

A FOUNDATION OF VOIVODE RADU OF AFUMAȚI (1522-1523; 1524; 1524-1525; 1525-1529) IN THE PRECINCT OF THE ARGEȘ MONASTERY*

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Abstract: The church of the Argeș Monastery, founded by voivode Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521) in 1517, was enclosed since its beginning by precinct walls and surrounded by buildings belonging to the monastery. In the first half of the 16th century, on the eastern side of the monastic complex one could find the chapel and the princely house – foundations of voivode Neagoe Basarab, and beside them the princely house and chapel with two towers – erected by voivode Radu of Afumați (1522-1529). These buildings are mentioned in archive documents, writings of foreign travellers, drawings and engravings.

The restoration of the Episcopal Church in Curtea de Argeș (*The Court upon Argeș*), between the years 1875 and 1885, made possible the discovery of a fragmentary plate tile from the 16th century, on which an equestrian soldier is portrayed in a battle scene, with a church with two spires. The composition is probably a representation of voivode Radu of Afumați and his foundation within the enclosure of the monastery. This ceramic piece synthesises, through its iconography, the political programme of the voivode, namely protecting the Orthodox Church in a period of intense military confrontation with the Ottoman army. The voivode is similarly portrayed as a warrior for the Christian faith on his tombstone in the Argeș Monastery.

Rezumat: Biserica mănăstirii Argeș, ctitorie din anul 1517 a voievodului Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521), a fost împrejmuită încă de la început cu ziduri de incintă și înconjurată de construcții aferente mănăstirii. În prima jumătate a secolului al XVI-lea, pe latura estică a complexului monahal, se aflau biserica-paraclis și casa domnească – ctitorii ale voievodului Neagoe Basarab, iar alături, casa domnească și biserica-paraclis, cu două turlă – ctitorii ale voievodului Radu de la Afumați (1522-1529). Aceste construcții sunt menționate în documentele de arhivă, în consemnări ale călătorilor străini, în desene și gravuri.

Restaurarea Bisericii Episcopale de la Curtea de Argeș, între anii 1875-1885, a prilejuit descoperirea unei cahle-placă, fragmentară, din secolul al XVI-lea, pe care este figurat un oștean ecvestru, într-o scenă de luptă, apărând o biserică cu două turlă. Compoziția îl reprezintă, probabil, pe voievodul Radu de la Afumați și ctitoria sa din incinta mănăstirii. Această piesă de ceramică sintetizează, prin iconografie, programul politic al voievodului și anume apărarea Bisericii Ortodoxe, într-o perioadă de intense confruntări militare cu armata otomană. Voievodul este înfățișat în aceeași manieră de luptător pentru credința creștină și pe piatra sa de mormânt, din biserica Mănăstirii Argeș.

The church of the Argeș Monastery, a quintessential monument of Romanian architecture,¹ foundation of voivode Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521), was ceremoniously consecrated half a millennium ago, on the 15th of August 1517, on the celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the patron of the church. The patriarch of Constantinople himself, Theoleptus I (1513-1522), was among the guests at the consecration. A vast and eclectic documentary material (documents emitted by the voivodes, censuses and documents of the monastery, drawings, engravings, photographs, notes of foreign travellers) reflect the life of the monastery, its cultural and spiritual role. Through the centuries, the entire monastic ensemble suffered repeated degradation caused by conflagrations, earthquakes, invasions or intentional demolishing. Between 1875 and 1885 the Episcopal Church was subjected to vast restoration works under French architect André Lecomte du Nouÿ.

A plate tile from the 16th Century

During restoration in 1875-1885, among the vestiges of centuries past brought to light in the perimeter of the monastery, several tiles were found, once used in decorating the stoves in the princely houses or in the monk cells nearby. The pieces were graphically reproduced in the monography "*The Episcopal Church of the Curtea de Argeș Monastery, restored in the days of his highness King Charles I and again consecrated in 12 October 1886.*"² Since restoring the monument didn't include an archaeological research of the area, which was

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¹ Ghika-Budești 1927, pp. 143-182; Ghika-Budești 1931, pp. 6-41; Ionescu 1963, pp. 281-298.

² Tocilescu f. a., fig. A - E.