

THE *CAFAS* – AN ELEMENT OF LEVANTINE ARCHITECTURE IN THE CHURCHES OF WALLACHIA

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Abstract: In Wallachia two churches with *cafás* are known to exist, in Târgoviște and Strehaia. A third church, of the Radu Negru Vodă Monastery in Câmpulung Muscel, could also have had a *cafás*, as hypothesised by architects Grigore Ionescu, Cristian Moiescu and Cornel Ionescu. The importance of the *cafás* was remarkable from a religious point of view. The *cafás* assured, on the one hand, the separation of the women due to the dogma, and on the other hand, the protection of the lives of the people there, in what was a plot-filled era.

Rezumat: În Țara Românească se știe că există două biserici cu *cafás*, la Târgoviște și la Strehaia. A treia biserică, a Mănăstirii Radu Negru Vodă din Câmpulung Muscel ar fi putut fi și ea înzestrată cu *cafás*, așa cum presupun arhitecții Grigore Ionescu, Cristian Moiescu și Cornel Ionescu. Importanța *cafásului* a fost deosebită din punct de vedere religios. *Cafásul* asigura, pe de o parte, separarea femeilor datorită dogmei și, în al doilea rând, apărarea vieții celor care se găseau în acel loc, în acea epocă plină de comploturi.

In the medieval architecture of Wallachia, starting from as early as the 14th century,¹ clear forms of Byzantine architectural influence appeared. Since the Byzantine Empire had a millennium-long, complete, and complex rule over the Levant, the two notions are superposed from a geographical point of view. Therefore, it is not wrong to alternatively use, with the same meaning, one term or the other when there is a reference to the Eastern Mediterranean, later called, after World War One, “the Near East”. The state of the population must also be considered. In that area of littoral of the Mediterranean Sea there was a veritable mortar of peoples. From it there arose geniuses, such as those in the field of construction. They had influence over the entire Eurasia.

Considering the rules imposed by the “celestial religions”² – Christianity,³ Islam, and Judaism – during the officiation of the sermons a separation of the sexes was imposed.⁴

In the Christian churches the area reserved for women was generally represented by the galleries above the ground floor, on the northern, southern, and western sides of the church, therefore with the exception of the altar side. This placement was assumed by the other religions – Judaism, Islam.⁵

The denomination of these spaces appears sometimes, in the 6th century, as *catechumena*, rarer as *gynaecium* or *matronaeum* (=the women's place) – initially such a place also being mentioned on the ground floor, subsequently being placed on the upper galleries.

In time, a total separation between the sexes appeared and also between the women who were part of the imperial family. The latter got a reserved place in the galleries-loggias-balconies on the upper floor, that were also reached via the exterior, with a separate entrance, where they were screened from the gaze of the crowd, from any violent attempts, a space that got the name, in the local ecclesiastic architecture, of *cafás*.⁶

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¹ Moiescu 1998, p. 53.

² Disli, Ozcan 2020, pp. 279-295.

³ Taft, 1998 pp. 27-87.

⁴ Disli, Ozcan 2020, pp. 279-295.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 291.

⁶ In this case, we are talking about the initial definition of the *cafás*: balcony from which the family of the ruler, and at a certain point only the ruling ladies, listened to the sermon (DEX under *Cafás*). The other definitions of the *cafás* (choir, for example), do not take into consideration the essential elements: that the church had to have a royal rank, and that the balcony/*cafás* was to be dedicated to the ruling family. To this end we insisted on correcting the old definition given until now by people who did not consider the writings and accomplishments of the emperors and architects of the Byzantine Empire.