

# KEY ASPECTS FOR THE DATING OF “SAINT NICHOLAS” CHURCH LOCATED IN THE VILLAGE IZVORU DE SUS, ARGEȘ COUNTY

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**Key words:** Izvoru de Sus, Peticari, “Saint Nicholas” Church, historical monument, dating

**Abstract:** Izvoru manor was first mentioned during the reign of Prince Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521), when it passed from the possession of Glavacioc Monastery to a boyar ownership. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest, this manor belonged to Știrbei boyars and was later transferred to Colfescu and Peticari families.

The only traces of the old mansion are the vaulted cellars of a ruined house, atop of which a new house was built toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the chapel – currently the parish church, severely deteriorated.

The history of this halidom, which was classified as a monument in 1930s, is unclear. Historical sources reveal contradictory information. On the one hand, some sources and the typological survey place the building of the church during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, the hypothesis of erecting it at the beginning of the subsequent century should not be ruled out, as suggested by the epigraphic documents.

According to these sources, “Saint Nicholas” Church of Izvoru de Sus was built during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Rezumat:** Moșia Izvoru – menționată în documente încă din vremea lui Neagoe Basarab (1512 – 1521) când trece din stăpânirea mănăstirii Glavacioc în posesiune boierească – devine, cel mai devreme în secolul al XVI-lea, moșie a boierilor Știrbei, trecând apoi în proprietatea familiilor Colfescu și Peticari. Astăzi, din curtea boierească constituită cel mai târziu în cursul secolului al XVII-lea se păstrează doar pivnița vechiului conac – peste care s-a construit, la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, o nouă casă – și capela, transformată în biserică parohială cu hramul Sfântul Nicolae.

Prezentul studiu are ca obiect biserica Sfântul Nicolae, monument de arhitectură de importanță națională, clasat în perioada interbelică. În ciuda valorii sale, edificiul nu a suscitât interesul specialiștilor, majoritatea studiilor dedicate arhitecturii de cult din Țara Românească făcând abstracție de existența sa. În lipsa cercetărilor sistematice, stabilirea evoluției monumentului este destul de anevoioasă. Unul dintre cele mai neclare aspecte privind istoricul bisericii se referă la datarea ei. Deși o parte a surselor consultate – printre care se numără și documentele epigrafice – afirmă că biserica a fost construită în prima jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea, Elena Peticari susține că lăcașul fusese edificat cu câteva decenii mai devreme. Dacă această ipoteză este corectă, biserica Sfântul Nicolae din Izvoru de Sus marchează un moment important în evoluția arhitecturii bisericăști din Muntenia.

The village Izvoru de Sus is located in the south of Argeș county, on the road connecting the cities of Pitești and Alexandria, in the neighbourhood of the former manors of Tătăraștii de Sus and Balaci (Fig. 1). Izvoru de Sus manor was first testified during the reign of Prince Neagoe Basarab and belonged, as time went on, to Știrbei, Colfescu and Peticari families. Out of this manor, which was probably built by boyar Știrbei, the sole today's survivors are the chapel patronized by Saint Nicholas (the parish church nowadays) and the manor cellars, which were later incorporated in one of the buildings erected by boyar Peticari.<sup>1</sup>

Although classified as a monument since 1930s and currently listed among the monuments of national heritage importance, the history of “Saint Nicholas” Church is ambiguous, being marked by contradictory sources (Fig. 2). Specifically, while most of the available data reveal that this edifice was built during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Elena Peticari – the last owner of Izvoru manor, who dealt with the refurbishment works of this monument during the period between the World Wars – dated the building works almost half-century earlier (the latter conclusion is confirmed by the typological survey). The history of “Saint Nicholas” Church should be clarified not only for retracing its development, but also for thoroughly understanding the Wallachian religious architecture since this edifice stands for a transition monument between two distinct stages.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanciu 2011, p.161-173.

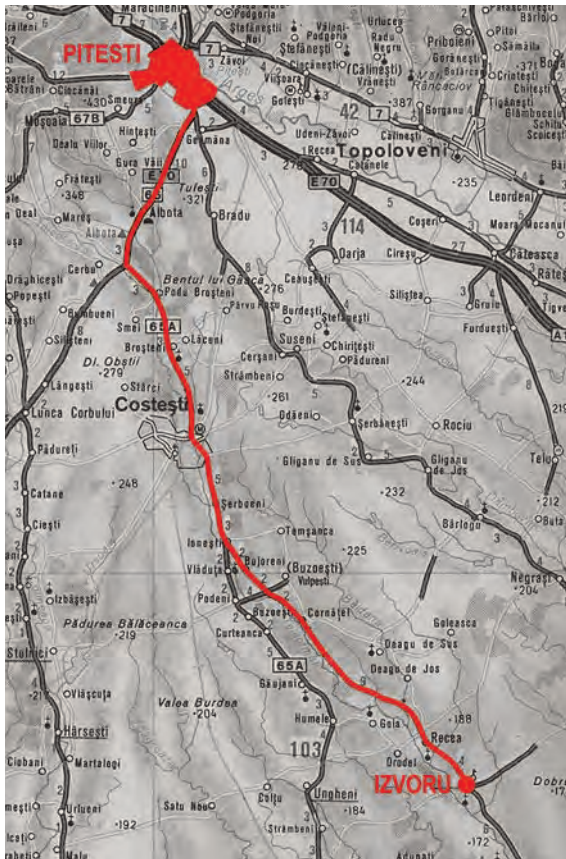


Fig. 1. Location of Izvoru de Sus village.



