

# ECCLESIASTICAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE BANAT DURING THE 14<sup>TH</sup>-15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES. THE REFLECTION OF A BORDER AREA IDENTITY

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The evolution of medieval ecclesiastical architecture in the Banat has always remained outside the interest of historical writing, regardless of the angle from which the theme of medieval ecclesiastical architecture has been approached in a multicultural and multi-denominational historiography. Synthetic monographs on the medieval art of Transylvania and the Arpadian Kingdom, older or more recent, have devoted few pages to the subject of Banatian medieval art<sup>1</sup>. The explanation is very simple: the extremely small number of historical monuments. In an approach to this ecclesiastical geography, I made reference to a statistics of the medieval churches and monasteries in the province that have disappeared. Around 226 parish churches were under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Diocese of Cenad during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A total of 39 monasteries were organized under the obedience of Rome, in the area between the Danube and the Mureș, from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and until the conquest of the province by the Turks in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During the same chronological period, the Eastern Orthodox Church had a total of 31 monasteries<sup>2</sup>. Regardless of their denomination, none of the medieval churches raised in the Banat up until 1550 survived the wars and invasions that afflicted the Banatian area from the 13<sup>th</sup> century until the Turkish-Austrian conflicts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Only five Orthodox monasteries withstood the calamities and

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<sup>1</sup> Virgil Vătășianu, *Arta feudală în Țările Române* (Bucharest, 1959); Tibor Gerevich, *Magyarország románkori emlékei* (Budapest, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Dumitru Țeicu, *Geografia ecleziastică a Banatului medieval* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujană, 2007), 41-44.

the wars. The archeological record compiled over the past few years for 18 churches identified in the space of the province and the architectural record of the few churches preserved to this day have included the issue of the Banat among the themes recently approached in art historiography<sup>3</sup>.

### *The research sources*

Archeological documentation has gathered information on a total of 31 monuments. Of these, 20 are circumscribed to the period of the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, providing substance to the discussion we propose on the ecclesiastical architecture of the Banat during this period. The researches conducted at Ilidia brought information both on the formation of a center of power pertaining to the Arpadian royalty in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century and on ecclesiastical architecture, with churches belonging to the late Romanesque<sup>4</sup>. The monuments from Căvăran (present-day Constantin Daicoviciu) and Caransebeș, as well as those from Turnu-Severin, are related to the particularly intense activity of the Franciscan Order in the Banat during the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The modest cult monuments from Reșița, Cârnecea, Berzovia and Mehadia, known thanks to recent archeological research, reflect the absorption of ecclesiastical stone-based architecture in the rural world in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is solely to medieval archeology that we owe the information gathered on the dissemination of the churches built on a triconch layout, of Serbian tradition and influence in the Banat, starting from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and lasting throughout the following centuries. The religious architecture of medieval boroughs and towns in the Banat, covered by the new urban structures imposed in the province during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has remained quasi-unknown. The churches from Căvăran and Caransebeș (the latter being a medieval Romanian town in the Mountain Banat), discovered by chance and through archeological investigations, are exceptions in this regard. The chronology of the monuments was based on the archeological inventory found in the necropolis around and, rarely, inside

<sup>3</sup> Adrian Andrei Rusu, George Pascu Hurezan, *Biserici medievale din județul Arad* (Arad, 2000), 36-43; Cristian Moisesescu, *Arhitectura românească veche* (Bucharest, 2001), 52-55; Zsuzsa Mór Heitel, "Egyházi építészet a Maros-völgy alsó szakaszán," in Tibor Kolar, ed., *A Középkori Dél-Alföld és Szer* (Szeged, 2000), 593-635; Nebojša Stanojević, *Arača trkve, nekropola, manastir* (Novi Sad, 2004), 5-35.

<sup>4</sup> Ștefan Matei, "Câteva considerații privind arhitectura romanică în Banat," *Banatica* 2 (1973): 311-319.

the churches. Archeological documents are fundamental for the historical reconstruction of the evolution of ecclesiastical architecture in the Banat.

Through their specific elements of stone and painting decoration, the monuments offer the support on which the discourse of art history is built. The case of the Banatian province is, however, special in this regard, because a small number of monuments provide substance to a historiographical approach elaborated on the basis of the aforementioned elements of art. The approaches towards a history of medieval art have started from analyses of the monuments in Mesici, Voilovița, Bezdin, Baziaș and Șemlacu Mic<sup>5</sup>. They underwent transformations under the impact of Baroque architecture during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A dilation of spaces occurred then, both horizontally, through additions, and especially as regards the vertical volumetry, by adding stately towers on the western side of the churches, highly visible in all the churches preserved. The few medieval monuments that have been preserved were clothed in this new Baroque coat and they merged into the Baroque landscape of ecclesiastical architecture that dominated the Banat from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century on. Medieval painting, which offers for the adjoining spaces - Hațeg, for instance - so much information on the cultural relations with the Orthodox world south of the Carpathians, but also from Central and Southeastern Europe, had disappeared entirely by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century in the medieval churches from the Banat. The late 18<sup>th</sup>-century writings of Nicolae Stoica of Hațeg and Igumen Vincent Liustina have pages devoted to the memory of the murals that adorned the churches from the monasteries of Mraconia and Zlatița. The neighboring space of Hațeg, with its impressive heritage of churches preserved from the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, which belonged either to the local Romanian elites or to some communities, reveals a variety of information about the monuments, the cultural ambience provided by the church paintings, the Slavonic inscriptions, and the votive paintings of the founders<sup>6</sup>. The impulses coming from the cultural ambience of Wallachia,

<sup>5</sup> Miodrag Jovanović, *Srpski manastiri u Banatu* (Novi Sad, 2000), 27-38; Leposava Šelmić, Branislav Žicović, *Mesić. Les dessines des fresques* (Novi Sad, 1990); Miloje Milošević, Jovan Nenadović, "Arhitektonski objekti Manastira Mesiča," *Rad Vojvodanski Muzeja* 3 (1954): 344; Voislav Matić, "Manastir Voilovica," *Zbornik za Likovne Umetnost* 9 (1973): 170-171; Jovan Zdravković, "Manastir Mesić," *Starinar* V-VI (1954-1955) [1956]: 331-334; Oliver Velescu, Adrian Corvătescu, "Un monument din vestul țării - mănăstirea Bezdin," *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice* XLI, no. 1 (1972): 55-58.

<sup>6</sup> Marius Porumb, *Pictura românească din Transilvania* (Cluj-Napoca, 1981), 15-16; Liana Tugearu, "Biserica Sfântului Nicolae din Ribîța," in *Pagini de veche artă românească*, vol.

from the Balkan-Byzantine art or the Serbian cultural centers that were captured by the monuments of Hațeg could not avoid the geographical and cultural corridor of the Banat, linked through the Danube Valley to the Serbian or the more remote cultural centers from Southeastern Europe. Known largely through the pieces discovered by medieval archeology around monuments or necropolises, the minor medieval art created in the Banat during the 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries reveals these connections with the artistic centers in Serbia and the Byzantine-Balkan world.

Written sources. The chancery documents from the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries offer the support for the ecclesiastical geography reconstructions approached so far in the historiography of the Banatian province. Late Ottoman sources from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century are indispensable in this regard<sup>7</sup>. The papal documents from the years 1332-1337 represent the essential source for understanding the parish structure of the Diocese of Cenad in the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>. At the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there was a high concentration of monuments in a confined space, between the Bega and the Bârzava, where the documents invoked above mentioned 84 churches in the structure of the Archdeaconry of Timiș<sup>9</sup>. Rarely did documents drafted later bring further information about the building material of the churches, their roofing or the elements of high visibility that the church towers represented. Stone churches were mentioned in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, on the estates owned by Theodor of Voiteg, in 1322, and at *Wyodvar*, *Gerwr* and *Gungudyhaza*, and later, in 1329, in the village of *Achad*<sup>10</sup>. A special monument was the knezial church on the Valea estate, on the lower course of the Caraș, *ecclesia partim in lignis et partim in lapidibus constructa*<sup>11</sup>. A document from 1424 provides information about the churches in Cebza, Jebel, Voiteg and Teremia. The churches from Jebel and Teremia were built of stone and had no tower. At the time of the mention in

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V (Bucharest, 1985), 129 and passim; Anca Bratu, "Biserica reformată Sfânta Fecioară din comuna Sântămărie Orlea," in *Pagini de veche artă românească*, vol. V (Bucharest, 1985), 283 and passim.

<sup>7</sup> Pál Engel, *A Temesvári és Moldvai Szandzsák Törökkori települései (1554-1579)* (Szeged, 1996); Olga Ziroević, *Crkve i manastiri na području Petčke patriaršije do 1683 godine* (Beograd, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Tivadar Ortvy, *Magyarország egyházi földelirása a XIV század elején a pápai tizedjegyzékek alapján feltüntetve*, vol. I (Budapest, 1892), 380 and passim.

<sup>9</sup> Țicu, *Geografia*, 17-18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v.

<sup>11</sup> Frigyes Pesty, *Krassó vármegye története*, vol. III (Budapest, 1882-1883), 147.

documents, the roof of the monument from Teremia had been destroyed. The churches from Voiteg and Cebza, built of stone, had no towers<sup>12</sup>.

A document dated 10 November 1432 provides a picture of the state of the parish church from Opațița, on the Bârzava Valley, an area subject to Ottoman attacks<sup>13</sup>. The monument with two towers was protected by a wooden wall fortification (*ecclesia superiore partis in angulis duos sacristias, super quibus olim ad tuendam ecclesiam contra incursione Turcorum muri de lignaminibus aedificare sunt*). The church of the nobles Himfy from Remetea, on the Bârzava Valley, raised in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, was in ruins in 1435 and needed repair. Mention was made of a church in a state of ruin on the estate *Vidaeghaz*, of the nobles of Macedonia (*ecclesia lapidea anichilata ex vetustate*). The toponymy of the medieval churches from Cenad is found in a document dated 7 February 1433<sup>14</sup>.

### *Historiographical routes*

The desolate landscape of medieval ecclesiastical architecture in the Banat and the lack of archeological research that might have recovered monument structures found underground were the reasons why the province was absent, for a long time, from the historiographical discourse of medieval art in this area of the Western Lower Danube. The medieval art of the Banat, a multiconfessional space, has recently been approached from a denominational and national perspective<sup>15</sup>. Despite the situation mentioned above, there has never existed, at the level of the province or the historical research centers outside it, a punctual, consistent and long-lasting concern for reconstructing the history of medieval ecclesiastical architecture. Cenad, with the Byzantine monuments raised in around the year 1000, but also those from the following centuries, is known only from the notes and drawings made in 1868<sup>16</sup>. The archeological research attempts from the years 1971-1975 were modest<sup>17</sup>. Recently published by Suzana M. Heitel, a map of the fortress of Cenad from

<sup>12</sup> Adrian Magina, "Parohiile catolice din Banat în epoca lui Sigismund de Luxemburg," *Analele Banatului*, Arheologie-Istorie. Serie-Nouă XX (2012): 177.

