

ANDRÉ-EMILE LECOMTE DU NOÛY: MEDIEVAL ARCHITECTURE AT THE BEGINNING OF ROMANIAN MODERNITY*

Horia Moldovan**

Keywords: André-Emile Lecomte du Noüy, nineteenth century architecture, restoration, medieval Romanian monuments, Cathedral Church at Curtea de Argeș, Church of Trei Ierarhi Monastery in Iași, Sf. Dumitru Church in Craiova, Old Metropolitan Church in Târgoviște, Sf. Nicolae Domnesc Church in Iași.

Abstract: André-Emile Lecomte du Noüy's name occurs frequently in the Romanian architectural historiography, becoming famous for his involvement in the restoration or reconstruction works for some of the most representative Romanian medieval monuments, as well as in new projects. Despite the large number of controversies generated by his work – most of which was conducted under the patronage of King Carol I – and the abundant documentary evidence available, one century after his death Lecomte du Noüy continues to be a controversial character. His work also remains just as controversial, so much discussed upon but still lacking a comprehensive and thorough study, based on the preserved primary sources rather than on the large number of opinions or interpretations, often jaundiced, mainly focused on his restoration and reconstruction works. Suspected of having purloined some heritage values, criticised for his artistic ambitions for the sake of which he overrode invaluable monuments of the Romanian medieval history, Lecomte du Noüy enjoyed however the appraisal of some of the most prominent personalities of the time; the study of his activity is thus a requisite for completing the perspective of a history upon which the 19th century left a deep and often beneficial footprint. Lecomte du Noüy's drawings, surveys and plans of the projects or photographs, selectively published in articles or synthesis papers, continue to be a very valuable material, from at least three points of view: for documenting some of the most important old Romanian architectural works, for understanding the inception of modern restoration practices at the turn of the 20th century and, last but not least, for the role that his reconstruction works played in the modern development of Romanian Orthodox religious architecture.

Rezumat: André-Emile Lecomte du Noüy este un nume frecvent citat în studiile de istoria arhitecturii românești, implicarea sa în șantierele de restaurare sau reclădire ale unora dintre cele mai reprezentative monumente medievale românești, dar și proiectele noi, aducându-i notorietatea. În ciuda numeroaselor polemici pe care le-a stârnit opera sa – în mare măsură patronată de regele Carol I – dar și a bogatului material documentar care se păstrează, la un secol de la moartea sa, Lecomte du Noüy continuă să rămână un personaj controversat. La fel de controversată rămâne și opera sa, atât de discutată, dar lipsită încă de o cercetare de ansamblu, aprofundată, bazată pe sursele primare și mai puțin pe numeroasele păreri sau interpretări, adesea părtinitoare, concentrate în special pe proiectele sale de restaurare și reconstrucție. Suspectat de sustragerea unor valori de patrimoniu, criticat pentru ambițiile sale artistice pentru care a nesocotit monumente inestimabile ale trecutului medieval românesc, Lecomte du Noüy s-a bucurat totuși din plin de prețuirea unora dintre cele mai proeminente figuri din epocă, cunoașterea activității sale fiind indispensabilă în întregirea perspectivei asupra unui trecut asupra căruia secolul al XIX-lea și-a lăsat adânc și adesea benefic, amprenta. Publicate selectiv în articole sau lucrări de sinteză, desenele, releveele, planșele proiectelor sau fotografiile realizate de Lecomte du Noüy rămân un material foarte prețios din cel puțin trei puncte de vedere: documentarea unora dintre cele mai importante opere de arhitectură românească veche, înțelegerea debuturilor practicilor moderne de restaurare la cumpăna dintre secolele al XIX-lea și al XX-lea și, nu mai puțin important, pentru rolul pe care l-au jucat reedificările sale în evoluția modernă a arhitecturii religioase ortodoxe românești.

André-Emile Lecomte du Noüy's name¹ occurs frequently in the Romanian architectural historiography, becoming famous for his involvement in the restoration or reconstruction works for some of the most representative Romanian medieval monuments, as well as in new projects. Despite the large number of controversies generated by his work – most of which was conducted under the patronage of King Carol I² – and the abundant documentary evidence available, one century after the architect's death the Romanian specialised historiography still lacks a detailed and objective research of his activity that covered more than four decades (1875-1914). The drawings, surveys and plans of the projects or photographs donated by Lecomte du Noüy to the Royal Foundations, selectively published in articles or synthesis papers, continue to be a very valuable material, from at least three points of view: the documentation of several of the most important old Romanian architectural works, the understanding of the inception of modern restoration practices at the turn of the 20th Century and, last but not least, the role that his reconstruction works played in the modern development of Romanian Orthodox religious architecture.

* The present contribution elaborates on the paper presented at the Symposium "Architecture. Restoration. Archaeology" (ARA/15).

** "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest; e-mail: horia.moldovan@yahoo.com

¹ The architect started to sign "Lecomte du Noüy" after having added his mother's name "Denöy", around 1884.

² Carol I of Romania (Karl Eitel Friedrich Zephyrinus Ludwig von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, 1839-1914), Ruler (Prince) between 1866 and 1881 and King of Romania between 1881 and 1914.



Fig. 1. Lecomte du Noüy's family residence in Curtea de Argeș (DITACP-UAUIM).

Born in Paris on 7 September 1844, André-Emile Lecomte had access to artistic education since childhood. In 1859 he enrolled at the *École Impériale de Dessin et Mathématique* under the name André Lecomte; however the available information is not sufficient to retrace his first formative years.³ Former student of Joseph Auguste Émile Vaudremer, Anatole de Baudot and Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Lecomte du Noüy was involved in a number of projects on which little is known: in 1864 he was leading the construction works at the Monaco Palace; in 1868 he was in charge of the funeral chapel of Princess De la Tour d'Auvergne on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem etc. According to Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș, Lecomte du Noüy had collaborated as inspector with the *Commission des Monuments Historiques* in France.⁴ In 1873 he went to Palestine as a member of the archaeological mission led by Charles Clermont-Ganneau, member of *Institute de France*. The results of this expedition illustrated by a large number of surveys and drawings made on site by A. Lecomte du Noüy, were published more than two decades later, in 1899.⁵

Lecomte du Noüy arrived in Romania in 1875, planning to stay here for only two years, until the completion of restoration works at Curtea de Argeș (Fig. 1). However the important projects assigned to him as well as the lack of a comfortable family life made him spend most of his life here.⁶ With his "gentle

³ Popescu 1999, p. 288.

⁴ Rosetti 1897, p. 115. Carmen Popescu notes that Lecomte's participation in 1869 as attaché of *Commission des Monuments Historiques* for the restoration of the chapel of Vincennes castle is not confirmed by the preserved documents.

⁵ Clermont-Ganneau 1899 (*apud* Popescu 1999, pp. 289-290).

⁶ Cantacuzino 2013, p. 126. In February 1877 Lecomte du Noüy married the daughter of French painter Eugène Stanislas Oudinot, writer Hermine-Auguste-Eugénie. Sabina Cantacuzino speaks about the opposite tempers of the spouses. Whereas Lecomte was able to live in the "wilderness of Argeș", for Hermine-Auguste-Eugénie the "hermitage" in the small Wallachian town soon led her to return to her family in Paris.

temper and thorough erudition” and being “wholly dedicated to the work undertaken”,⁷ Lecomte du Noüy had close relationships with the Romanian cultural and political elite. Corresponding member of the Romanian Academy since 1887,⁸ Lecomte du Noüy was a close friend of the Brătianu and Golescu families and also of the royal family. He had a long term relationship with Titu Maiorescu, and it was through him that Lecomte du Noüy met Caragiale, who was a school inspector in Curtea de Argeş at the beginning of the 1880s. Lecomte du Noüy died in 1914 and, at Queen Elisabeta’s⁹ initiative, approved by King Ferdinand I,¹⁰ he was buried in the cemetery of Flămânzeşti Church (the hospital chapel of the former Argeş monastery).

Documenting Medieval Monuments. The interventions on historical monuments led by Lecomte du Noüy have always been accompanied by a detailed written assessment and drawn documentation. His endeavours to study old Romanian architecture, including vernacular works,¹¹ on the one hand, and his thorough assessment of the current condition of the buildings or complexes which he was assigned to restore, on the other hand, were the main reasons for the development of surveys and detailed descriptions of some of the most representative works in the two Principalities. Although many of the drawings were lost, there are still a large number of carefully drawn survey plans which survived as precious witnesses.¹² Thus the measured drawings of the following churches were preserved, fully or partly: Sf. Nicolae (St. Nicholas) Aroneanu (“the church from Aron Vodă”), Sf. Nicolae of Bălineşti, Sf. Nicolae of Popăuţi-Botoşani, Sf. Nicolae of Dorohoi, Sf. Ion (St. John) of Piatra Neamţ, the church of Voroneţ Monastery, Mântuleasa Church in Craiova, the church of the Princely Court in Târgovişte, the churches of the Stelea and Dealu monasteries also in Târgovişte. Proposed by Lecomte du Noüy to be rebuilt in a shape we have no information about,¹³ Sf. Nicolae Domnesc (St. Nicholas of the Princely Court) Church in Curtea de Argeş was surveyed at the beginning of summer 1884. Whereas most monuments were preserved till present days as described by the drawings of the French architect, the buildings which made the object of his interventions suffered considerable alterations (the Cathedral Church at Curtea de Argeş), complete reconstructions more or less truthful to the original (the church and refectory of Trei Ierarhi – Three Holy Hierarchs – monastery and Sf. Nicolae Domnesc in Iaşi, Sf. Dumitru – St. Demetrius – church in Craiova or the old Metropolitan Church in Târgovişte) or were even demolished altogether (the old monastery precinct in Curtea de Argeş, the ancillary buildings and the gate tower with clock and bells at Trei Ierarhi monastery in Iaşi etc.). Nevertheless, before the beginning of construction works the French architect carried out detailed investigations – essential evidence for the understanding of the original form. The information is not limited to religious architectural objects but also includes fragments of the urban fabric where they were located or of the building complexes to which they belonged.

The court church of Ştefan cel Mare¹⁴ in Iaşi (1491-92) had been substantially altered before the second half of the 17th century. Whereas written evidence is more consistent, only one representation of the old building is preserved in the votive fresco painting recovered from the church during the reconstruction

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Personalulu* 1889, p. 349.

