

A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE: THE CASE OF ARNOTA

Horia Moldovan*

Keywords: nineteenth century architecture, conservation, prison architecture, *Rundbogenstil*, Arnota Monastery, Johann Schlatter, Karl Benisch, Vladimir Blaremborg.

Abstract: Still far from providing a comprehensive picture of the architectural variety and creativity of the nineteenth century Wallachia, specialist works have mainly concentrated on buildings dating from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, subsequent to the coronation of Carol I. The case of Arnota Monastery, in Vâlcea County, is interesting and important firstly because the alterations led by “monastic architect” Johann Schlatter to this complex during the nineteenth century inaugurated the autonomous programme of prison architecture in Wallachia, and, secondly, they illustrate, among numerous other examples still preserved, the beginnings of modern practices of restoring old architecture. At the same time, the recent reconstruction and extension work undertaken at the monastery brings to light contemporary issues connected with the lack of understanding of the conservation and restoration of a heritage still little valued.

Rezumat: Departe încă de a crea o imagine cuprinzătoare a varietății și creativității arhitecturale din secolul al XIX-lea valah, scrierile de specialitate s-au concentrat în special pe producția din ultimul sfert al secolului, după încoronarea lui Carol I. Cazul Arnotei, jud. Vâlcea, este interesant și important în primul rând pentru că transformările conduse de „arhitectul mănăstiresc” Johann Schlatter asupra ansamblului în secolului al XIX-lea inaugureau autonomizarea programului arhitectural al închisorii în Țara Românească și, în al doilea rând, pentru că ilustrează – printre numeroase cazuri încă păstrate – debuturile practicilor moderne de intervenție asupra arhitecturii vechi. Totodată, recente lucrările de reconstrucție, extensie și completare suferite de incinta mănăstirii pun în lumină problemele contemporane care privesc slaba înțelegerea a conservării și restaurării unui patrimoniu încă prea puțin prețuit.

The architectural heritage of the nineteenth century did not become a subject for research until quite late, during the last decades of the twentieth century. Still far from providing a comprehensive picture of the architectural variety and creativity of the period, specialist works have mainly concentrated on buildings dating from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, subsequent to the coronation of Carol I. Although numerous studies exist, the contextualisation of their subject matter is lacunary, and clichés and prejudices are still rife in their analyses. This is to a certain extent pardonable given that from the viewpoint of the history of architecture, study of nineteenth-century Wallachia is still at the accumulative phase. The incomplete knowledge of the century’s heritage, the poor popularisation of subjects pertaining to it, and the persistence of unfounded preconceptions (such as those regarding foreign architects involved in the first interventions in the historical architecture of Wallachia) have had often serious repercussions on conservation practices.

The example of Arnota, in Vâlcea County, is interesting and important from a number of points of view. On the one hand, the alterations to this monastery complex during the nineteenth century inaugurated an autonomous programme of prison architecture in Wallachia, and, on the other, they illustrate, among numerous other examples still preserved, the beginnings of modern practices of restoring old architecture. At the same time, the recent reconstruction and extension work undertaken at the monastery brings to light contemporary issues connected with an understanding of the conservation and restoration (often based on unjustified analogies) of a heritage still little understood.

Wallachia’s prisons before 1866. For the architecture of the nineteenth century, the importance of the prison Barbu Știrbei ordered to be built at Arnota cannot be explained or understood outside the context of the then efforts to reform the penitentiary system in Wallachia. Compared with developments in the West, public architectural programmes in Wallachia began to diversify, gaining autonomy, rather late in the day, not until after the middle of the century. The problem of the Principality’s prisons was resolved in various forms, more often than not resulting from improvisation or adaptation of usually inadequate spaces, sections of buildings or complexes with administrative or religious functions.

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

In the late-mediaeval period, civil prisons were crammed into unlit, unventilated, insalubrious cellars or mines, prisoners usually being held there “... for short periods prior to execution, which was the most frequent punishment.”¹ In the eighteenth century, the number of prisons in the Principality was high, and not only the *domnitor* (ruling prince) and his high officials, but also the clergy had their own prisons, where they sent convicts,² and which also provided them with a constant source of income, in the form of the tax paid by prisoners to purchase their freedom.³ The legal code passed by Prince Alexander Ipsilanti (in force between 1774 and 1817) abolished prisons run by high officials and the local clergy, thereby attempting to put a stop to countless abuses in the administration of justice.

Besides civil prisons, in the early mediaeval period confinement in monasteries was also practised, a form of “corrective imprisonment,” which was temporary or permanent (the prisoner sometimes becoming a monk), in contrast to the “punitive imprisonment” practised by the lay authorities.⁴ Corrective imprisonment was reserved mainly for the clergy and boyar class, whose members had either transgressed or presented some danger to the ruling prince, for which reason we might speak of political imprisonment, and also involved confiscation of property. Introduction of the notion of correction was the privilege of the ecclesiastical courts, which aimed not only to administer punishment, but also to redeem and re-educate the prisoner with a view to his reintegration into the community. The ecclesiastical courts resorted to monastery prisons mainly for women and more rarely for men, who were sent either to the Metropolia prison or the civil prisons.⁵ Besides the isolation created by their usually remote locations, the monastery prisons also represented a “space for meditation on one’s sins.”⁶ For women, the usual places of detention were the Dintr-un Lemn and Viforâta monasteries, while for men they were part of the monastic complexes at Tismana,⁷ Snagov (given its remote location, “madmen” were also sent here, with the aim of isolating them rather than correcting them), Cernica, Căldărușani, Mărgineni, Arnota and Secu⁸ (reserved for priests and monks who had infringed ecclesiastical laws and more rarely for boyars or husbands guilty of domestic violence).⁹

The monasteries that included prisons did not have specific architectural or functional solutions, and the convicts were imprisoned in cells under the supervision of the monks, who more often than not lacked the means necessary to perform the task of re-education. Thus, those imprisoned were neither monks nor laymen participating in the life of the monastic community in any way, but rather “intruders”¹⁰ who might be treated kindly or, on the contrary, wretchedly: imprisoned in narrow spaces, without doors or windows, usually cellars with a trapdoor in the ceiling, through which food and water was lowered to the prisoner at intervals.¹¹ Nor were the prisons run by the lay authorities adapted to the special needs of their function. More often than not the detention area was the improvised result of re-assignment of an existing space; it was supervised by the men of the prison owner, who often came to understandings with the convicts.¹²

¹ Rădulescu 1910, p. 12.