<sup>13</sup> Pál Lukacsics, *XV. századi pápák oklevelei*, vol. II (Budapest, 1938), 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Jovanović, *Srpski manastiri*; Moisescu, *Arhitectura*, 25; 186-189.

<sup>16</sup> Dávid Katalin, *Az Árpád-Kori Csanád vármegye művészeti topografiája* (Budapest, 1974), 14-38.

<sup>17</sup> Petru Iambor, Ștefan Matei, Adrian Bejan, "Cercetări arheologice în așezarea feudal-timpurie de la Cenad (1974-1975)," *Ziridava* XIV (1982): 89-108.

around 1760 brings paramount information regarding the topography and layout of the medieval churches<sup>18</sup>. The theme of medieval ecclesiastical architecture was not a priority of historiography during the interwar period. The church from Căvăran was incidentally identified and excavated by Ioachim Miloia in 1930-1931<sup>19</sup>. The highly insightful approach on the history of the Cenad Diocese initiated by Koloman Juhász in the same period, at the end of the 1920s, produced pages devoted to the ecclesiastical monuments, supported by layouts and drawings of ornamental elements and the planimetry of churches<sup>20</sup>. It is therefore not surprising that Virgil Vătășianu's vast synthesis recorded only the church from Căvăran in the area of the Banatian province. The role played by the Banat as a cultural corridor to the Western Lower Danube, between two large spheres of European civilization - Byzantine-Balkan and Catholic, in Central Europe - is illustrated in exemplary manner in Răzvan Theodorescu's historiographical discourse<sup>21</sup>. The absence of archeological research on ecclesiastical monuments was difficult to compensate for from other sources. In the historian's perspective, the triconch church from Vodița, from the Danube corridor, was important for the dissemination of this type of church in the Romanian monastic environment north of the river<sup>22</sup>. Among the more substantial concerns on the topic of ecclesiastical architecture were the notices made at the beginning of the 1970s, when excavations began on the churches from Ilidia, Arad, Vărădia de Mureș, Bulci, Frumușeni, Șemlacu Mic, and Chelmac<sup>23</sup>. The medieval architecture of the Banat was a consistent preoccupation for Ștefan Matei and Petru Iambor during the above-mentioned period. The trend has remained somewhat constant, without becoming a research

<sup>18</sup> Suzana More Heitel, "Despre biserica lui Ahtum de la Morisena (Cenad)," *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 23 (2005): 9-22.

<sup>19</sup> Ioachim Miloia, "Biserica medievală de la Căvăran," *Analele Banatului* 4 (1930): 31-48.

<sup>20</sup> Juhász, Koloman, *Die Stifte der Tschanader Diözese im Mittelalter* (Münster, 1927), Fig. 5, 6; 18-21.

<sup>21</sup> Răzvan Theodorescu, *Bizanț, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești (secole X-XIV)* (Bucharest, 1974), 340-342.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 296-299.

<sup>23</sup> Matei, "Câteva considerații," 314-318; Gheorghe Cantacuzino, "Date arheologice privind trecutul unei mănăstiri bănățene: Mănăstirea Săraca din Șemlacu Mic," *Mitropolia Banatului* 24, no. 4-6 (1974): 299-300; Suzana More Heitel, *Începuturile artei medievale în bazinul inferior al Mureșului* (Timișoara, 2010), 15; Dumitru Țeicu, Florin Mărginean, "Despre localizarea abației Eperjes la Chelmac," in Dumitru Țeicu, Ionel Cândea, eds., *Românii în Europa Medievală (Între Orientul Bizantin și Occidentul Latin). Studii în onoarea profesorului Victor Spinei* (Brăila: Istros, 2008), 243-250.

direction financed and promoted by a particular institution, representing rather the concern of several researchers interested in the topic. Noteworthy, in this respect, is the interest manifested by Luminița Munteanu,<sup>24</sup> who investigated the spaces of the Banatian monasteries from Bodrog, starting from the north of the province and reaching Vărădia and Cusici on the Caraș and Nera Valleys. Our concerns of over a decade, throughout the years 1983-2000, were focused on investigations of ecclesiastical architecture, a period during which research and publication efforts focused on the churches from Reșița, Berzovia, Mehadia, Obreja, Cârnecea, Baziaș, Zlatița and Cusici<sup>25</sup>. Approached from the perspective of the ecclesiastical geography of the province, the problem of the medieval monasteries and churches has revealed, on the one hand, priority areas regarding architectural monuments which should be included in a research program and, on the other hand, hardly surmountable difficulties in identifying monuments attested in the written sources.

### *Medieval archeology and the chronology of monuments*

The relationship between archeological documents and ecclesiastical monuments always remains open in the historiographic debate on the chronology of monuments. Recourse to other sources will shed more light on the issue in each individual case. The chronology of the medieval churches that have disappeared or have been preserved, or which have benefited from archeological investigations, is usually constructed on basis of the funerary inventory of the graves found in or around churches. The ornaments and coins deposited as funeral oblations or found in the cultural layer provide the basis for the chronological placement of the monuments. The limits of historiographical constructions around ecclesiastical architecture monuments, which are based on archeological documents, always permeate historical writing. It would probably suffice to cite a few extreme cases from the proximity of the Banat, the medieval ecclesiastical monuments from Hațeg, for instance, before focusing our discussion on the ones from the Banatian territory. The

<sup>24</sup> Luminița Munteanu, "Date arheologice preliminare privind mănăstirea Partoș," *Mitropolia Banatului* 38, no. 10-12 (1978): 718-726; Luminița Munteanu, "Un vechi monument rupestru din Banat," *Mitropolia Banatului* 48, no. 2 (1988): 77-81; Luminița Munteanu, "Cronica cercetărilor arheologice 1990-1993. Mănăstirea Cusici," *Cercetări Arheologice* X (1997): 431-432.

<sup>25</sup> Dumitru Țeicu, *Banatul montan în Evul Mediu* (Timișoara, 1998), 174-198; Dumitru Țeicu, "The Nera Valley Medieval Ecclesiastic Geography," *Istros* XVIII (2012) 286-296.

case of the church from Ribița, in Zarand, or the one from Densuș, where the funerary inventory offers late dating references, while the architecture, the monument inscription or painting provide arguments for a much earlier dating, is an illustration of the limits that archeological documents suffer from in terms of the information they convey<sup>26</sup>. Certainly, however, the church from Streisângiorgiu, whose dating goes further back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the funerary inventory of the graves compiled by Radu Popa, represents a plea in favor of the medieval archeology of monuments<sup>27</sup>.

The Banatian case of ecclesiastical architecture from the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries illustrates the full dependence of attempts to reconstruct the chronology of medieval ecclesiastical architecture upon medieval archeology. The chronology of ecclesiastical monuments from the Banat has been constructed almost exclusively on the basis of the archeological records. The court church of the knezes from Țerova has been dated to around 1350 or shortly thereafter based on the funerary inventory<sup>28</sup>. Recourse to archeological documents and chancery information on the Franciscans from the Banat has provided us with the support for determining the moment when the monastery of Caransebeș was constructed, around the year 1350. The churches from Mehadia and Cârnecea have been placed chronologically solely on the basis of archeological records. Determining the time of their construction in around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century has been made in the context of written information about the Himfy family and the noble court from Remete, given that the archeological documentation could not provide significant benchmarks, and the church was only attested in a document from 1414<sup>29</sup>. The two monuments from Ilidia are subject to discussion. The church inside the earthen fortification with a rectangular altar has been placed in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the suggestion being that the construction moment pertained to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It has been identified with the parish church of Ilidia, attested in 1333-1334. The rotunda church from Ilidia, identified within a feudal court, has been dated, based on the layout analogies, to around the year 1200. The

<sup>26</sup> Adrian Andrei Rusu, *Ctitori și biserici din Țara Hațegului până la 1700* (Satu Mare, 1997), 146; Adrian Andrei Rusu, Vasile Mizgan, "Biserica Sf. Nicolae și curtea nobiliară a Arceștilor de la Densuș," *Arheologia Medievală* VII (2008): 163-164.

<sup>27</sup> Radu Popa, *La începuturile Evului Mediu românesc. Țara Hațegului* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1988), 225-226; 238-239.

<sup>28</sup> Țeicu, *Banatul*, 179.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

funerary inventory of the graves around the rotunda outlines the chronology of the mid-century necropolis from the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>30</sup>. The beginnings of the feudal court from Ilidia-Oblița, with a housing tower, can be attributed to the period around the year 1200. The chronological rapport between the beginnings of the feudal court and the church construction has not received a satisfactory assessment based on the archeological record.

*The ecclesiastical architecture of the 14<sup>th</sup> century*

The location and dissemination of ecclesiastical architecture in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in the Banat, an area characterized by a scarcity of monuments, is unquestionably suggested by the parish network dynamics recorded in the written documents. An evaluation made some time ago shows that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a mere 11 churches were included in the Diocese of Cenad, while in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, there were no less than 226 parish churches<sup>31</sup>. Certainly, some of them were founded in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, because the documents made reference to the Archdeaconry of Caraș in 1285, and those of Cenad, Timiș, Torontal and Sebeș in 1288. The lists of papal collectors from the years 1333-1337 represent an important source for the timeline of ecclesiastical architecture, marking equally, through the placement of the churches in the Banat area, the flourishing centers of influence for stone architecture in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The lowland area of the province, between the rivers Bârzava and Timiș, where the Archdeaconry of Timiș functioned with 84 churches in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, marks, along the borderlines of the archdeaconry, an area of high concentration of ecclesiastical architecture monuments in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Medieval archeology provides the documentation for an extremely limited number of monuments in the Banatian space, situated in the peripheral areas of the province. The lowland area in the central and northern Banat, where around 200 churches, with monuments that have disappeared entirely, could be found in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, has remained an open field for archeological research.

The layout of the churches continues to be, both in art history and in medieval archeology, the customary operating criterion in elaborate historiographical constructions<sup>32</sup>. Nuances and constraints in the use of planimetry elements, the semicircular apse or the square choir, for instance, have imposed precautions as regards the placement of some monuments in the

<sup>30</sup> Matei, "Câteva considerații," 317.

