

# THE POLITICAL-RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE ORTHODOX ROMANIANS FROM TRANSYLVANIA IN THE 9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF WOODEN CHURCHES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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*Abstract: The Orthodox Church in Transylvania played an overwhelming role in the history of the Romanian people, because the entire cultural and religious life of the Romanians from the intra-Carpathian lands revolved around it. The churchly organization of the 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Transylvanian Romanians, shows that there were a large number of churches and monasteries in which many monks, priests and hierarchs, in the harshest conditions and circumstances, bravely fought the Calvinist teachings and Catholic proselytism. for preserving the faith and strengthening the unity of Romanians around the Orthodox Church.*

*In Transylvania, the Orthodox architectural art could not develop as in Wallachia and Moldavia because of the foreign oppression. Characteristic for the religious architecture in Transylvania are the wooden churches that show significant similarities with those in the European Carpathian region.*

*Keywords: Orthodox Church, political realities, Catholicism, Calvinism, hierarchs, churchly art, European context.*

## **Political-religious context**

Protected by the Carpathian belt that included the Transylvanian plateau, this population that lived in the cradle of the pre-Roman Dacia, became the framework of the new ethnic reality that would soon correspond to a new political reality. Once established in this territory, it was forced to defend itself in permanently unfavourable external circumstances and, against all dangers, managed to preserve its identity.<sup>1</sup>

Starting with the 8<sup>th</sup> century, on the intra-Carpathian territory, but also in the other regions of the country, there was a process of evolution of the Romanian society from the inferior structure of the early feudal order, to that of the developed feudalism from the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the following. Now the first political formations on the Transylvanian territory have begun to crystallize: it is about the voivodeships led by Gelu,<sup>2</sup> Menumorut,<sup>3</sup> Glad<sup>4</sup> and the formation in the centre of Transylvania, around the

<sup>1</sup> Adolf ARMBRUSTER, *Romanitatea românilor. Istoria unei idei*, (București: Enciclopedică, 2003), 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> A.D. XENOPOL, *Dacia în vremea năvălirilor barbare*, în *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană 270-1290*, II, (București: ELF, 2008), 138-139.

<sup>3</sup> Ovidiu BOZGA, Liviu LAZĂR, Mihai STAMATESCU, Bogdan TEODORESCU, *Constituirea Statelor Medievale*, în *Istorie*, (București: ALL, 2003), 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> Sorin OANE, Maria OCHESCU, *Românii și statele vecine în Istorie*, (București: Humanitas, 2003), 48-49.

city of Alba Iulia.<sup>5</sup> However, the new political situation also demanded the existence of a tailor-made church organization.<sup>6</sup>

From the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called chorebishops (horepiscopi) were active on the territory of our country, sent here either by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, or by the Archiepiscopate of Justiniana Prima (6<sup>th</sup> century), or by the south-Danubian episcopates, as well as by those of the present-day Dobrogea (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries). Also, were able to minister here "missionary" bishops (periodeuti), sent by the same churchly leaders from abroad. But for the new political situation, with local leaders residing in a "fortress", the institution of the chorepiscopate (horepiscopatului) proved to be inadequate. From now on, every political leader wanted to have a diocesan bishop by his side, who would extend his spiritual pastorate over the priests and believers within the borders of the respective political formation. It was in the tradition and orthodox churchly ordinances that the churchly organization should follow the political one.<sup>7</sup>

A first episcopate could exist in Dabaca, the centre of Gelu's reign. The foundations of several churches from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries have been discovered here thus far, as well as an Orthodox Christian necropolis. Particularly interesting are the fragments of glazed pottery, coins and a bronze cross, all of Byzantine design. These are an obvious proof of the economic, political, but also churchly connections that the voivodes of Dabaca had with Byzantium. All lead to the assumption of the existence of an episcopal see.<sup>8</sup> In fact, with the formation of the medieval Romanian states and their independent prominence, the Romanian-Byzantine relations entered their most important phase. It is the moment when the Byzantine Empire would "offer to the Romanian Principalities the model of state structures and its civilization."<sup>9</sup>