Fig. 2. South-west view of "Saint Nicholas" church. August 2006.

### Written information on the church of Izvoru de Sus

According to available data, it was Friedrich Wilhelm von Bawr,<sup>2</sup> a German military cartographer acting at that time under the command of the Russian tsar, who first mentioned the existence of a church in Izvoru de Sus village. The fifth section of his *Mémoires historiques et géographiques sur la Valachie avec un Prospectus d'un Atlas Géographique & Militaire de la dernière Guerre entre la Russie & La Porte Ottomane* (Historical and Geographic Memoirs on Wallachia with a Prospect of a Geographical and Military Atlas of the Last War between Russia and Ottoman Porte), published in Leipzig in 1778, displays a catalogue of the towns, fairs and villages located in Wallachia, with a special mention of their significant elements such as churches or monasteries, boyar mansions, mills, ponds, rivers, bridges, vineyards and woods. Among the settlements lying in the county of Vlașca, von Bawr mentions Izvoru de Sus village as well as the church and stone houses thereof.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Bawr 1778, pp. 167, 169.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem* 1778, p. 167. Considering the administrative location of the settlements, Bawr's information is not entirely accurate. For example, Izvoru de Sus village, which is situated near Teleorman river, is mentioned twice: both in the county of Vlașca and in that of Teleorman. Since Izvoru de Sus and Izvoru de Jos villages stretch along the right shore of the river, we think the right version is their location in the county of Vlașca. We also suppose that the church Bawr refers to was just "Saint Nicholas" and the stone house was the mansion with cellars on the top of which the small castle has been erected.

In 1824, the Argeş diocese carried out a census briefly featuring the religious edifices under its supervision. This document, which was tackled by historian Ion Ionaşcu in a study published in 1942, was not preserved in full, so that the pages on Izvoru de Sus unfortunately disappeared.<sup>4</sup> However, since the preserved part of the manuscript only presents broad information,<sup>5</sup> we are entitled to conclude that no significant data relating to “Saint Nicholas” Church have been lost.

The geographical dictionary of Argeş county, published in 1888 by Ion Lahovari, was the first work hypothesising on the church dating. Izvoru de Sus is described as a village stretching near Teleorman river and having an old church patronized by Saint Nicholas, which “was founded in 1701 by its owner, cupbearer Iordache Colfescu, and subsequently refurbished by the new owners, Peticari.”<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, no mention is made on the source attesting the date of the monument or the presumed founder’s name.<sup>7</sup> The works and documents drawn up subsequently took some of the information over Lahovari’s dictionary. Thus, in the questionnaire commissioned by the Historical Monuments Committee and issued in 1921, the priest Ion Bădulescu specified that the edifice under analysis was built in 1701 by Peticari family;<sup>8</sup> however, the author of this record provided no reason to substantiate his statements. Worth mentioning is also that Bădulescu described an inscription lying “*on the church front*”, which was probably damaged when demolishing the wall above the door. It is very likely that what Bădulescu referred to was actually the painted inscription placed in the church porch, above the entrance into the narthex.

A more comprehensive document as regards both Izvoru de Sus village and “Saint Nicholas” Church is the monograph achieved by schoolteacher Constantin Zinca in 1942.<sup>9</sup> The bulk of the manuscript information is supposed to come from Elena Peticari. “The church of Izvoru village”, Constantin Zinca wrote, “was built in 1670s and is currently a historical monument under the direct supervision of Historical Monuments Committee”. It is made of brickwork which perfectly withstood until November 10, 1941 (sic!) when the great earthquake somehow damaged it so that no mass was conducted until refurbishing works were accomplished [...]. The first founder of this halidom was boyar Colfescu whose today’s descendant is Peticari family. The church was built on a ground granted by Colfescu family.”<sup>10</sup> Zinca’s monograph also includes two documents of particular importance, both achieved during the reign of Prince Ştefan Cantacuzino, namely a front side picture of the church, taken in 1942 at the latest and a transcript of the inscription on the Holy Table,<sup>11</sup> the latter being subsequently published by historian Constantin Bălan.

