

NOTE ȘI DISCUȚII / NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

THE SAVING OF THE WOODEN CHURCH OF URȘI IN A NEW POSTURE: THE INTER-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH, PLANNING AND CONSERVATION

Dan Mohanu, Ioana Gomoiu, Ana Chiricuță*

Keywords: Urși, wooden church, inter-disciplinary research, iconography, *al fresco* painting, *al secco* painting, degradation factors, biodeterioration, conservation-restoration.

Abstract: Part of the salvation plan of the 60 wooden churches, initiated by the Order of Architects in Romania, the wooden church of Urși, Popești Village, Vâlcea County, is in a new posture: going from the urgent intervention, meant to protect immediately and remove the danger of an imminent collapse to an inter-disciplinary-based research, planning and the operations of consolidation and conservation-restoration of the church architecture together with its artistic components (mural painting, iconostasis and icons, and furniture). The anamnesis, the iconographic and stylistic analysis, the technological analysis about the nature of materials employed in the *al fresco* and *al secco* paintings, the initiation of microclimate monitoring, the identification of degradation factors, with a deep analysis of the biodeterioration are the branches of the inter-disciplinary research undertaken at Urși. The execution of the general conservation-restoration project of the church made possible a long-term allocation of the operations through which the church will be rendered to the community. The article closes with a plea for the authorities to get involved in saving a type of monuments representative for the history of Romanian art facing disappearance.

Rezumat: Aflată în planul de salvare a celor 60 de biserici de lemn inițiat de Ordinul Arhitecților din România, biserica de lemn din satul Urși, comuna Popești, județul Vâlcea, se află într-o nouă ipostază: trecerea de la intervenția urgentă, destinată protejării imediate și a înlăturării pericolului unei iminente prăbușiri la cercetarea cu caracter interdisciplinar, proiectarea, operațiunile de consolidare și conservare-restaurare a arhitecturii bisericii împreună cu componentele sale artistice (pictura murală, iconostasul și icoanele, mobilierul). Anamneza, analiza iconografică și stilistică, analiza tehnologică privind natura materialelor folosite în picturile realizate *al fresco* și *al secco*, inițierea monitorizării microclimatului, identificarea factorilor de degradare, cu o analiză aprofundată a biodeteriorării sunt ramificațiile cercetării interdisciplinare întreprinse la Urși. Realizarea proiectului general de conservare-restaurare a bisericii a făcut posibilă o eșalonare pe termen lung a operațiunilor prin care biserica de lemn va fi redată comunității. Articolul se încheie cu o pledoarie pentru implicarea autorităților în salvarea unei categorii de monumente reprezentative pentru istoria artei românești aflate în curs de dispariție.

Included in the list of the 60 wooden churches¹ which the Order of Architects of Romania proposed to be saved, as a matter of emergency, the Church *Buna Vestire* (the Annunciation) in Urși illustrates the fate of peasant monuments in an exemplary way. With an apparently recent history, the village foundations are an echo, as Iorga once said, of the dawn of the Romanian civilization.² New and old at the same time, the wooden churches are the first to disappear. Except the well-known group of monuments of Maramureș, the constellation of wooden churches going down from the North of the country to the Southern Wallachia do not manage to get the status of the masonry monuments, sharing a fate close to the old and almost vanished peasant architecture.

Built from organic materials, subject to biodeterioration first and foremost, part of the conditions of a severe microclimate, the wooden ecclesiastic buildings need a complex and difficult treatment based on inter-disciplinarity and a stable post-operative monitoring. All those requirements prove to be inversely proportional with the attention that the custody provides to that category of monuments under an accelerated process of destruction.³

In this context, the intervention on the wooden church in Urși aims at attracting the attention both on forgotten or ignored values and on the way in which, in a focused action, wooden churches may be rendered back to the communities.

Erected towards the late 18th century,⁴ the wooden church dedicated to the Annunciation and Archangel Michael (Fig. 1) has engraved over the portal the date 7303 (1794-1795). Another testimony about the existence of the church towards the end of the 18th century is the

¹ "60 wooden churches. A project to save the built heritage" under the coordination of Architect Șerban Sturdza.

² Iorga 1929, chapter "Eglises de bois: chansons premières", pp. 5-6. An idea adopted and supported by Ioan Godea (Godea 1996, pp. 30-32).

³ Petranu 1931, pp. 3-6.

⁴ N. Stoicescu presents the wooden church of the Annunciation as being built in 1757 by Ion Danciul and Father Constantin. At the same time, he points out to the information received from C. Bălan regarding the existence of the church of the Annunciation and Archangel Michael founded by Nicolae Milcoveanu (Stoicescu 1970, p. 687). The 1757 dating and the mentioned ktitors also appear in A. Pănoiu (Pănoiu 1977, p. 112). A document from 1509, under Mircea, son of Mihnea I, mentions the existence of a wooden church on Cucești estate, a church belonging to Teodosie the Monk in 1730, who, in 1742, offers it to Amota Monastery.

* National University of Arts, Bucharest, e-mail: dan_ileana_m@yahoo.com.