

## **THE DRAWING UP OF A DATABASE, THE STUDYING AND THE TURNING INTO GOOD ACCOUNT OF THE WOODEN CHURCHES FROM THE GORJ AND VALCEA COUNTIES, ROMANIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research project has the aim of the drawing up of a database, the studying and the turning into good account of the wooden monuments, including their mobile patrimony, and the drawing up of a scientific documentation used in the event of Emergency Interventions - preservation and restoration projects - on wooden churches from the Gorj and Valcea counties. The wooden churches had an important place in the history of the national and international architecture. Their existence is attested on the entire European continent. The wooden churches from the North part of Oltenia weren't studied systematically, so there is no complete study or repertory of these churches and we have no information about their conservation status. From a preliminary study that our firm did we can conclude that because of the degradation, the lack of interest of the local communities and the fact that they weren't used anymore, these churches are on the brink of disappearing. That's why the project we propose is so urgent, being the first stage in the protection and conservation of these important monuments. The mobile patrimony owned by parishes from the North part of Oltenia, besides the fact that it is not known, didn't benefit by small conservation or restoration operations, and it is in an advanced degree of degradation, being on the brink of disappearing. Once this study will be finished we hope that the local communities will be aware of the importance of these churches and they will invest money in their restoration-conservation, avoiding thus to watch them disappear for good.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The wooden churches from the territory of Romania were signaled from the end of the XIV<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the XV<sup>th</sup> Century, and a good example is the Șintea Church, attested documentary from 29 August 1338. But the oldest archeological remains date back to the XI<sup>th</sup> Century, for example the Dăbâc archeological site where they discovered the foundations of two wooden churches, with a square nave and altar, too. But, unfortunately, the oldest monuments of this kind date back only from the end of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Century, in the Maramureș area. There are today some area in Romania, like The Criș, Valea Maramureșului, The Northern part of Oltenia area, in which these monuments are very frequent and they share stylistic and structure resemblances to each other.

The wooden churches from The Gorj and Vâlcea Counties were not studied until now thoroughly, only sporadically, and we don't have a Repertory.

The wooden churches represent, from the architectural and spiritual points of view, the highest achievement of the craftsmanship and artistic expressions of the peasants starting with the XV<sup>th</sup> Century.

The wooden churches from The Gorj and Vâlcea Counties (although many of them rebuilt, others reconstructed with the original material, the majority in the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century, and others in the period between the two world wars) still retain decorative elements from the end of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Century or the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century. The deterioration and even destruction of these monuments was due, in part, to the wars and revolts, to the Austrian occupation, at the end of the XVII<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century, and also, to other social and historical events of the above mentioned period. At the beginning of the XIX<sup>th</sup> Century, many churches from The Gorj and Vâlcea Counties were robbed and even destroyed by some troupes of Turkish soldiers that came from the South part of the Danube.

Also, because of the historic and social conditions and of the evolution of the rural communities in time, in the XX<sup>th</sup> Century, from the Gorj and Vâlcea Counties, more than 200 wooden churches had disappeared.

It is well known the fact that in the period 1880 – the 1<sup>st</sup> World War the rural communities became stronger, from the economical point of view, so they started to erect larger wall churches, for the increased number of people. This had as a consequence the neglect of the old wooden churches that continued to be used, for a short period of time, as cemetery chapels. The same reason, the economical one, had as a consequence the movement of the center of the village, in the period between the XVII<sup>th</sup> and XIX<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Thus the wooden churches remained isolated, a few miles away from the communities that they erect new churches to replace the old ones.

Nowadays, the wooden churches that still exists, are destroyed in proportion of 60%-70%. Their existence is in danger and they might not survive in the next half of the century.

For these reasons, taking into consideration the value and the age of these monuments, their uniqueness in the European space and their importance for the wood civilization in Europe, we consider that it is necessary to integrate them in an ample European program, dedicated to the saving of these wooden monuments, that weren't restored at all in the last century.

### **2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

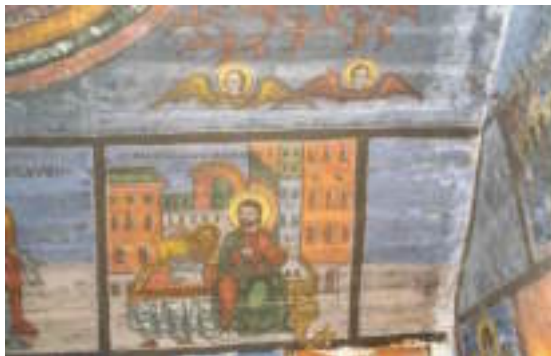
In the last 6 years, our firm, SC CONS-ART S.R.L., Craiova, Romania, started a campaign for the tracing out, the monitoring and the process of evaluation of these wooden monuments. In a project of collaboration with The Archbishopric of Oltenia, we succeeded in making preliminary studies and to renew the database of 140 wooden churches, that figured as such in the paper documentation, but with big gaps of information (from the artistic, historical and architectural points of view). Also, we completed the list of monuments drawn by The Romanian Ministry of Cultures in 2000 with new churches. All the wooden churches were studied, on their site, and a serious photo documentation was made (details of architecture, the interior paintings, ensemble photos). On some of the churches, we made some chemical and biological analyses and also we did some cleaning tests on the painting surface, at some of them. From

the churches that we studied we made a selection, a few examples of churches that we studied and the objectives that we wanted accomplished.

**The wooden church “ Saint Dumitru”, Jupânești commune, Boia village.** It was erected in 1760, and the interior painting dates from 1816. The conservation status of the interior painting is very poor. There is an exterior painting in the porch and in the narthex, on the East and West walls, there still exists the original painting coat.



Detail of the Altar – the Northern wall



Iconostasis Ensemble



Nave – detail vault



The exterior – The Lelești Church



Iconostasis Ensemble



Nave – detail



Iconostasis – detail

**The wooden church “ Saint Nicholas”, Lelești commune, Lelești village.** It was erected in 1774, the monument was remade, partially and painted again in 1847, and then again in 1932 and 1957 there were made some interventions. The conservation status of the interior painting is poor, partially, and mediocre in the rest.

**The wooden church “ Saint Paraschiva”, Peștișani commune, Peștișani village.** It was erected and attested documentary at 1735. In 1856 there were made major interventions on the monument and its interior painting. The conservation status of the painting is mediocre.



The exterior – The Peștișani Church



Detail of the Altar's vault



Iconostasis – detail



Ensemble of the Nave – West wall



Iconostasis – detail



Detail of the Nave's vault



Iconostasis Ensemble



Iconostasis - detail

**The wooden church “ The Dormition of The Virgin”, Turcinești commune, Horezu village.** It was erected in 1814, suffered major interventions in 1855. On the exterior of the church there was a canvas painting, destroyed now almost completely. The conservation status of the painting is very poor.

**The wooden church “ The Dormition of The Virgin”, Lelești commune, Frătești village.** It was erected at 25<sup>th</sup> June 1862, on the site of an old one dated back in 1825. The exterior painting is distemper on mortar, on wooden beams. The conservation status of the interior painting is very poor and partially destroyed.



The exterior – The Frățești Church



Narthex – detail – East wall



The porch - detail