In a short presentation of “Saint Nicholas” Church drawn up in 1972, the priest Marin Crânguş underlined that this monument was built around 1700 and founded by Preda Postelnicu and Colfescu-Peticari family.<sup>12</sup> Without mentioning the contribution of the Peticari family in restoring and keeping the edifice, Crânguş surveyed the overhauling works he took part at.<sup>13</sup> We assume this document was commissioned by

<sup>4</sup> Ionaşcu 1942, p. 88. Pages 105-108 were entirely broken. According to Ionaşcu, the manuscript ended with an alphabetical table displaying the village names as mentioned in the census. Thus, page 105 featured data on Izvoru de Sus and Izvoru de Jos villages.

<sup>5</sup> The census carried out in 1824 highlighted such data on halidoms as: building material, founders’ names, priests’ names etc.

<sup>6</sup> Lahovari 1888. The dictionary also mentions that the church was administered by the owner and the mass was officiated by a priest, a vocalist and a sacristan. Mention is also made on the remnants of the mansion built by Iordache Colfescu as well, in the same year 1701.

<sup>7</sup> The possibility that the author took into account the locals’ tradition should not be ruled out.

<sup>8</sup> I.N.P. – C.M.I., folder 2100/ 1921-1946, *Questionnaire on historical monuments*, 1921, leaves 2-3 recto+verso.

<sup>9</sup> A.N.I.C. – M.C.N.C., folder 478/ 1942, leaves 544-580 recto+verso: *Izvoru de Sus Village Monograph, Argeş county, drawn up by Constantin Gh. Zinca*. In 1943, the schoolteacher Maria Tarabega transcribed almost entirely the monograph of Constantin Zinca. See also A.N.I.C. – M.C.N.C., folder 633/1943, leaves 45-63 recto+verso. In the first pages of the manuscript, the author shows the transcript of a charter enacted by the Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu in 1707, a copy of which was probably held by Elena Peticari Davila; this charter make mention of Izvoru de Sus manor. See also Stanciu 2010, Annex 1.

<sup>10</sup> A.N.I.C. – M.C.N.C., folder 478/ 1942, leaves 561 – 565. Cultural movements. Zinca makes mention of the fresco restoring works carried out by painter Iordache, before the 1940 earthquake. He also points out the intention to build a new church somewhere within the village boundary since 1923.

<sup>11</sup> A.N.I.C. – M.C.N.C., folder 478/ 1942, leaves 563 recto-564 recto. The inscription was transcribed by the priest Marin Crânguş and Constantin Zinca; the text has some mistakes.

<sup>12</sup> Crânguş 1972.

<sup>13</sup> According to the priest Marin Crânguş, the church was repaired in 1829, 1837, 1880, 1930, 1937, 1940 and 1944.



Fig. 3. Painted inscription. August 2010.

*attach hereto a part of a document I am in the possession of – the Charter enacted by Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu in 1712,<sup>16</sup> that is to say two years before he passed away. The church walls feature the founders ranked in such a way to [...].<sup>17</sup>*

It should be noted that Elena Peticari denoted the approximate year of the church construction as being 1680, two decades earlier than the year specified in the Geographical Dictionary published in 1888. As revealed by another note of Elena Peticari, this conclusion is based both on family anecdotal evidence, and on a discovery made after a number of surveys on the fresco layers, carried out during the monument restoration works: *“Still I was right: the church must have been built around 1660, since today they found out the second fresco was achieved in 1702; hence the first one was achieved around 1680, plus some years, needed to raise the building [...].”<sup>18</sup>*

### **The dating of the church based on epigraphic documents**

The most important epigraphic document related to “Saint Nicholas” Church of Izvoru de Sus is the inscription<sup>19</sup> painted by Peticari family in 1823 (Fig. 3), when the construction was repaired, reading as follows: *[† This h]<sup>a</sup> oly and d(i)vine [church] ...<sup>b</sup> [cel]ebrat[es the patron] ... from the ground up through ... and ...*

<sup>14</sup> Monografie 1976, p. 260.

<sup>15</sup> I.N.P. – C.M.I., folder 2100/ 1921-1946, “Saint Nicholas” Church, Izvoru de Sus, Argeş county.

<sup>16</sup> The date is wrong. The charter dates from 1707.

<sup>17</sup> I.N.P. – C.M.I., folder 2100/ 1921-1946, leaf 44.

<sup>18</sup> I.N.P. – C.M.I., folder 2100/ 1921-1946, leaf 36 verso.

<sup>19</sup> The inscription is placed in a niche of the porch, above the entrance door into the church narthex. It is mostly covered with a plastering layer, due to repairs made on the cracks in process of time.

