

AVATARS OF A DESTROYED MONUMENT: THE VĂCĂREȘTI MONASTERY. 1985-2022

Dan Mohanu*

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Abstract: From its demolishing until today, in an unending suffering, the amplest monastic ensemble from the last great chapter of Romanian medieval art attempts to recompose its dismembered image. The reconstruction à *l'identique* and the resuming of life in the monastic space, the pious reunion of the dismembered elements of the church in a memorial with partial anastylases and suggestions of the sacred space, the integration of the recovered fragments in the museal circuit of Bucharest, the virtual reconstruction, represent at the same time the subject of unending discussions, controversies, or resigned solutions. Beyond the unhonoured promises, the obstinate, decades long efforts, to sensitise the public conscience and to awaken the will of the authorities, the issue with the Văcărești Monastery remains symptomatically unsolved: firstly, the recouping of the foundation place. The restitution of the eighty fragments of mural painting that had been extracted, the anastylasis of the magnificent columns in the narthex of the church and the conservation of that which had been saved from the stonework of the ecclesial space, are until today the only signs of a long and hesitant process of recovery.

Rezumat: De la demolarea ei și până astăzi, într-o neîntreruptă suferință, cel mai amplu ansamblu monastic din ultimul mare capitol al artei medievale românești încearcă să-și refacă imaginea dezmembrată. Reconstituirea à *l'identique* și reluarea vieții în spațiul monastic, pioasa reunire a elementelor dezmembrate ale bisericii într-un memorial cu parțiale anastiloze și sugestii ale spațiului sacru, integrare a fragmentelor recuperate în circuitul muzeal al Bucureștilor, reconstituirea virtuală, reprezintă deopotrivă subiectul unor nesfârșite discuții, controversate sau desemnate soluții. Dincolo de promisiunile neonorate, de eforturile obstinate, vreme de decenii, de a sensibiliza conștiința publică și a trezi voința autorităților, problema Mănăstirii Văcărești rămâne în mod simptomatic nerezolvată: în primul rând, redobândirea locului ctitoririi. Restituirea celor optzeci de fragmente de pictură murală extrase, anastiloza magnificelor coloane din pronaosul bisericii și conservarea a ceea ce s-a salvat din pietrăria spațiului eclesial sunt până astăzi singurele semne ale unui lung și ezitant proces de recuperare.

Erected on the plateau of an elevated hilly area, south-east of Bucharest, the foundation of the Mavrocordatos family went through several phases of construction. Between the end of 1715 and the autumn of 1730 Voivode Nicholas-Alexander Mavrocordatos¹ builds the large precinct, hosting the catholicon – The Church of the Holy Trinity, consecrated in 1723 – The Royal Quarters, the abbey, the kitchens, the beautiful arched galleries on the eastern side. Dedicated to the Patriarchy in Jerusalem, the monastery was finished in

* National University of Arts, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: dan_ileana@yahoo.com

¹ Nicholas Mavrocordatos was ruler of Moldova in 1709-1710 and 1711-1715, and ruler of Wallachia in 1715-1716 and in 1719-1730, when he returned to the throne. His father, Alexander Mavrocordatos Exaporite, depicted in the votive painting from Văcărești, had the rank of Grand Dragoman and was a confidant of the Sultan. On his father's side he originated from the upper Greek aristocracy from Chios, and on his mother's, Sultana Hrisocoleu, was a descendant of the old dynasty of Moldova. He was the first Phanariot ruler of Wallachia, after the tragic demise of Constantin Brâncoveanu. With a reign marked by dramatic events, caught between the tensions with the autochthonous boyars and the difficult external situation generated by the conflict between the Ottoman Empire, to which the voivode had remained loyal, and the Habsburg Empire, the voivode was taken down by the plague, being entombed in the nave of the catholicon in Văcărești. A highly educated man, he offered his unequalled foundation a mission in the lines of the great tradition of the Romanian monasteries, gifting it with a rich library, a typography, and a Greek school. He himself was the author of books written in the Old Greek language: *On debts, Filotheos' Respites, The Defamation of Nicotine, On the Importance of Learning and Lecturing Books*. He was a supporter of the Athonite monasteries – Dionysiou, Konstamonitou, Karakalou, Stavronikita, St. Paul, Xeropotamou, and the Great Lavra – of the St. Catherine Monastery on Mount Sinai, of the Greek monastery Tatarna, of the Romanian monasteries Mărgineni (Wallachia) and Dancu (Iași). See Mărculeț *et alii* 2009, pp. 112-113.