

Ecclesiastic dwellings inside monastery courtyards of Iasi

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Summary

We surveyed three interesting buildings from three different courtyards: the semi-basement near by the tower of the Barnovschi monastery, the so called Dosoftei house near by the wall of Sf. Nicolai Domnesc monastery and the house inside the courtyard of Golia monastery. Comparing them, comparison made in the context of certain characteristics of the structures of the medieval Moldavian monastery courtyards, we may notice that these three buildings have in common some aspects. These houses show also some particularities that make them different, resulted out of the special history and lifespan of each structure, conferring them, even today, magnetism, charm and personality.

Keywords: architecture, historical researches, monastery courtyards, ecclesiastic dwellings.

1. INTRODUCTION

Protected for long time by the fortified walls and, consequently, kept in a better state compared to the rest of the buildings from the urban space of Iasi, structures erected inside the monastery courtyards of Iasi offer new and valuable information for the research work, substituting the lost information about the medieval built base, demolished during the time.

We surveyed three interesting buildings from three different courtyards: the semi-basement near by the tower of the Barnovschi monastery, the so called Dosoftei house near by the wall of Sf. Nicolai Domnesc monastery and the house inside the courtyard of Golia monastery.

2. CELL ROOMS OF BARNOVSCHI MONASTERY

Erected in the heart of Iasi "borough" by Barnovschi Voda Moghila and finished in 1627, the Barnovschi monastery had, like any other famous ecclesiastic dwelling, a courtyard with various buildings and extensions necessary for monastic life. Moreover, according to the note of Atanase Comnen Ipsilante, regarding the Greek School of Iasi, we find out that this school operated "in the cell rooms of Barnovschi" – even the elementary courses of Greek language – and that towards



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the end of the 17th century, the sons of Mihai Racovita, future prince, studied with the school headmaster himself, the great scholar, Natanail Colonari [1].

In 1904, out of the cell rooms of the monastery still remained only one building, the one adherent to the tower of Barnovschi monastery, partially visible in a photograph from 1913 [2].

The documentation sources mention that in this house “was hosted the first printing house with books in Arabic characters in this country” [3].

Presently, out of this structure, only the undercroft (half-buried) part was kept, containing two rooms, entirely built of stone (Image 2). At the beginning of 20th century, inside the building, there was still an old “channel, above two stone basements, nobody knowing where it leads” [2]. The two basements are actually the two vaults of the cellar. In the cellar’s walls, presently, is not visible any opening, and the text clearly mentions that the entrance in to the channel was placed above the cellar. It is possible that the church tower and the cell room to communicate through channels with the underground cave network of the city, by access ways now gone [4].

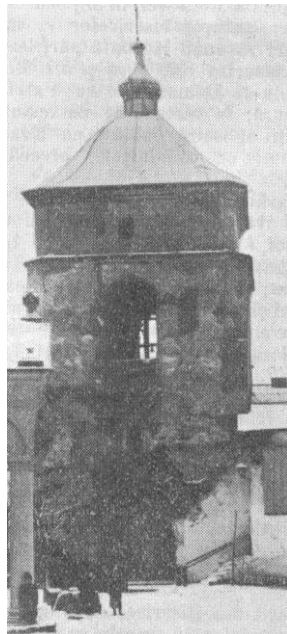


Image 1 - Photo of 1913

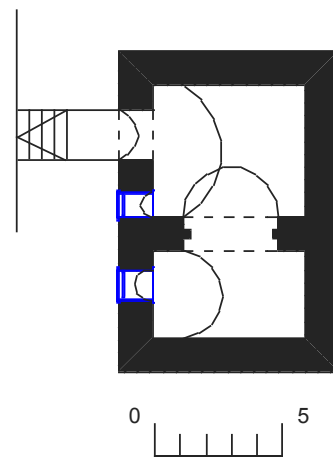


Image 2 - Undercroft Plan

The cellar has the same dimensions as the so-called Dosoftei house from Sf. Nicolai Domnesc monastery – about 9 x 13 m (Image 2). The dimensions resemble



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in a way with the dimensions of the house of Golia – about 7 x 15 m. We mention that the dimensions of the other two structures, which are analyzed in the following, do not contain the width of 3 m of their porches, but are referring only to the structure body.