Another bishop could have existed in the citadel of Biharea, the political centre of the voivodeship led by Menumorut. Anonymus relates that Menumorut, in negotiations with Arpad's envoys, invoked in his support the suzerainty of the Byzantine emperor. Later, being in a critical situation following the fights with the Hungarians, he was preparing to go "to Greece", to ask for the support of the basileus of Constantinople.<sup>10</sup> It turns out that the voivode of Bihor had close friendship ties with Byzantium, which could not be limited to political or economic issues, but also involved those of the church. Byzantium's policy of attracting neighbouring peoples through the intercession of the official Orthodox Church, was well known. Another argument in favour of the

<sup>5</sup> Ioan-Aurel POP, *Românii și Maghiarii în secolele IX – XIV. Geneza statului medieval în Transilvania*, (Cluj-Napoca: Tribuna, 2003), 184-191.

<sup>6</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, I, (București, EIBMBOR, 1992), 218.

<sup>7</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, I, (București, EIBMBOR, 1992), 219.

<sup>8</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, I, (București, EIBMBOR, 1992), 219-225.

<sup>9</sup> Stelian BREZEANU, *Romanitatea orientală în Evul Mediu. De la cetățenii romani la națiunea medievală*, (București: ALL, 1999), 12; Nicolae DĂNILĂ, *Elemente bizantine în viața populației autohtone din Banat și Transilvania în secolele VII-XIII*, MB, 11-12, (1984): 707-725.

\* \* \* *Bizanțul și instituțiile românești până la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea (Bizanțul și Țările Române*, Institutul de Studii Sud-Est Europene), coord. Maria Holban, (București: Academiei, 1980), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Ioan-Aurel POP, *Românii și Maghiarii în secolele IX – XIV. IX – XIV. Geneza statului medieval în Transilvania*, 128-129.

existence of an episcopal see in Biharea was the establishment of the centre of Bihor county, by the Hungarians, here, together with the residence of the Latin episcopate. Probably the Latin episcopate had overlapped with the Orthodox one because any trace of the old statal and churchly organization of the native population was disappearing. According to the Hungarian canon Gánoczy Antal, the Orthodox bishop had been moved to Oradea, but here too he was forced to make room for the Latin bishop following the destruction of the Biharea fortress by the Cumans in 1091.<sup>11</sup>

Another political leader resided in Alba Iulia after the discovery of a rotunda with a semicircular apse, from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, under the current Romanic cathedral, from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, but also of the traces of a much older Christian place of worship, was concluded that also here, as in Biharea, over the Orthodox episcopate another Catholic overlapped. The relocation of the Latin episcopate from Tasnad to Alba Iulia was made during the reign of King Ladislaus (1077-1095), probably in 1092.<sup>12</sup>

The existence of Orthodox hierarchs is also clear from the correspondence of Pope Innocent III. In 1204, King Emeric of Hungary (1196-1204) informed him that some churches of the "*Greek monks*," that is, the Orthodox, from his kingdom were ruined "*by the carelessness of the diocesan bishops and because of those Greeks themselves*."<sup>13</sup> On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1205, the pope wrote to the archbishop of Caloccea that on the estates of the sons of Prince Balea (Bela cnese), there is "*an episcopate ... which is not subject to any Metropolitan church*", asking him to bring that bishop under the obedience of the Roman Church. It was about an Orthodox episcopate located in the parts of Bihor, in the lands once reigned by Menumorut, probably in the Hateg area, where there are several Romanian stone churches from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

During this time, within the borders of the Hungarian feudal kingdom, there were a significant number of Orthodox monasteries. Apart from those from Morisena and Oroszlanus, other well-known monastic places were Hodos-Bodrog, Isou, Kenez, Saraca-Semlac, Varadia, Meseseni (12<sup>th</sup> century). The foundation of Galad or Glad is also known from the documents, evoking the name of the great prince. A monastery in the south of Banat, named Toson or Rosani, had donations from Glad and Manuel I Comnenus. In 1204, further north, in the land of Semlac, there were many Orthodox monasteries and only one Latin. The hermitages and cave churches were discovered within the border of the villages of Moigrad, Jac, Greaca and Brebi (all in Sălaj county), in Cib (Alba county), in Varadia and Gaura Chindiei (Caraş-Severin county), dated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, presenting analogies with the cave churches from Cappadocia and Murfatlar (Constanța County).<sup>14</sup> Other monasteries, such as those from Cluj, Meses and two others in the Somes Valley, were taken away from the Orthodox Church and transformed into Catholic monastic places. Likewise, it is assumed that this is the case of the current Latin monasteries from

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<sup>11</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 219-220.