⁹ Elisabeta I of Romania (Elisabeth Pauline Otilie Luise zu Wied, 1843-1916) was Carol’s wife and Queen of Romania between 1881 and 1914.

¹⁰ Ferdinand I of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen (1865-1927), nephew of Carol I, was the second King of Romania from 1914 until his death in 1927.

¹¹ Popescu 2004, pp. 70-72. The author notes Lecomte du Noüy’s interest in the sources and reference points of Romanian art and architecture, which he seeks both in the Occident and in the Byzantine world. Carmen Popescu also discusses the research on Romanian vernacular architecture, within the architect’s notebooks, three of which still exist in the Romanian Academy Library (Biblioteca Academiei Române), Stamps Section, units AD I 307, 308, 309.

¹² The most important set of drawings associated with the studies, surveys and plans developed by Lecomte du Noüy or in his office are preserved in the archive of the History and Theory of Architecture and Heritage Conservation Department, at the “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning in Bucharest.

¹³ Musicescu, Ionescu 1976, p. 8.

¹⁴ Ştefan cel Mare (1433-1504), ruler of Moldavia from 1457 to 1504.



Fig. 2. Copy of the representation of Sf. Nicolae Domnesc Church in Iași, as shown in the votive painting (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy collection, no. 13-A-465, unsigned drawing).

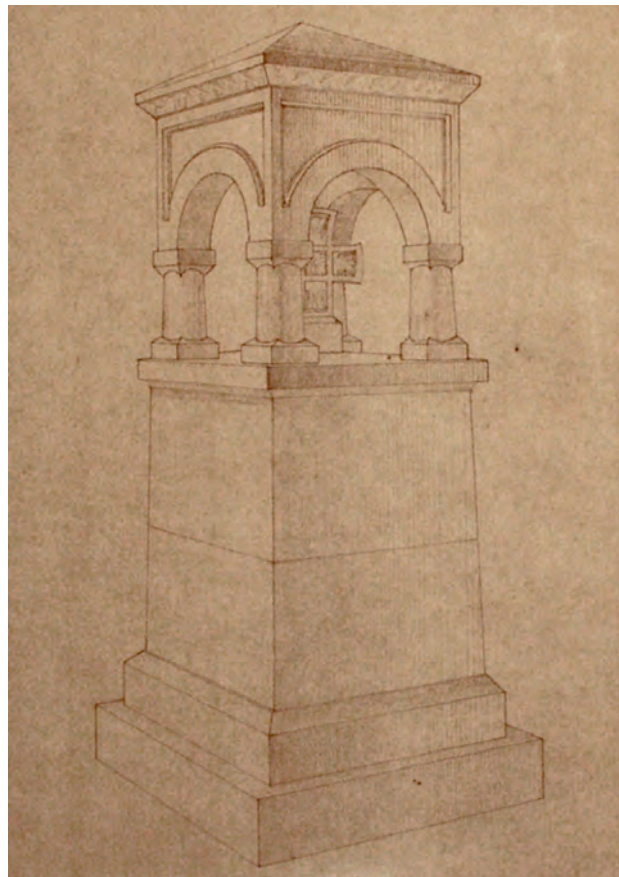


Fig. 3. A. E. Lecomte du Noüy (or his collaborators): Project for the monument which was intended to mark the position of the former side altars of Sf. Nicolae Domnesc Church in Iași (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy Collection, no. 9-B-228, unsigned and undated drawing).

works at the end of the 19th century (Fig. 2). The painters of Antonie Ruset¹⁵ sketched the architecture of a church which has little to do with what is considered to be the Moldavian architectural tradition. In 1593 the Russian deacon Trifon Korobeinikov described the monument as having a narthex and a belfry on the west side,¹⁶ while chronicler Ion Neculce mentioned that the western tower had been turned into a minaret for the mosque improvised here during the visit of Sultan Mehmet IV.¹⁷ The church was repaired and extended upon the request of Prince Antonie Ruset, who is supposed to have ordered the arrangement of a funeral area in the narthex and the construction of the two side chapels with altars dedicated to saints Stephen and Barbara (nowadays marked by two stone monuments built upon completion of construction works at the end of the 19th century) (Fig. 3). Just as unusual as the architectural distribution created (Figs. 4, 5) was the celebration of the mass, in three languages at the same time: Greek, Romanian and Slavonic.

Restoration of Medieval Monuments. In April 1874, one year before Lecomte du Noüy's arrival in Wallachia, Carol I signed the decree appointing the members of the "Honorific Commission of Monuments in the

¹⁵ Antonie Ruset (Kiriță Ruset Draco, of Greek origin), became ruler of Moldavia with Ottoman support, keeping the throne from 1675 to 1678. Ruset moved the Metropolitan seat from Suceava to Iași where the princely court had been established a century ago by Prince Alexandru Lăpușneanu.

¹⁶ *Călători* 1971, p. 352.

¹⁷ Ion Neculce *apud* Caproșu, Bădărău 1974, p. 50.

Country”: M. Kogălniceanu, Al. Odobescu, C. Bolliac, Al. Orăscu, D. Berindei, Dim. Sturza, Theodor Rosetti and C. I. Stăncescu. A few months later Minister Titu Maiorescu, was sending a circular letter to secular and religious local administrations to inform them that “the government, preoccupied with the conservation of historic and artistic monuments which we have in the country, assembled a commission whom it assigned the task to ascertain, register and conserve, to the extent that will be possible, these monuments”.¹⁸ Maiorescu was asking local representatives to contribute to the creation of the “Register of public monuments” by reporting the existing cultural values in the country.¹⁹ “The Commission for Public Monuments” was supposed to operate based on a regulation which provided in detail its statute and duties.²⁰ Nevertheless, the immediate results of these legal acts were not very significant in the Principalities, the spotlight being still on the construction site opened at the Cathedral Church at Curtea de Argeș.

The commencement of studies, plans and cost estimates for the restoration of the **Cathedral Church at Curtea de Argeș** had been approved by Prince Cuza’s²¹ decree in May 1863.²² Gaetano Burelly²³ was appointed by ministerial order to perform this preliminary research, but his involvement had no consistent results.

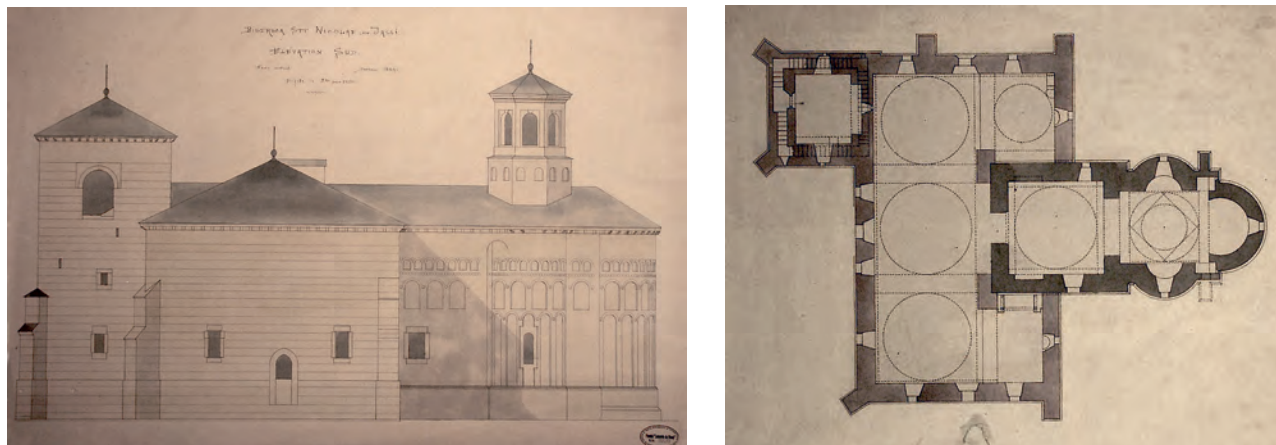


Fig. 4, 5. A. E. Lecomte du Noüy (or his collaborators): Survey of the Sf. Nicolae Domnesc Church in Iași – southern elevation and plan (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy Collection, no. 9-B-219 and 9-B-249, unsigned drawings dated in December 1884).

For this reason a contract was signed with the architect Filip Montoreanu²⁴ in 1870. Despite the duties undertaken, Montoreanu didn’t manage to start the restoration. Before 1874 the only accomplished intervention was that of sculptor Karl Storck at the stone socle of the church. At the beginning of 1874, a commission led by Alexandru Orăscu²⁵ prepared a detailed report on the way the works were supposed to continue.

¹⁸ ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file. 7/1874, f. 31 (“... guvernul, preocupat de conservarea monumentelor istorice și artistice ce avem în țară, a întocmit o comisiune căreia i-a dat sarcina de a constata, de a înregistra și de a conserva, pe cât va sta prin putință, aceste monumente”).

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 32.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, ff. 25–26.

²¹ Alexandru Ioan Cuza (1820–1873) was elected on the 5th of January 1859 Prince of Moldavia and on the 24th of January Prince of Wallachia, becoming the first ruler of the Romanian United Principalities.

²² *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 4.

²³ Antonio Gaetano Burelly (c. 1820–1896) was a Romanian architect of Italian origin, who studied architecture at the *École des Beaux-arts* (2^e classe). Most of his accomplishments concerned public contracts as “town architect” of Bucharest (1853–1855 and 1856–1859) or as the architect of the Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction (from 1864).

²⁴ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 7. See also Crosnier Leconte 1999–2000, p. 88: Montoreanu had been accepted at *École des Beaux-Arts* in the primary cycle in 1865. It is not known to what extent he followed architecture courses, considering that his file does not include any assessment sheet.

²⁵ Alexandru Orăscu (1817–1894) studied engineering and arts in Berlin with a scholarship from the state. Upon his return to Wallachia he was appointed architect of the city of Bucharest (in 1848) and also engaged in teaching activities. The most important works of Orăscu include the University of Bucharest, Hotel Bulevard etc. Former rector of the University of Bucharest, Orăscu had an important contribution to the establishment of the Society of Romanian Architects (1891) whose first president he was.

