

SPACES WITH A SPECIFIC MORPHOLOGY OF MURAL PAINTINGS DEGRADATION: THE PORCHES OF ORTHODOX CHURCHES*

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Summary: The degradation morphology and its evolution in the space of our medieval churches, indicates the existence of an architectural zone with a specific behavior due to the environment. Its impact has to be studied *before any other interventions* which should completely modify the transitory condition – outdoor / indoor – of the porch.

Rezumat: Morfologia degradărilor și evoluția lor în spațiul pridvoarelor bisericilor noastre medievale, indică existența unei zone arhitecturale cu un comportament specific față de factorii de mediu. Impactul acestora va trebui studiat *înainte de realizarea* oricăror intervenții care ar putea modifica radical condiția tranzitorie – *interior / exterior* – a pridvorului. Am ales, în sprijinul analizei noastre, trei cazuri din epoci diferite pe care le cunoaștem îndeaproape și mai cu seamă, pe care le-am putut urmări într-un amplu interval de timp. Este vorba de pridvorul Bisericii Mănăstirii Humor (sec. XVI), de cel al Bisericii Doamnei din București (sec. XVII) și de pridvorul, datorat unei refaceri ulterioare a ctitoriei, al Bisericii Mănăstirii Stavropoleos (sec. XVIII).

Preliminary observations

One of the conditions for a correct diagnosis of the architectural “epidermis” degradation if this being a simple plaster finish or a complex multi-strata structure is a careful morphological analysis corroborated with a correct explanation of destructive phenomena according to their complexity. A correct diagnosis should place the morphological and etiological analysis inside the given architectural place and as it is generally done in the restoration documents, in a space of general aspects considered to be always correct. This attitude often prevented a correct understanding of some degradation processes specific for different architectural spaces, consequently to adequate conservation solutions. This is the case of some architectural spaces with a particular shape such as the porches of orthodox churches, spaces designed in order to facilitate the transition from inside to outside, a preparatory function amplified by a complex iconographic program, with a strong eschatologic message.

Mural painting degradation has to be correlated with the specificity of the architectural space to which they belong. To sustain our analysis three cases were selected, ones that are familiar to us, belonging to different historical epoch and which could be observed during a large period of time.¹ These are the porch of the Humor Monastery Church (16th Cent.), that of Doamnei’s Church – Bucharest (17th Cent.) and the porch which is due to a subsequent restoration of the church of Stavropoleos Monastery (18th Cent.).

The case of Humor: 1973-1996

At the beginning of the 70s of the 20th century, the ICCROM mission dedicated to the North Moldavian mural paintings² – entrusted to the team of most outstanding personalities of conservation and restoration domain, Laura and Paolo Mora, together with Paul Philippot – discovered a very dangerous aspect: even if they are situated in a quite protective space, compared to the iconography of the facades, the mural paintings of the porch of Humor Monastery have suffered a process of defoliation of an unexpected extension.

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¹ In the case of Humor Monastery the author took part in the conservation activity of the porch mural painting, first time in 1973. Between 1996/1998 the conservation of the porch mural painting was retaken due to the fact that a process of adhesion loss of the pictorial stratum and an extension of the phenomenon to the outdoor facades was detected. At Stavropoleos Church the degradation of the pictorial stratum of the porch was detected and cured between 1998-2001. Similar degradation phenomena were detected at the porch of Doamnei’s Church in Bucharest, where the consolidation work and further monitoring activity took place between 2005-2011.

² Draguț 1977, p. 11.