<sup>12</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 221.

<sup>13</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 224.

<sup>14</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 225.

Igriș (Timiș county), Saniob (Bihor county), Carta (Sibiu county), etc., built on the site of ancient Orthodox monastic settlements.<sup>15</sup>

The existence of an intense Christian life is also proven by the numerous archaeological discoveries, registered on the whole territory of Transylvania and Banat. Kievan-type engolpions (rounded arms ends), from the 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, were discovered in Moigrad (Salaj county), in Saschiz (Mures county) and another in an unknown locality in Transylvania.<sup>16</sup> Simple crosses come from Bratei (Sibiu county), Dabaca (Cluj county), Moldovenesti (Cluj county), Hoghiz (Brașov county), Socodor (Arad county); other small crosses, simple, made of bronze, lead, granite rock or local shale, provided at the upper arm with holes for hanging around the neck, come from the localities: Unirea (Alba county), Laslea (Sibiu county) etc.

Regarding the origin of some Byzantine pieces discovered in Transylvania and Banat, two opinions were formed: some specialists link their presence to the expedition of Emperor Manuel I Comnenus against the Hungarians, others consider that they belonged to the local population.

From what is presented, it can be seen that in Transylvania there was a strong Romanian Orthodox life. Recent archaeological discoveries, corroborated with the information given by Anonymus, attest the existence of flourishing Orthodox communities, led by hierarchs, who were closely related to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as the small voivodships were under the influence of Byzantium.

After the gradual occupation of Transylvania by the Hungarian kingdom, an action of the popes and kings of Hungary began, to persecute the Romanian Orthodox Church. This involved the conversion or destruction of the "schismatics," "heretics," and "false Christians" from his kingdom. King Louis the Great (1342-1382) inaugurated an even harsher religious policy towards the Romanians, starting with the year 1366. By a *first act* he refused to recognize to the Romanian princes the quality of nobles, unless they were confirmed by royal acts and ordered the "extermination" of the "Wallachians". By *another act* the king conditioned the right of dominion over the land and the re-knowledge of the quality of noble by the belonging to the Catholic denomination. Finally, *by the third act*, the king ordered the nobles and other landowners, cities and towns to arrest the "*Slavic or schismatic*" (Orthodox) priests.<sup>17</sup>

By royal decrees, the Orthodox denomination was outlawed, and the Romanians removed from the political life of the country; at the same time, only one denomination was recognized, the Catholicism. No one could own any property, neither as a nobleman nor as a prince, unless "*he was a true Catholic and followed that faith which the Roman Church believes and confesses.*"<sup>18</sup> It was also stipulated the confiscation of the estates of the nobles and princes who would dare to house Orthodox priests, forbidding everyone to baptize their children through Orthodox priests.

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<sup>15</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 221.

<sup>16</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 222.

<sup>17</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 286-287.

<sup>18</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 288.

Until the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Orthodox Romanians were not obliged to pay tithes to the Catholic Church, except for serfs on the churchly estates who paid the usual serf tributes to their masters, but from this century, the Catholic hierarchy began to demand tithes also from the Romanians. However, all these measures to oppress the Church and the Orthodox faithful did not lead to the desired result. The kings themselves, although supporting the papal policy of converting the Orthodox to Catholicism, did not fully fulfil the measures of repression envisioned by the popes, as the expulsion of the "schismatics" from Transylvania would have led to the destruction of entire regions, which was not in the interest of their feudal lords, who would have lost their labour. Catholic proselytizing action lost its intensity after 1541, when the Hungarian state was transformed by the Turks into a pashalik, and Transylvania became an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty, ceasing altogether after 1556, the year of the suppression of the Roman Catholic Episcopate of Alba Iulia and of other Catholic settlements in Transylvania.<sup>19</sup>

