

ARCHAEOLOGY IN PITEȘTI. ‘THE SPIRIT OF PLACE’. THE CASE OF “THE TOWN CLOCK CHURCH”*

Dragoș Măndescu**

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Abstract: In the summer of 1962, a defining element for the old architecture and identity of Pitești, the Church of Saint Nicholas and Saint Panteleimon (“The Town Clock Church” – built by the inhabitants at the beginning of the nineteenth century over an older one, built in the mid eighteenth century), was demolished so that a new systematized centre of the region’s capital city to be built. In a new stage of modernization of the city centre, in 2007, the foundations of the two successive churches with numerous adjacent tombs were discovered in a vast archaeological rescue excavation. The author, a member of the archaeological team, shows in this article how the residents of the nowadays city identify themselves to the symbol of the old town during the archaeological excavations, the perception of archaeology by the urban contemporary, as well as the manner of municipal authorities (as commissioners of the public utility works and hence of the archaeological excavations) to assume and restore the archaeological remains.

Rezumat: În vara anului 1962, un element definitoriu pentru domeniul arhitectonic și identitar al Piteștiiului vechi, Biserica Sfântul Nicolae și Sfântul Pantelimon (“Biserica cu ceas” – lăcaș de cult de la începutul sec. al XIX-lea ridicat de mahalagii peste unul mai vechi, de la mijlocul sec. al XVIII-lea), a fost dărâmat pentru a face loc noului centru sistematizat al municipiului reședință de regiune. În contextul unei noi etape a modernizării centrului orașului, în anul 2007, fundațiile celor două biserici succesive, împreună cu numeroase morminte adiacente au fost date la iveală în cadrul unui amplu șantier arheologic de salvare. Autorul, membru al colectivului arheologic, prezintă în acest articol modul cum locuitorii orașului actual s-au raportat la acest simbol al orașului vechi pe durata șantierului, percepția arheologiei în mediul urban contemporan, precum și maniera autorităților municipale (comanditare ale lucrărilor edilitare și implicit ale șantierului arheologic) de asumare și valorificare a vestigiilor arheologice.

For those who pass through the city of Pitești by car or on foot, the feeling of a new and modern city with no past and no personality is, beyond any doubt, a real and pervasive one. The admirable geographical position of the town (“There, where in Argeș flows the Doamnei River” – Ion Pillat) given by a clever use of environmental conditions, was not completed by the building and protection of an identity based on the assumption of the values of the past. The impression that one finds oneself in the middle of a city founded in the second half of the twentieth century is probably stronger than in any other urban area between the Carpathians and the Danube. Concrete, cement, asphalt, marble, stainless steel (too much steel), aluminium, plastic, glass of all colours, matte, translucent, gray, silver... all mixed in a developed urban chaos, rebellious and presumptuous, which doesn’t want to take into account any architectural system, not even follow an elementary common sense. Deprived of the perennial old town’s identity elements, the inhabitants of Pitești always look forward, never to the past they barely know. Perhaps this explains, among other things, the absence of a city museum...

Meritoriously still standing, against all odds, in the downtown area, St George Church, a voivodal foundation from the start of the second half of the seventeenth century (Constantin Șerban - 1656), improperly called “cathedral” (neither recommended by its size, nor justified by its past or present function), and a few other late medieval churches fail to counterbalance the great loss of secular architecture. Even the memorial houses, spots closely related to the memory of eminent representatives of national culture, found no escape from destruction under the road rollers of recent years: the house where the painter Costin Petrescu was born – scraped from the earth in order to build a private parking and a new building; on the same central street, the house where another famous painter was born, Rudolf Schweitzer-Cumpăna, is crumbling under the weight of time and indifference; at Valea Mare, right next to the city, the house of the writer Liviu Rebreanu, where he lived the latter part of his life and where he finally passed away, is to receive its new conditions, of winery; and also at Valea Mare, the voivode Constantin Brancoveanu’s mansion, where the prince spent the late autumns with the entire suite, harvesting “the vineyards in Pitești”, has been transformed *ad hoc*, in the bleak years of

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** Argeș County Museum.