<sup>31</sup> Țeicu, *Geografia*, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Vătășianu, *Arta feudală*, 72-73; Rusu, Hurezan, *Biserici medievale*, 43.

late Romanesque or the Gothic periods and the use of elements that are truly characteristic of the Romanesque and Gothic in the chronological placement of the monuments under discussion<sup>33</sup>.

Churches with a rectangular altar are found in the rural settlements from Ilidia, Cârnecea, Mehadia, Berzovia and the feudal court from Reșița. The layout of the monuments is simple, archaic, the structure consisting of a rectangular nave, terminated with a rectangular altar in the east (Fig. I/3). The Remetea parish church from Berzovia was articulated with buttresses (Fig. I/3). These simple ecclesiastical structures, from which seldom have stone decoration elements been preserved, have a planimetry that has endured for a long time, ever since the early Middle Ages. Recourse to the documentation provided by medieval archeology, in conjunction with written information about the settlements or the feudal courts, represents the only option for dating the monuments. The church from Ilidia has been attributed to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and the moment of its destruction was placed at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. I/5)<sup>34</sup>. The funerary inventory of the researched necropolis around the church includes coins issued by the kings Bela IV (1235-1270), Charles Robert (1300-1341) and Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387-1437), which suggests that the church was in operation until the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The nave of the church was surmounted by a massive dome, raised above the western wall and on two massive pillars of masonry placed in the interior (Fig. II/1). The church from Ilidia is identified with the parish church from the Archdeaconry of Caraș, attested in the years 1333-1335. A carefully carved monument is in ruins north of Mehadia, on the banks of the Belareca River. The medieval builders exploited the Roman brick and stone from the ruins of the Roman castrum in the immediate vicinity. What may be noticed in the case of the monument from Mehadia is the use of squared blocks for the ridge joints of the nave walls, which gives it an elegant allure. The site of the medieval fortress from Mehadia, where the housing tower was plated with squared blocks, influenced the construction of the stone church. The church underwent changes at a later stage by attaching a sacristy on the north side of the altar (Fig. I/2; II/3). The chronological placement of the Mehadia monument in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was based on an ornament from

<sup>33</sup> Eugenia Greceanu, "Influența gotică în arhitectura bisericilor românești de zid din Transilvania," *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei*, Seria Arte Plastice 18, no. 1 (1971): 35-36.

<sup>34</sup> Matei, "Câteva considerații," 315; Ștefan Matei, Ilie Uzum, "Date noi asupra bisericii și fortificației de la Ilidia," *Acta Musei Napocensis* 9 (1971): 555-556.

the funerary inventory of the graves around it<sup>35</sup>. An identical approach was that of the medieval builders from the Bârzava Valley, a plain area lacking in building stone, by using the resources offered by the ruins of the Roman castrum from *Berzobis*. The planimetry of the church from Berzovia displays the same simple structure, consisting of a rectangular nave articulated with a rectangular choir (Fig. I/3; II/5). Buttresses arranged at right angles flanked the nave walls. The funerary inventory of the few identified graves records a coin issued by King Louis I (1342-1382). The chancery documents recorded the Remete parish church at a late date, in a deed from 1414. It was in ruins in 1435, when renovations were necessary<sup>36</sup>. On the basis of the documentary and archeological information, the construction of the church from Remete has been placed chronologically in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The parish church from the borough of Caran, investigated by Ioachim Miloia, had a similar layout to that of the monument from Berzovia<sup>37</sup>. The nave with a rectangular layout had a massive tower on the west side, resting on the western wall of the nave and on the two masonry pillars inside. Buttresses at angle of 45 degrees flanked the western walls of the nave. Miloia placed the church from Căvăran in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the construction being, in his opinion, the work of a western monastic order, while Vătășianu saw the monument from Căvăran as a Gothic church from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The church from Căvăran, fortified with a massive moat at one time, was a parish church raised by “royal guests” in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The time of its construction can be placed sometime around the year 1400 (Fig. II/2)<sup>38</sup>. Romanian feudalism adopted similar ecclesiastical architectural structures in the peripheral areas of the province at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The court church of the knezes from Țerova is a monument with a simple layout, a rectangular nave and a square altar, similar to the point of being identical with the court chapels of the Romanian feudals from Hațeg. The idea that the court chapel of the knezes from Țerova was built in around 1350 is supported by archeological information from the necropolis around it (Fig. I/1; II/4).

The Franciscan Church from Caransebeș, dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was raised, in our opinion, only in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, during

<sup>35</sup> Dumitru Țeicu, *Studii istorice* (Timișoara: Mirton, 2003), 95-98.

<sup>36</sup> Magina, “Parohiile,” 187.

<sup>37</sup> Miloia, “Biserica medievală,” 32 and *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> Țeicu, *Geografia*, 150.

the reign of King Louis I (1342-1382)<sup>39</sup>. Structurally, a simple layout with archaic elements has been preserved, such as a rectangular nave with an elongated choir, ending with a semicircular apse (Fig. I/4). Massive buttresses articulated the perimetral walls of the nave. Elements from the structure of an ogival vault, discovered in the ruins of the construction, along with the presence of buttresses, establish a Gothic monument raised in Caransebeș by the Franciscan monks, who were extremely active in the Banat through the seven sees that were founded during the time of King Louis I. They were the promoters of simplified Gothic architecture, which also produced the church from Turnu Severin, with a polygonal choir articulated with buttresses<sup>40</sup>.

The churches with a rectangular nave and choir, built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century or in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, known exclusively from the archeological record, belonged to rural architecture, only the monuments from Caransebeș and Căvâran appearing in medieval boroughs and urban centers. The vast majority were very small, with a nave of 5 by 6 m and an altar of 3 by 3 m in the court chapel from Reșița, a nave of 11 by 6.55 m and a choir of 6.50 by 4.50 m in the parish church from Berzovia, the church from Mehadia resembling it structurally and having a nave of 7.60 by 7.40 m and an altar of 6 by 5.20 m. In contrast with these churches, the Franciscan convent from Caransebeș had a nave of 15 by 8.4 m and an elongated cone of 5.90 by 5.50 m.

Churches with a semicircular apse. There are a few monuments with this planimetry in the area of the province, composed of a nave and a semicircular apse, dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The monuments that definitely fall into this category are the ones from Szöreg and Obreja and, with some caution, the one in Belinț may also be included here (Fig. III/1-3). The first that we invoked have a planimetry established by archeological research, while the layout of the ruins from Belinț is known only through field research. The semicircular apse has a layout form that is specific to Romanesque architecture, frequently encountered in the monuments from the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries in the space of the Arpadian kingdom<sup>41</sup>. It was also used in the following period, throughout the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in monuments from the Gothic ambience of

<sup>39</sup> Radu Popa, "Caransebeș și districtul său românesc în secolele X-XIV," *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie*, 40, no. 4 (1989): 363-368; Petru Bona, *Biserica medievală din Caransebeș* (Reșița, 1993), 98; Țeicu, *Studii*, 72 and passim.

<sup>40</sup> Vătășianu, *Arta feudală*, 149, fig. 128.

<sup>41</sup> Károly Kozák, "Eglises à absides en hémicycle dans la Hongrie du XI<sup>e</sup> s." *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae* 25, fasc. 1-2 (1973): 185-201.

Transylvania<sup>42</sup>. The altar with a semicircular apse also appears in monuments dated to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Vad, for instance<sup>43</sup>.

The church from Szöreg has a planimetry consisting of a nave with a sacristy on the north side and an apse in hemicycle which closes up the eastern space (Fig. III/2). A stage of development from the 14<sup>th</sup> century shows a spatial extension of the nave. Two pairs of buttresses flank the nave walls<sup>44</sup>. The other monument that benefits from an archeological record is the church of the vanished village of Bizere, in the Bistra Valley<sup>45</sup>. Despite the opulence of the Romanian noble family of Bizere, the parish church was a modest architectural structure, sloppily built, which in fact imposed, at one moment, the necessity of reinforcing it with abutments (Fig. III/1). The building had a rectangular layout with dimensions of 6 by 6.25 m, terminated with a semicircular apse. It has been attributed to the early period of the 15<sup>th</sup> century rather on the grounds of historical information about the Bizere family and its villages on the Bistra Valley, because the funerary inventory was extremely modest and analogies have revealed the long-term persistence of the altar in the hemicycle.

The monument from Belinț, with a very long nave of 14 m, finishing with a semicircular apse in the east, is known from the field research conducted by the art historian Ioachim Miloia<sup>46</sup>. The absence of an archeological record leaves the matter of chronologically placing the church within the timeframe we are focusing on undecided.

Churches with a central layout. A monument preserved at Kiszombor, in the lowland area of the northern Banat, and another from Ilidia, in the mountainous area from the south of the province, known for its medieval archeology, provide the support for the discussion on medieval rotunda churches. There definitely must have been other monuments with this layout, as suggested by the toponymy and the documents from the papal chancery<sup>47</sup>. The rotunda from Kiszombor, a unique Romanesque monument in the landscape of medieval ecclesiastical architecture from the Banatian province, belongs

<sup>42</sup> Greceanu, "Influența gotică," 35.

<sup>43</sup> Rusu, *Ctitori și biserici*, 151.

<sup>44</sup> Ottó Trogmayer, "A Szeged-Szöregi románkori templom feltárása," *Műemlék Védelem* 24 (1980): 155.

<sup>45</sup> Țeicu, *Studii*, 106-113.

<sup>46</sup> Ioachim Miloia, "Raport istoric," in *Anchetă monografică în comuna Belinț* (1938), 30-33.

<sup>47</sup> *Documente privind Istoria României*, seria C. Transilvania, veac XIV, vol. III (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1953) 234, 238, a church.

to 13<sup>th</sup>-century architecture, which exceeds the chronological limits of the debate proposed herein<sup>48</sup>. The monument with an inner structure of six lobes surrounded by a circular perimeter, along with those from Karcasa and Gereny, with an identical structure, define a special, well-defined typology of rotunda architecture (Fig. III/5,6)<sup>49</sup>. The rotunda from Ilidia, identified and researched within the framework of a feudal court, has raised discussions regarding its dating. The beginnings of the architectural arrangements from the center of power in Ilidia-Oblița can be placed near the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century thanks to the housing tower identified there.