Despite so many repressive measures, the Orthodox Church continued its activity among its believers, with churches, monasteries, priests, archpriests, abbots and hierarchs. In the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries we find a number of Romanian stone churches and monasteries, most of which still survive to nowadays. They are an undoubted proof of our presence and continuity in these lands, in spite of so many vicissitudes.<sup>20</sup>

In Maramures there was an Orthodox monastery in the village of Peri (Ukraine), dedicated to the Holy Archangel Michael, founded by two brothers, Dragos and Drag. This Dragos is the future ruler of the country of Moldavia. On August 13, 1391, the Patriarch Anthony IV (1389-1390 and 1391-1397) declared the monastery a *stavropighie*, being directly related to the patriarch. He invested the abbot Pahomie with the title of patriarchal exarch, having some attributions reserved for bishops: to teach priests and believers, to judge the churchly processes, to sanctify churches. The only exceptions were the ordinations, which of course were performed by the "*local bishops*", mentioned in the same patriarchal act of 1391. The patriarchal Stavropighia of Peri then played an important role in the religious and cultural life of the Transylvanian Romanians.<sup>21</sup>

From the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the local inhabitants and the colonists kidnapped from the pastures, forests, fields and meadows of the Peri monastery and other neighbouring monasteries. At the abbot's complaint, the komit of Maramureş forced them to return what they had stolen and pay a fine in cash. The name of the abbot, Simion Salajanul, shows his Transylvanian origin, which proves that the monastery gravitated towards Transylvania, and not towards Halici. The Ruthenian bishop, John from Muncaci (Ukraine), tried to limit as much as possible the rights of exarch of the abbot Ilaria of Peri, who complained to the King Vladislav II of Hungary (1400-1516). At the trial which was judged at Buda, the abbot Ilarie won the trial, the privileges of 1391, on the

<sup>19</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 289.

<sup>20</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 290.

<sup>21</sup> Ștefan LUPAȘ, *Biserica Ortodoxă Română din Ardeal și Ungaria în veacul al XV-lea*, MA, 3-4, (1957): 223-224.

condition that both he and his successors should give due honour to the bishop of Muncaci, "and to the archbishop of Transylvania, as to his superiors". We can conclude that if in 1494 the "superior" of the abbot of Peri was the "archbishop of Transylvania", the "local bishops" of 1391 were also from here.<sup>22</sup>

In 1479 a new hierarch appeared for the Orthodox believers of Transylvania: Metropolitan bishop *Ioanichie*. At his request, the King *Matthias Corvinus* (1458-1490) exempted forever the Romanian Orthodox priests of Maramures from any donations to the state, and all the Orthodox believers, without any distinction, from the Catholic tithe.<sup>23</sup>

The Romanian Orthodox metropolitan bishops of Transylvania established their headquarters in Feleac for about seven decades. Just as John de Caffa settled in Hunedoara, where Iancu had built his fortress, which still exists today, his son Matthias Corvinus probably asked the Orthodox metropolitan bishop of Transylvania to settle near Cluj, a city that came under him to a special economic and political significance. The first known hierarch in Feleac was *Daniil*. He is mentioned, in this capacity, in a note on a *Slavonic Tetraevanghel* - the four gospels. His successors Mark, Dancius and Peter, who appear in Latin documents as "bishops", but we must also consider them metropolitan bishops, as were both their predecessors and their successors. The ordination of the metropolitans of Transylvania was made in Wallachia, because as early as May 1401, the metropolitan bishop of Hungary-Wallachia was called by the ecumenical patriarch "exarch of all Hungary and the Regions", by "Regions" meaning Transylvania. From an administrative point of view, the Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania had its specific rules, full autonomy, without being noticed any interference in its internal affairs from the Metropolitan Church of Hungary-Wallachia.<sup>24</sup>

In 1489, Stephen the Great, lord of Moldavia, obtained from the king of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus, son of Iancu de Hunedoara, two possessions (feuds) in Transylvania, in which he and his boyars would take refuge in case he was forced by the Turks to leave their country. These were the fortresses of Ciceu, near the town of Dej and the Cetatea de Balta, on Tarnave. Both remained in the possession of the rulers of Moldavia until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, Petru Rares managed to conquer in 1529 the fortresses of Bistrita, Rodna and Unguras. Because the rulers of Moldavia needed in these Transylvanian possessions not only political military, but also ecclesiastical help, they established a Romanian Orthodox Episcopate in the village of *Vad*, belonging to the Ciceu fortress, where there was an Orthodox monastery. Most historians consider that the Orthodox Episcopate of *Vad* and the episcopal church, still existing today, were founded by Stephen the Great, for the Romanian Orthodox believers from his Transylvanian feoff.