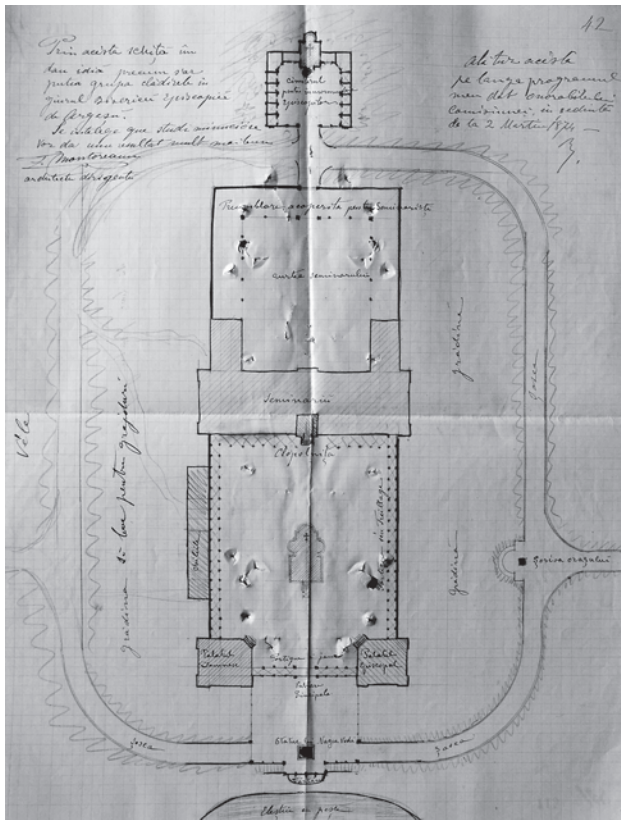


Fig. 6. Filip Montoreanu: sketch of the general functional layout plan for the bishopric ensemble at Curtea de Argeș, annex to the “table” of restoration works planned at the beginning of March 1874 (ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file 127/1874, f. 42).

In addition to a detailed description of existing damages, the report also included a number of observations and recommendations, the commission’s option being “to restore the monument in all the areas found to be altered or destroyed by time, as compared to the original plan.”²⁶ Following a delay in the achievement of Montoreanu’s project (Fig. 6), the works were again postponed and the architect lost the contract.

When the position of “chief architect” became vacant, the Romanian government, through Minister Titu Maiorescu, approached French architect Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, an older acquaintance of Carol I. Viollet-le-Duc sent to Curtea de Argeș his collaborator Anatole de Baudot, former vice-president of *Commission des Monuments Historiques* in France. Returning to France, after a thorough examination of the monument, de Baudot and Viollet-le-Duc prepared a detailed report on the building condition and the necessary restoration interventions, submitted to the authorities in Bucharest at the end of 1874 (Figs. 7, 8, 9).²⁷ The recommendations for the truthful restoration according to the original shape included three categories of works: consolidation and ensuring the good condition of the building’s preserved elements; recomposing the parts which had been fully destroyed, based on unquestionable evidence; and finally, the furniture and the exterior and interior decorations.²⁸ Considering that none of them was able to become directly involved, Viollet-le-Duc

recommended Minister Titu Maiorescu his “student and friend”,²⁹ architect Lecomte.

The construction works started again in 1875, and the first reports indicated that Lecomte du Noüy’s intervention plans were diverging from the path outlined by his masters. Although the deadline for completing the restoration works was 2 years, in 1877 the minister proposed an extension of the agreement with the French architect.³⁰ At the beginning of 1878 architects Alexandru Orăscu and Karl Benisch appreciated that about 2/3 of the work had been completed, and that it had been performed “soundly and competently”.³¹ Despite some brutal gestures (such as the complete demolition of the monastery precincts or the reconstruction of the little pavilion – or “*canthar*”³² – in front of the church entrance in a new shape, with no connection to the original), during the course of the works the central administration representatives were mostly concerned with quantitative aspects (the necessary funding and the committed deadlines) rather than with qualitative ones.

²⁶ ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file. 127/1874, ff. 118-136v: “...restituirea monumentului în toate părțile ce se vor constata ca alterate sau suprimate, prin efectele timpului, de la planul primitiv”.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, file. 342/1875, ff. 3-19v.

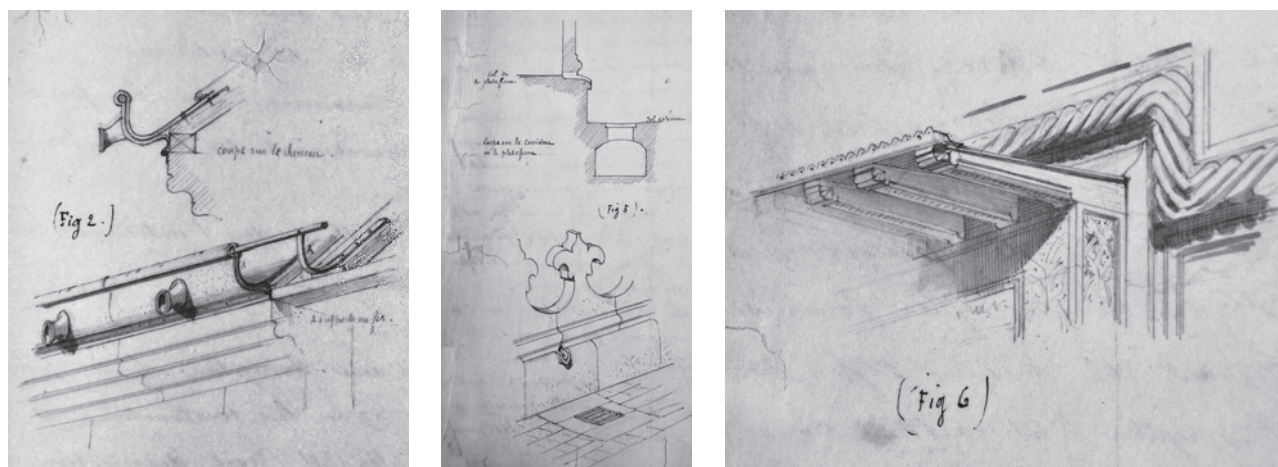
²⁸ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 17.

²⁹ ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file 342/1875, f. 28. The letter signed by Viollet-le-Duc has 3 pages and is dated 8 June 1875 (ff. 28-29v).

³⁰ *Restaurarea* 1890, pp. 64-65.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

³² *Călători* 1976, p. 167, ref. 40. The covered pavilion in front of the church entrance – usually mentioned to be used for consecrating the holy water – was meant to keep the semantron.



Figs. 7, 8, 9. Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Anatole de Baudot: restoration solutions for various parts of the Cathedral Church at Curtea de Argeș (1874) – the upper metal roof gutter, the decorative parapet and the ditches of the platform on which the church was raised, as well as a proposal for covering the main access area (ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file 342/1875).

Although the building founded by Neagoe Basarab³³ was preserved to a large extent, it was also subject to substantial modifications and additions. The dome above the nave, damaged during the earthquakes of 1802 and 1838, had to be rebuilt. Lecomte du Noüy recomposed the upper part of the western side of the drum, restored the exterior sculpture and replaced the stone jambs of the windows.³⁴ Although the dome base was still solid, interventions were made upon the discharge structure, with the squinches above the nave being built in a slightly different shape.³⁵ The central dome above the nave was also only partly preserved, with two sides of the drum being rebuilt,³⁶ by replacing only the damaged stone parts. The eroded sculptures were also “refreshed by chiselling”.³⁷ The small domes in the south-western and north-western corners of the narthex were also rebuilt, as the fine original structure, affected by earthquakes, did not allow for superficial repairs. Although Viollet-le-Duc had recommended a lead roof gutter (Fig. 7), Lecomte du Noüy modified the upper cornice by adding a draining system carved in stone, richly decorated, provided with gargoyles which discharged water above a second cornice, again made of stone, replacing the old lead cover. The original lead cover, fixed upon a thick layer of compact soil, had been displaced by earthquakes. Lecomte du Noüy completely replaced the old roof structure and cover and, for the new one added the metal ornaments, the presence of which, not confirmed by documents or other evidence, had been approved, as per his notes, by members of the Romanian Academy. The need to “restore” the decoration at the western twisted domes cornices was one of the items the report prepared by the commission established in 1874. Despite any factual evidence of the presence of decorative details, the text mentioned that “the small domes in front of the church also require this delicate decorative element, which has certainly disappeared over time.”³⁸ In the case of the small twisted domes Lecomte du Noüy added new ornaments, different from those existing at the cornices of the narthex and nave dome, both having the lily flower as leitmotif. The façade decorations were also altered. Some of the sculpted stone disks above the blind arcade were replaced, the marble bars

³³ Neagoe Basarab (ca. 1459–1521), ruler of Wallachia from 1512 to 1521.

³⁴ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 89.

³⁵ Ionescu 1940, p. 135. Although no reference to this aspect could be found in the primary sources reviewed, Grigore Ionescu considered that before the intervention of Lecomte du Noüy “these squinches were perfectly conical, but very flat. The restorer, who altered the old aspect of the church at some points, by introducing new elements and ‘correcting’ some imperfections which however gave the monument a very special aspect, replaced these flat squinches with some kind of inclines, which start from the intersection of the large arches extrados and end at the height where the octagonal drum starts, entwining in an almost conical surface.”

³⁶ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 89.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 24 (“...reclamă și turlele cele mici din fața bisericii, acest grațios element decorativ, care a dispărut negreșit cu timpul”).

between the lower register windows were replaced with new ones, which raised criticism towards the French architect who “chiselled the sculptures again and scraped the walls, *a barbarian thing to do*,” and “painted the outer church walls in oil paint, *an even more barbarian thing to do*.”³⁹

The lily flower motive was reused in the reconstruction of the stone fence around the platform on which the church stood (Fig. 8). At the beginning of the restoration works “some people still remembered” that fence, although “there were not even traces left of it”.⁴⁰ Traces of the foundation had been found during the excavation works around the church, as well as about 50 sculpted flowers from the original parapet,⁴¹ so their recomposing was based on certain evidence.