² Ghițulescu 2004, p. 367.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 376.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 366–374. The issue is widely discussed in the analysis of prisons typical of the eighteenth century.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 368–369 and Mazilu 2006, p. 487. Adulterous women were sent to monasteries for open-ended periods. In the eighteenth century the law nonetheless limited the punishment to two years, leaving it up to the ecclesiastical judge to rule whether the woman should become a nun in cases where the cuckolded husband refused reconciliation.

⁶ Mazilu 2006, p. 487.

⁷ National Archives of Romania – Central Historical National Archives (N.A.R.-C.H.N.A.), Ministry of Religion and Public Instruction (M.R.P.I.) collection, file 312/1850, f. 189. In 1860, the Abbot of Tismana Monastery spoke of the existence of a make-shift prison for women.

⁸ Mazilu 2006, p. 488.

⁹ Ghițulescu 2004, pp. 370–371.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 372.

¹¹ Brătuleanu 1994, p. 20. The author mentions the skeletons discovered in cells with no exterior access that were to be found in the cellar of the abbot’s house at the Dintr-un Lemn Monastery.

¹² Ghițulescu 2004, p. 375.

Despite the existence of special places for prisoners, in Bucharest the situation was dire, and poorly organised security meant that escape was often easy. Those who did not manage to escape had to endure squalor, illness, hunger and cold. Up until the mid-nineteenth century, prison architecture and regulations were not a priority for the authorities, despite the stipulations of the Organic Regulations:¹³ “... the governors shall take care that the prisons be safe and clean, lest the convicts’ health be damaged.”¹⁴ In addition, the Ordinary Common Assembly passed the Prisons Regulations,¹⁵ a text that was later expanded and incorporated in its extended form within the Organic Regulations passed in 1837. Besides administrative matters, the Regulations also included stipulations as to “... the creation of prisons and prison buildings in the counties.”¹⁶ Article 117 of the Organic Regulations provided for the establishment of special institutions to administer prisons in the principality: the *Vornicia* (Governorship) of Prisons, headed by a *Vornic* who replaced the older office of the High *Armaş*, seconded by lesser *armaşi*, *zapcii* (constables) and *călăi* (executioners).¹⁷ Hierarchically, the rank of *Vornic* of Prisons – in charge of the inspector of all prisons in Bucharest, the assistant in Craiova responsible for the penitentiaries of Little Wallachia, and the *cinovnici* or directors of each establishment – was below that of the *Vornic* of the Police. The position of *Vornic* of Prisons was maintained up until the Decree passed by Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1859, subsequently being replaced with that of “Administrator of Prisons and Penitentiaries”, subordinate to the Interior Ministry. From 1860 the penitentiary system was run by a “Director General of Prisons,” and after the unification of the services of the two Principalities in 1862, the post of General Inspector¹⁸ was established within the Interior Ministry.

During the period of the Organic Regulations in Wallachia there were six principal civil prisons (Bucharest, Giurgiu, Brăila, Craiova, and the Telega salt mines in Prahova, for prisoners from Greater Wallachia, and Ocnele Mari in Vâlcea, for prisoners from Lesser Wallachia) and a further fourteen gaols in the counties, as well as “specially organised” cells in the monasteries. The salt mines, reserved for men only, were used to imprison those with life sentences, but convicts with fixed-term (*cu soroc*) sentences were also sent to Ocnele Mari (“the large salt mines”).¹⁹ The other principal prisons housed convicts whose sentences were not so harsh. While the principal prisons were funded from the state budget, the county gaols were administered using the revenues of the *maghistratură* (magistracy), the greater part of which money came from the labour of the prisoners. In towns where there was no magistracy, the gaols were subordinate to the *Vornicie*, but were run by a local *poliţ-maiester* (*Polizeimaister*).²⁰

The reforms also dealt with the way in which both the principal and the county prisons were built. To the Regulations of 1832 is appended a design drawn up by the State Engineer (subordinate to the Department of Interior Affairs), Colonel Vladimir Blaremburg, who became *Vornic* of Prisons in 1841²¹ (Fig. 1). Blaremburg’s drawings²² are summary, consisting of a plan and a view of a prison (*Maison de correction pour les districts*). The layout of the complex was simple: a courtyard enclosed by walls, with spaces

¹³ The Organic Regulations, adopted in Wallachia in 1831 and in Moldavia in 1832, were legal texts of a constitutional nature. Drawn up under the supervision and with the direct involvement of Russia, and subsequently ratified by the Ottoman Porte, the Regulations, despite their conservatism, were the first step towards the modernisation of the Principalities. Besides introducing fundamental principles – such as the separation of the powers of state – the Regulations also included numerous stipulations as to state institutions, the economy, infrastructure, the army, etc. The legislation was amended and expanded and remained in force until the Union of the Principalities in 1859.

¹⁴ Regulamentele Organice 1944, p. 117. Under Article 297 of the Organic Regulations for Wallachia it is stated that “... the rulership shall make sure that prisons are safe and clean, in order not to damage the convicts’ health.”

¹⁵ Introduction to *Regulamentele Organice ale Valahiei şi Moldovei*, eds. Paul Negulescu and George Alexianu, vol. I, Bucharest, 1944, p. VIII and IX.

¹⁶ Filitti 1915, p. 61. Appendix to Chapter VII: “Additional Laws”.

¹⁷ Stănciulescu 1933, p. 19.

¹⁸ Filitti 1915, p. 48, note 1.

¹⁹ Stănciulescu 1933, p. 33.

²⁰ Filitti 1915, p. 49.

²¹ *Buletin. Gazetă Oficială*, Bucharest, 1841, pp. 158-159.

²² N.A.R.-C.H.N.A., *Vornicia of the Prisons* collection, file 276/1833, f. 9.