The first bishop of *Vad*, about whom we have certain news, was *Anastasie*, a native of Moldavia and a trusted man of Petru Rares. During his pastorate, Petru Rares

<sup>22</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 293.

<sup>23</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, (Sibiu: 1978), 77.

<sup>24</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Începuturile Mitropoliei Ortodoxe a Transilvaniei*, (București: 1980), 93-94.

gave two estates to the Episcopate: Upper Bogata (Bogata de Sus) and Lower Bogata (Bogata de Jos), as well as a mill in Catcau, and his predecessors in the royal seat had given him the estates Vad and Slatina. With all the confidence that Petru Rares had given him, Bishop Anastasie, in 1538, machinated against his benefactor, for which he was expelled by the Moldavian ruler, retiring to the Putna monastery. In 1541, Petru Rares forgave him, resuming his seat as a ruler of the episcopate. In 1546 also Petru Rares appointed a new bishop in Vad, *Tarasie*, and in 1550 his son Ilias designated Gheorghe as bishop. In 1557 a new bishop appeared, *Marcu*, and later *Spiridon* and *John Cernea*. Usually, the bishops of Vad were ordained by the metropolitan bishops from Suceava, some being Moldavians, other Transylvanians who became monks in Moldavia.<sup>25</sup>

The Romanian Orthodox Church of Transylvania has been active in this century in very harsh conditions. In 1451 the Turks conquered Hungary, which was divided into three: the northern part was occupied by the Habsburgs, the central and southern became Turkish pashalik, and Transylvania, Banat, Crisana, Satmar and Maramures were organized into an autonomously principality, under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. These Romanian territories remained in this situation for about 150 years.<sup>26</sup>

After a period of internal anarchy, the princes of Calvinist denomination began to rule Transylvania. The Diet successively decreed, as "receptae" religions, that is, admitted, the new Protestant denominations: Lutheran, Calvinist and Unitarian. The Romanian Orthodox Church, which was the denomination of the overwhelming majority of the Transylvanian population, remained in its old state of "tolerated", unrecognized religion. After 1556, when the Diet of Transylvania abolished the Roman Catholic Episcopate of Alba Iulia, the place of Catholic proselytizing action was taken by the Calvinist one, which pursued the same goals: the alienation of Romanians from their faith and nation.<sup>27</sup>

In these circumstances, around the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the headquarters of the Metropolitan Church of Transylvania moved from Feleac to other localities. The first metropolitan known in the second half of the century is *John*, a former priest in Pesteană (near Hateg), ordained in 1553 in Wallachia. He probably established his residence as a ruler of the episcopate at the Prislop monastery. His successor, in 1557, was *Christopher*, who had his residence at the monastery from Geoagiul de Sus (Alba county). Christopher was succeeded by *Sava*, in 1559, who came from Wallachia. With his blessing, the deacon Coresi printed in Brasov, in 1560, the book entitled *Christian Question (Intrebare crestineasca)*. We do not know for what reasons, between 1561 and 1562, Sava was replaced by bishop Gheorghe. Sava shepherded until 1570, when he retired from the see. Near the end of his pastorate, he settled in the village of Lancram, near Alba Iulia, where he bought a house. In the last three decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Romanian Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Transylvania established its headquarters in Alba Iulia, which was now also the capital of the principality. Thus, in

<sup>25</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 120.

<sup>26</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 121.

<sup>27</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 121.