Presently, in the two rooms of the cellar, the access is available from the outside, on some stairs [5]. In the right part of 1913 photo (Image 1) the access to the cell room of the undercroft is not visible, but is visible the fact that the overground structure is raised enough above the ground. Compared to the land height arranged today, the increased height is of about 1 m. In the external over ground walls are arranged two small windows, oriented towards the church building.

The two spaces of the cellar are covered with semi-cylindrical vaults made of stone, supported on the side walls, the openings being of 4.70 m and 4 m. The high thickness of all the walls, made also of stone – about 1.35 m – could raise the hypothesis that, initially, they supported over the level of ground floor and first floor. The ground floor is visible in the photo of 1913 (Image 1).

Regarding the spatial arrangement, it is possible that the ground floor and the first floor might had the same internal spatial distribution, e.g. binuclear and in enfilade, as same as the cellar. As functionalities, both the ground floor and the first floor could be used for monastic dwelling, hosting cell rooms; each floor could have either one room or two rooms. The possibility of one floor implies also the logical hypothesis of an external wooden stair with an access stairhead to the cell rooms on the first floor.

Also, some new elements were kept, appearing on the portal's arch that separates the cellar rooms. Though, we are talking only about the semi-basement of some modest cell rooms, the internal portal arch, for passing from one room to another, is covered with bricks. Into this portal it is embedded, for fixing the door, a beautiful round profile of molded stone, carefully executed.

These carefully executed details could constitute a sign of the semi-basement multi-functionality, even of the existence of the above mentioned printing house.

3. THE SO-CALLED DOSOFTEI HOUSE, OF SF. NICOLAE DOMNESC MONASTERY COURTYARD

Presently, the Iasi people knows this monument as « Dosoftei House » because it was supposed, in time, that in this house either the Metropolitan Bishop Dosoftei lived, or that in this space his printing house might have operated [6].

Some surveys assume that this house dated back from 18th century, considering that in the 17th century, on the place of the house was the monastery graveyard [7]. Other surveys estimate that this graveyard was not positioned towards the Sf.



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Vineri alley and they advance the hypothesis that the edifice already existed in 17th century [8].

Image 3 – Nowadays image of house



Adherent to the north wall of the monastery courtyard, the arcaded house has kept, till its restoration, signs about its old shape. The restoration destroyed many of these signs, so that, today, we can only make up some hypotheses, starting from the few present details, correlating them with historical information and documentation sources.

It is possible that, in the 17th century, the fortified courtyard of the Sf. Nicolae royal chapel comprised not only the church but also the monastic constructions adjacent to the perimetric wall, required for a good operation of the clerical complex.

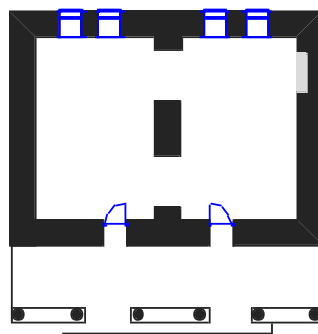
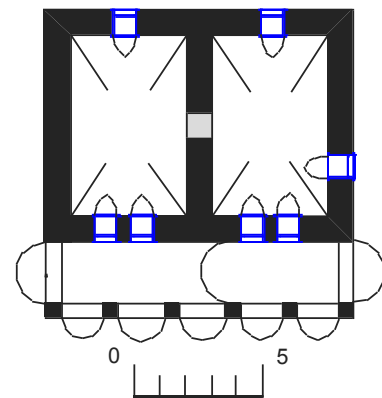
The supposition that, at its beginning, the building was designed for monastic dwelling draws the conclusion that the edifice orientation, with its accesses, was towards the courtyard's interior. We may also notice, even today, that the monastery courtyard wall is the extension of the northern wall of the house, e.g. of the wall of Sf. Vineri alley – today Anastasie Panu Street. Also, we may clearly notice that the edifice body is developed towards the courtyard interior and not towards the street. This detail is supporting the hypothesis that, initially, the edifice was part of the courtyard, fulfilling a necessary function, possibly of monastic dwelling.

Later on, probably in 18th century, because of economic reason of the monastery at that time, the building suffered a functional reconversion. The transformation of the cell room edifice in to a commercial space involved the construction of a new arched porch for protection of the goods and of the buyers, the entire house was reoriented to the north, towards the alley, through some modifications of the constructions, specified below.