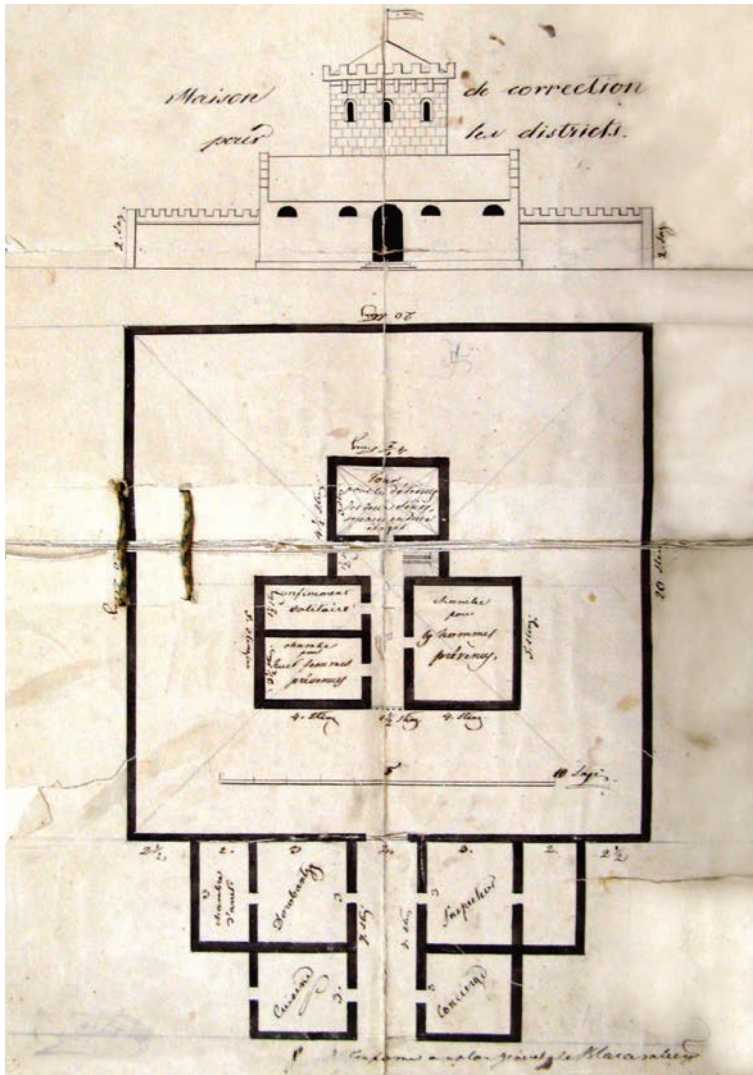


Fig. 1. Vladimir Blaremberg, *Maison de correction pour les districts*, 1833 (N.A.R.-C.H.N.A., *Vornicia of the Prisons* collection, file 276/1833, f. 9).

for the prisoners grouped in the centre. The compact building, dominated by a tower that alludes to mediaeval fortifications, housed cells for long-term prisoners, separate from those for those being held under arrest, which included a solitary-confinement cell. Those under arrest were segregated by sex, and it is to be noted that the men had larger cells. On both sides of the main entrance there were annexes and spaces for staff: a gatekeeper's room, a guardroom, an arms room, an inspector's office, and a kitchen. The design did not include details as to the practicalities of construction and was sooner the sketch of an amateur architect. The difficulty of achieving the model "house of correction" was demonstrated by the results of the colonel's initiative. Although the *Vornicia* had laid down the interval of 1833-1836 for the building of the principal prisons at Giurgiu, Brăila, Telega and Ocnele Mari, the plans were not followed and the buildings, more often than not makeshift, fell into disrepair, and the prisoners were moved to the old monastic complexes.²³ Even if Vladimir Blaremberg's proposals were not carried out, they laid the groundwork for the creation of cellblock prisons, a format common in western architecture since the early seventeenth century.²⁴

The prisons that remained at the design stage and those that were actually built were minimally adapted to the needs of detention. At the Telega salt mines,

for example, the surface gaol had to have two "separations": one for those with fixed-term sentences and one for those serving life imprisonment or sentences to death.²⁵ Besides these areas, where the prisoners lived together, there were also solitary-confinement cells for the isolation of the insubordinate and recalcitrant. Those who tried to break out of prison and their accomplices were confined and beaten (two hundred blows of the cane) in these cells. The prison also had a separate hospital wing and a block for administrative staff. Nevertheless, the first building to house prisoners sentenced to fixed terms with hard labour was not built until 1843. The prisoners had hitherto slept in abandoned mine shafts on "mesh beds, with straw, hay or rush

²³ Dianu 1900, p. 51.

²⁴ Pevsner 1979, p. 161.

²⁵ Since 1823 nobody had been executed in Wallachia, despite capital punishment being re-introduced at the demand of the Russian governor Pavel Kiseleff.

mattresses,²⁶ with heating provided by wood fires at the entrance to the shaft. In 1847, French physician Joseph Caillat visited the prisons at Telega and Ocnele Mari, where he found two hundred convicts, eighty with fixed-term sentences and one hundred and twenty serving life imprisonment. Whereas those with fixed-term sentences slept with their legs tied to wooden bunks in the surface prison, the life prisoners rarely left the salt mines, and their suffering led Caillat to write that a death sentence would have been kinder than the agonising three or four years they usually survived underground.²⁷ In the counties, there were separate cells according to the prisoners' sentences. Those imprisoned for "political" offences were isolated from other prisoners in rooms at the county courts or administrative buildings and were supervised by a *polizeimaister*.²⁸ In Bucharest and Craiova, where there were prisons with capacities to hold two hundred and forty convicts, there were four sections: two for men, divided into those "under preventative arrest" and those "punished", and two for women, divided according to the same criteria. Besides cells for those under arrest, there also had to be an infirmary and a chapel, but the latter of these was usually lacking. Visiting Bucharest in 1838, French diplomat Edouard Antoine Thouvenel described the city's gaols as being in a deplorable state compared with those in France. Nevertheless, he saw fit to note the efforts made by Logothete Manolache Florescu – the *Vornic* of Prisons up until 1846 – to reform the penitentiary system, "reflecting" the ideas of Tocqueville and Beaumont.²⁹

During the reign of Gheorghe Bibescu (1842-1848) attempts were made to modernise the Wallachian penitentiary system by means of reforming measures: separation of prisoners by type of sentence, payment of prisoners in the gaols and salt mines for their labour, and so on. Manolache Florescu pushed the idea of prison reform further, attempting to abolish "punishment in the salt mines". The reforms also continued during the reign of Barbu Știrbei (1849-1853, 1854-1856), who, as an extension of his brother's attempts to modernise the salt mines, making them independent of a penal system described by contemporaries as barbaric,³⁰ met the Emperor Franz Josef in Hermannstadt (Sibiu) in 1852 and requested that he send him a mining engineer experienced in "the various phases of subterranean salt extraction". Engineer Carol Karatșioni was appointed to work in Wallachia. He later wrote *The History of the Romanian Salt Mines* (1870), a rather subjective work, which besides giving an account of the author's rôle in the development of modern salt mining, also described the state of the salt mines at Telega and the dangers to which the "arrested" were exposed.