*in ... [Lord Steward (bi(v) vel crucer) [Iordache Col]fescu za arie, subp[refect] ... 20 May, in the days of his serene highne[ss prince, Io] ...<sup>c</sup>, His Holiness metropolit[an] bishop ...<sup>d</sup> Now, in 1823, burned \*(?) ... and it was adorned with paintin[g] ... [as] displayed, by ...<sup>e</sup> subprefect of Vla[sc(a)] ... [M]adame Zoița Colfea[sca] ... the daughter[s] ... this heli[dom] ...<sup>20</sup>*

According to Constantin Bălan, the painted inscription suggests the church was built “from the ground up” in 1744-1748<sup>21</sup> by Iordache Colfescu, husband of Zoița Știrbei (cousin of Preda Postelnicul).<sup>22</sup> Iordache Colfescu – who murdered the metropolitan bishop Antim Ivireanu<sup>23</sup> – was the counselor of Prince Nicolae Mavrocordat. In 1727, Colfescu became high steward, then high equerry,<sup>24</sup> and in 1739 high provost marshal.<sup>25</sup> Later on, Tănase – one of Colfescu’s descendants – was governor of the county of Vlașca until 1775.<sup>26</sup> It is very likely that Izvoru de Sus manor passed into the possession of Perticari family<sup>27</sup> when Zoița<sup>28</sup> – daughter of Tănase Colfescu – married Ioan Perticari.<sup>29</sup>

An epigraphic document of high interest in terms of dating the church is the inscription made on the Altar Table, carried out in 1714-1715 and transcribed by historian Bălan as well:<sup>30</sup> *This holy altar was built by seneschal Preda s(i)nu high purveyor (vel sluger) Ivasco, grandson of high seneschal (vel postelnic) Ivan Știrbei Izvoranu. And it was achieved in the days of the good Christian, way ode Io Ștefan Cantacuzino.*

The line of descent as displayed by the inscription is confirmed by Nicolae Stoicescu who wrote: *„Ivasco from Izvor,<sup>31</sup> son of seneschal Ivan from Izvoru de Sus; grandson of high steward Harvat; Ivasco married Iana, sister of great ban Mano... His son was Preda”.*<sup>32</sup>

Another potential source for dating the monument consists of the inscriptions attached to founders’ portraits which are painted in the narthex.<sup>33</sup> One of the characters displayed on the south wall is “Young titled lady Iana, mother of high steward Preda Știrbei, sister of ban Manu (biv vel ban ot Frățești)”, spouse of Ivasco from Izvor who is mentioned in documents during 1645-1670.<sup>34</sup> This detail provides a valuable hint for dating the

<sup>20</sup> Bălan 1994, p. 338. The painted inscription was transcribed by the historian Constantin Bălan who made the following remarks: a. Inscription impaired, covered with plaster, repaired by us./ b. Inscription impaired, covered with plaster./ c. Prince’s name may be “Constantin Mavrocordat” (?), during his reign from 1744 to 1748, when Iordache Colfescu is also confirmed as a Lord Steward (according to Th. Rădulescu, Sfatul domnesc, sec. XVIII, p.468, note 1749)./ d. Inscription impaired; metropolitan bishop’s name may be “Neofit” (?), whose pastorate lasted from 1738 to 1754./ e. Inscription impaired. His name is probably “Ioan Peldicar(i) high steward (biv vel stolnic)”./ \* Legible text, although it might be also read “Arsănie”.

<sup>21</sup> Grecianu 1913, p. 366-367. On June 30, 1746 Iordache Colfescu is mentioned as “Lord Steward”.

<sup>22</sup> Nicolescu 1903, p. 183. Nicolescu is the author of Știrbei family genealogical tree. According to him, Zoița Știrbei – cousin of high steward Preda Știrbei, who donates the Altar Table to the church in 1714-1715 – married the cupbearer Colfescu, who is quite frequently referred to as the founder of the Izvoru de Sus church. The votive picture shows Iordache Colfescu and Zoița Greceanu (*sic!*), holding the church in their hands.

<sup>23</sup> Ștefănescu 2000, pp. 62-64.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p.65.

<sup>25</sup> Grecianu 1913, p. 166.

<sup>26</sup> Cronț 1973, p. 234.

<sup>27</sup> In 1823, when the church was repainted, Izvoru manor was owned by Perticari family. This is confirmed by the Census carried out in 1831, featuring “the house of high steward Ioan Perdicaru” on the position of “manor lord” for Izvoru de Sus manor, in Izvoru district, county of Vlașca. See Donat, Pătroi, Ciobotea 2000, p. 161.

<sup>28</sup> Grecianu 1916, p. 242: “...Casandra Bălăceanu, who married first the high steward Tănase Colfescu (deceased in 1814) and secondly ... She had children with her first husband as well.” In 1835 Zoița Colfescu is mentioned as “Joița Perticari”. See Penelea-Filitti 1973, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Filitti 1929, p. 12: “Ion Perdicari, high steward, sub-prefect of Vlașca in 1829 and 1831, owns the manor of Izvoru de Sus, lives in 458, Crețulescu quarter, green district, Bucharest, and is married to Zoița Colfescu”.

<sup>30</sup> Bălan 1994, p. 338. The transcript includes the following note: <sup>1</sup> This inscription is dated as subsequent to the period from Prince Ștefan Cantacuzino’s enthronement until the end of his reign, meaning from March 25, 1714 until December 25, 1715.