1572, a new metropolitan bishop of Transylvania, named *Eftimie*, was ordained at Ipek, Serbia. He is *the first Orthodox metropolitan bishop of the Transylvanian Romanians with residence in Alba Iulia*. He pastored for a short time, because in 1574 the prince of Transylvania, of the time, designated *Christopher II* in his place, as metropolitan bishop. In 1579, Metropolitan bishop *Ghenadie* was consecrated in Targoviste. During his pastorate, several books were printed in Brasov by the deacon Coresi. Ghenadie died at the beginning of 1585. In his place, the council of Romanian priests elected the abbot *John from Prislop*, also ordained by the metropolitan bishop of Hungary-Wallachia, in Targoviste.<sup>28</sup>

In the 16th century, the reformist ideas of Martin Luther and Jean Calvin began to penetrate Transylvania. As a result, the Saxons here embraced Lutheranism, and a large part of the Hungarians, Calvinism. Because the new doctrine of Calvin had been accepted by the prince of Transylvania himself and by the great nobility, it came to the point that the Diet of the country, convened in 1556, abolished the Roman Catholic Episcopate of Alba Iulia, secularizing its fortunes, and the Catholic priests and monks were expelled from Transylvania. Due to this fact, it was possible to establish in Alba Iulia the residence of the Romanian Orthodox metropolitan bishops of Transylvania. Since then, the Catholic propaganda among Romanians can be considered over for a century and a half, its place being taken by the Calvinist propaganda. The Calvinist leaders of Transylvania considered that in order to attract the Romanians to Calvinism, it was necessary to place some Calvinist "bishops" amongst the Romanians. Three such "bishops" are known: *Gheorghe of Sangeorz* (1566), *Paul of Turdas* (1569) and *Michael of Turdas* (1577). There were too few Romanians who embraced Calvinism, and they did so only to preserve their noble properties and titles, while alienating themselves from the people from whom they came. The great mass of the Romanian believers remained in the bosom of the ancestral Orthodox Church, giving obedience to the metropolitan bishops of Transylvania or to the bishops of Vad.<sup>29</sup>

The Romanian Orthodox Church in Transylvania was able, in the 16th century, to carry out its activity due first of all to the help that came to it from the rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia. The Metropolitan Church of Transylvania did not have a stable residence, but it moved, successively, from Feleac to Geoagiu, Lancram and, finally, to Alba Iulia. It knew an ephemeral state of flowering under the great ruler Mihai Viteazul. The attempts of the Calvinists to attract the Romanians to their denomination proved to be utterly futile, as had also happened to those of the Catholics in previous centuries.

### **The wooden Orthodox churches of Transylvania and the crystallization of a national style**

In Transylvania, the Orthodox architectural art could not develop as in Wallachia and Moldavia because of the foreign oppression.<sup>30</sup> Characteristic for the religious

<sup>28</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 498-502.

<sup>29</sup> Mircea PĂCURARIU, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, 505-507.

<sup>30</sup> Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica generală*, (București: EIBMBOR, 1998), 521.

architecture in Transylvania are the wooden churches that are found throughout the mountainous region and especially in Maramures, Crisana and Salaj. They precede the "wall and stone" architecture. Not too old churches have been preserved, as the wood does not last long; the oldest is the church from Ieud-Maramures dating from 1370.<sup>31</sup>

The evolution of the wooden church - being particularly dynamic - obviously reflects both the level of civilization of a community and the level reached by the means of production at a given time. In the literature, the idea is quite common that the maximum age limit for the wooden churches from Transylvania would be between the 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> centuries, but the stage of evolution of wood architecture of the 15<sup>th</sup> century could not have been reached without 2-3 centuries of previous experience.<sup>32</sup>

The wooden architecture from the north of Transylvania is special and naturally marked the evolution of the ecclesiastical buildings from the neighbouring lands, Satmar, Salaj, Crisana, too. The preponderance of the wooden churches from Transylvania is indisputable, but the documents related to them are rare, the only sources of research are the archives and church documents that attest to their existence only from the 14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (ex. Churches from Barsana 1390, Ieud din Deal 1364, Sacalasseni 1442). However, the archaeological excavations from the voivodship precinct from Dabaca, discovered together with other traces of habitation from the 6<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> century, the foundations of two churches, one of which was dated with certainty in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The square plan of the nave and the altar led the archaeologists to conclude that they probably derive from the plans of the older wooden churches.<sup>33</sup>

The very existence of laws in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, by which the Romanians were forbidden to build stone churches, confirms the existence of the wooden churches long before the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The geographical and socio-economic conditions, relatively similar on the entire Transylvanian space, dominated by the wooden architecture, reveal a certain unity of it. Of all the areas studied, the wooden architecture of *Maramures* has the greatest complexity and diversity, thus, integrated in the European context, it is part of the features of the Central European wood architecture. The wooden church as an architectural program, is extremely well represented in this area.