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Passing in front of the Royal Court of Sf. Nicolae Domnesc monastery and extending till Targul Fainii – today called Targul Cucului - Sf. Vineri alley made up a prominent urban space of Iasi and one of its important commercial roads. Since the 16th century, a little bit further of Sf. Nicolae Domnesc and on the opposite side of the alley, there was a vacant land or a commercial fair next to the Sf. Vineri monastery. This fair was one of the most important commercial center of the city, keeping its magnetism till the 19th century, being visible both in Bayardi plan of 1819 and in Peytavin plan of 1857. In 1845, the arcaded house is clearly represented in the well-known stamp of J. Ray that renders the époque atmosphere and the commercial hustle of the alley, not far way being visible the Sf. Vineri monastery [9].

**Image 4 - First floor****Image 5 – Second floor**

Comparing this edifice with the one at the Barnovschi monastery, we notice the fact that, without portico, the dimensions of the building are identical: about 9 x 13 m. Here, we have to mention an important fact related to the width of the edifice: it is about 8.75 m, a dimension largely used in Moldavia, in the second half of the 17th century, on many edifices from monastic courtyards like Dragomina but also in the royal house of Cetatuiia-Iasi (Image 4 and 5).

The building's length of about 13 m allowed the partition of the interior in two spaces. The high height of the edifice suggests the hypothesis of initial existence of a vertically spatial segregation, in ground floor and first floor (Image 4 and 5). Today, the house interior has a floor which is accessed by a wooden indoor stair – these details being necessary to the present functioning of the museum, was designed in the restoration project. The first level has a wooden ceiling, but the last level is covered with stone crossed vaults, that probably existed initially too. The



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initial spatial organization and the presence of stone vaults are mentioned in the survey carried out by Prof. Ionescu Grigore [10].

The entrance to the two commercial spaces is made from the alley, being possible that the two rooms would communicate. In the 17th century, before transforming it in a commercial space, the ground floor could host either cell rooms, or storing rooms and that first floor hosted cell rooms. The two rooms were arranged in enfilade, both at the ground floor and at the first floor, and the access and illumination were made from the courtyard. However, it is possible that illumination of the spaces from the ground floor was made also through the gaps of the northern wall from the alley, gaps that later were supposedly transformed in access doors to the commercial spaces. Regarding the cutting of some gaps in the northern wall, at the first floor to the Sf. Vineri alley, these gaps could exist since the initial period, being necessary for illuminating the cell rooms. If this edifice with cell rooms initially had two levels, then it would be necessary an access way to the first floor on an outdoor stair with a wooden stairhead, as it was the usage at that time. The positioning of the stair was on the southern façade from the monastery courtyard, either by one of the end of the building, or in the middle like in the royal house of Cetatuiia-Iasi.

Another resemblance with the civilian-monastic models in the 17th century is related to the external aspect of the house, evidently austere, a feature underlined also by the ratio between fillings and gaps, in which the fillings are evidently predominant. The southern façade, opposed to the façade with portico, very well suggests the simplicity of the facades of 17th century, by a few very small windows placed on the massive fillings of stone.

Regarding the house dating, worthy argument to consider is also the material used for construction, stone. Near the city, the calcareous stone was for Iasi a main building material during the 17th century [4].

Although built later, in the 18th century, the external portico is also stone made, vaulted and decorated with arcades on all sides (Image 3 and 4). Its width, of about 3 m, allowed both circulation and presentation and selling of goods towards the Sf. Vineri alley (Image 3). This kind of portico derives from the ancient house models with porticos, frequently met in Roman or Greek houses [11]. The perpetuation of the same model by the Greek colonies of Asia Minor continued till Middle Ages. The portico was taken over and used in various ways till the present, mainly on Byzantine territory, where many houses with porticos are still used today [12].

It is supposed that, in 17th and 18th centuries, the house eave was more enlarged to offer protection. The restoration took over the narrow cornice, specific for urban edifices of the 19th century. This cornice is visible also in the above mentioned Ray's stamp.



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5. THE HOUSE OF GOLIA MONASTERY COURTYARD

Within the Golia monastery courtyard there were in the 17th century various constructions, many of them destroyed. Among them, in documents are mentioned the cell rooms and some warerooms and storing rooms [13].