The burials around and inside the rotunda confirm its purpose as a court chapel. The coins deposited in tombs as funerary offerings were issued by the kings Louis I (1342-1382) and Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387-1437). The ornaments found there belong to a cultural trend specific of the minor art of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The funerary inventory pleads for a late dating of the monument, within the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Seen from this perspective, the beginnings of the rotunda church from Ilidia could not have been prior to the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was originally dated on the basis of layout analogies, to the cusp between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>50</sup>. The moment when the rotunda from Ilidia appeared could be fixed more precisely only after the publication of all the documents relating to the feudal court of Ilidia-Oblița and of the whole center of power from Ilidia, which included the medieval fortress, the fortified church and the noble court.

*Orthodox monasteries from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The influence exerted by Serbian architecture*

The influence of Serbian medieval art in the Banatian space, a geographical and, at the same time, a cultural corridor, is equally evident in the minor art and in the ecclesiastical monuments of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>48</sup> Veronica Gervers-Molnár, *A középkori Magyarország rotundái* (Budapest, 1972), 46-48; Dávid, *Az Árpád-Kori*, 39 and passim; discussions regarding the early chronology of the monument - the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>49</sup> Gervers-Molnár, *A középkori*, 48; Béla Zsolt Szakács, "Négykaréjos templomok az Árpád-kori Magyarországon," *Arhitectura religioasă medievală din Transilvania V* (2012): 10 and passim.

<sup>50</sup> Ștefan 316-317, adopted then by Gheorghe Petrov, "Considerații asupra unor biserici medievale în plan central din Transilvania," *Acta Musei Napocensis* 33/II (1997): 49-50; Virgil Vătășianu, *Studii de artă veche românească și universală* (Bucharest, 1987), 17; Moisescu, *Arhitectura*, 25.

Products of the minor art of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, made of filigree silver in the silversmithery centers from Serbia, they circulated in the feudal milieu of the Banat. The hoard of ornaments from Macoviște, from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, is an outstanding illustration of the reception that the Serbian minor art had in the northern space of the Western Lower Danube<sup>51</sup>.

The Serbian ecclesiastical architecture from the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century had an impact upon the Romanian Orthodox world north of the Danube. The Banat played the role of a corridor of dissemination for churches with a conch layout church and churches with a transept, transposing a layout that had flourished in the Serbian architecture of the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Raška.

The reception in the Romanian Orthodox feudal environment of the church model with a conch layout borrowed from Serbian architecture was noticed in historiography by Ștefan Balș almost one century ago and it was thereafter accepted without reservation. Research conducted in the monuments that have been preserved, the excavations from the church of Vodița Monastery nuanced the observations made by Balș and Ghika-Budești<sup>52</sup> and attempted to chart the dissemination timeline of the triconch in the North-Danubian space<sup>53</sup>. The absence of research on the few preserved architectural monuments in the Banat has excluded the medieval ecclesiastical architecture of the Banatian province from scholarly discussions. The churches of the monasteries from Baziaș, Cusici, Mraconia and Sirinia, located along the Danube Gorge, as well as those from Bezdin and Bodrog, in the northern Banat plain illustrate, despite their limited number, the dissemination of the monuments with a triconch layout throughout the whole space of the province. Ottoman sources of the 16<sup>th</sup> century recorded a total of 20 monasteries, founded most certainly during the period prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, or perhaps earlier, and whose

<sup>51</sup> Dumitru Țicu, *Arta minoră medievală din Banat, Minor medieval art in Banat* (Timișoara: Cosmopolitan Art, 2009), 89-91.

<sup>52</sup> N. Ghika Budești, "Evoluția arhitecturii în Muntenia. Originile și înnămuririle străine până la Neagoe Basarab," *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* XX (1927): 13; N. Ghika Budești, "L'ancienne architecture religieuse de la Valachie," *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* XXXV, no. 1-2 (1942): 12.

<sup>53</sup> Virgil Drăghiceanu, "Săpăturile de la Vodița. Bisericile Sfântului Nicodim și a lui Litovoiu-Vodă," *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* XXII (1929): 155 and passim.; Gheorghe Cantacuzino, "Probleme ale cronologiei fostei mănăstiri Vodița," *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche* 32, no. 3 (1971): 473-477 with the results of the archaeological research from Vodița; Vătășianu, *Arta feudală*, 186-187; Theodorescu, *Bizanț*, 297 and passim.

layout is unknown yet<sup>54</sup>. Along the Danube corridor, from Baziaș up to Vodița, monasteries were found in Baziaș, in Moldova Veche, Sirinia, Svinița and Mraconia, mentioned in the Turkish chancery documents from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the same area, not far from the confluence of the Nera River with the Danube, there were the monasteries of Cusici and Zlatița, attested in the documents at the same moment of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We have at our disposal archeological documentation, which is not very consistent or conclusive, from the monuments in Baziaș, Cusici and Sirinia that have lent themselves to planimetric reconstructions (Fig. VII). The church of the monastery from Baziaș underwent a dilation of space in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by having a massive tower, specific to Baroque architecture, adjoined to it. It originally had a simple triconch layout, with a rectangular central bay, flanked by two semicircular apses. The altar, shaped like a semicircular apse, closed the eastern space of the monument. The apses have a semicircular route both inside and outside. The two pairs of pilasters flanking the side apses supported the dome crowning the nave on arches. In cross-section, the dome tambour has a circular shape on the inside and an octagonal shape on the outside, being covered by a semispherical dome. The three apses have a semi-dome covering. The space with a rectangular layout, delineated between the pilasters and the altar apse, was covered with a transversal semi-circular vault. The documentation gathered by researching the outer space with graves has not produced conclusive evidence for the beginnings of the triconch from Baziaș. The chancery documents referring to Baziaș are late, from the period 1554-1579, which leaves open the question of the moment when the church began to be laid out. Layout analogies with Vodița II,<sup>55</sup> Vișina and Topolnița,<sup>56</sup> churches with a triconch layout from the Danube corridor, or with other more remote churches from the Serbian environment, from Gornjak or Lipovac<sup>57</sup> support the dating of the monument in around 1400. Typological similarities may also be drawn with the church with a triconch layout from the Sirinia Monastery, known only from the Ottoman financial records of the years 1554-1579. It has dimensions that are similar to the church from Baziaș, measuring 15 by 9 m (Fig.

<sup>54</sup> Dumitru Țicu, "Monastères orthodoxes médiévaux de Banat," in *Vilaetul Timișoarei (450 de ani de la întemeierea pașalâcului (1552-2002))* (Timișoara, 2002), 35-45.

<sup>55</sup> Theodorescu, *Bizanț*, 296-297.

<sup>56</sup> Moisesescu, *Arhitectura*, 127-129.

<sup>57</sup> Deroko A., *Monumentalna i dekorativna arhitektura u srednjemvekovni Srbiji*, second edition (Beograd, 1962), 176-178, fig. 379, 387.

VII/3). The planimetry, known via medieval archeological research, features a trapezoidal narthex, a rectangular nave flanked by lateral semicircular apses. In the case of the church from Sirinia, the space that separates the altar from the pilasters flanking the side apses is much narrower (Fig. VII/3). In the absence of archeological and historical information, recourse to layout analogies was the option for chronologically dating Sirinia Monastery. From this assessment perspective, it belongs to the period from the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>58</sup>. Mraconia Monastery was found in the eastern extremity of the Danube Gorge, in the Great Cauldrons of the Danube, in the proximity of Vodița and Sirinia. Its ruins, covered with paintings inside, were visible in 1800, when they were described by the chronicler Nicolae Stoica of Hațeg. The triconch planimetry highlights its similarity with the monuments from Vodița II and Sirinia, which actually led us to place it chronologically in the same first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>59</sup>. Placing the church with a triconch layout from Cusici, from the Nera corridor, in the landscape of medieval Banatian architecture must overcome the same difficulties invoked above. The reconstruction of the triconch layout under the church structure, built exactly on its foundations in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was achieved through archeological research, which did not, however, offer chronological references. The central bay is flanked by two side apses, with a perfectly semicircular route inside and outside, while the altar apse has an elongated semicircular layout (Fig. VII/1). The typological similarity between the layout of the church from Cusici and that of Gorniak Monastery, owned by Serbian nobles in southern Banat in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century constituted circumstantial evidence, which we referred to when we dated the triconch church from Cusici in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>60</sup>.

The monuments with a triconch layout from Hodoș-Bodrog and Bezdin on the Mureș Valley belong to the period of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The church from Bezdin originally had the layout of a simple triconch, structurally comprising a nave flanked by two apses with on-axis edges and with an altar in the shape of a polygonal apse. The initial construction has been dated to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Later, during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the church underwent transformations under the influence of the Baroque, which also affected other medieval Banatian monuments that outlived the military impact of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The church of Hodoș-Bodrog Monastery, a

<sup>58</sup> Țeicu, *Studii*, 130-131.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>60</sup> Țeicu, "The Nera Valley," 281.

monument with a triconch layout from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, survived without structural changes. The central bay is flanked by two apses with a semicircular inner layout and a polygonal outer layout. The development of the spaces flanking the central bay on the east and west was carried out in perfect symmetry, which gives harmony to the monument. The dome that straddles the nave has structural solutions identical to those seen in Baziaș and Bezdin, with supporting arches on the two pairs of pilasters. The construction of the monastery has been attributed to the Serbian noble Dimitrie Jakšić.

The churches of the medieval monasteries from Voilovița, Mesici, Zlatița, Șemlacu Mic and Lipova illustrate another side of the influence exerted by the Serbian medieval architecture in the neighboring areas of the Banat. The architect Eugenia Greceanu, who was deeply involved in investigating the Transylvanian medieval architecture, remarked in 1971 the closeness - to the point of identity - of the School of Raška and Serbian architecture, evident in the original structure of the medieval church from Lipova<sup>61</sup>. The initial planimetry was composed of a nave flanked by two rectangular porches, which served as a "false transept"; the eastern space, terminated with a semicircular apse, was bordered, in turn, by two rectangular chambers (Fig. IV/1)<sup>62</sup>. The above-mentioned elements are also found in the structure of the Serbian medieval churches constructed by the Serbian school from Raška, under the influence of Byzantine and Romanesque architecture<sup>63</sup>.

