

# STAVROPOLEOS MONASTERY THROUGH TIME. ON PRESERVING AND LOSING AUTHENTICITY\*

Dan Mohanu\*\*

**Keywords:** addition, remaking, restoration, reconstruction, plasterer, mural painting, authenticity.

**Abstract:** After the period of transition from the empiricism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the foundation of the first constitutional forms of protection of our historical monuments, in 1890, Stavropoleos Monastery stood under the attention of the authorities and on the cusp of an ample salvage intervention.

We can say that the restoration of the foundation of Metropolitan Ioanichie represented the transition from the methodology established by Lecomte du Noüy to the rigours of “historical restoration”, according to the stages proposed by Prof Grigore Ionescu. The conservation-restoration dichotomy, unequivocally expressed by architect H. Révoil in defence of his French colleague, transformed the creativity of the restorer into a perfectly legitimate action, in which addition and remaking were accepted. Suspended, the criterion of authenticity only functioned in the measure in which the creation of the restorer was impregnated by the spirit of the original work. On such permissive grounds, the genius of architect Ion Mincu saved the monastic ensemble from flagrant disaccords, building, in an elegant eclecticism and in the language of an original synthesis of the autochthonous architectural shapes, a new precinct, and rebuilding the church steeple.

At the same time, Mincu distanced himself from the methodology of demolition and reconstruction intensely used by Lecomte du Noüy in the first-rank Romanian monuments. Entering the area of “historical restoration”, the restorer of Stavropoleos Monastery preserved, as far as what he considered possible, the authentic substance, from 1724 and 1730, of the church. The rebuilding of the steeple and the drastic remaking of the exterior painting and of the work of plasterer

Iordan was a visible connection to the new monastic precinct, with its portico and buildings.

**Rezumat:** După perioada de trecere de la empirismul secolului al XIX-lea la constituirea primelor forme instituționale de protecție a monumentelor noastre istorice, la 1890, Mănăstirea Stavropoleos se afla în atenția autorităților și în pragul unei ample intervenții de salvare.

Putem spune că restaurarea ctitoriei Mitropolitului Ioanichie a reprezentat tranziția de la metodologia împământenită de Lecomte du Noüy la rigorile “restaurării istorice”, conform etapizării propuse de profesorul Grigore Ionescu. Dicotomia conservare-restaurare, exprimată fără echivoc de arhitectul H. Révoil în apărarea confratelui său francez, a transformat creativitatea restauratorului într-o acțiune perfect legitimă, în care adaosul și refacerea erau admise. Suspendat, criteriul autenticității nu mai funcționa decât în măsura în care, creația restauratorului era impregnată de spiritul operei originale. Pe un asemenea teren permisiv, geniul arhitectului Ion Mincu a salvat ansamblul monastic de la dezacorduri flagrante, construind, într-un elegant eclectism și în limbajul unei originale sinteze a formelor arhitecturale autohtone, o nouă incintă și reconstruind turla bisericii.

În același timp, Mincu s-a îndepărtat de metodologia demolării și reconstrucției utilizată asiduu de Lecomte du Noüy la monumente românești de prim ordin. Intrând în zona «restaurării istorice», restauratorul Mănăstirii Stavropoleos a păstrat, pe cât a considerat posibil, substanța autentică, de la 1724 și 1730, a bisericii. Reconstrucția turlei și refacerea drastică a picturii exterioare și a operei stucatorului Iordan fost o vizibilă racordare la noua incintă monastică, cu porticul și clădirile sale.

Many of Bucharest’s medieval foundations bear today the marks of transformation and irreversible loss. Hit by earthquakes and brushfires, passing through the epoch of secularisation, subjected to arbitrary interventions, and more importantly destroyed or moved from their places of foundation in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the churches of the Capital City have partially lost their original appearance and ambiance.

Occurring at relatively short intervals, between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, earthquakes have had devastating effects on the ecclesiastic architecture of Bucharest.<sup>1</sup> The great earthquake of 1802 had cut down most of the steeples in the historical area of the Capital City, and the subsequent restorations have covered many of the medieval masonry works in hybrid clothing, with an Occidental influence, crowned with tin towers. Churches such as Curtea Veche (Old Court), Colțea, Crețulescu, Sf. Dumitru Poștă (Saint Dumitru Post), Biserica Doamnei (the Lady’s Church), or Biserica Icoanei (Icon Church)

\* The present article represents the version in English of the author’s contribution to the collective anniversary volume Stavropoleos 300, that will appear in June 2024.

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

<sup>1</sup> Nedioglu 1924, p. 154.