In a report of 1879, Th. Aman, Th. Ștefănescu, K. Storck and Al. Săvulescu maintained that “the restorer should be the faithful slave of the noble original (primitive) concept, all the more so that each stone of this monument testifies that its architect was an exquisite artist”⁴² and “no innovation, no matter how slight, should be allowed”.⁴³ In 1880 however the contracted works were accepted, “the Commission in charge with acknowledging the works performed” concluded that “Mr. Lecomte accomplished his task for the exterior restoration and he could be issued a discharge document for this”.⁴⁴

To continue the works inside the building, the members of the commission established by the Ministry of Cults believed that “the restoration should reproduce exactly the old layout, style and decorations”.⁴⁵ Following the unsuccessful search for a local artist capable of continuing the site works, the ministry renewed the agreement with Lecomte du Noüy at the beginning of 1881.⁴⁶ Inside the church the French architect decided to remove what was left from the old frescoes, affected by the recent fire in the winter of 1867, “replacing them with an oil decoration, which is as expensive as it is fantastic and unsuitable”,⁴⁷ a creation of French artists F. Nicolle, Charles Renouard and Luc-Olivier Merson. In addition to removing the old frescoes, the interior pavement was also replaced during the last stage of the works. Although the original pavement was made of white marble with an inconspicuous decoration,⁴⁸ Lecomte du Noüy imagined an opulent project, completed only in part because of the associated costs. In the absence of the old furniture destroyed by the fire, the architect had full freedom to imagine a new one, and the new objects made were not exempt from the blame of the contemporaries who qualified them as useless, “overdecorated and of a doubtful taste”.⁴⁹ Upon completion of the restoration, the total costs of the works carried out in the interval 1875-86 were estimated at 1,501,000 lei,⁵⁰ that is, three times more than initially considered.⁵¹

The thorough research of the monument of Argeș during the restoration works revealed aspects which shed a new light upon the origins of the church and provided potential arguments to explain the unusual shapes and decorations of the building. Grigore Tocilescu mentioned the discovery of a brick “built in the very vault of the big tower <on which> the word *Aláh* is written in Arab letters”,⁵² a possible indication of the involvement of master builders brought by Neagoe Basarab from the Ottoman world, which he seemed to know quite well. The text of Neagoe’s founding inscription on the western façade, on the right side of the entrance includes a detail

³⁹ Popescu 1999, p. 295 (“...a cizelat din nou sculpturile și a răzuit zidurile, lucru barbar!”; “a spoit cu vâpșea de ulei exteriorul bisericei, lucru încă și mai barbar”).

⁴⁰ Tocilescu 1887, p. 57.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 78-81 (“...restauratorul trebuie să fie sclavul fidel al nobilei concepții inițiale (primitive), cu atât mai mult cu cât fiecare piatră a acestui monument atestă calitatea de artist desăvârșit a arhitectului său”).

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁴⁴ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 111. The Commission Report dated 8 December 1880.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 112 (“...restaurarea trebuie făcută reproducând exact dispozițiunile, stilul și ornamentațiunea veche”).

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 114-116.

⁴⁷ Révoil 1890, p. 7 (“...substituind în locul lor o decorațiune în ulei, pe cât de costisitoare, pe atât de fantastică și nepotrivită”).

⁴⁸ *Călători* 1976, p. 167.

⁴⁹ Révoil 1890, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Tocilescu 1887, p. 63.

⁵¹ ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file 342/1875, ff. 125-127.

⁵² Tocilescu 1887, p. 37 (“...zidită tocmai în bolta turnului celui mare <pe care> se citește cu litere arabe cuvântul *Aláh*”).



Fig. 10. Carol Popp de Szathmari: The Cathedral Church at Curtea de Argeș before restoration, ca. 1860 (MNAR archive).



Fig. 11. The consecration of the Cathedral Church at Curtea de Argeș in 1886 (after G. Tocilescu).

which can be interpreted to indicate the same involvement of foreign master builders, brought by Neagoe from south of Danube. The text makes a special reference to the Christian masters working on the site, for whom the founder was asking for divine forgiveness: “if anyone of Christian belief was present and toiled here, sweating and suffering hunger and thirst and worries and derision and chagrin; Holy Mistress, please receive their work and supplicate to the One born from you for them, so as not to shame them on the day of judgement”.⁵³ It could therefore be inferred that in addition to Christian builders, skilled masons of a different religion were also employed on site, possibly brought by Neagoe in Wallachia at the end of his presumed journey to Istanbul.⁵⁴

The condition of advanced decay of Neagoe’s church (Fig. 10) as well as the repeated hesitations and the lack of experience of those involved in restoration projects (starting with 1863) would have certainly resulted in irreversible losses, or perhaps even the complete ruin of the monument, considered by Odobescu “the main title of glory of old Romanian art”.⁵⁵ Despite all its shortcomings, the intervention led by Lecomte du Noüy may be considered without any hesitation, the first restoration – in the modern sense of the concept – of a Romanian monument (Fig. 11).

One cannot say the same about the result of the works carried out at the church of **Trei Ierarhi Monastery in Iași**, regarded by some historians as a second example of successful restoration, together with the Cathedral Church in Curtea de Argeș. The urgent need for repair works at the church and the monastery premises was notified to the Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction by the church caretaker, Bishop Iosif Bobulescu, in May 1878.⁵⁶ The Assembly of Deputies immediately approved financing for a project drawn by

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 35 (“...dacă cineva în credința creștinească a fost și a lucrat cu multă osteneală și cu sudoare și foame și sete și supărare și cu bătaie de joc și ocară; primește prea Sfântă Stăpână munca lor și roagă pentru ei pe cel născut din tine ca să nu-i rușineze în ziua judecății”).

⁵⁴ Drăguț 1986, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Odobescu 1908, p. 263, ref. 1. Excerpt from the closing speech of the Romanian Academy meeting of 1879 (“...principal titlu de glorie al artelor române din trecut”).

⁵⁶ ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file 130I/1874, ff. 52, 52v. Report of Iosif Bobulescu (6 May 1878).

a specialist. The ministry appointed for the preliminary steps architect Carol Kugler,⁵⁷ who was at that time involved in the construction works commenced at Galata monastery in 1877. More than 3 years after the beginning of the discussions between the clergymen in charge and the authorities, minister V. A. Urechia, based on approval by the Council of Ministers, appointed Lecomte du Noüy to prepare a preliminary report and then to initiate the restoration works.

Often compared with the edifice founded by Neagoe Basarab in Curtea de Argeș, the church was considered by the French architect worth of “being classified among the most curious historical monuments, not only of Romania but also of Eastern Europe. An architectural study of its history will reveal the peculiarity of this Byzantine style so little known and will provide precise documents regarding the passage of Italian artists going to Moscow through the Romanian principality”.⁵⁸ Probably aware of the accounts of La Croix, secretary of the ambassador of Louis XIV, who visited Iași in 1672, Lecomte du Noüy took over the narrative of Vasile Lupu⁵⁹ bringing “masters builders from Italy and Rome”⁶⁰ for the building of Trei Ierarhi church. Of course La Croix was presumably referring to the inception of the Golia monastery church, confusing the two churches in his narrative about master masons.⁶¹ Although the founding inscription of the church does not mention the masters involved in its construction, A. G. Suțu, in a study published in 1883, mentioned (somehow uncertain about the translation) a different inscription “in old Slavonic, held by the church [...], very well preserved, laid in an area surrounded by decorative sculptures on the outer southern wall”; the text allegedly mentioned a certain “architect named *Maftai* or *Matkias*, probably Transylvanian or Serbian [...] <and who> had to involve foreign workers, particularly stone carvers who could not be found in Romania at that time [...] and that Slavons were also present among those people”.⁶² Surprisingly neither the master nor the inscription cited by Suțu were mentioned by the erudite biographer of Iași, N. A. Bogdan; the latter discussed the elaborately made stone decoration and accredited it, according to an older tradition, to some “masters wandering through Moldova from the Swedish armies, vanquished and scattered by the Russians in a terrible war”.⁶³

Upon the commencement of the works Lecomte du Noüy appointed Nicolae Gabrielescu, his collaborator at Curtea de Argeș, as site foreman and he committed through the contract to also concern himself, in addition to the intervention to the church itself, with the statue of the founder, Prince Vasile Lupu and to embellish the church surroundings by demolishing the old buildings of the enclosure. It was proposed from the beginning to keep only one building (fully refurbished) from the old monastery complex – the refectory (“The Gothic Hall”).⁶⁴ Despite the criticism launched in 1879 on the progress of restoration works at Curtea de Argeș,⁶⁵ no conditions were imposed to the French architect at Trei Ierarhi: “Mr. Lecomte will have full freedom of action regarding the artistic completion of restoration works”.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Carol Kugler (Karl von Kugler) is mainly known for his activity as “town architect” of Iași and later within the Ministry of Cults and Public Education for Moldova; see Moldovan 2014.

⁵⁸ ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file 130II/1874, f. 60. The report of A. Lecomte du Noüy from 1884 (“...a fi clasată printre monumentele istorice cele mai curioase, nu numai ale României, dar și ale Europei orientale. Studiată din punct de vedere arhitectural, istoria sa va arăta partea curioasă a acestui stil bizantin atât de puțin cunoscut și va prezenta documente precise relative la trecerea artiștilor italieni ce se duceau la Moscova, traversând Țara Românească.”).

⁵⁹ Vasile Lupu (1595-1661), Ruler of Moldavia from 1634 to 1653.

⁶⁰ *Călători* 1980, p. 260.

⁶¹ Theodorescu I 1987, p. 133, ref. 138.

⁶² Suțu 1884, pp. 28-29 (“<inscripție> în slavă veche, ce o posedă biserica [...] foarte bine păstrată, care figurează într-un câmp împrejurat cu săpături decorative ce se află pe perețele din afară despre miazăzi, <inscripție în care ar fi fost menționat un anume> arhitect numit Maftai sau Matkias, probabil transilvănean sau sârb [...] <și care> a fost nevoit să se ajute cu lucrători străini, mai ales săpători de piatră pe care România nu-i avea pe la acea vreme [...] și că în fine se aflau printre acei lucrători și slavoni”).

⁶³ Bogdan 1915, p. 203 (“...meșteri rătăciți prin Moldova din oștile suedeze, cari fuseseră bătute și împrăștiate de ruși într-un război crâncen”).