In 1851, Benjamin Nicolas Marie Appert, the former director general of prisons in France, visited the Prahova mines and a number of other penitentiaries in Wallachia, but his descriptions of the buildings are scanty. In addition to recording the harsh conditions for prisoners, Appert raised a number of issues connected to the poor administration of the institutions he visited. In the prison at the Snagov Monastery he found around 160 to 170 convicts serving between two and eight years, who were held together in damp rooms without being given work, which turned them into "... idlers with strange habits".³¹ At the time, there were four or five monks who looked after maintenance, but there was no infirmary or any "capable and compassionate priest".³² A decade later, in 1862, Alexandru Odobescu published in *Revista Română* a description of his visit to the Snagov Monastery, converted in 1821 into a gaol for a maximum of thirty prisoners, "... who did not merit the harsher punishment of labouring in the salt mines or the ports on the banks of the Danube"³³ and who "... through penitence cleanse their minds of sins".³⁴

²⁶ Stănculescu 1933, p. 34.

²⁷ Bușă 2010, pp. 539-540 (translation of Joseph Caillat, *Voyage médicale dans les provinces danubiennes*, in *L'Union Médicale*, Paris, March-May, 1854).

²⁸ Broșteanu 1901, p. 581.

²⁹ Cernovodeanu, Bușă 2006, p. 819 (translation of Edouard Antoine Thouvenel, *La Hongrie et la Valachie (Souvenirs de Voyage et notices historiques)*, Paris, 1840).

³⁰ Broșteanu 1901, p. 583.

³¹ Bușă 2010, pp. 695-696.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 696.

³³ Odobescu 1862, p. 229.

³⁴ Șerbănescu 1944, p. 79.

Although the legislation laid down that the State was financially responsible for prisoners, the convicts at Snagov were kept at the expense of the monastery, which before secularisation earned significant revenues from its vast estates.³⁵ To meet the new functional requirements, the old monastery structures, with the exception of the church, were demolished in 1840 and replaced with new buildings intended for the convicts, the prison's petty functionaries, and the monks that had remained at the monastery.³⁶ The reconstruction work consisted of a rectangular structure with the church at the centre, next to which there was a prison yard.³⁷ Access to the monastery island was by a "travelling bridge", propelled across the lake with oars.³⁸ Apart from this brief description no other information has been preserved as to the manner in which the prison was organised. But according to a report written by "monastic architect" Johann Schlatter³⁹ in 1850,⁴⁰ it had been poorly built from the outset, and due to any concrete measures on the part of the abbots it fell into disrepair and the detainees were moved to the gaol at Mărgineni Monastery in 1864.⁴¹

In the account of Wallachia that Thibault Lefebvre published in Paris in 1857, it emerges that Barbu Știrbei's reforms had had a visible impact on at least a part of the prisons system:

"In Wallachia the children are separated from the adults, those under preventive detention are placed in a separate place <from the convicted criminals> and all are housed in salubrious places. Under the supervision of warders the prisoners labour on public works, on paving the streets, or they are hired out to private persons for various jobs. They work among the populace, with shackles on their legs, without inspiring the repulsion that they do in France. The state, the city or the private person that hires a convict pays him a wage. A part of the wage is allocated to prison expenses, and the other part is handed over to him at the end of his sentence."⁴²

Despite giving a detailed description of the prisoners' lives and the Wallachian prisons system and its funding, Lefebvre does not provide any description of the prison buildings.

In 1862, Alexandru Ioan Cuza passed the "Regulations for the Organisation of the Penitential and Benevolent Establishments Service in Romania",⁴³ whereby the prisons of the two Principalities were unified under the administration of the Interior Ministry, which created two special offices, both headed by Frenchman Frederic Dodun des Perrières, the author of the Regulations and the future prisons law (1874), which was based on the French model and remained in force until the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Cuza's Regulations revised the prisons hierarchy. Preventative prisons were established for prisoners awaiting sentencing, correctional prisons for convicts with sentences between six days and two years, and confinement prisons for those with long-term or life sentences with hard labour, including in the salt mines. Young people below the age of twenty were treated as a special category and sent to correctional prisons. There was strict segregation of the sexes in the prisons, and prisoners still under trial were kept separate from convicts. Whereas men were separated according to their type of sentence, women were imprisoned together regardless of sentence.⁴⁵ Short-term convicts and young people were usually involved in agricultural or industrial work, a part of the money they earned being used by the state for their upkeep and the remainder being returned to them on their release. Those serving long sentences, however, were sent to the salt mines. In regard to the organisation of the prisons, Article 283 of the Regulations states that "... in the absence of prison cellblocks" prisoners were to be accommodated in dormitories that had to be "... as

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Odobescu 1862, p. 247.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 236-237.

³⁸ *Buletin Oficial* 1853, p. 55. Announcement by the Vornicia of Prisons regarding a tender for the rebuilding of a floating bridge on Snagov Lake for the use of prisoners in the gaol there.

³⁹ See Moldovan 2013.

⁴⁰ Șerbănescu 1944, p. 83.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

⁴² Bușă 2010, pp. 245-299, excerpt from Thibault Lefebvre, *Diplomatic and Economic Studies on Wallachia*, Paris, 2nd edition, 1857.

⁴³ Bujoreanu 1873, p. 821. Decree 630 of 11 august 1862.

⁴⁴ Rădulescu 1910, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Bujoreanu 1873, p. 821.

large as possible, and the place of each convict must be separated from the rest by planks a hand's breadth in height."⁴⁶ However, the organisation of the prisons system in accordance with the Regulations of 1862 lasted just three years and in 1865 the "Penal and Criminal Instruction Code" was introduced, substantially altering the organisation of prisons and the regime of punishments.

In the context of the modernisation of the prisons system in Wallachia, the prison designed and built by Johann Schlatter and Karl Benisch at the Arnota Monastery was a first, inaugurating an architectural programme that was not to come to maturity until the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While in the majority of cases information about the construction and organisation of the civil and monastic prisons is vague and fragmentary, in the case of Arnota, despite the loss of the plans, archive documents and period accounts and pictures allow us to reconstruct to a large extent the local beginnings of one of the modern programmes of architecture.

The "princely prison" at the Arnota Monastery. According to the legend recorded by Grigore Tocilescu from the Abbot of Arnota Monastery, Father Severian Marinescu,⁴⁷ which is quoted in the twentieth-century literature, the complex was founded by Matei Basarab after escaping from pursuing Turks and hiding in that place. In the absence of written sources, the monument was initially dated to the year 1635,⁴⁸ and it was supposed that the buildings were erected in the place of originally wooden structures.⁴⁹ In regard to the monastery church there are definite sources, however.⁵⁰ Building work was completed in 1638, when the monastery was endowed by the voievode. The monastery church, made of unplastered brick, as a report from 1881 attests,⁵¹ was built to serve as a princely necropolis, as the circumstances in which the prince died led to him being buried in Tîrgoviște. During the reign of Mihnea III (1658-59), the founder's bones were interred at the monastery along with those of his father, Danciu the Dvornik. Like other churches and monasteries founded by Matei Basarab, Arnota was "renewed" by Constantine Brîncoveanu, but the significance of these alterations remains unclear given the lack of definite sources.