In the Bihor area there is *one of the rare wooden churches with a baroque tower, built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century* and in the Salaj area we are dealing with an architectural element not yet sufficiently explained in the specialized works, namely, "*wooden churches with a semicircular altar*".<sup>34</sup>

In Tara Motilor, a well-individualized area from an architectural point of view at the level of Transylvania, from the analysis of the plans of the wooden churches, the rectangular plan with pentagonal detached apse is constantly detached. It is

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<sup>31</sup> C. PETRANU, *Bisericile de lemn ale românilor ardeleni*, (Sibiu: 1934), 18.

<sup>32</sup> Romulus ZAMFIR, *Arhitectura populară a lemnului în Transilvania - în context european*, (Sibiu: Universităţii "Lucian Blaga", 2007), 5.

<sup>33</sup> Romulus ZAMFIR, *Arhitectura populară a lemnului în Transilvania - în context european*, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Tudor OTELEŞEANU *Contribuţii la cunoaşterea arhitecturii bisericilor de lemn din Transilvania, MI*, (1991): 27.

unanimously recognized by specialists that the evolution of the plans of the wooden churches started from the plans of the secular wooden constructions. Starting from the simple, rectangular plan of the peasant houses, which inspired the plans of the wooden churches, there is a classification of them in three types<sup>35</sup>: type 1 - the wooden church with a rectangular plan and the polygonal apse of the altar, *non-unhooked* where the craftsmen, in order to differentiate it from the house, highlighted a room and placed the bell tower in front of it; type 2 - the wooden church with a rectangular plan and the unhooked polygonal apse of the altar, evolved from type 1; type 3 - the wooden church with the initial rectangular plan and which has both polygonal ends.<sup>36</sup> The geographical and socio-economic conditionings, relatively similar on the entire Transylvanian area, dominated by the wooden architecture, reveal a certain unity of it.<sup>37</sup>

Painting in popular wooden architecture is generally known by its presence in places of worship, but especially as a way to decorate them in two ways: the representation of religious theme and the decoration of the architectural elements. The representativeness of wood painting in Transylvania derives from the ensembles of *mural painting* of the wooden churches from the area of Cluj, Maramures, Arad and the Apuseni Mountains.<sup>38</sup>

This natural and permanent contact between the majority Romanian population and the cohabiting nationalities of Catholic, respectively Calvinist or Lutheran denomination will lead to the reception of some architectural and pictorial artistic elements such as the *Roman-Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque or Neoclassical*, which can be seen especially in the Transylvanian area. However, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a need to return to the Byzantine tradition, within the neo-Byzantine style.<sup>39</sup>

These clarifications related to the architecture and evolution of the wooden churches highlight their importance within the entire intra-Carpathian area. Transylvanian wooden architecture in the European context has the great merit of highlighting that there are significant similarities between the wooden churches from Transylvania and those from the whole Carpathian area (southern Poland, Slovakia and Eastern Hungary, the historical Maramures beyond the Tisza). These links attested historically, documentary, by the churches preserved and kept in open-air museums attest the artistic and architectural value of the holy places.

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<sup>35</sup> Virgil VĂTĂȘIANU, *Contribuție la studiul tipologiei bisericilor de lemn din Țările Române*, AII, III, (Cluj-Napoca, Academiei R.P.R., 1960), 142.

<sup>36</sup> Ioan GODEA, *Biserici de lemn din Nord- Vestul Transilvaniei*, (București: Meridiane, 1996), 52.

<sup>37</sup> Romulus ZAMFIR, *Arhitectura populară a lemnului în Transilvania - în context european*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Romulus ZAMFIR, *Arhitectura populară a lemnului în Transilvania - în context european*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> Ștefan METEȘ, *Zugravii bisericilor române*, în „*Din istoria artei religioase române*” I, (București: 1929), 27.

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