⁶⁴ The demolition of the “Gothic hall” started in 1893 and extended even after the death of Lecomte du Noüy. The site was closed after the fire which broke in winter 1916-1917 and the reconstruction works were completed in 1960.

⁶⁵ *Restaurarea* 1890, pp. 78-81. The report of the Commission comprising Th. Aman, Th. Ștefănescu, K. Storck and Alex. Săvulescu (3 November 1879).

⁶⁶ ANR-ANIC, MCIP Collection, file 130I/1874, f. 177v. Art. 7 of the contract dated 1 April 1882 (“D. Lecomte va avea deplină libertate de acțiune, din punctul de vedere al executării artistice a lucrărilor de restaurare”).

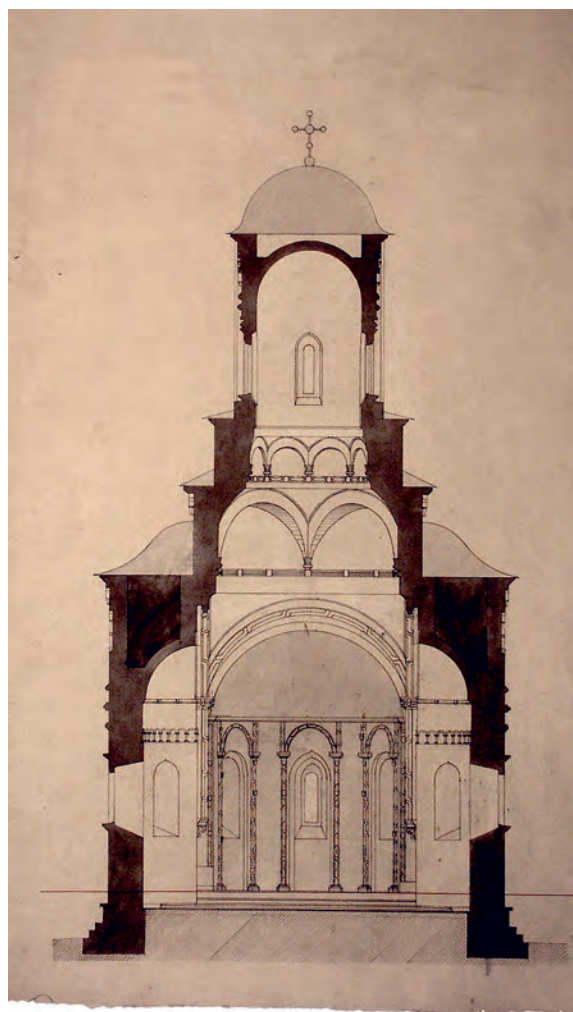


Fig. 12. A. E. Lecomte du Noüy (or his collaborators): cross-section through the Trei Ierarhi Church before restoration (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy Collection, no. 9-C-272, unsigned drawing dated 1885).



Fig. 13. A. E. Lecomte du Noüy (or his collaborators): cross-section through the Trei Ierarhi Church after restoration (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy Collection, no. 9-C-272, unsigned and undated drawing).

In the summer of 1882, following the thorough examination of the building, Lecomte du Noüy sent a report to the minister presenting the condition of damages and alterations suffered by the building during the years: replacement of the roof, changes at the upper parts of the buttresses, substantial alteration of the domes bases “which are not a reason of praise for those who attacked such monuments”.⁶⁷ The building was cracked from the base to the cornice as a result of earthquakes, while fires had affected the sculpted decoration. During the following years research continued, bringing out “difficulties and surprises which wholly changed the initial estimation of the works”,⁶⁸ worsening the problems which required a solution.

As the church continued to be used, the intervention works started in the domes area with the rebuilding of the one above the narthex. The old dome was demolished down to the level of the support arches

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 88v. Report of architect A. Lecomte du Noüy on the damage condition of Trei Ierarhi Church, 8 July 1882 (“...care n-avuc laudă celor care au atacat asemenea monumente”).

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, file 130II/1874, f. 78. Report of architect A. Lecomte No. 61 addressed to the Ministry of Cults, 13 February 1885 (“...greutăți și surprize, care au schimbat cu totul estimația făcută asupra lucrării”).



Fig. 14. Detail of the southern access to the Trei Ierarhi Church before restoration (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy Collection, no. F5-D-025, undated).



Fig. 15. Current view of the southern access to the Trei Ierarhi Church (photo H. Moldovan, 2013).

and was rebuilt in a shape considered by the French architect to be truthful to the original. The collapse hazard made Lecomte du Noüy rebuild the columns, arches and the upper separation wall between the nave and the narthex,⁶⁹ with the roof structure being supported in the meantime by complicated scaffolding. In addition, in the narthex the two pairs of side niches for the princely tombs weakened the stability of the northern and southern walls, although located symmetrically under the window spaces. It was decided to build “strong masonry” arches above the alcoves, for consolidation and for rationalising the load distributions. In parallel with these works they also started to dismantle the dome above the nave, which required ceasing the religious service. Surprisingly, although aware of the importance of preserving the old building’s authenticity, at the beginning of 1885 Lecomte du Noüy wrote to the minister describing the radical decisions he had been and would be forced to make: “Instead of limiting our work to repairing the façades by re-chiselling the sculptures and replacing damaged parts, we had to rebuild again most of the sculpture and masonry. [...] It was not possible to reuse any part of the two domes, nor of the upper part of the church body and the main cornice. All these parts which have to be rebuilt again stand for half of the outer surface of the monument.”⁷⁰ The text also mentioned the possibility to return to the assumed polychromy of the outer decoration, sustained by tradition although lacking clear evidence. Although the idea of gilding and colouring the façades was abandoned, the truthful restoration of the complicated sculpted ornaments is surprising. A comparative analysis of the period photographs and current elevations confirms the compliance with the method of treating the decorative strips, despite the tendency to arrange their joints in line with the surrounds of the openings (Figs. 14, 15).

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, f. 78v (“În loc de a ne mărgini în a repara fețele, recioplină sculpturile și înlocuind bucăți stricate, a trebuit refăcut cu totul din nou, în mare parte, sculptura și zidăria. [...] Din amândouă turlele nu s-a putut reintrebuința nici o bucată, tot asemenea și cu partea de sus a corpului bisericii împreună cu coronamentul principal. Toate aceste părți ce trebuiesc făcute din nou, reprezintă jumătate din suprafața exterioară a monumentului.”).

Further works revealed many other issues which required more or less substantial rebuilding, more or less truthful to the original. At the beginning of 1887, when the construction works were getting close to completion, Lecomte du Noüy requested a new budget extension to justify the large amounts already spent and stated in the report to the Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction that “to ensure a solid work we were gradually forced to completely rebuild the monument from the foundation to the top. The work was extremely difficult, particularly under the tower above the narthex where the whole masonry was rebuilt, substituting the old building with a new one.”⁷¹ Without questioning in any way the abandonment of original elements, Lecomte du Noüy believed that building a 30 m high solid church, covered with sculpted ornaments from the base to the upper part of the domes, for the amount of 623,000 lei, was a worthy performance. The interior rearrangement and redecoration works continued after 1900 and the church was consecrated again in the presence of the royal family in October 1904.⁷²

Whereas in the case of the bishopric church at Curtea de Argeş we can speak about a restoration with many alterations brought about by the subjective approach of Lecomte du Noüy, at Trei Ierarhi the project ended in a reconstruction, from many points of view an idealised one, of the church of Vasile Lupu. The differences in architectural concept between what Lecomte du Noüy found and what he left behind were identified by G. Balş⁷³ based on a comparative analysis between the built edifice and the survey of the original, prepared by architect Ştefan Emilian,⁷⁴ accompanied by the descriptive text of S. Mureşianu.⁷⁵ Thus the main transformations consisted of heightening the domes above the narthex and the nave, reconstructing the exonarthex vaults at a lower level, modifying the nave vaulting and adding new decorative elements, reducing the height of corner buttresses and raising those neighbouring the side apses of the nave (thus interrupting the median twisted moulding) or the different solution for the socle. It is difficult to appreciate today to what extent the old church building could have been preserved, even in part. The demolition and gradual reconstruction were however performed over more than 5 years, based on the approval and under the observation of secular and religious authorities; the justified blames were those related to the constant tendency of the French architect to correct and complete the architecture and decorations based on criteria related solely to his subjective taste and understanding.

“Reconstruction” of Medieval Monuments: Iaşi, Târgovişte and Craiova

Some protests of Romanian architects and elites started to arise even during the development of construction works. Nevertheless, the interest and concern of the royal house for the works led by Lecomte du Noüy allowed the continuation of construction works, while the financial investigations regarding the huge amounts spent had no consequences. Actually part of the amounts for the reconstruction works were allocated by Carol I directly from the “royal cassette”; this kind of subsidies started on the occasion of the break of the financial crisis of 1901 and continued for eight years.⁷⁶ This was justified by the King’s intention to add a new significance to some of the key monuments of medieval history – that of the new monarchy.⁷⁷ Showing no resentments for the alteration of the authenticity of old buildings, immediately after the re-consecration of the Cathedral Church at Curtea de Argeş, in a speech before the Parliament, the King said: “The reconstruction of old monuments was one of the works which has always drawn my special care. I happily saluted the day when the beautiful cathedral of the Argeş episcopate was rendered back to divine service, restored in splendour and beauty, which rises the country in its own estimation. Soon we shall celebrate the consecration of the

⁷¹ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 188. Report of architect A. Lecomte on the overall financial estimation of the works at Trei Ierarhi, 12 January 1887 (“...pentru a avea o lucrare solidă, am fost siliți treptat a refăce complet monumentul de la temelie până la vârf. Lucrarea era din cele mai grele, cu deosebire sub turnul ce acoperea narthexul unde s-a refăcut toată zidăria, substituind o nouă clădire în locul celei vechi”).

⁷² Bogdan 1916, pp. 527–530.

⁷³ Balş 1933, pp. 134–145.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 135, 141.

⁷⁵ Mureşianu 1890.

⁷⁶ Lapedatu 1911, p. 788.

