

THE PINACOTEQUE OF CĂLDĂRUȘANI MONASTERY

Ruxandra Nemțeanu*

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Abstract: The Căldărușani Monastery, a fortress monastery and an important nucleus in the suite of defence systems set up by Wallachian rulers around Bucharest, was founded by Matei Basarab, and has since been called the “fortress”. History notes that the Căldărușani Monastery has been used since 1690 as a prison for political adversaries.

Metropolitan Ghenadie Petrescu, born in 1836 in Bucharest, became a monk in Căldărușani at the age of 18, and was elected Metropolitan-Primate of the Romanian Orthodox Church of Hungaro-Wallachia on May 18th, 1893, following in the seat of Metropolitan Iosif Gheorghian (1829-1909), who had withdrawn because of disagreements with the Conservative government which came into power at the time. In turn, he was removed from the metropolitan seat, which determined a forced residence at the Căldărușani Monastery. There he arranged his dwelling, which in time became a true *pinacoteque* (Painting Gallery).

In 2002, through the National Restoration Plan of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, an important amount is allocated for both the design and the execution of the restoration of the *pinacoteque*, which was near collapse. The restoration works lasted from 2003 until August 30th, 2018, the moment of celebrating 100 years since the death of the Metropolitan; the institution of the Romanian Patriarchate desired the sanctification of the building, therefore hastening the completion of the execution works.

Rezumat: Mănăstirea Căldărușani, mănăstire fortăreață, un important nucleu în suita sistemului de apărare constituit de domnitorii valahi în jurul Bucureștiului, a fost fondată de Matei Basarab și este ceea ce s-a numit dintotdeauna “cetatea”. Istoria consemnează că Mănăstirea Căldărușani a fost încă din 1690 utilizată ca închisoare pentru adversarii politici.

Mitropolitul Ghenadie Petrescu, născut la 1836 la București, călugărit la 18 ani la Căldărușani, a fost ales Mitropolit al Ungrovlahiei - Primat al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române în data de 18 mai 1893, urmând în scaun mitropolitului Iosif Gheorghian (1829-1909) ce se retrăsese din cauza neînțelegerilor cu guvernul conservator ajuns la putere. La rândul lui, Ghenadie Petrescu a fost dat jos din scaunul de mitropolit și a avut domiciliu forțat la Mănăstirea Căldărușani, unde și-a amenajat locuința, devenită în timp o adevărată Pinacotecă.

În anul 2002, prin Planul Național de Restaurare al Ministerului Culturii și Cultelor se alocă o sumă importantă atât pentru proiectare cât și pentru execuție, pentru restaurarea Pinacotecii, care se afla aproape în colaps. Lucrările de restaurare au durat din anul 2003 până la 30 august 2018, când se împlineau 100 de ani de la moartea mitropolitului, iar instituția Patriarhiei Române a dorit sfințirea clădirii, grăbind finalizarea lucrărilor de execuție.

* Spiru Haret University, Faculty of Architecture, Bucharest, e-mail: rnemteanu@yahoo.com

The Căldărușani Monastery, a fortress-like convent, an important centre in the defence system set up by the Wallachian rulers around Bucharest, was built in a strategic, rather hidden place, in the former *Codrii Vlăsiei* (the Forests of Wallachia), on *Balta Caldărușani* (Căldărușani Pond). It is difficult to say whether the hydronym's name came first or if it originates in that of the site and of the monastery. The monastic ensemble developed on the small peninsula, about a quarter of a kilometre long, facing west-east, in a natural position surrounded on three sides by water. It is probable, according to the once visible particularities of the relief of the place that in its narrower part the peninsula had been artificially cut by a ditch in order to improve the defensive efficiency.

However, in a *zapis*¹ dated November 4th, 1728, the water and the *Balta Căldărușani* pond are mentioned. Located downstream from the confluence of the Vlăsiei and Cociovaliștei valleys, the current length of the *Căldărușani* water is approximately four and a half kilometres and the maximum depth around the monastery of over four meters. The monastic ensemble developed on the small peninsula surrounded on three sides by water. The quadrilateral fortified enclosure of the monastery comprises a strong enclosure wall with an entrance bell tower, a large church, cellars, trapeze, etc., founded by the ruler Matei Basarab. The main construction of Matei Basarab's foundation is known as the “fortress” - the quadrilateral enclosure housing the large church, via an enclosure wall, including an entrance tower.

A second monastic court, outside the “fortress”, was created later, during safer times. Partially destroyed or enclosed by modern buildings, this first enclosure wall might have remained unknown, had it not been described by the well-known J. A. Vaillant, a former French language professor at the National College of St. Sava in Bucharest, in 1841, who has left a picturesque description of the Căldărușani monastery: “the first enclosure wall rises in front, grooved like a fortress; passing through a portico one enters the first courtyard. Somewhat farther away was the second enclosure in which one used to enter through another portico.”² Furthermore, the French traveller appreciated it, overall, as “an entire city with no women /... /, a two hundred and six year old phalanstery, perfectly located on a plateau overlooking the beautiful lake that surrounds dark forests, as ancient as the earth /... /; the cluttered buildings could perhaps be more enjoyable when compared to monotonous regularity.”³

¹ Slavic term for “document”, common in correspondence or communication during the time.

² Veniamin 1973, pp. 84-85.

³ *Ibidem*, loc cit.