The complex was badly affected by the earthquake of 1838, and the buildings deteriorated even further as a result of a storm in 1846, as recorded by Abbot Anania.⁵² The little information we have about the way in which the monastery was structured before the alterations carried out in the mid-nineteenth century has been preserved in the brief description given by Paul of Aleppo and the census of 1829. The only graphic representation of the complex in its old form, an image of doubtful accuracy, is the sketch included in the "Plan of the main domain of Arnota Monastery", executed in 1838 by land-survey engineer G. Pleșoianu⁵³ (Figs. 2, 3). In 1851, at the request of Abbot Chesarie Arnoteanul,⁵⁴ the monastery complex (excepting the church) began to be rebuilt according to plans drawn up by "monastic architect" Johann Schlatter. The abbot's description does not provide data to allow us to evaluate the architecture of the buildings that made up the precinct, but it is highly likely that they did not display any great aesthetic quality. Although an intention to begin these works had been declared during the reign of Gheorghe Bibescu ("the previous reign")⁵⁵, design and building work at Arnota did not commence until 1851, in the reign of Barbu Știrbei, with the declared aim of constructing a prison for "... insubordinate boyars or those that are wicked and

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 841, art. 283.

⁴⁷ Lahovari *et alii* 1898, p. 124.

⁴⁸ Nicolae 1982, p. 67.

⁴⁹ Moiescu 2002, p. 90 and Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru 1976, p. 192, note 179.

⁵⁰ Cristescu 1937, pp. 17-18.

⁵¹ Monumente Naționale II 1881, p. 193.

⁵² Corfus 1975, p. 146.

⁵³ N.A.R.-C.H.N.A., Plans collection, Vilcea County, no. 42.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, M.R.P.I. collection, file 373/1851, f. 5. The document, signed by the abbot and dated 27 January 1851, was addressed to the Department of Religion within the Ministry of Religions and Public Education, requesting that restoration work should commence.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, file 162/1851, f. 9.



Figs. 2-3. G. Pleșoianu (land-surveyor), „Plan of the main domain of Arnota Monastery”, 1838 (N.A.R.-C.H.N.A., Plans collection, Vilcea County, no. 42).

disturb the princely peace.”⁵⁶ Following the report made by the abbot of Arnota and the prince’s acceptance of the plans and estimates drawn up by Johann Schlatter, in June 1851 the Department of Religion announced a tender for carrying out the works.⁵⁷ The official document is a highly suggestive illustration of the manner in which tenders were held for building work to be carried out using public funds. The contract was to be signed based on tenders drawn up using the architect’s estimates. Schlatter and his partner Karl Benisch undertook to carry out the building work, and this was confirmed in a document issued by the princely chancellery in 1852.⁵⁸ The document states that the contractors were required to complete the building work at Arnota by 1853, concomitantly with that at Tismana Monastery. Because the deadline was exceeded, the ruling prince demanded that checks on the stage of the works be carried out, appointing Austrian architect Anton Hefft as inspector. Hefft’s report⁵⁹ gives us a detailed picture of the stage of the reconstruction work: Schlatter and Beneș’s achievements “... from the beginning of construction up to now [*i.e.* 1852] are limited to preparatory work.” This preparatory work included rebuilding the aqueduct; making around 42,000 bricks, which had not yet been fired, meaning it was not yet possible to determine their quality; cutting a part of the timber needed (beech from nearby woods); and repairing the road, which up to then “had been impossible even to walk on, but on which now is possible to ride on horseback.” The buildings of the old monastery had been demolished and the ground prepared for the new structures. Building work was completed long after the deadline stipulated by the contract, in the autumn of 1856 (Fig. 4), as attested by the application sent by Johann Schlatter and Karl Benisch to the Department of Religion requesting that a commission be appointed to take possession of the finished buildings.⁶⁰ The year 1856 was also inscribed on the stone tablet still preserved above the main entrance, below the belfry on the south side of the rebuilt complex.

⁵⁶ Dianu 1910, p. 53, note 1.

⁵⁷ N.A.R.-C.H.N.A., M.R.P.I. collection, file 162/1851, f. 9, request regarding the holding of a tender, and file 373/1851, f. 66 for the command signed by Prince Barbu Știrbei and the Secretary of State, Ioan Manu, dated 19 May 1851.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, file 60/1851, f. 309. Document signed by Barbu Știrbei and dated 5 July 1852.

⁵⁹ N.A.R.-C.H.N.A., M.R.P.I. collection, file 98/1849, f. 12-16.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, file 312/1850, f. 115.



Fig. 4. Arnota Monastery, view from south-east at the end of the 19th century (Antoniou, 1901).

Drawings for the various design phases of the new complex have not been discovered. The structures built by Schlatter have been preserved only in part: the east half of the main (south) wing. Given this situation, reconstruction of the phase, insofar as this is possible, has been based on primary and secondary written sources, as well as on period images. Arnota was the first prison with individual cells to be built in Wallachia, employing a compact design, more than half a century after radial-plan cellblock prisons had become widespread in Western Europe, modelled on Pierre Gabriel Bugniet's ideal prison (1765) and the *Maison de Force* near Ghent (1772-75), and, less frequently, circular-plan prisons inspired by Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* (1791).⁶¹ Visiting the monastery in 1859, T. Margot claims that it had been "... adopted to the modern style, but with a twofold purpose: that of a hermitage and that of a state prison", adding that for the second purpose "... the location could not have been more appropriate or more severe".⁶² Although it would seem that only one prisoner was held here,⁶³ Arnota's function as a political prison was also maintained during the reign of Cuza, who, in his turn, had repairs made to the prison wing.⁶⁴ As long as there was a prison there, the monastery was home to only one monk, who looked after the church. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the staff was made up of a caretaker who also officiated religious services, a sexton, and a cantor, in the pay of the government.⁶⁵ This state of affairs does not necessarily demonstrate any concern for historical monuments, but rather a respect for the symbolic nature of the complex.