⁷⁷ Voinescu 1944, p. 148.

metropolitan church in Craiova and of the Trei Ierarhi church in Iași. A nation which respects its ancestral monuments and particularly those of Christian piety and faith has a secure and unshakeable future.”⁷⁸

The complete demolition of some important monuments raised heavy blames from the Romanian cultural elite, as well as from some of the most important professionals of the time. Virulent criticism supported by thoroughgoing argumentations addressed directly to Lecomte du Noüy has even been published by his close collaborators, although they had often expressed their opinion in favour of demolition. Posterity retained too little from the conservative intentions of Lecomte du Noüy, just as it pardoned too easily the role of the other actors involved in the construction works led by the French architect. For instance, in the autumn of 1884, in his letter addressed to the French architect, the minister of religion and public instruction G. Tocilescu did not exclude the demolition and reconstruction of Sf. Dumitru Church in Craiova, where no religious service had been held for 40 years because of its ruined condition.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, when commenting on the “unfortunate transformations” undergone by the church in the past, Lecomte du Noüy expressed his confidence that he would be able to restore the monument to its “original physiognomy”, claiming that a reconstruction was not necessary, despite its advanced state of decay.⁸⁰

Despite the enthusiasm shown by the King upon completion of the works at Curtea de Argeș, Nicolae Gabrielescu, former inspector of the restoration works coordinated by Lecomte du Noüy, did not hesitate to express his different opinions from those of his superior regarding the restoration of Golia Tower in Iași. Considering the intervention far too difficult, Lecomte du Noüy had avoided to give a solution for that edifice which was in an advanced state of decay and subject to the risk of collapse.⁸¹ The ministry was consequently deciding for the demolition. Gabrielescu intervened however, stating in a report that “no matter how damaged a building might be, solutions can be found to consolidate and preserve it.” The text suggests his obvious opposition towards the attitude of Lecomte du Noüy in coordinating interventions to old monuments: “I maintained that an old building should not be demolished, regardless of its condition, because the destruction of a historical relic is an irretrievable misdeed. [...] To monuments we are tied by precious souvenirs, they are an unseen testimony of past centuries of a nation and a source of studies for artists in the future.”⁸² The divergences between the two continued to deepen, with Gabrielescu having a doubtful attitude. Despite his straightforward expression of opinions regarding the obligation to preserve Golia Tower, his position was contrary in some of the projects on which he collaborated with Lecomte du Noüy. In Craiova he believed that Sf. Dumitru Church “is too decayed; and it is almost impossible to keep merely one brick of it; it must be completely rebuilt”.⁸³ In a letter sent to Lecomte du Noüy in 1888 he expressed similar considerations as to what could be done at the belfry tower at Trei Ierarhi in Iași: “Pour le clocher, j’ai examiné de près; j’ai monté pour me rendre compte de l’état où il est et il y aura plus d’avantage à le démolir, surtout qu’il faut refaire tout le bas, un travail soigneux et délicat.”⁸⁴ It can be assumed that Gabrielescu’s ambiguous position drew the attention of Lecomte du Noüy; in a report written in the summer of 1889 he requested, among other measures proposed to reduce the costs associated with the restoration of Trei Ierarhi church, the dismissal of inspector Gabrielescu, whose role would no longer be justified while the restoration works was coming to an end.⁸⁵ The proposal is accepted by the ministry and Gabrielescu is fired from

⁷⁸ *Cuvântările* 1939, p. 444 (“Reedificarea monumentelor vechi a fost una dintre lucrările care întotdeauna a atras deosebita mea îngrijire. Am salutat cu fericire ziua în care frumoasa catedrală a episcopiei de Argeș a fost redată cultului divin, restaurată în splendoare și frumusețe care ridică țara în ochii ei proprii. În curând vom serba sfințirea bisericii metropolitane din Craiova și a bisericii Sfinții Trei Ierarhi din Iași. O națiune care își respectă monumentele străbune și mai ales acele ale pietății și credinței creștinești are un viitor sigur și neclintit.”).

⁷⁹ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 147.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

⁸¹ Iftimi, Ichim 2010, p. 202.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 203. The restoration of Golia Tower was initiated by Gabrielescu in 1889 and was completed in 1906 (“Am ținut să nu se dea jos o clădire veche, oricare ar fi starea ei, pentru că distrugerea unui suvenir istoric e o nelegiuire irecuperabilă. [...] De monumente ne leagă suvenire scumpe, ele sunt o mărturie nevăzută a veacurilor trecute a unei națiuni și un izvor de studii pentru artiști, în viitor”).

⁸³ Révoil 1890, pp. 38-39 (“este foarte dărpănată; și este aproape cu neputință de a păstra măcar o cărămidă din ea; trebuie a o reface cu desăvârșire”).

⁸⁴ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 205, ref. 1. Letter dated 12 December 1888.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 211.

his position. He got immediately involved in the restoration of Golia Tower (where the restoration works were completed in 1906), and published in Iași the brochure called *Overview on national monuments and on the means to prevent their destruction*.⁸⁶ Although not mentioning any name, the text was directly targeting the activity of Lecomte du Noüy: “[...] people should once and for all abandon the idea that they achieved anything, when making a monument more beautiful than it was. [...] Such criminal pleasures at the expense of the monuments and the country should be prevented. It is ridiculous to see someone who, not being able to achieve new beautiful things, wants to embellish old ones.” Considering the evidence certifying that Gabrielescu was directly involved in the demolition of some old buildings as well as his latent conflict with Lecomte du Noüy, with whom he had worked together for more than a decade (1876–89), his case can only be judged with some reserves.

The attacks from close collaborators continued with *Memoire for informing the public on the issue of historical monument restoration*⁸⁷ published by Gabrielescu, and the articles *The restoration of historical monuments abroad and in Romania*⁸⁸ and *What is restoration. With regard to Sf. Nicolae Church in Iași*,⁸⁹ both written by George Sterian. Based on the principles of restoration presented by Viollet-le-Duc in *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e au XVI^e siècle* (1854–1868), Sterian challenged, on the one hand, the interventions led by Lecomte du Noüy and, on the other hand, the decisions of those who validated them. In the first article, focused on the examples of the bishopric church in Curtea de Argeș and the Trei Ierarhi monastery in Iași, Sterian started his case with the definition of “restoration” given by the French master, recklessly construed by those who “altered entire monuments under the pretext that the primitive structure of the edifice they restored was defective [...] [invoking] the authority of Viollet-le-Duc to cover their ignorance and cunning.”⁹⁰ Sterian mentioned the unjustified extension of restoration works and the expenditure of extravagant amounts as compared to the initial provisions of Viollet-le-Duc and de Baudot and openly criticised the megalomania which governed the works at Argeș: “and in order to satisfy our appetite for beautiful things and our restlessness of new rich louts, we furnished the church with all sort of gilded gear, copied from all furniture styles in other countries.”⁹¹ His considerations, some of which are justified, become somehow pejorative, particularly in the subtle references to the churches rebuilt from their foundations: “Following such criminal acts [with reference to the restoration works at Curtea de Argeș and Iași], another people would have taken some rest; we however go on tirelessly. Without realizing anything and proud of our first success, we started to long for new and bigger successes along the path of destruction. [...] We searched for all churches which, based on their artistic value and historical interest, should be subject to our restoration plots. We surrounded them with nice scaffolds and if this operation did not damage them sufficiently, we uncovered them and left the vaults open, abandoned for 3 or 4 years continuously, until they became just good enough for restoration; then we have torn them down so as to be able to rebuild them with grandeur, altering them at our own will and building them different from what they were.”⁹²

⁸⁶ Gabrielescu 1890b (“*Privire generală asupra monumentelor naționale și mijlocul de a împiedica distrugerea lor*”; p. 161: “...să iasă odată din capul oamenilor ideea că au făcut ceva, făcând un monument mai frumos decât era. [...] Să se împiedice asemenea desfătări criminale pe spinarea monumentelor și a țării. E ridicol a vedea pe cineva care, neputând a face lucruri noi frumoase, voiește a le înfrumuseța pe cele vechi”).

⁸⁷ Gabrielescu 1890a (“*Memoriu pentru luminarea publicului în afacerea restaurărilor de monumente istorice*”).

⁸⁸ Sterian 1890a (“*Restaurarea monumentelor istorice în străinătate și în România*”).

⁸⁹ Sterian 1890b (“*Ce este o restaurare. Cu privire la Biserica Sf. Nicolae din Iași*”).

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 52 (“au denaturat monumente întregi sub pretext că construcția primitivă a edificiului pe care l-au restaurat era defectuoasă [...] <invocând> autoritatea lui Viollet-le-Duc pentru ca să acopere neștiința și reaua lor credință”).

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 55 (“și ca să mulțumim setea noastră de lucruri frumoase și neastâmpărul nostru de mitocani îmbogățiți, am mobilat biserica cu fel de fel de scule aurite, copiate din toate stilurile și după toate mobilele celorlalte țări”).

⁹² *Ibidem* (“După niște fapte atât de criminale, un alt popor s-ar mai fi odihnit puțin; noi însă suntem neobosiți și mergem înainte. Fără să ne dăm seama de nimic și mândri de primul nostru succes, am început a răvni alte izbânde și mai mari pe calea distrugerilor. [...] Am căutat toate bisericile care din cauza valorii lor artistice și a interesului istoric, trebuia să fie supuse uneltirilor noastre restauratrice. Le am înconjurat cu schele frumoase și dacă din împrejurare nu erau destul de stricate le-am descoperit și am lăsat bolțile gole în voia întâmplărilor 3 sau 4 ani de-a rândul, până ce s-au făcut numai bune de restaurat; pe urmă le-am dat la pământ pentru ca să le putem reclădi cu multă strălucire, schimbându-le după placul nostru și refăcându-le alt fel de cum erau.”).



Fig. 16. A. E. Lecomte du Noüy: reconstruction drawing of the original stage of the Metropolitan Church of Wallachia in Târgoviște (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy collection, no. 11-A-421, unsigned and undated drawing).