The planimetric solutions adopted by the medieval builders of the church from the monastery in Șemlacu Mic are found in the Serbian monuments constructed in the tradition of the School of Raška. The church, measuring 15 by 8 m, has a layout consisting of a nave flanked by two side apses, with a rectangular layout and a semicircular altar (Fig. IV/2). A narrow narthex, which contains two pairs of pilasters, delineates their structure in three bays. The pilasters flanking the nave's side apses support a tower that crowns the nave. There have been divergent approaches in historiographical discourse to the two side porches of the nave. Adopting the perspective of the art historians Gabriel Millet, Svetozar Radojčić and, more recently, Dorica Popović, Teresa Sinigalia considers that despite its cruciform layout, the church from Șemlacu

<sup>61</sup> Eugenia Greceanu, "Un tip singular al arhitecturii feudale românești: Biserica „Adormirea Maicii Domnului” din Lipova, jud. Arad,” *Muzeul Național III* (1976): 282.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 282 fig. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Gabriel Millet, *L'ancien art serbe I. Les Églises* (Paris, 1919), 56-62; Deroko, *Monumentalna*, 50-51, 53.

Mic belongs to a long line of Serbian monuments erected under the influence of the School of Raška, the side porches serving as the arms of a transept<sup>64</sup>. The planimetry of the monument and the roofing solutions for the side porches have led Cristian Moisescu to advocate the inclusion of monument from Șemlacu Mic among the churches shaped like a “cross with open arms”<sup>65</sup>. Archeological research has not produced evidence for establishing the chronology of the monument. Recourse to layout analogies and historical sources has remained the option used in the approaches of ecclesiastical art and geography. The church appears therefore among the ecclesiastical architecture monuments of the Banat from the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>66</sup>. The question of the chronology of the churches from Mesici and Voilovița Monasteries remains under dispute even in recent approaches. These churches were attested later, between 1569-1579, in the Ottoman tax documents, which is why reference has been made to oral historical traditions or circumstantial historical arguments related to the activity of monastery founders carried out by the Branković family in Mesici, or the despot Ștefan Lazević at Voilovița Monastery<sup>67</sup>. The church of Mesici Monastery originally had a naos structure composed of a single nave, crowned by a dome resting on four pillars. Two porches with a rectangular layout flank the naos. The semicircular altar is covered with a hemispherical cap (Fig. IV/2). An embossed belt with interrelated decorative hemicycles surrounds the dome and the apse of the altar. The initial dimensions of the church from Voilovița Monastery were 14.40 by 7.80 m; it was garbed subsequently, like the church from Mesici, in a Baroque décor dominated by a high dome.

The layout structures and the volumetries from Voilovița are similar to those from Mesici. In this case, the dome which surmounts the space of the nave was placed on the two pairs of pillars flanking the two side porches of the nave. It has typological similarities with the churches from Șemlacu Mic, Mesici, Lipova, in the Serbian architectural lineage of the School of Raška.

<sup>64</sup> Tereza Sinigalia, “O ipoteză privitoare la soluțiile planimetrice și structurale ale bisericii Mănăstirii Săraca,” *Analele Banatului*, Artă. Serie Nouă III (1998): 29-30.

<sup>65</sup> Moisescu, *Arhitectura*, 186.

<sup>66</sup> Jenő Szentklaray, *A Szerb monostoregyházak történeti emlékei Délmagyarországon* [=Értekezések A Történeti Tudományok Köréből, XX, 1] (1908), 61; Miloia Ioachim, “Mănăstirea Săraca,” *Analele Banatului* IV, no. 2-4 (1931): 114; Jovan Radonitch, *Histoire des serbes de Hongrie* (Paris, Barcelona, Dublin, 1919) 110; Jovanović, *Srpski manastiri*, 155; Moisescu, *Arhitectura*, 186; Sinigalia, “O ipoteză,” 30; Țicu, *Geografia*, 126-127.

<sup>67</sup> Szentklaray, *A Szerb monostoregyházak*, 46-47; 54-55; Matić, “Manastir Voilovica,” 165-171; Jovanović, *Srpski manastiri*, 30-31; Ziroević, *Crkve i manastiri*, 132; Engel, *A Temesvári*, 21; Milošević, Nenadović, “Arhitektonski objekti,” 338-343.

We owe to medieval archeology the original image of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century church from Zlatița Monastery, destroyed due to age and the military conflicts from the years 1716 and 1798. The monument had similar layout and volumetry structures to those from Voilovița and Șemlacu Mic<sup>68</sup>. The nave of the church was flanked by two rectangular side apses. The altar had an elongated semicircular shape similar to that from Voilovița. The dome that surrounded the nave rested on the two pairs of pillars from the extremities of the side porches. A document from 1757 recorded the dilapidation of the monument, which was dedicated to the Light-Bearing Serbian Saints Simeon and Sava. The historical tradition that has been preserved established the moment when Zlata Monastery was built on the shores of the Nera in 1496, at the same time as the monasteries from Cusici and Baziaș. The absence of archeological documents has led us to place the building of the monastery, based on the layout analogies and related historical information, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, in the cultural area under the influence of Serbian architecture, in which the monasteries from Șemlacu Mic, Mesici and Voilovița were built.

*Ecclesiastical monuments. The reflection of a border area identity*

The approach to the topic of 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century ecclesiastical architecture in the Banat is circumscribed to a well-defined geographical area, with its own individuality, conferred by its frontier position on the Danube, which ensured its status as a border province during the time mentioned above. Historical discourse on the construction of medieval identity has recently focused on architectural monuments, moving from aspects of rural settlements to phenomena related to acculturation and castelology, with already validated theoretical and methodological tools<sup>69</sup>.

The discussion of 14<sup>th</sup>- and 15<sup>th</sup>-century ecclesiastical architectural monuments from the Banat reveals, from the very beginning, the constraints derived from the insufficient knowledge of the monuments. The vast

<sup>68</sup> Țeicu, *Studii*, 147-149.

<sup>69</sup> Siân Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London, 1997), 119 and passim; Siân Jones, "Discourses of identity in the Interpretation of the Past," in Paul Graves-Browk, Siân Jones, Clive Ganble, eds., *Cultural Identity and Archaeology: The Construction of European Communities* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 66-75; Tadhg O'Keeffe, "Rural Settlement and Cultural Identity in Gaelic Ireland 1000-1500," *Ruralia* 1, (1996): 142 and passim; Tadhg O'Keeffe, "Concepts of Castle and the Construction of Identity in Medieval and Post-Medieval Ireland," *Iris Geography* 34, no. 1 (2001): 69-71.

phenomenon of the destruction suffered by the medieval churches in the Banat is not encountered in any of the adjacent spaces. The ultimate cause of this destruction phenomenon pertained to the geographical border position of the province. The area of the Western Lower Danube, which delineates the Banat, became, after 1382 and until 1552, a war front that engaged, on opposite sides, the Christian and the Muslim worlds, the latter gradually conquering the Balkan space south of the Danube. The 1757 Austrian statistics on the churches in the Banat reveal a desolating picture, with an architecture of wood and twigs, in which stone churches were quite rare.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century, in which we find over two hundred churches recorded in documentary manner, was the era in which ecclesiastical architecture witnessed its greatest flourishing in the space of the province. The development of ecclesiastical architecture in the Banat during the 14<sup>th</sup> century was due to the accumulations of the previous period, part of the building having been certainly constructed during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The institutional organization of the Cenad Diocese, with the archdeaconal structures from the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was undoubtedly the result of the increasing number of churches under the obedience of the Catholic Church. The ecclesiastical architecture of 14<sup>th</sup> century in the Banat belongs, in overwhelming proportion, to the Catholic Church. The layout forms adopted and promoted naturally belong to the Central European architecture, being manifestations of the late Romanesque and of Gothic architecture. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, these layout forms of churches with a rectangular nave and altar were also adopted in the Romanian feudal environment from the south of the province, in the court chapel from Reșița, or in the church from Cârnecea. The ecclesiastical architecture of the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, which we know because of medieval archeology, is, to this stage, a rural architecture. The medieval churches from the medieval towns and boroughs of the province disappeared under the modern urban structures, which covered the province starting with the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The monuments erected in the 14<sup>th</sup> century are simple constructions, composed by adjoining two spaces, a nave and a rectangular altar. The square choir is an archaic form adopted in the Romanesque architecture of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, which had a long persistence in time, until the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the rural Transylvanian architecture<sup>70</sup>. Structures that are specific to the late Romanesque, such as the elongated choir with a semicircular apse, are

<sup>70</sup> Vătășianu, *Arta feudală*, 244; Greceanu, "Influența gotică," 36; Rusu, Hurezan, *Biserici medievale*, 44.

also found in monuments raised by the Franciscans from Caransebeș, next to structures specific to Gothic architecture. The church from the castrum of Turnu-Severin, with a polygonal choir supported by buttresses, and that from Caransebeș were raised by the Franciscan Order in around the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, when its presence, through its seven sees, was extremely active in the space of the Banatian province. The Franciscans were the medieval builders who promoted a ruralizing Gothic architecture, which is found near the centers of political and military power in the province<sup>71</sup>. The polygonal choir and buttresses that articulated the nave or choir walls - defining elements of Gothic architecture in the Transylvanian area - are also found in the ecclesiastical monuments from the boroughs of Căvăran and Caransebeș, as well as in the Remete parish church on the Bârzava<sup>72</sup>. The above-mentioned monuments were erected in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The church of the Franciscan monastery from Caransebeș had a nave covered with an ogival vault, as evidenced by the fragments from the arches that supported the vault and keystone found in the ruins. The buttresses identified in the monuments from the Transylvanian ambience have, as a rule, been associated with Gothic architecture<sup>73</sup>. This conclusion is valid only in the Transylvanian context, when they are usually associated with a system of ribbed vaults, according to the amendment proposed by Eugenia Greceanu<sup>74</sup>. The buttresses of the Franciscan church in Caransebeș, arranged at angles of 45 degrees, supported the western side of the nave, and in a later stage, another two pairs flanked the other perimetral walls of the nave (Fig. I/4). An identical arrangement of the buttresses is found in the church from the borough of Caran (Fig. II/2). The tower housing in Turnu Rueni, in close proximity to Caransebeș, has buttresses at the corners of the quadrilateral, arranged identically to those in the churches from Căvăran and Caransebeș. Archeological and numismatic materials identified in the archeological excavations suggest a notable construction activity in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. We have invoked the dungeon from Turnu Rueni

<sup>71</sup> Vătășianu, *Arta feudală*, 149; Viorel Achim, "Ordinul franciscan în Țările Române în secolele XIV-XV. Aspecte teritoriale," *Revista Istorică* VI, no. 5-6 (1996): 399-400; Țicu, *Geografia*, 25.

<sup>72</sup> Vătășianu, *Arta feudală*, 244; Greceanu, "Influența gotică," 38; Corina Popa, "Biserici sală gotice din nordul Transilvaniei," *Pagini de veche artă românească*, vol. IV (Bucharest, 1981), 66.

<sup>73</sup> Popa, "Biserici sală," 72-73.