The manner in which the complex's functions and the prison in particular were organised is known to us thanks to the accounts of Grigore Dianu, former Director of Prisons, and Virgil Drăghiceanu, and also the plan of the ground floor made by I. Vulcan in 1904 (Fig. 5). The west wing of the complex was entirely taken up by the prison, while the south wing housed the monks' cells and the belfry. The east side of the complex was enclosed by a low wall, which also extended northwards, where there were stables sited outside

⁶¹ Pevsner 1979, pp. 161-163.

⁶² Nicolae 1982, p. 70.

⁶³ Năsturel 1912, p. 270. The statement is contradicted by Staurophoros Meletie Răuțu, who in 1908 wrote that "in the cells were also imprisoned many boyars" (Videscu, Rucăreanu 2011, p. 116).

⁶⁴ Drăghiceanu 1933, p. 16.

⁶⁵ Lahovari *et alii* 1898, p. 124.

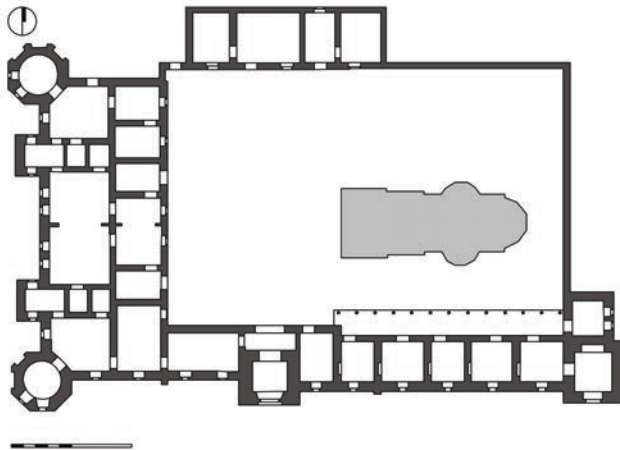


Fig. 5. Arnota Monastery, ground floor, 1904 (after I. Vulcan, “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism).

the precincts. The prison building, flanked by two polygonal towers, had three storeys, the upper storey having eight spacious cells intended for boyars: six were for “second-hand” boyars and two for boyars of the first rank. On the ground floor there was a room where “common criminals” were to be imprisoned, flanked on either side by narrow cells “barely large enough for a man.” The cells for the petty boyars had tall, narrow windows with iron bars facing onto the exterior of the monastery, while the windows in the high-ranking boyars’ cells were of normal size, but still fitted with bars. Within the monastery courtyard, the prison had a corridor where the prisoners could walk, which had to be permanently guarded by a sentry.⁶⁶ From Drăghiceanu’s description it is apparent that the prisoners’ cells were more comfortable than the monks’.⁶⁷ The monks’ cells were arranged

“according to the principle of a barracks,” all in a row along a corridor with a glass partition, painstakingly repaired in 1932⁶⁸ and preserved to this day.

Suggestive of a modest castle rather than a “magnificent citadel,”⁶⁹ as some contemporaries described it, the architecture of the complex rebuilt by Schlatter employed the same idioms also to be found in the reconstructions of the Bistrița and Tismana monasteries. The composition did not follow a unitary schema, as the wings set aside for the different functions were each treated individually. The main wing – the south side of the complex – was asymmetrical in composition, punctuated by three towers, two at each end, one a parallelepiped, the other polygonal, and the other a belfry, positioned out of alignment with the axis. Insofar as the depiction of the precincts in 1838 corresponded to the situation on the ground at that time, we might put forward the hypothesis that the asymmetry of the reconstructed buildings was due to the preservation and incorporation of parts of the old precincts, which themselves had been asymmetrical. The prison on the west side, on the other hand, had a symmetrical exterior elevation, flanked by polygonal towers, similar to those at the Bistrița and Tismana monasteries in their volumetric and plastic solutions. The prismatic volume that housed the cells had small exterior-facing windows in the upper part of the rooms, the series they formed being interrupted by the two *avants-corps* housing the latrines. Despite the economy of decorative elements and the starkness of the complex as a whole, references to the *Rundbogenstil* idiom⁷⁰ were numerous: the Lombard cornice, the highlighting of the façade panels with *piles engagées* capped with decorative *flèches*, and the allusions to the North-Italian Romanesque style evident in the belfry tower.

The contemporary collective imagination enhanced the peculiar fame of Arnota. The threat of being

⁶⁶ Dianu 1900, p. 53, note 1.

⁶⁷ Drăghiceanu 1933, p. 16.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*. The author cites the repair work undertaken on the corridors alongside the cells a year before the publication of the article, *i.e.* in 1932.

⁶⁹ *Românul*, no. 227, Bucharest, 30 September 1861, p. 862.

⁷⁰ The *Rundbogenstil* (round-arch style) originates in the early architectural experiments of Karl Friedrich Schinkel and the concept was later theorised in an essay by Heinrich Hübsch, *In welchem Style sollen wir bauen?*, published in 1828. Attempting to find arguments for a new formal approach to architecture, Hübsch laid the groundwork for an eclectic direction with sources in the ancient and mediaeval/Romanesque past, which rested on the two central themes of the culture of the epoch: a Romantic inclination towards the past, imbued with deep religious faith, and a fascination with the rapid evolution of contemporary technology. Developing in parallel with the revival of ancient and late-mediaeval (gothic) styles, the *Rundbogenstil* quickly spread throughout the German speaking states and also had a major influence in the United States up until the end of the nineteenth century (see Curran 2003).



Figs. 6-7. Arnota Monastery: the west wing in 1930 / the belfry seen from the monastery court in 1930 (N.A.R.-C.H.N.A., Photographical Documents collection – Albums).

sent to Arnota for “political crimes” transformed the monastery gaol, which had never been used, into a significant place, one that, according to contemporary accounts, “... came to be the country’s and the populace’s greatest fear.”⁷¹ “The name Arnota remained proverbial and even long afterwards the saying ‘to Arnota with him!’ could still be heard.”⁷² Those directly involved in ruling the country and their critics made a decisive contribution to the prison’s renown as a place of imprisonment for those who opposed the ruling prince. In political commentaries in the press of the time there were frequent references to the “... magnificent prison at Arnota, built with the State’s money, whose cells and cellars were ready for whoever ventured to appeal to justice or to speak to the Rumanians about rights, about their country’s autonomy.”⁷³ Of the abuses of the “regulation boyar class” it was said: “... crimes among which the least warrants no less than the imprisonment of the perpetrator for life in that magnificent citadel at Arnota [...] intended by Prince Știrbei for political criminals, as he defined them, which is to say, for those who ventured during his reign to speak out against arbitrary rule, against tyranny and above all against the benevolent protection of the Tsar.”⁷⁴

The monastery buildings began to deteriorate in the 1870s. In 1881, the commission set up by the Ministry of Religions ascertained that the structures built during the reign of Știrbei “... lacked the care required for the maintenance of a large building, and today it is largely in ruins. The wing in front

⁷¹ Pelimon 1858, p. 102.

