

THE POSSIBILITY AND FAILURE OF RECONSTRUCTION: TWO CASE STUDIES OF VĂCĂREȘTI AND COTROCENI

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Abstract: Accepted as part of the methodological structure of restoration, the reconstruction of the work of art, in its widest sense, from architecture to objects of mobile heritage, was legitimised either by the recovery of the memory of the destroyed heritage, or by the need of integrity of the image, with its many connotations. Also, the reconstruction has been assimilated, more or less abusively, with the act of fanciful reconstruction, of creative remaking or *anastylosis*. Stimulated today by the possibilities of endless, performant reconstitutions, by means of virtual space, reconstruction seems to get further and further away from one of the fundamental principles that governs the existence of heritage: the principle of authenticity understood as indestructible relationship between the image and the historicized matter in which it survived. This article analyses the dramatic destiny of the two monuments which were destroyed during the communist regime, the church of the Cotroceni Palace and the Văcărești monastic ensemble, in relation to the genesis of the concept of conservation-restoration of historical monuments in the Romanian space.

Rezumat: Acceptată a face parte din structura metodologică a restaurării, reconstrucția operei de artă, înțeleasă în sensul ei cel mai vast, de la arhitectură la obiectele patrimoniului mobil, a fost legitimată fie de recuperarea memoriei patrimoniului distrus, fie de nevoia, cu multiple conotații, a integrității imaginii. De asemenea, reconstrucția s-a identificat, mai mult sau mai puțin abuziv, cu actul reconstituirii fanteziste, al refacerii creative sau al anastilozei. Stimulată astăzi de posibilitățile reconstituirilor nelimitate, performante, din spațiul virtual, reconstrucția pare a se îndepărta tot mai mult de unul din principiile fundamentale care guvernează existența patrimoniului: principiul autenticității înțeles ca relație indestructibilă între imagine și materia istoricizată în care a supraviețuit. Articolul analizează destinul dramatic al celor două monumente distruse în timpul regimului comunist, biserica palatului Cotroceni și ansamblul monastic Văcărești, în raport cu începuturile formării conceptului de conservare-restaurare a monumentelor istorice în spațiul românesc.

Much has been written and commented about the destruction of the Văcărești Monastery (Fig. 1)¹ the commemoration of the disappearance of the most extended monastic ensemble of late mediaeval architecture gaining the symbolic dimensions of a national event.² Surprisingly however, the same thing failed to happen with the Cantacuzino foundation in Cotroceni (Fig. 2), which was at the end of a journey similar to that of the foundation of the Mavrocordat dynasty, passing through the act of secularization and ultimately destroyed in the final phase of the Communist era. The demolition of the former church of the Cotroceni Monastery³ happened shortly after the dramatic dismantling of the Văcărești Monastery, in a scenario that attempted to conceal the destruction of the church, accomplished at the same time as the restoration of the Royal Palace, converted in a presidential palace for the Ceaușescu regime. A part of the scenario was, as with Văcărești, the hasty removal of a modest fragment of the iconographic ensemble which subsequently disappeared while the church walls were demolished.

The destruction of the two voivodal foundations was survived by most of the stonework, along with a surface of less than 10% of the mural painting. These witnesses represented sufficiently convincing arguments in support of the idea, foreseeable after the events in 1989, of reconstructing the destroyed monuments. A recovery, an act of memory, which to some seemed imperiously necessary, and to others a gesture which was inadequate and doomed to failure.

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¹ Giurescu 1994, pp. 52, 80-90, Leahu 1996, Anania *et alii* 1995, pp. 171-186, Panaitescu 2008.

² Todireanu 2013.

³ Anania *et alii* 1995, pp. 90-108.