<sup>74</sup> Greceanu, "Influența gotică," 43.

because it defines, together with the two ecclesiastical monuments from the Caransebeș Depression, the construction atmosphere of the time during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The monuments with buttresses arranged at the western corners of the nave at angles of 45 degrees, found in the Transylvanian culture, belong, according to Corina Popa, to the high and late stages of the Gothic<sup>75</sup>.

In terms of the Banatian ecclesiastical architecture, the 14<sup>th</sup> century stood entirely under the influence of Central European culture, promoted by the Catholic Church and the monastic orders that carried out their missionary work in the province. The Late Romanesque architecture was adopted in the rural architecture and in the ecclesiastical architecture of the boroughs. The assessments regarding the dynamics of the Catholic parish network in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, recorded in the lists of papal tithe collectors from the years 1333-1335, reveal, on the one hand, the extent of the phenomenon, and on the other hand, the areas of high concentration of the churches raised before the aforementioned chronological interval. The ecclesiastical structures of the Cenad Diocese had an impact on the development of ecclesiastical architecture promoted by the Latin Church under obedience to Rome. The Greek churches and monasteries that survived until the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, without the support of the Byzantine Empire or of centers of power, were in ruins. Adjoining the Transylvanian area inside the Carpathian Basin, the Banat adopted, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, in both the Catholic and the Orthodox milieus, the forms of architecture derived from the Central European cultural sphere. From this perspective, the identity of the province is close to that of the neighboring areas of Hațeg and Transylvania, which had the same orientation and openness to the Central European space, to which they were in fact related from a political, administrative and denominational standpoint<sup>76</sup>.

Located on the corridor of the Lower Western Danube, the Banat had opportunities for receiving cultural impulses coming from the Balkan-Byzantine medieval world, which the Transylvanian space received to a lesser degree. Visible in the minor art, the impulses coming from south of the Danube were also felt in the Banatian ecclesiastical architecture of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period in which 31 Orthodox monasteries were attested in documents. The churches built under the influence of the Serbian Moravian school of architecture are illustrated now by monuments from the Danube

<sup>75</sup> Popa, "Biserici sală," 73.

<sup>76</sup> Lucian Boia, *România țara de frontieră a Europei*, 3rd edition (Bucharest 2007), 24-25; Rusu, Hurezan, *Biserici medievale*, 38.

Gorge, as well as from the Mureș Valley corridor. The impulse came in the last quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century through Nicodemus, a Serbian monk with strong ties to the monastic world of Athos, who raised at Vodița, in the Danube Valley, the first monument with a triconch layout in the feudal Romanian world. The churches of the Banatian monasteries from Baziaș, Cusici and Sirinia adopted in around 1400, or shortly thereafter, the simple triconch layout derived from Serbian architecture. The 15<sup>th</sup> century marked thus a change in the ecclesiastical architectural landscape in the province thanks to the architecture of Serbian tradition visible in the Orthodox monasteries constructed immediately after 1400. The well-known monument layouts from Șemlacu Mic, Lipova and Mesici, on the one hand, and the previously mentioned monuments with a triconch layout from Cusici, Voilovița and Baziaș suggest the directions of evolution followed by the Orthodox architecture in the space of the province during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Together with monuments pertaining to Central European architecture, these gave a new identity to the Banatian cultural space in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The frontier position of the province - which in the 15<sup>th</sup> century became a permanent military and denominational battleground against the Ottoman power south of the Danube, with repercussions in the sphere of sacred architecture - was critical for the identitarian construction of Banatian ecclesiastical architecture in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The waves of Serbian colonization in the Banat during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, coming under the pressure of the Turkish conquests, were accompanied by the establishment of domains belonging to the Serbian nobles Branković or Jakšić, donated to them by the Hungarian kings, who, in this way, created opportunities for raising medieval monasteries<sup>77</sup>. The episcopal structures created in the Banat after 1557, when the Patriarchate of Ipek was reestablished, constituted the institutional cohesion element in the Romanian and Serbian Orthodox world from the province converted into an Ottoman vilayet<sup>78</sup>. The Patriarchate of Ipek exercised its authority over a vast area, stretching from the Vardar and Struma Valleys, in southeastern Europe, to the middle course of the Danube, in Buda. In 1557, the Romanian Orthodox bloc in the Banat was, together with the Bulgarians, the Croats and the Serbs, under the obedience of the Serbian

<sup>77</sup> Ljubivoje Cerović, *Sârbii din România* (Timișoara, 2005), 8-14.

<sup>78</sup> Ladislav Hadrovics, *Le peuple serbe et son église sous la domination turque* (Paris, 1947), 112-113; Silviu Anuichi, "Relații bisericești româno-sârbe în secolele al XVII-lea și al XVIII-lea," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* XCVII, no. 7-8 (1979): 884 și urm.; Țeicu, *Geografia*, 39-40.

Patriarchate. This vast territory with an ethnic conglomerate was considered Serbian ground and the idea of belonging to the Serbian nation was imposed through the church and its episcopal structures<sup>79</sup>. The ecclesiastical architectural monuments were ethnically assimilated, with major long-lasting consequences in canonical, legal and denominational terms. A Serbian denominational and ethnic identity was thus formed for the entire set of 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup> -century monuments of the Orthodox community in the Banat. The medieval historical tradition was taken up in the local historiography of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, thus reinforcing the ethnic identity of the monastic churches from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. A summary analysis of the dissemination of the ecclesiastical monuments from the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries in the area of the province and their placement in the social and cultural context in which they appeared highlight, in this regard, the features that define the “identity” of this space.

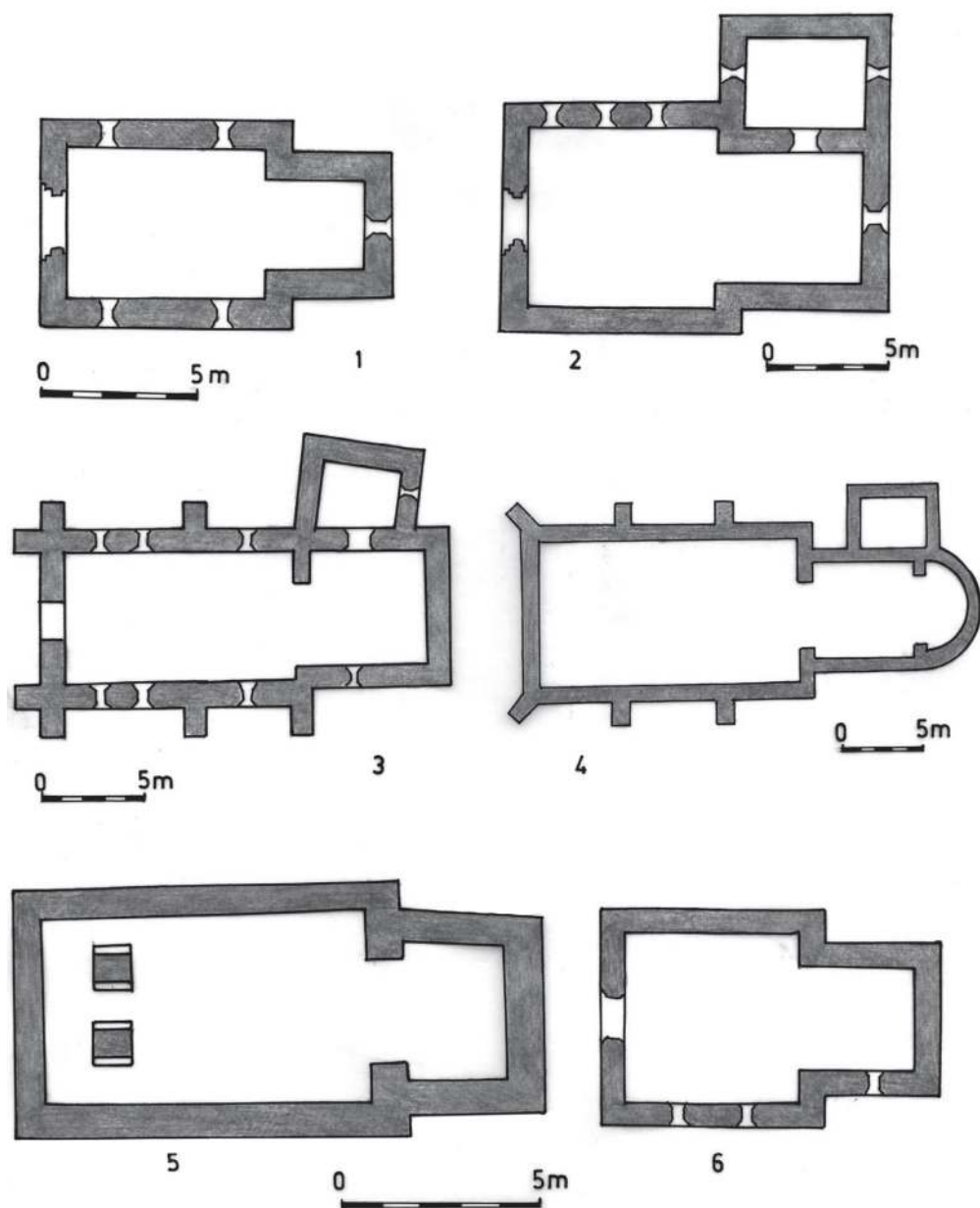
## ARHITECTURA ECLEZIASTICĂ ÎN SECOLELE XIV-XV DIN BANAT. REFLEXIA IDENTITĂȚII UNUI SPAȚIU DE FRONTIERĂ