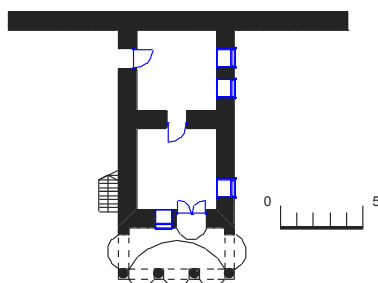


Image 6 - First floor

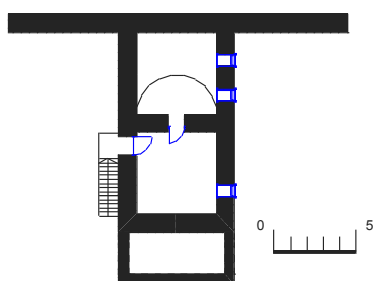


Image 7 – Second floor



Image 8 – The house today

Regarding the modest stone edifice, stuck to the courtyard walls on the right side of the church, we do not know what function had and when it was built (Image 8). Gh. Bals named it “the treasury” without giving any explanations [14]. Other researchers consider that it was only a simple storage place, the type usually built in the 18th century in the courtyards, in order to store the fortunes of some wealthy people when Iasi was attacked – but these storing rooms are mentioned in the documents only at the beginning of the 19th century [15].

In the support of the hypothesis that this edifice was initially designed for monastic dwelling, for cell rooms, a documentary clue is mentioned in the beginning of the 18th century. In 1701, a Russian traveler – the abbot Leonte – relates that he hosted in one of the cell rooms lined up on the walls of the Golia monastery courtyard. From his report, we find out that superior himself lived, at that time, in a cell room, as in an excerpt of the document, “he was standing in front of his cell room” [16]. In other words, if in 1701 it was not mentioned a superior house in Golia courtyard,



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we foresee the possibility that the edifice under survey hosted even the superior cell room.

In favor of edifice dating, as existing to the end of 17th century, we bring some arguments by its comparison with the other monastic buildings mentioned in this paper work. Regarding the aspect, the house mostly resembles with the building stuck to the courtyard wall of Sf. Nicolae Domnesc church [17]. However, the portico is placed on the short side and it is oriented towards the monastery courtyard. The house is stuck to the courtyard wall on its short side, and the entrance is made on the longitudinal axis.

Its width, of about 7 m, is smaller than at the other studied edifices that have about 9 m. The high length of the house, of about 12 m, related to the small width, has lead to an arrangement in two rooms displayed in enfilade (Image 6 and 7). The high height of the edifice, about 7 m, generated an arrangement on two levels. The access to the high level is made, even today, from the outside, on the left side, but the wooden stair was replaced with a metallic one.

The fact that it was integrally built of stone, without brick insertions, would favor the dating of the 17th century. In this case also, if we eliminate the arcaded portico, a very simple and austere construction results that resembles mostly with the aspect of the houses from Moldavian monastery courtyard of the 16th and 17th century, where the filling predominated in the facades.

The portico is made of stone (Image 6, 7 and 8), having a width of 3 m. Some researchers consider that this portico confers the house an aspect of commercial building. We have to mention the fact that, generally, the porticos have the function of intermediary space, of transition between indoor and outdoor, being present since 15th century in many European and Balcanic dwellings. Generally, being a shelter space for rainfall, wind or sun, it is not necessary to be considered specific only to the commercial spaces.

It is possible that this portico was built later, in the 18th century, like the so-called Dosoftei house. The beautiful stone decorations of its arcades, of the column heads with four columns and of the entrance door frame to the house, were inspired from the church decorations.

Concluding, even though we can not know for sure what function the building had, for monastic dwelling or for storing, the above mentioned documentary clues, from its arrangement and aspect, we may suppose that it was destined for dwelling and that it can be traced between the end of 17th century and the beginning of 18th century.

4.CONCLUSIONS

Comparing them, comparison made in the context of certain characteristics of the structures of the medieval Moldavian monastery courtyards, we may notice that these three buildings have in common some aspects:



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- They could be, originally, destined for monastic dwelling, hosting the cell room function;
- They could be dated at the end of 17th century; obvious characteristic elements are kept, obviously reminding of other structures of 17th century Moldavia;
- The construction structure is massive, with vaults; stone was used as integral building material;
- The outside aspect is very austere;
- The facades in which the fillings strongly dominate the gaps.

These houses show also some particularities that make them different, resulted out of the special history and lifespan of each structure, conferring them, even today, magnetism, charm and personality.

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