<sup>31</sup> Mano 1907, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Stoicescu 1971, p. 201.

<sup>33</sup> These inscriptions were published by Constantin Bălan. See Bălan 1994, p. 339. The list of founders’ names was also mentioned by Elena Perticari in a letter sent to Nicolae Iorga. These two lists are identical; in addition, Elena Perticari made some remarks on the relationship (man-wife) between the featured characters. See also Stanciu 2010, pp. 19-21.

<sup>34</sup> Stoicescu 1971, p. 201.



Fig. 4. Votive picture. August 2010.

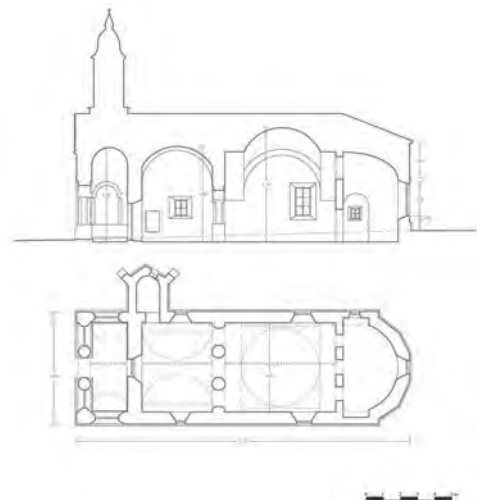


Fig. 5. Draft survey.

monument, giving an additional reason to place the church building in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. All in all, although the above-mentioned epigraphic documents (i.e. the painted inscription and the inscription on the Holy Table) suggest the monument was constructed around 1715 and subsequently overhauled (even fully rebuilt perhaps) toward mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, Iana's picture among the church founders make us query this hypothesis.

#### Typological ranking of the church of Izvoru de Sus

From a typological perspective, "Saint Nicholas" Church ranks among the monuments having a unique rectangular nave and a bell tower atop the narthex, as classified by Ghika-Budești under group 14 (17<sup>th</sup> century) and 22 (18<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>35</sup> This type appeared in Wallachia in early 17<sup>th</sup> century, being widely used in the epoch of Prince Matei Basarab and throughout the next century. Initially, these halidoms only had the nave and narthex, while the tower was accessed by means of a stairway built in the thickness of the western or northern wall (later on, there was adopted the solution of a polygonal staircase attached to the narthex north wall.<sup>36</sup> Once the bell tower was built atop the narthex,<sup>37</sup> constructors substituted a dome on pendentives for the old covering system consisting of a longitudinal or transverse barrel vault (Figs. 4, 5).

Churches belonging to this category are often provided with a porch. At first, this had a massive architecture, featuring round arches resting on thick octagon pillars (seldom square or circular) with reinforced corners.<sup>38</sup> Since the end-17<sup>th</sup> century and particularly after 1700, a number of new elements were frequently used such as stone pillars, more open spans, and arches of various shapes (trefoil arch, ogee arch, multi-lobed arch).

The typological ranking of "Saint Nicholas" Church is based on the specific features of the nave, the arches built in the wall separating the nave from the narthex, the porch, the staircase, the currently-perished bell tower, and the façade treatment. The rectangular apse-less nave, covered by a dome on pendentives, was quite frequently used during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries at the nobiliary churches (e.g. "Saint Nicholas" church of Brâncoveni, Olt county, 1634; Herăști, Giurgiu county, 1644; Căndești, Buzău county, ca. 1650; Coiani-Mironești, Giurgiu county, 1669). Today, there is a window on the north and south walls of the nave. However, the votive picture features two holes on the south wall and this fact is confirmed by the eccentric position

<sup>35</sup> Ghika-Budești 1936, p. 28 and Ghika-Budești 1933, p. 43. Group 14 was introduced during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was followed by group 22 in the next century.

<sup>36</sup> Ghika-Budești 1933, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9. At first, the bell tower had a square or rectangular section; later on the octagon section was preferred. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the tower openings became taller and narrower.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20.

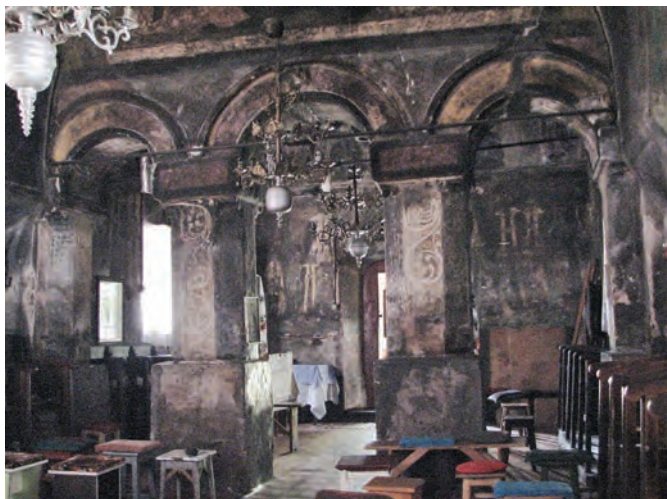


Fig. 6. View of the narthex. August 2010.

of the present-day window on each above-said wall. The solution of nave lightening by means of four windows became traditional around mid-17<sup>th</sup> century – (examples are churches of Gherghița, 1641; Strehaia, 1645; “Sfinții Împărați”, Târgoviște, 1650) (Figs. 6, 7, 8).