### *Rezumat*

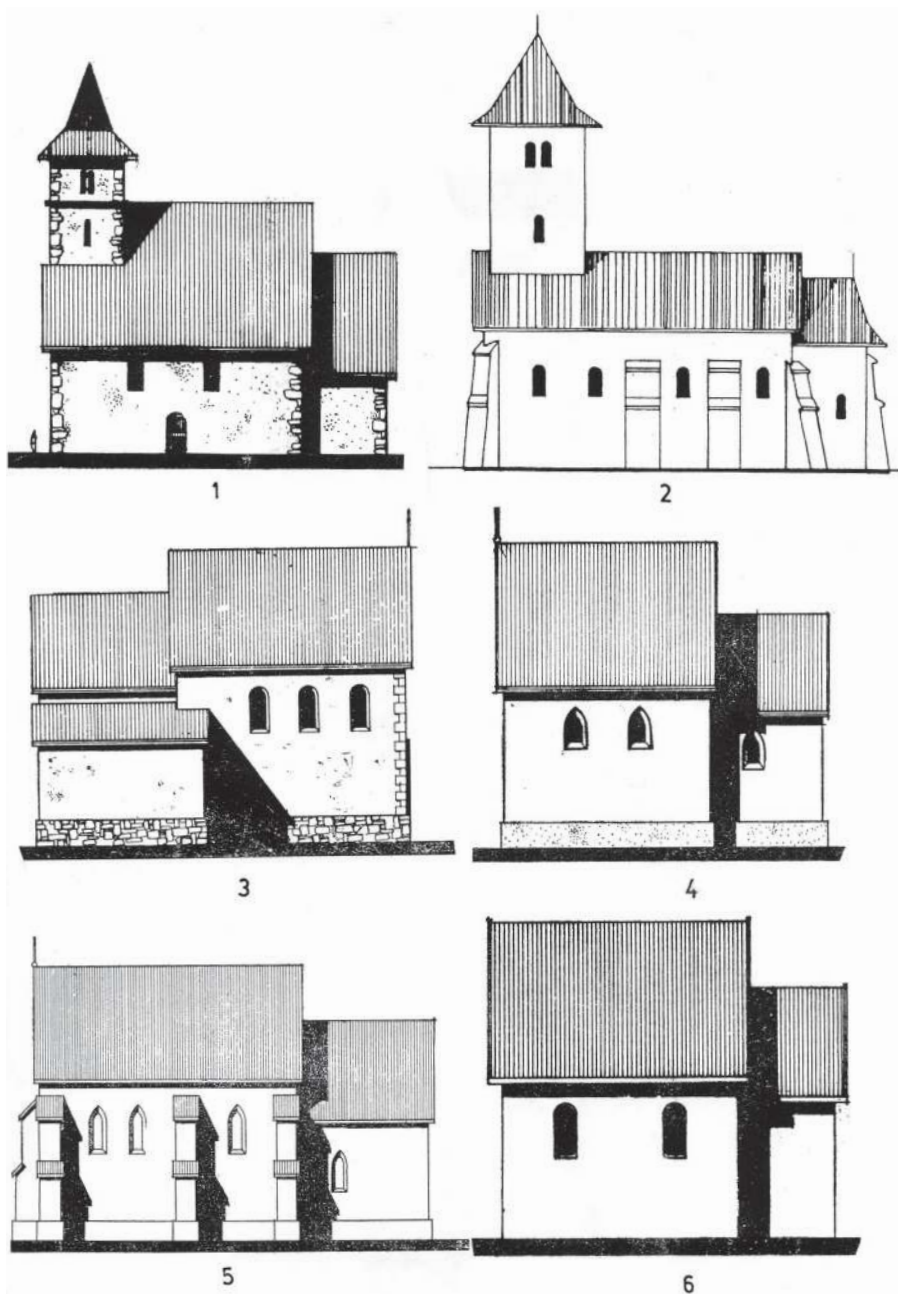
Discursul propriu-zis privind evoluția arhitecturii ecleziastice a fost construit pe documentația arheologică acumulată în ultima jumătate de veac. Banatul, o provincie de frontieră în cadrul regatului medieval maghiar, a suferit pierderi catastrofale în domeniul monumentelor de cult, bisericile parohiale catolice și ortodoxe, capelele de curte fiind distruse în întregime. Discuția relevă constrângerile venite din sfera surselor de cercetare, a monumentelor cu precădere. Veacul al XIV-lea, când sunt înscrise peste două sute de biserici sub obediența diocesei Cenadului, a fost epoca de mare înflorire a arhitecturii ecleziastice. Planimetria monumentelor relevă adoptarea formelor specifice arhitecturii central europene, manifestări ale romanicului târziu și ale arhitecturii gotice. Așezat pe culoarul geografic al Dunării de jos apusene, Banatul a receptat în veacul al XV-lea influențe venite dinspre arhitectura sârbească. Ele se înscriu într-o tradiție culturală a influențelor cu civilizația bizantino-balcanică, evidente cu precădere în arta minoră a secolelor XIII-XIV. Monumentele de arhitectură ecleziastică din secolele XIV-XVI reflectă identitatea unui spațiu de frontieră medieval, unde s-au interferat două mari sfere ale civilizației europene, cea central europeană, de care Banatul este legat în mod natural și civilizația medievală bizantino-balcanică.

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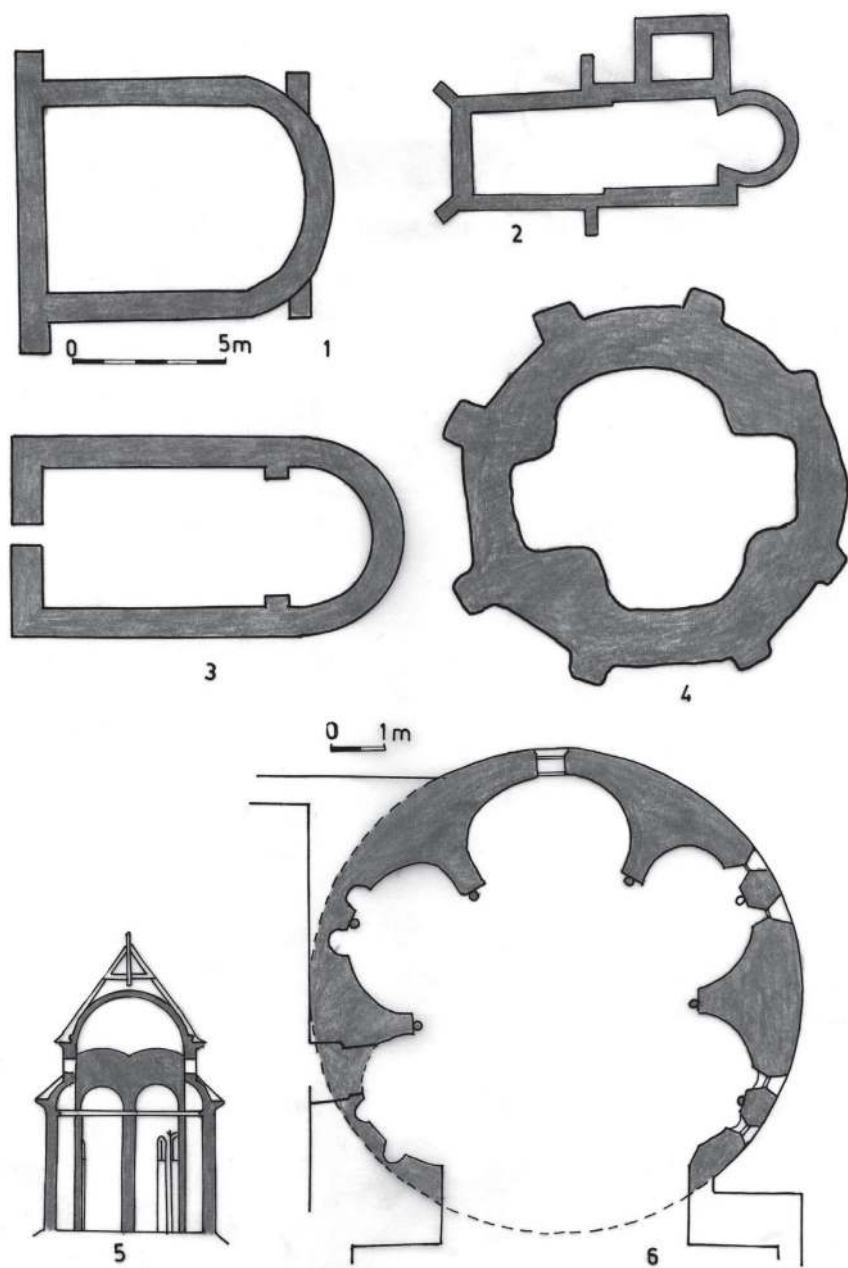
<sup>79</sup> Hadrovics, *Le peuple serbe*, 112.



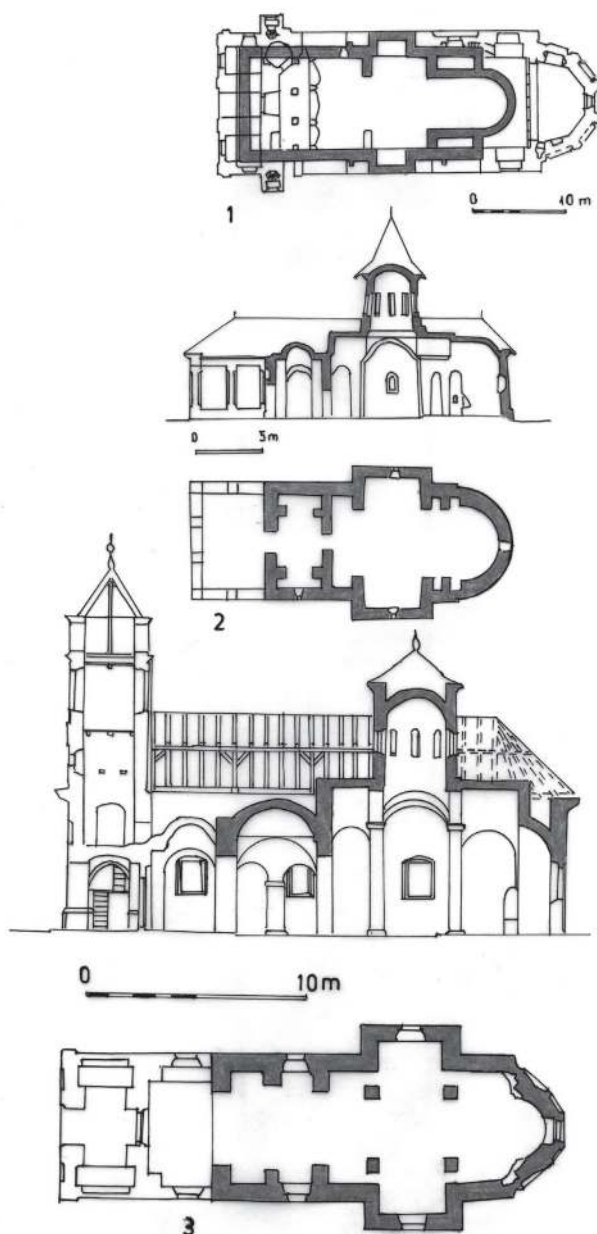
**Fig. I.** Church hall layout: 1. Reșița; 2. Mehadia; 3. Berzovia; 4. Caransebeș; 5. Ilidia; 6. Cârnecea



