

# THE GOTHIC HALL IN THE “THREE HIERARCHS”. TESTIMONIAL EXCERPTS ABOUT THE RESTORATION COORDINATED BY ANDRÉ LECOMTE DU NOÛY AND ITS DESTINY IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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**Abstract:** We live with the feeling – at times folded into stripes of certainty – that the monuments we pass by and admire in the few breaks between daily struggles have always been there, patiently waiting to tell us a story or inspire us with a life lesson. It is illusory to think, though, that the urban landscape has always benefitted from their beauty. In this respect, one such unwanted and misfortunate proof is the Gothic Hall. During the last two centuries, the building in the “Three Hierarchs” churchyard showed its splendour only for mere decades. For the rest of the many years, it was a ruin and a reason for administrative and construction site tensions.

**Rezumat:** Trăim cu impresia, pliată uneori în striuri de certitudine, că monumentele pe lângă care trecem, pe care le admirăm în răgazurile dintre agitațiile cotidiene, sunt acolo dintotdeauna, așteptându-ne răbdătoare să ne spună câte o poveste, să ne inspire vreo pildă. E o iluzie însă că ele au înfrumusețat mereu peisajul urban, una dintre nedoritele și nefericitele dovezi fiind reprezentată de Sala Gotică. Din curgerea ultimelor două veacuri, abia dacă putem aduna câțiva zeci de ani în care edificiul din curtea Trei Ierarhilor să-și fi etalat splendoarea. În restul celor prea mulți ani rămași a fost ruină, pricină de tensiuni administrative și șantier.

Public memory, historical research, architectural expertise, and even some travel sketches, have highlighted the “Three Hierarchs”, with apparent scholarly reliability from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a representative monument of Romanian civilisation. N. Gabrielescu, one of the architects involved in the restoration of the “Three Hierarchs”, showed in 1899 that “the long list of Moldavian churches had come to completion, acquiring an ultimate form of brilliance upon creating “The Three Hierarchs” in the middle of Iași. The vault proportions of the building and the rich decorations exceed any counterpart within the neighbouring countries, making it even unique in Europe”.<sup>1</sup> This citation is illustrative to grasp the scarce data and extremely rare details – either written or painted – about the Gothic Hall, not only up to that point but even nowadays. It was almost always embedded in the story as a *sine qua non* part of the “Three Hierarchs” ensemble, thus eclipsed by the refinement and architecture characterising the building erected during the reign of Vasile Lupu. Such a projection – with consistent details – is signed by G. Balș.<sup>2</sup> His scientific assessment in 1933 enabled him to launch a supposition, increasingly vehiculated during that time (*i.e.* that “the Gothic Hall must have resembled that of Dragomirna and Cetățuia, leaning against the outer wall”).<sup>3</sup> Glimpses of memories show it as the location where the Synod of Iași was organised in 1462.

The legend’s beginnings, primarily of a written nature, can be traced in the travel journal penned by Paul of Aleppo.<sup>4</sup> He stated that the monastery was like no other<sup>5</sup> and that “everybody agrees that neither Moldavia, Wallachia, nor the land of the Cossacks possesses a church that can compare with this as to ornamentation and beauty”. The orthodox archdeacon also took a glance at what the place’s culture preserved as the Gothic Hall; he mentioned succinctly that the refectory had a vault made of stone.<sup>6</sup>

The notes of foreign travellers, reproduced in a fundamental thematic series in Romanian culture and mostly historiography,<sup>7</sup> failed to mention the building near the “Three Hierarchs”.

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<sup>1</sup> Gabrielescu 1889, pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> Balș 1933, pp. 134-145.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 307.

<sup>4</sup> See Paul of Aleppo 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Paul of Aleppo 2014, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 191.

<sup>7</sup> More precisely, *Călători străini despre Țările Române*.