The narthex is separated from the nave through a three-opening archway with barrel arches and high-footing octagon pillars,<sup>39</sup> covered with a transverse barrel vault. This covering system, taken over from the religious monuments built earlier, can be found at a few churches built later than 1600 (e.g. “Saint Nicholas” church of Brâncoveni, Olt county, 1634; the church of Bradu monastery, Buzău county, 1641; Herăști, Giurgiu county, 1644; the church of Domneștii de Sus, Ilfov county, 1662?).<sup>40</sup> As mentioned above, building the bell tower atop the narthex imposed the adoption of the dome on pendentives for covering the narthex;<sup>41</sup> in terms of structure, this solution is better than that consisting of a barrel vault. Consequently, “Saint Nicholas” Church of Izvoru de Sus may be deemed as atypical from this perspective. There are two possible reasons for this peculiarity: one is that it was not the founders’ intention to cap the narthex by a steeple and the bell tower and its staircase were added later, when the building was nearly or even fully completed. The other reason could be that the constructors were not skilled enough to build such a structure; if this is the case, it follows that the church of Izvoru de Sus is one of the oldest halidoms having a tower-topped narthex.

This bell tower can be accessed climbing a spiral stair closed by a slightly oblong polygon-shaped case, fairly unusual.<sup>42</sup> There are quite frequent examples in this respect dating both from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (such as church “Sfinții Împărați” in Târgoviște, 1650 as well as those located in Săcuieni, Dâmbovița county, 1654; Bărbuleț, Dâmbovița county, 1662; Mogoșoaia, Ilfov county, 1688; Vlădești, Argeș county, 1657 a.s.o.), and the 18<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. “Sfinții Voievozi”-Flămânzești, Curtea de Argeș and Slăvitești, Vâlcea county, 1751). In

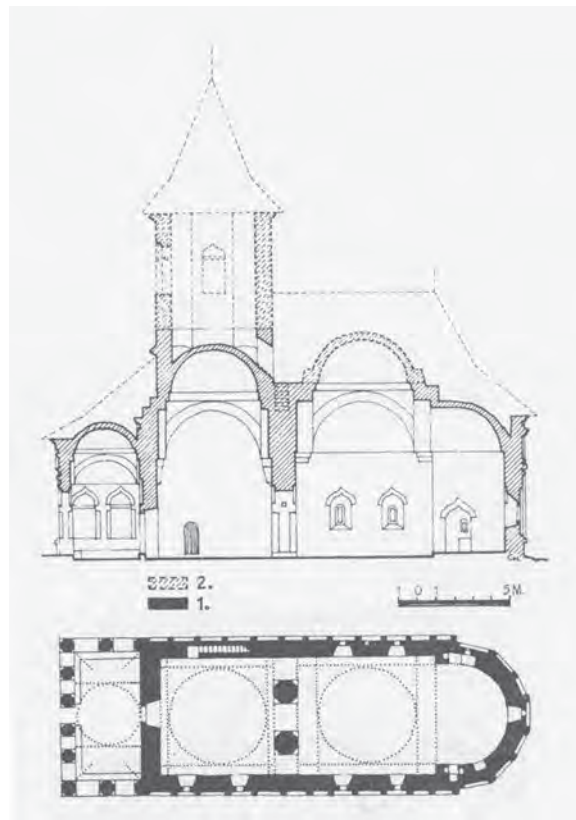


Fig. 7. “Saint Nicholas” church, Coiani-Mironești, Giurgiu county, 1669.

<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, there are monuments dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century where the two rooms are separated by a compact wall having only the door opening.

<sup>40</sup> None of these churches has a steeple atop the narthex.

<sup>41</sup> Moiescu 2002, p. 128. This system is specific to the epoch of Prince Matei Basarab.

<sup>42</sup> I.N.P. – C.M.I., folder 2100/ 1921-1946, leaf 9. In his report drawn up in October 1935, the architect Emil Costescu mentioned that “the shape of the staircase placed on the north part of the church is fairly peculiar; it is unlikely the original one”.