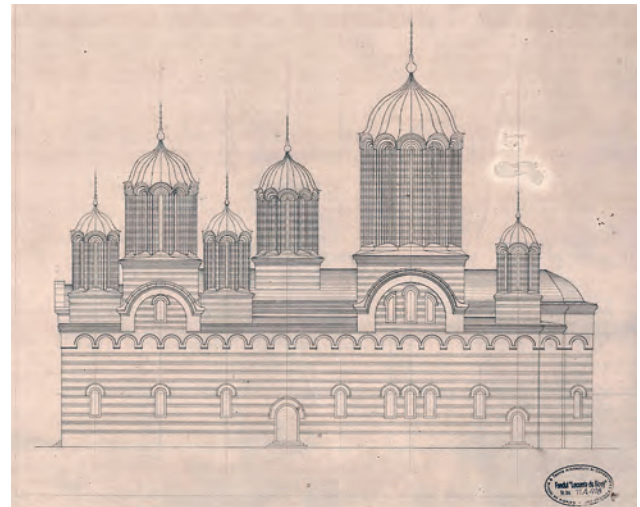


Fig. 17. A. E. Lecomte du Noüy (or his collaborators): plan for the restoration of the old Metropolitan Church in Târgoviște – southern elevation (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy collection, no. 11-A-418, unsigned and undated drawing).

In the same year 1890 some of the most famous names of Romanian architecture and arts signed a petition addressed to the prime minister listing the errors of Lecomte du Noüy's approach; they requested the application of the "Regulation of the Commission for Public Monuments" approved by the King in 1874, until a special law would be adopted, as well as the establishment of an "Architectural – Archaeological Commission", "consisting of specialists in architecture and archaeology, to examine what has been done till now and to study the way forward for the truthful preservation of these noble relics of our past".⁹³ Thus the first meeting of the "Honorific Commission for Public Monuments" was held in April, according to the provisions of the 1874 regulation. The minute of the meeting mentioned that the restoration works of Lecomte du Noüy had become a "matter of national interest",⁹⁴ and for this reason it was proposed to appoint an "over-arbitration to examine and give an opinion on these works, from an artistic perspective".⁹⁵ The architect who was supposed to judge what had been achieved and how the existing construction sites should continue should "not be involved in the criticisms and disputes which arose in the country".⁹⁶

Upon Maiorescu's proposal, it was agreed during the meeting to call Henri Révoil to Romania, a corresponding member of *Institute de France*, involved in the restoration of French historical monuments.⁹⁷ Révoil had gained his fame for the thorough study of Romanesque architecture in the south of France (*L'Architecture romane du midi de la France*, Paris, 1866-73), as well as for his long term involvement in the construction works of Romanesque-Byzantine churches Sainte-Marie-Majeure and Notre Dame de la Garde in Marseille, as a successor

⁹³ *Restaurarea* 1890, p. 223. The petition, signed, among others, by Theodor Aman, Karl Benisch (formerly a close collaborator of Johann Schlatter), Ștefan Ciocârlan, Nicolae Gabrielescu (trained actually on Lecomte's sites), Ion Mincu, Gheorghe Mandrea, Dimitrie Maimarolu, G. D. Mirea, Alexandru Orăscu, Al. Săvulescu, Ion Socolescu, George Sterian (similarly to Gabrielescu, a close collaborator of Lecomte), Karl Storck or Gheorghe Tattarescu. ("Comisiuni architecto-archeologice [...] compusă din persoane speciale în arhitectură și arheologie, care să examineze ce s-a făcut până azi și să studieze cum trebuie să se urmeze pe viitor cu conservarea fidelă a acestor mândre rămășițe ale trecutului nostru.").

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 226, "Proces verbal No.1 cu expunerea făcută de Ministrul Cultelor asupra lucrărilor de restaurare" (Minute No. 1 with the presentation of restoration works made by the Minister of Cults), 27 April 1890.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*: "supra-arbitragiu, care să examineze și să se pronunțe asupra acestor lucrări, din punctul de vedere artistic".

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 241, "Comisiunea onorifică a monumentelor publice, Proces verbal No. 3" (Honorific Commission of Public Monuments, Minute no. 3), 12 May 1890. The statement belongs to M. Kogălniceanu.

⁹⁷ Ionescu 1979, p. 53.

of architects Léon Vaudoyer and Henri-Jacques Espérandieu.⁹⁸ The objectivity of Révoil's opinions is doubtful, considering that he stood up for the “erudite and skilled” Lecomte du Noüy against the “undeserved and cunning” criticisms and he brought forward again, tendentiously, the difference between “conservation” and “restoration”. Thus conservation meant “maintaining [the monument] in its current state, that is, giving it to posterity in its current condition”, whereas restoration involved “rendering it its primitive condition, that is, making it again appropriate for its purpose”. In the light of this understanding of restoration the architect “in want of reliable documents, takes his inspiration first from what he has under his eyes then from what he can find in similar monuments. He should permeate himself with the idea of the artist who created the work and gather around him all the information justifying his innovations.”⁹⁹ The presence of Révoil and his report were publicly challenged, considering that “the investigation was done in private, listening only to one party”, and the result was considered “an act of complaisance”,¹⁰⁰ to which Gabrielescu responded by a detailed critical analysis in the pages of *Analele arhitecturii* of 1891.¹⁰¹

The century elapsed since the completion of Lecomte du Noüy's construction works has gradually alleviated the fierceness with which his contemporaries blamed the unwary sacrifice of valuable medieval monuments to replace them with fanciful projects, subjective interpretations of the Eastern Orthodox architecture. Bringing forward again the reconstruction works performed by Lecomte du Noüy as “restoration works”, Carmen Popescu considered it legitimate that the French architect achieved what Romanian architects had not managed to, lacking either the opportunities or, rather, lacking resources: creating a new architecture able to synthesise and to represent Romanian Orthodoxy in modern times.¹⁰² Despite the disapprovals of his contemporaries, the results of Lecomte du Noüy's construction and restoration works in Târgoviște (Fig. 16, 17), Craiova (Fig. 18, 19) and Iași had an undeniable influence upon the further evolution of Romanian religious architecture.

The complete reconstruction of the princely court church in Iași, affected by the interventions performed in the 17th century (Fig. 4, 5), was an idealized interpretation of Moldavian architecture during the reign of Ștefan cel Mare.



Fig. 18. South-east view of Sf. Dumitru Church in Craiova, before demolition (DITACP-UAUIM, Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș collection).



Fig. 19. South-east view of Sf. Dumitru Church in Craiova, after reconstruction (DITACP-UAUIM, Lecomte du Noüy collection, no. F7-A-046).

⁹⁸ Bergdoll 1994, pp. 210, 269.

⁹⁹ Révoil 1890, p. 2 (“<Conservarea făcea referire la> menținerea <monumentului> în starea sa actuală, adică a-l face să treacă la posteritate, în starea în care se află, <în timp ce restaurarea presupunea> a-i reda starea sa primitivă, adică a-l face propriu pentru destinațiunea ce trebuie să i se dea. [...] <Astfel, arhitectul> lipsit de documente sigure, se inspiră mai întâi din ceea ce are sub ochi și din ceea ce poate găsi în monumente similare. El trebuie să se pătrundă de ideea artistului creator al operei și să strângă împrejurul său toate informațiunile care justifică inovările sale.”).

¹⁰⁰ Restaurarea 1891, p. 17.

¹⁰¹ Gabrielescu 1891.

¹⁰² Popescu 2004, p. 105.

Although violently blamed, the church in Iași became a model for other projects in Bucharest. The “Cuțitul de Argint” (“Silver Knife”) Church (1905-1906), part of the “General Romanian Exhibition”, was built as a close copy of the example in Iași, based on a design of architects Nicolae Ghika-Budești and George Sterian – a fierce adversary of Lecomte du Noüy’s approaches.¹⁰³

The reconstruction works at Târgoviște and Craiova diverged from the original structures both in dimensions and shape and in the manner of approaching the façade and decorations. Having assimilated obvious Byzantine motives, the two churches are closer to the Western interpretations (particularly from the south of France) of the Eastern Orthodox medieval architecture models, than to the examples actually studied by Lecomte du Noüy in Wallachia or south of the Danube. The churches are therefore modern, personal interpretations of eastern religious architecture, appreciated for sure by the architect’s patron, Carol I.¹⁰⁴ Condemned by some or openly praised by others, the two reconstruction projects were covertly assumed as sources for many projects signed by the most important architects of the time: Petre Antonescu, George Mandrea, Constantin Iotzu, Ion D. Traianescu etc.¹⁰⁵ While Constantin Argetoianu blatantly condemned the fact that “a curse brought down one by one the churches Trei Ierarhi in Iași, Curtea de Argeș and Sf. Dumitru in Craiova, raising in their place three abominations having nothing to do any more with the models they were supposed to replace”,¹⁰⁶ A. Vincenz described appraisingly the new church in Craiova: “When we gaze today at the wonderful silhouette of the new Sf. Dumitru Church, which comes to sight against the horizon, and when we step through the monumental porch inside the church, with its perfectly designed shapes, with its rich painting of flawless unity, as if wholly powdered with gold dust [...], we feel enchanted and we must admit that only a great artist could have created such a work and that King Carol, the founder, proves worthy of his predecessor, Prince Matei, the founder.”¹⁰⁷

Most of the valuable documentary materials produced and collected by the architectural office in Bucharest led by Lecomte du Noüy were gradually scattered, lost or destroyed by a posterity who on the other hand criticised him for his lack of consideration for the past. Lecomte du Noüy had himself donated the copies of the old frescoes decorating the interior of Curtea de Argeș monastery church,¹⁰⁸ survey plans and project plans for the medieval religious monuments, execution details, photos, samples etc. to the Royal Foundations. In 1911, seriously ill, the architect handed over, through Alexandru Tzigara-Samurçaș, “all the plans and drawings”, which were arranged on special shelves in a locked room.¹⁰⁹ The transfer was done under the King’s supervision, who also ordered, the same year, a bust of the French architect for the gallery of donors.¹¹⁰ One century after his death Lecomte du Noüy continues to be a controversial character. His work also remains just as controversial, so much discussed upon but still lacking a comprehensive and thorough study, based on the archive material kept, rather than on the large number of opinions or interpretations, often jaundiced, mainly focused on his restoration and reconstruction works. Suspected of having purloined some heritage values, criticised for his artistic ambitions for the sake of which he dismissed invaluable monuments of the Romanian medieval history, Lecomte du Noüy enjoyed however the appraisal of some of the most prominent persons of the time; the study of his activity is thus a requisite for completing the perspective of a history upon which the 19th century left a deep and often beneficial footprint.

