest of some institutions responsible in the field, led by some corrupt persons, because of whom there was no transparency in the financing of these works from the state budget. Because of this, we did not succeed, as the owner's representative, nicknamed beneficiary of use of the monument, to find out how much was spent for the partial restoration of the architecture, made with funds from the state budget, and for the restoration of the painting. At the final reception of painting restoration works in 2014, asking the plenary of the reception committee if the monastery could find out, for informational and documentary purposes, what funds were allocated from the state budget for this restoration carried out in the period 2001-2013, we have received the categorical answer from the financial inspector on the line of artistic components of the monuments that it is not possible. This is the reason why this important reference is not found in this paper. Instead, the bell tower was restored with funding from the state budget, and in the case of the church, only the roof and the interior painting. The monastery funded from its limited funds the pre-feasibility studies, the archaeological excavations, the restoration of the church facades, including the pluvial drainage system and the protection pavements, and inside the church: the restoration of the iconostasis and patrimony objects, the gilded ceramic pavement, and the joinery of the two entrance doors.

Regarding the rebuilding of the monastic spaces, we presented the phases of these works, executed at the monastic cells, absolutely necessary for the monastery's community, on the enclosure wall, which provides a minimal sound and visual protection, creating an ambient-monastic atmosphere, and the new church "Protection of the Mother of God (Virgin Mary's Cerement)", the construction of which was imposed by the mission realities of the place and the rules of protection of the recently restored voivode church. Regarding the building of the new church, we highlighted a more rare reality, namely that the monastic community built with minimal aid, from the foundations to the roof, this building in a relatively short period, then investing with patience, in fresco painting, extended over several years, to create, as much as possible, a proper image of the house of God.

In this atmosphere of restoration and rebuilding of the mentioned buildings, the abbots of the monastery had the first responsibility to form a monastic community, which we mentioned at the end of this paper, which is hard to accomplish in a monastery with an obviously missionary purpose in an urban environment.

Viewed as a whole, the present paper is an exhaustive approach and an elaboration, mostly inedite, with important contributions, covering the areas that such a monographic approach implies, argued and based on various historical sources, some of which published, and others, most of them, unpublished and including the details required by the research of such an important cultural objective as the one from Popăuți.