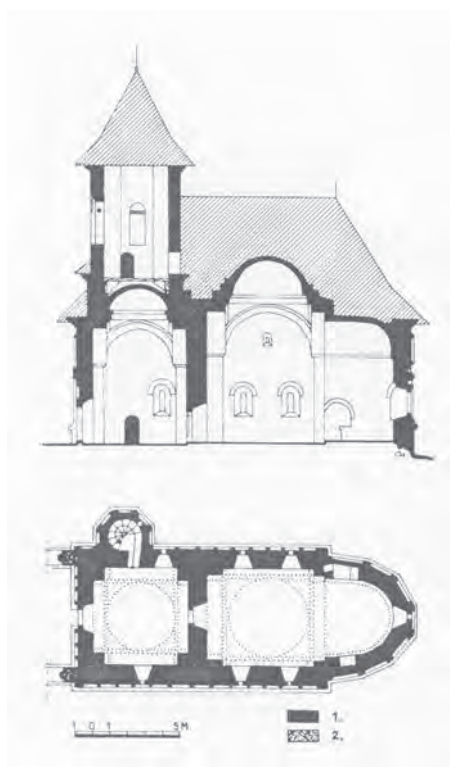


Fig. 8. Church in Vlădești, Argeș county, 1657.

time, some cracks appeared at the joint between the staircase and the narthex north wall, suggesting that this element as well as the bell tower were rather added after the edifice completion than built at the same time with it.<sup>43</sup>

The church has a medium-sized porch having three openings on the west side and one on the south and north side respectively. Its arches and pillars look like those built indoors in terms of both shape and size, which suggests that the porch is of the same date as the rest of the edifice. Such archways as those featured by this church, with round arches being supported by massive octagon brick pillars<sup>44</sup> are often found at the churches dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Bălteni, Ilfov county, 1628; “Saint Nicholas-Andronești”, Târgoviște, Dâmbovița county, 1653; Cândești, Buzău county, cca 1650). This architectural solution is hardly found during the 18<sup>th</sup> century – examples are the church of Polovragi monastery, (porch added in 1704) and that of Slăvitești church, in Vâlcea county (1751). Since 1700s, the octagon pillars have been replaced either with circular brick pillars or carved-and-sculpted stone columns, while trefoil, ogee or multi-lobed arches were substituted for the round arches. Another element featured by the Izvoru de Sus church narthex and found at the 17<sup>th</sup> century monuments are the corners reinforced with massive brickwork piers (Figs. 9, 10).<sup>45</sup> The outside decoration of the monument – a simple continuous median belt course dividing the wall surface into two flat, almost equal registers – suggests that the church was built rather in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, than during the subsequent one.<sup>46</sup> A similar façade treatment can be seen at Cândești, Buzău county (1650?), Vulcana Băi,

Dâmbovița county (1654), Bărbuleț, Dâmbovița county (1662) and Fundeni Câmpulung. We do not know if the current belt is the original one. As featured by the votive picture, the median stringcourse was not the tangent to the porch arches – as it is today – and the upper register was much smaller than the lower one. The same votive picture shows that the upper register was adorned with medallions or blind arcades. Considering the wall smoothness, we suppose that this decoration – if it really existed – consisted only in painted panels.<sup>47</sup>

Since 1823, the church of Izvoru de Sus underwent several repairs which altered its original appearance. The odds are that during the 1838 earthquake the steeple broke down and the roof structure was severely damaged. As it seems, the renovation works consisted not only in replacing the framework and the former steeple, but also in modernizing the main entrance façade. Under the neo-classicism influence, the west end of the church was crowned by a triangular pediment, fairly peculiar considering the Romanian traditional architecture but highly appreciated at that time.<sup>48</sup>

As far as its typology is concerned, the monument features several similarities with religious buildings dating both from 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of the features, like the barrel vault of the narthex (found

<sup>43</sup> Stanciu 2010, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> I.N.P. – C.M.I., folder 2100/ 1921-1946, leaf 9 verso. In his report drawn up in October 1935, the architect Costescu proposes to unhide from the brickwork the former stone columns. In our opinion, Emil Costescu was wrong; those columns are hardly the outcome of such a change; they are rather specific to the 17<sup>th</sup> century architecture. Anyway, a final conclusion requires local surveys.

<sup>45</sup> Bălteni, Ilfov county, 1628; “Saint Nicholas-Andronești”, Târgoviște, Dâmbovița county, 1653; Cândești, Buzău county, cca 1650, Vlădești, Argeș county, 1657. Reinforced corners can also be found at churches “Holy Archangels” in Curtea de Argeș (1717) and that in Mihăiești, Vâlcea county (1756).

<sup>46</sup> On the façades decorated only with median stringcourse see Moisescu 2002, p. 134.

<sup>47</sup> I.N.P. – C.M.I., folder 2100/ 1921-1946, leaf 9. According to Emil Costescu the outside architecture was transformed because of the countless repairs.

<sup>48</sup> Stanciu 2010, pp. 36-37.