¹⁰³ Teodorescu 2007, p. 69.

¹⁰⁴ Popescu 2004, p. 107.

¹⁰⁵ Popescu 2006, pp. 97-98.

¹⁰⁶ Constantin Argetoianu, *apud* Cantacuzino 2013, pp. 280-281, ref. 87 (“*blestemul a doborât pe rând Trei Ierarhi de la Iași, Curtea de Argeș și Sf. Dumitru de la Craiova, ridicând în locul lor trei porcării care nu mai aveau nimic de a face cu modelele pe care erau menite să le înlocuiască*”).

¹⁰⁷ Vincez 1926, pp. 197-198 (“*Când privim astăzi minunata siluetă ce se profilează în zare a bisericii celei noi a Sf. D-tru și când pășim prin tinda monumentală în interiorul ei, cu formele de o concepție impecabilă, cu zugrăveală bogată de o unitate desăvârșită, ca pudrată întreagă cu pulbere de aur [...], cădem într-o atmosferă vrăjită și trebuie să recunoaștem că numai un mare artist putea crea o asemenea operă și că regele Carol ctitorul se dovedește vrednic de premergătorul său Matei Vodă ctitorul.*”).

¹⁰⁸ Tzigara-Samurçaș 1933, p. 52. Some of these plans decorated the rotunda of the Palace of the University Foundation “King Carol I” (1895-1914), together with photos of the monarchs.

¹⁰⁹ Tzigara-Samurçaș 1999, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

Bibliographical abbreviations:

- Balș 1933 G. Balș, *Bisericile și mănăstirile moldovenești din veacurile al XVII-lea și al XVIII-lea*, București, 1933.
- Bergdoll 1994 B. Bergdoll, *Léon Vaudoyer: historicism in the age of industry*, Cambridge, Mass., 1994.
- Bogdan, 1915 N. A. Bogdan, *Orașul Iași. Monografie istorică și socială, ilustrată*, 1913-1915. Reprint, Iași, 2009.
- Bogdan, 1916 N. A. Bogdan, *Regele Carol I și a doua sa capitală. Relații istorico-politice scrise din inițiativa primarului Iașului G. G. Mărzescu*, 1916. Reprint, Iași, 2010.
- Cantacuzino 2013 S. Cantacuzino, *Din viața familiei Ion C. Brătianu 1821-1891*, 3rd rev. ed., București, 2013.
- Caproșu, Bădărău 1974 I. Caproșu, D. Bădărău, *Iașii vechilor zidiri*, Iași, 1974.
- Călători* 1971 *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. III, București, 1971.
- Călători* 1976 *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. VI, I, Paul de Alep, București, 1976.
- Călători* 1980 *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. VII, București, 1980.
- Cioculescu 2012 Ș. Cioculescu, *Viața lui I. L. Caragiale*, 3rd ed., București, 2012.
- Chevallier 2008 F. Chevallier, *Principatele Române la Expoziția universală de la Paris, 1867*, in *Napoleon al III-lea și Principatele Române*, București, 2008, pp. 143-164.
- Clermont-Ganneau 1899 Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological researches in Palestine during the years 1873-1874*, vol. I-II, London, 1899.
- Curinschi 1967 Gh. Curinschi, *Monumente de arhitectură din Iași*, București, 1967.
- Crosnier Leconte 1999-2000 M.-L. Crosnier Leconte, *L'enseignement de l'architecture en France et les élèves étrangers: le cas roumain*, RRHA, Tomes XXXVI-XXXVII, 1999-2000, pp. 81-101.
- Cuvântările* 1939 *Cuvântările Regelui Carol I (1866-1886)*, ed. curated by Constantin C. Giurescu, București, 1939.
- Drăguț 1986 V. Drăguț, *L'architecture dans les pays roumains au XVI^e siècle dans la perspective des relations avec le monde ottoman*, RRHA, Série Beaux-Arts, Tome XXIII, 1986, pp. 3-20.
- Gabrielescu 1890a N. Gabrielescu, *Memoriu pentru luminarea publicului în afacerea restaurărilor de monumente istorice*, Iași, 1890.
- Gabrielescu 1890b N. Gabrielescu, *Privire generală asupra monumentelor naționale și mijlocul de a împiedica distrugerea lor*, An.Arch., 1890, 7, pp. 148-152 ; 8, pp. 160-162.
- Gabrielescu 1891 N. Gabrielescu, *Respuns la raportul d-lui Révoil*, An.Arch., 1891, 2, pp. 17-27 ; 3, pp. 43-51.
- Iftimi, Ichim 2010 S. Iftimi, A. Ichim, *Cronica unei restaurări care a durat jumătate de secol (1898-1948)*, in S. Iftimi (coord.), *Mănăstirea Golia – 350 de ani de la sfințirea ctitoriei lui Vasile Lupu (Studii și documente)*, Iași, 2010, pp. 198-268.
- Ionescu 1940 G. Ionescu, *Curtea de Argeș. Istoria orașului prin monumentele lui*, București, 1940.
- Ionescu 1979 G. Ionescu, *Înaintașii noștri... în domeniul conservării și restaurării monumentelor istorice (V). Lecomte du Noüy și H. Révoil*, Arhitectura 2, 1979, pp. 53-56.
- Lapedatu 1911 Al. Lapedatu, *Scurtă privire asupra cestiunei conservării și restaurării monumentelor istorice în România*, in Lui Spiru C. Haret. „Ale tale, dintr'ale tale” la împlinirea celor șasezeci ani, București, 1911, pp. 780-801.
- Moldovan 2014 H. Moldovan, *An Alien Practice: "Town Architects" in 19th Century Romania*, Studies in History and Theory of Architecture 2, Bucharest, 2014, pp. 12-33.
- Mureșianu 1890 S. Mureșianu, *Biserica Trei Ierarchi (Fragment din mănăstirea Trei Ierarchi din Iași, studiu încă nepublicat)*, An.Arch., 1890, 3, pp. 60-64; 4, pp. 88-93; 5, pp. 101-104.
- Musicescu, Ionescu 1976 M. A. Musicescu, G. Ionescu, *Biserica Domnească din Curtea de Argeș*, București, 1976.
- Odobescu 1908 Al. I. Odobescu, *Opere complete*, vol. III, București, 1908.
- Personalulu* 1889 *Personalulu Academiei Române în anul 1888. Membri corespondenți, Analele Academiei Române*, Seria II. Tomul X, *Partea Administrativă și Desbaterile: 1887-1888*, București, 1889.
- Popescu 1999 C. Popescu, *André Lecomte du Noüy (1844-1914) et la restauration des monuments historiques en Roumanie*, Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français, 1999, pp. 287-308.

- Popescu 2004 C. Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une nation à travers l'architecture 1881-1945*, Bucarest, 2004.
- Popescu 2006 C. Popescu, *Le temple splendide de l'orthodoxie roumaine*, in B. Foucart, F. Harmon (eds.), *L'architecture religieuse au XIX^e siècle*, Paris, 2006, pp. 83-98.
- Restaurarea 1890 *Restaurarea monumentelor istorice 1865-1890. Acte și rapoarte oficiale*, Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice, București, 1890.
- Restaurarea 1891 *Restaurarea monumentelor istorice*, An.Arch. 2, 1891, p. 17.
- Révoil 1890 H. Révoil, *Restaurarea monumentelor istorice. Rapoarte despre Catedrala și Reședința Episcopală de la Curtea de Argeș, Bisericile Trei Ierarhi și S-tu Nicolae din Iași, Catedralele Mitropolitane din Târgoviște și București, Bisericile S-tu Dumitru din Craiova și Stavropoleos din București*, București, 1890.
- Rosetti 1897 Dim. R. Rosetti, *Dicționarul contemporanilor*, București, 1897.
- Sterian 1890° G. Sterian, *Restaurarea monumentelor istorice în străinătate și în România*, An.Arch. 3, 1890, pp. 48-58.
- Sterian 1890b G. Sterian, *Ce este o restaurare. Cu privire la Biserica Sf. Nicolae din Iași*, An.Arch. 5, 1890, pp. 98-101.
- Suțu 1884 A. G. Suțu, *Studiu asupra bisericii Trei-Ierarhi din Iași*, Convorbiri Literare XVII, 1 aprilie 1883 – 1 martie 1884, Iași, 1884.
- Teodorescu 2007 V. Z. Teodorescu, *Un parc centenar: Parcul Carol I*, București, 2007.
- Theodorescu 1987 R. Theodorescu, *Civilizația românilor între medieval și modern. Orizontul imaginii (1550-1800)*, vol. I, București, 1987.
- Tocilescu 1887 Gr. G. Tocilescu, *Biserica Episcopală a Mănăstirii Curtea de Argeș restaurată în zilele M.S. Regelui Carol I sfințită din nou în ziua de 12 octombrie 1886*, București, 1887.
- Tzigara-Samurcaș 1933 Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș, *Fundațiunea Universitară Carol I 1891-1931*, București, 1933.
- Tzigara-Samurcaș 1999 Al. Tzigara-Samurcaș, *Memorii*, vol. II, București, 1999.
- Velescu 1992 O. Velescu, *Preliminariile legii din anul 1892. Fapte istorice, juridice și deprinderi estetice*, RMI 2, 1992, pp. 5-13.
- Vincez 1926 A. Vincenz, *Din trecutul Craiovei*, Analele Olteniei 25-26, 1926, pp. 182-201.
- Voinescu 1944 T. Voinescu, *Principii conducătoare în restaurarea monumentelor artistice de la Bibescu și până azi*, Analecta II, 1944, pp. 137-154.
- An.Arch. *Analele Arhitecturii și ale artelor cu care se lăgă*, București.
- Analecta *Analecta*, Universitatea din București, Institutul de Istoria Artei, București.
- DITACP-UAUIM *Departamentul de Istorie și Teorie a Arhitecturii și Conservarea Patrimoniului, Universitatea de Arhitectură și Urbanism „Ion Mincu”* (Department for the History and Theory of Architecture and Heritage Conservation, “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning), Bucharest.
- MCIP *Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice* (Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction).
- MNAR *Muzeul Național de Istorie a României* (National Museum of Romanian History), Bucharest.