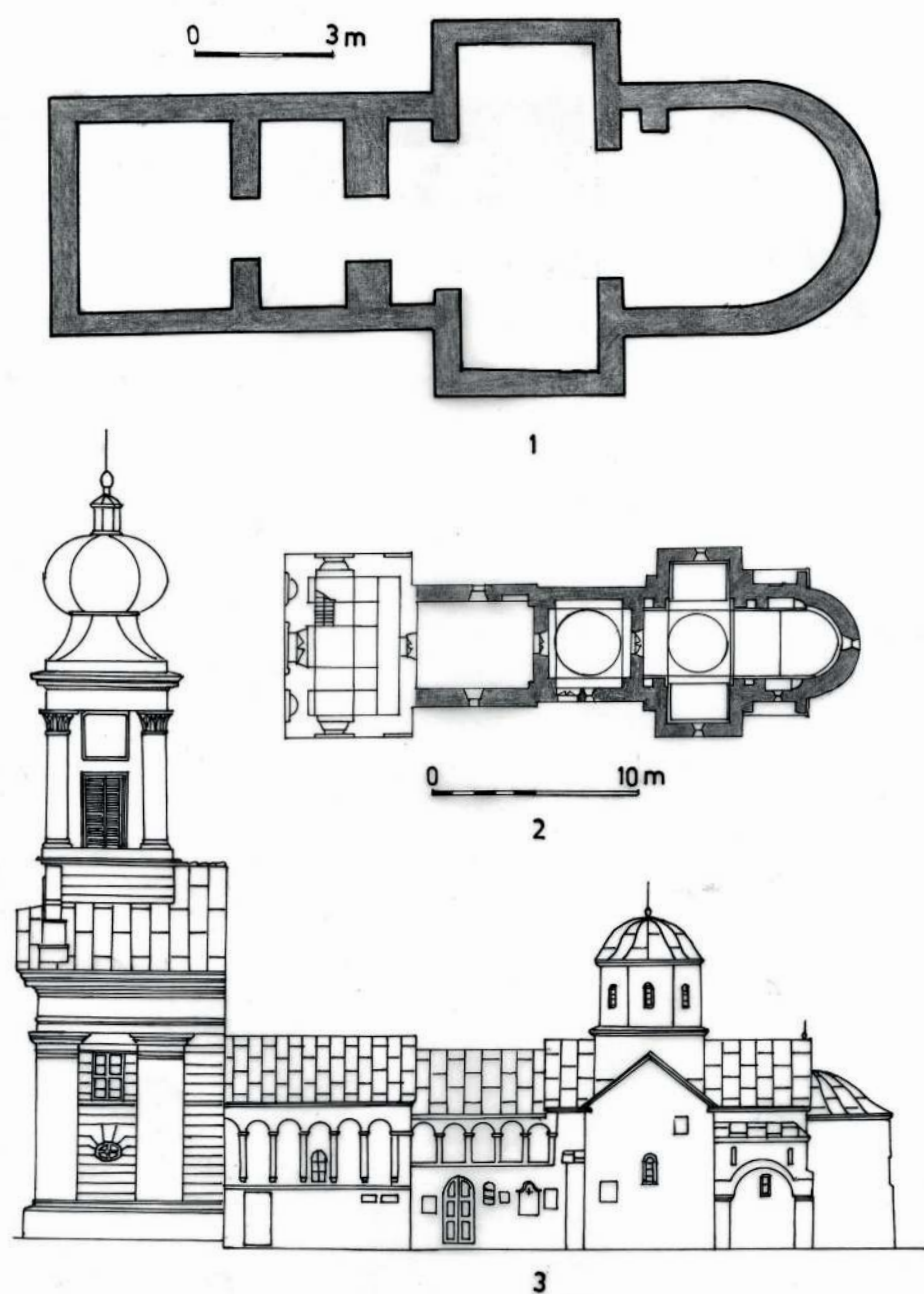
**Fig. II.** Proposals for the reconstruction of the church hall: 1. Ilidia; 2. Căvărăn; 3. Mehadia; 4. Reșița; 5. Berzovia; 6. Cârnecea (architect Dragoș Zipfl; 2 architect C. Moisescu)



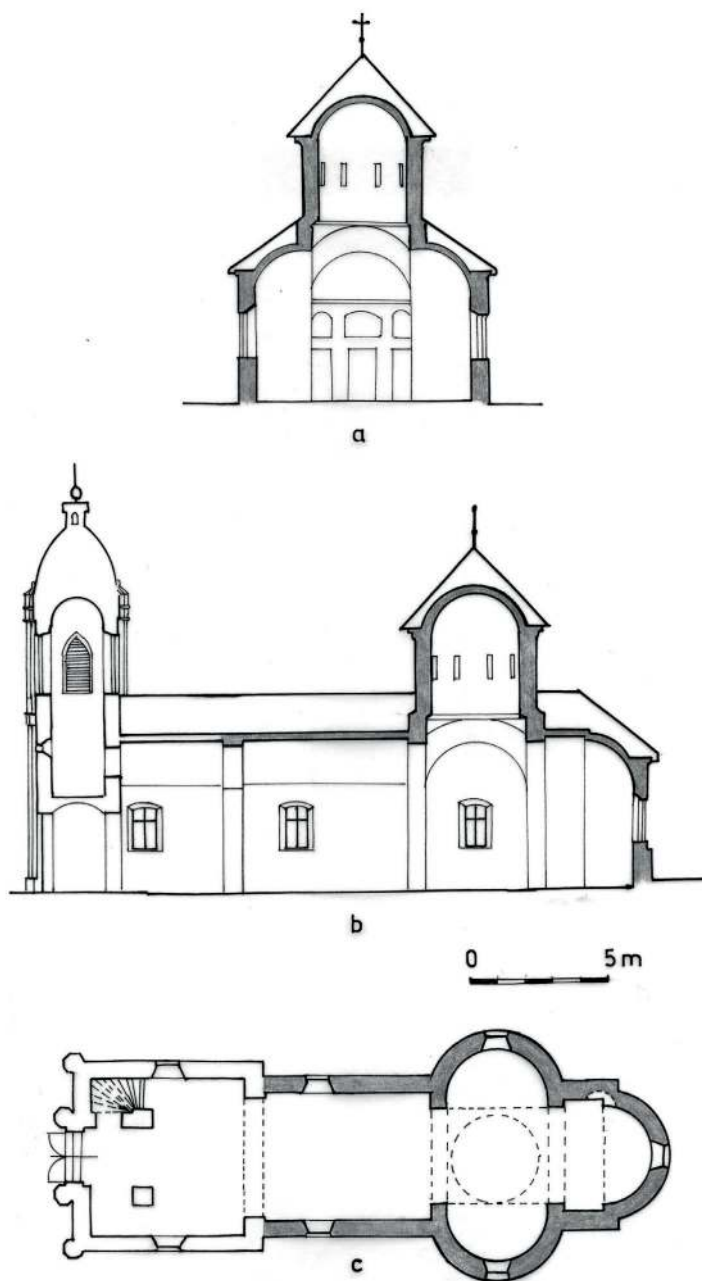
**Fig. III.** Church layout: 1. Obreja; 2. Szöreg; 3. Belint; 4. Ilidia; 5-6. Kiszombor



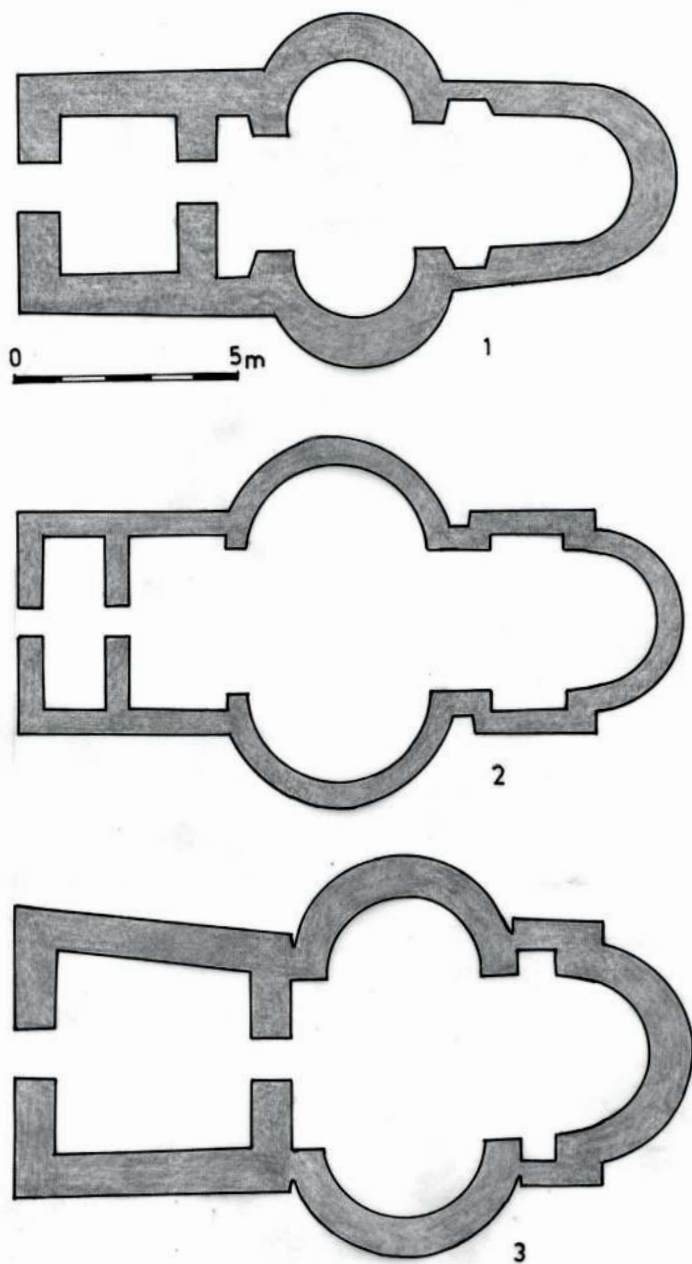
**Fig. IV.** The layout of the medieval church from Lipova (according to the architect E. Greceanu; 2. The layout and cross-section of the church from Șemlacu Mic (architect C. Moisescu); 3. The layout and cross-section of the church from Mesici Monastery (architect J. Zdravković)



**Fig. V.** The church of Zlatița Monastery; 2. The layout and cross-section of the monastery church Voilovița.



**Fig. VI.** The church of Baziaș Monastery. Layout and cross-sections (architect Dragos Zipfl)



**Fig. VII.** Churches with a triconch layout. 1. The church of Cusici Monastery; 2. The church of Mraconia Monastery; 3. The church of Sirinia Monastery