⁷² Dianu 1900, p. 53, note 1.

⁷³ *Românul*, nos. 220-221, 9 August 1861, p. 698.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 227, 30 September 1861, p. 862. The commentary is drawn from an article by Ștefan Sihlianu, “On the Administration in Our Country from 1832 to 1859” (a continuation of editorials in nos. 251 and 258).



Fig. 8. The complex seen from the south-east in 1930 (N.A.R.-C.H.N.A., Photographical Documents collection – Albums).

of the church, where there are twelve separate apartments, formerly intended for the internment of those convicted of political offences in particular, is in quite good condition, but the quarters of the service personnel cannot be moved here because this part of the building was constructed as a prison, with small windows up by the ceiling. The other wing of the building with two storeys, in which the monks were meant to live, is everywhere in disrepair, and the ceilings and even the floors of the upper storey have caved in and in places the beams have rotted. Finally, the belfry, likewise in disrepair, has been damaged by the rain.”⁷⁵ The two members who visited the monument – writer Ioan Slavici and architect G. Mandrea – demanded that repairs be made to the monument, which had been founded by Matei Basarab, the prince “who created the most national epoch in our history.”⁷⁶ Their recommendations do not exclude the continued use of the buildings for the function that had been established for them by Barbu Știrbei in the mid-nineteenth century: “Arnota being situated in a most isolated spot, it would in the opinion of the commission be a very suitable penitentiary for the high clergy and other well-off people convicted for deeds that cannot be classed as common crimes, particularly for people more unfortunate than they are morally corrupt, whom society must shield from contact with genuine evil-doers.”⁷⁷

Despite estimates being drawn up for the repairs, concrete measures were late in arriving and the complex

⁷⁵ *Monumente Naționali II 1881*, p. 194.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 232.



Figs. 9-10. Arnota Monastery: the south wing after the recent alterations (H. Moldovan 2009) / North-eastern view after the recent alterations (H. Moldovan 2012).



Figs. 11-12. Arnota Monastery: current views of the interior of the complex (H. Moldovan 2012).

gradually fell into ruins. In 1909, Raymund Netzhammer⁷⁸ wrote: “... the roof is broken, and the destructive effects of the rain may everywhere be observed; even some of the walls have already collapsed, allowing one to look inside some of the formerly inhabited rooms.”⁷⁹ Pictures from the early 1930s show abandoned, roofless structures, and the only building still in use is the church. The situation was also described in the inspection report Drăghiceanu made at Arnota in 1933, in his capacity as secretary of the Commission for Historical Monuments: “We must draw attention to the unimaginable filthiness and neglect that reigns here and which, if it continues,

⁷⁸ Raymund Netzhammer (1862-1945), a Benedictine monk, appointed Catholic Archbishop of Bucharest in 1905, arrived in Romania in 1900 and remained until 1924. Besides studies on religious subjects, numismatics and archaeology, Netzhammer also wrote *Aus Rumänien. Streifzüge durch das Land und seine Geschichte* (1909) and *Die christlichen Altertümer der Dobrudscha* (1918), as well as a journal of his sojourn in Romania (published in Munich in 1995-96). Netzhammer was particularly interested in palaeo-Christian vestiges from Dobrudja, whose archaeological sites he visited many times. The first-hand information on discoveries in Dobrudja and research by archaeologists working in the region that are included and interpreted in *Die christlichen Altertümer der Dobrudscha*, a study which is still the fundamental source for early Christianity in the former Roman province of Scythia Minor (see Barnea 2010, pp. 79-88).

⁷⁹ Netzhammer 2010, p. 47.

will completely ruin what is left of this reminder of the times after 1848.”⁸⁰ The report did not lead to any action to save what still remained, and the complete ruin of the complex, already affected by a fire in 1923,⁸¹ was inevitable (Figs. 6-8). Nevertheless, at the insistence of Abbot Cristescu, the Commission for Historical Monuments began extensive restoration work in 1935. The project was headed by architect I. L. Atanasescu, the manner adopted complying with the preliminary findings, which stated that the architecture of the complex, as rebuilt by Johann Schlatter and Karl Benisch, “... must be preserved, inasmuch as it embodies a particular epoch in the development of modern architecture.” Likewise, the Commission’s report demanded a reduction in the “... belvederes and tall towers, which are unsuited to the location and mountain climate, in order to preserve the look of an austere fortress that the monastery had in the past.”⁸² The first phase of restoration was completed in 1936. Work continued on the complex after the earthquake of 1940, but in 1944 it was abandoned for the next thirty years.⁸³

In the second half of the twentieth century, the complex lost a significant number of its structures: the west half of the main wing (situated to the south), the west wing with its two polygonal corner towers, and part of the buildings to the north. In 1988, there were discussions as to the need for extensive restoration work, but this was delayed for more than a decade. Four years after the conversion of the monastery into a convent in 1999, restoration and extension work began at Arnota, being completed in 2007 (Figs. 9-12). The results are dubious from a number of points of view, however. It is possible to speak of restoration work only in the case of the church and the salvaged section of the buildings constructed by Schlatter, as the additions mimic in places the mediaevalist architecture of the nineteenth century. The main (south) façade of the complex has been rebuilt symmetrically – the south-west corner tower was rebuilt to a square plan, and the west and north sides have been closed off with accommodation buildings and a chapel – with a new function, situated outside the nineteenth-century precincts, partly incorporating the old surrounding wall. The brutality of the new volumes, the cheap and often unsuitable materials (pardonable due to limited resources), the strident colours and the coarseness of some of the details distract the attention and distort the perception of what little authenticity has been preserved. Undoubtedly, the irreversible losses suffered by the buildings of the monastic complex at Arnota, as well as the unfortunate recent extensions, are a result usually unintentional ignorance of the built heritage of the nineteenth century. Disinterest in conservation of the architecture that resulted from the superposition or merging of the eclectic experiments of the nineteenth century – themselves not lacking in cultural interest and often spectacular – with significant examples of native mediaeval architecture has been heightened by ignorance, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the perpetuation of contempt for the work of the numerous foreign practitioners (whether architects or not) “imported” during the phase in which Wallachian culture oriented itself towards western civilisation.⁸⁴

Bibliographical abbreviations:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru 1976 | M.M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru (coord.), <i>Călători străini despre Țările Române, VI, Partea I. Paul de Alep</i> , București, 1976. |
| Antoniou 1901 | A. Antoniu, <i>Album general al României</i> , Partea I, Dresda și Berlin, 1901. |
| Barnea 2010 | A. Barnea, <i>Contribuția lui Raymund Netzhammer (1862-1945)</i> , în A. Barnea (coord.), <i>Primul secol de arheologie în România</i> , București, 2010, pp. 79-88. |

⁸⁰ Drăghiceanu 1933, p. 16.