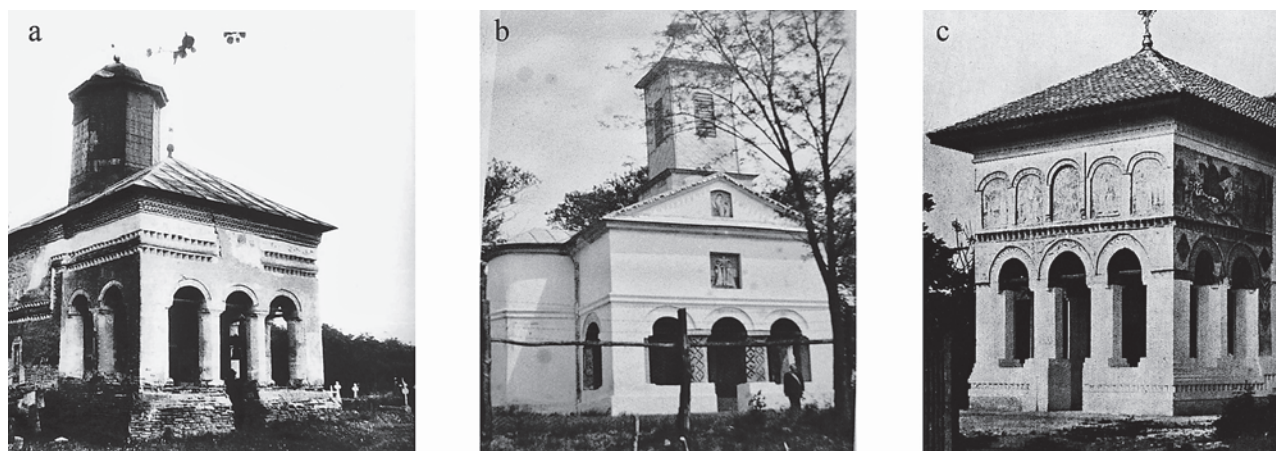


Fig. 9. Entrance porches: a. Cânduşti, Buzău county, cca 1650; b. “Saint Nicholas” church, Izvoru de Sus, Argeş county; c. “Saint Nicholas-Androneşti” church, Târgovişte, Dâmboviţa county, 1653.

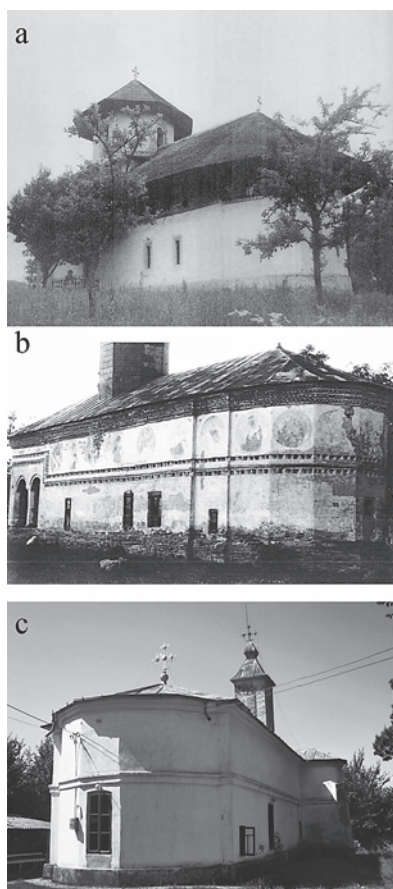


Fig. 10. External decoration: a. Bărbuleţ, Dâmboviţa county, 1662; b. Cânduşti, Buzău county, cca 1650; c. “Saint Nicholas” church, Izvoru de Sus, Argeş county.

in the “archaic” examples), the massive pillars of the porch, the design of the arcades and the façade treatment, are specific to the rectangular nave churches of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The staircase tower instead, which was probably added after the construction was finalized, could have been built either before 1700, or few decades later.

#### Some hypotheses on the Izvoru de Sus Church dating

As revealed by the above-mentioned documents, there is no precise evidence on the year when “Saint Nicholas” Church of Izvoru de Sus was built. Several documents, including the Lists of Historic Monuments from 2004 and 2010, point to the year 1701, although no mention is made of the source of this information. The only accurate evidence came from the inscription on the Holy Table, donated by seneschal Preda Ştirbei in 1714 or 1715, the painted inscription restored in 1823 and the votive picture. According to these sources, “Saint Nicholas” Church of Izvoru de Sus was built during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Elena Perticari, who knew the history of the monument better than anyone else, tried to demonstrate that the church dated from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Her theory was substantiated by the findings of the restoration surveys carried out in 1930’s; the painters concluded there are at least two fresco layers, dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, respectively. Unfortunately, no document was found until now in support of Elena Perticari’s theory. However, her assumptions are also confirmed by the church massive architecture, which is more appropriate to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, than to the next one.

For the moment, the suppositions on the Izvoru de Sus Church dating are just study premises. Their validation or invalidation depends especially on the direct investigation of the building. In the future, the theories regarding the construction and development of this important transition monument of architecture ought to be verified by a thorough research.

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