

THE METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL OF CURTEA DE ARGES. THE LEAD ROOF, THE TOWERS AND THE GILDED CROSSÉS*

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Abstract: Founded by voivode Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521) in the year 1517, the Church of the Argeş Monastery, today the Metropolitan Cathedral of Argeş and Muscel, awakens admiration and interest through the characteristics of its layout, the placement and shape of its spires, the rich carved limestone decoration which adorns the facades, the nobility of certain construction materials. The present study proposes to draw attention to several less known documents that, along the centuries, have mentioned events pertaining to the degradation and repair of the roof of this wonderful Romanian mediaeval architectural monument.

Rezumat: Ctitorie din anul 1517 a voievodului Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521), Biserica Mănăstirii Argeş, astăzi Catedrală Arhiepiscopală a Argeşului şi Muscelului, trezeşte admiraţie şi interes prin caracteristicile sale planimetrice, dispunerea şi forma turelor, bogata decoraţie în calcar cioplit, ce împodobeşte faţadele, nobleţea unor materiale de construcţie. Studiul de faţă îşi propune să aducă în atenţie câteva însemnări mai puţin cunoscute care, de-a lungul secolelor, au menţionat evenimente legate de degradările şi reparaţiile acoperişului acestui minunat monument de arhitectură medievală românească.

An architectural monument can impress visually through the harmony and balance of its plan, the interior and exterior decoration, the nature of its construction materials and, of course, through the way in which the architectural design adapts to the specific function of the building (economic, administrative, political, social, military, cultural, religious). For every building the design of the roof is of particular importance, both by its utilitarian role of protecting the edifice and through its aesthetic role, of harmonising with the entire ensemble.

The church of the Argeş Monastery, built at the beginning of the 16th century (1517), today the Metropolitan Cathedral,¹ represents one of the most valuable mediaeval historical monuments in Romania. Historians, architects and art historians have dedicated important studies to this edifice.²

In the following, several aspects related to the roof of this monument will be approached. We would like to mention that, until the present, the topic of the roof has only been approached in a generic matter, and included in the general presentation of the church. Therefore, we considered as necessary to address this subject in detail, and mention important documents kept in the National Archives, some of them unpublished, regarding the restoration of the Episcopal Church in Curtea de Argeş (1875-1886). In this context the preoccupation of the architects of the time to preserve the original style of the church's roof is highlighted. In that which concerns the final solution that was adopted in the restoration of the small, *spiralled* spires, by adding the *fleuron* crown, it can be deduced that their symbolism had been misinterpreted, or perhaps even forgotten. In a cult edifice, the shape or, as the case, the ensemble of shapes that make a roof, but also the construction materials that are employed, are considered so as to correspond to the era's mentality, creating a connection of the man with the divinity.

The Church of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Curtea de Argeş displays a roof on which four slender towers stand guard: the large tower, *Pantocrator*, above the nave, and after it, above the narthex, the large tower in the centre and the two *spiralled* towers³ north-west and south-west of the entrance (Fig. 1). The ensemble of the roof shapes, unitary and harmonious through volume and proportion, allows for the reading of the layout

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¹ The church of the Argeş Monastery, built in 1517, becomes headquarters of the Argeş Diocese in 1793, and from 2009 the Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Argeş and Muscel. The ecclesiastic edifice is included in the *List of historical monuments in Romania*, classification code AG - II - a - A - 13 628.

² Reissenberger 1860; Odobescu 1915; Tocilescu f. a.; Jaffé 1911; Ghika-Budeşti 1927, pp. 143-182; Ghika-Budeşti 1931, pp. 6-41; Ionescu 1963, pp. 281-298; Lăzărescu 1967; Chihăia 1974, pp. 105-130; Drăguţ 1986, pp. 3-20; Moldovan 2012, pp. 18-37.

³ The *spiralled* towers are remarkable through their innovative construction procedure in the architecture of Romanian churches.