⁸¹ Nicolae 1982, p. 70.

⁸² Opreș 2001, p. 383.

⁸³ Videscu, Rucăreanu 2011, p. 119.

⁸⁴ The first phase of modernity in the Principalities was that which immediately followed the end of Phanariot rule in 1821, the decisive break with the “old order”, which was reinforced by the adoption in 1831 of the Organic Regulations, allowing development based on the models and values of western culture. In architecture, western influences arrived mainly via architects or amateurs employed by the ruling prince, the state or members of the elite. Far from the complexity of the debates and achievements of western Europe, the architecture of Wallachia up until the 1870s was the result of assimilation of the influences of western civilisation, manifested outside any coherent movement or style and autonomous in its evolution. After the winning of independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and the proclamation of Carol as King of Romania in 1881, the previously accumulated experience entered its mature phase, synchronous with western developments.

- Brătuleanu 1994 A. Brătuleanu, *Mănăstirea Dintr-un Lemn – Stăreția. Studiu istoric-arhitectural*, mss., București, 1994.
- Bujoreanu 1873 I. M. Bujoreanu, *Colecțiune de legiuirile României Vechi și Nuoii câte s-au promulgat pene la finele anului 1870. Legi, procedure, regulamente, decrete, instrucțiuni, formularii, convențiuni, concesiuni, statute, circulare instructive, tablouri. Înăvușită cu Pravila lui Caragea, legiuirile principelui B. D. Știrbei, Codulu Civiulu Vechiu alu Moldovei (Calimach), Manualu de Pravila Bisericescă și statutele coloniilor Bulgare din Bassarabia*, București, 1873.
- Bușă 2010 D. Bușă (coord.), *Călători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, vol. VI (1852-1856), București, 2010.
- Broșteanu 1901 C. Broșteanu, *Salinele noastre. Studiu istoric, juridic și economic asupra exploatărei salinelor și monopolului sărei la romani și români (753 a. Crist.-1900 d. Crist.)*, după documente literare, epigrafice legislative și economice, București, 1901, extras din T. Pascal, *D-nul Carol Caratșion și Salinele Române – Broșură apărută prin inițiativa și speșele unui însemnat număr de Români, amici ai Domnului Caratșioni*.
- Cernovodeanu, Bușă 2006 P. Cernovodeanu, D. Bușă (coords.), *Călători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea*, vol. III (1831-1840), București, 2006.
- Corfus 1975 I. Corfus, *Însemnări de demult*, Iași, 1975.
- Cristescu 1937 D. Cristescu, *Sfânta Mănăstire Arnota, Râmnicul-Vâlci*, 1937.
- Dianu 1900 G. I. Dianu, *Istoria închisorilor din România: studiu comparativ. Legi și obiceiuri*, București, 1900.
- Drăghiceanu 1933 V. Drăghiceanu, *Monumentele Olteniei. Raportul al II-lea*, BCMI, 1933, pp. 49-75.
- Filitti 1915 I. C. Filitti, *Domniile române sub Regulamentul Organic. 1834-1848*, București, 1915.
- Ghițulescu 2004 C. Ghițulescu, *În șalvari și cu ișlic. Biserică, sexualitate, căsătorie și divorț în Țara Românească a secolului al XVIII-lea*, București, 2004.
- Lahovari 1898 G. I. Lahovari, C. I. Brătianu, G. G. Tocilescu, *Marele dicționar geografic al României alcătuit și prelucrat după dicționarele parțiale pe județe*, vol. I, București, 1898.
- Mazilu 2006 D. H. Mazilu, *Lege și fărădelege în lumea românească veche*, Iași, 2006.
- Moldovan 2013 H. Moldovan, *Johann Schlatter: cultură occidentală și arhitectură românească (1831-1866)*, București, 2013.
- Moisescu 2002 C. Moisescu, *Arhitectura epocii lui Matei Basarab*, vol. I, București, 2002.
- Năsturel 1912 P. V. Năsturel, *Biserici, mănăstiri și schituri din Oltenia*, RIAF XII, București, 1912, pp. 268-333.
- Nicolae 1982 V. Nicolae, *Ctitoriile lui Matei Basarab*, București, 1982.
- Netzhhammer 2010 R. Netzhhammer, *Din România. Incursiuni prin această țară și istoria ei*, vol. I, București, 2010.
- Odobescu 1862 A. Odobescu, *Câteva ore la Snagov (1862)*, in *Opere alese*, vol. II, *Scrieri istorice, istorico-literare, filologice, folklorice, arheologice etc.*, București, 1941.
- Opriș 2001 I. Opriș, *Monumentele istorice din România (1850-1950)*, București, 2001.
- Pelimon 1858 A. Pelimon, *Impresiuni de călătorie în România*, București, (1858), 1984.
- Pevsner 1979 N. Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, Princetown University Press, (1976), 1979.
- Rădulescu 1910 C. Rădulescu, *Studiu penal comparat asupra trecerii administrațiunii închisorilor sub dependența Ministerului de Justiție*, București, 1910.
- Stănciulescu 1933 O. Stănciulescu, *Cercetări asupra regimului penitenciar român din veacul al XIX-lea, cu un studiu necunoscut al lui Constantin Moroiu „profesor obștesc de legi la școala rumânească dela Sf. Sava”*, Cluj, 1933.
- Șerbănescu 1944 N. I. Șerbănescu, *Istoria mănăstirii Snagov*, București, 1944.
- Videscu, Rucăreanu 2011 T. Videscu, A. Rucăreanu, *Sfânta mănăstire Arnota. Istorie și spiritualitate*, București, 2011.
- Monumente Naționali II 1881 *Monumente Naționali. Monastiri și biserici ortodoxe. Raporturi de la comisiunile întocmite pentru cercetarea lor*, Partea II, București, 1881.
- Regulamentele organice 1944 *Regulamentele organice ale Valahiei și Moldovei*, Negulescu vol. I, București, 1944.