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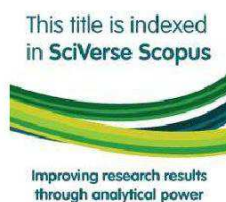
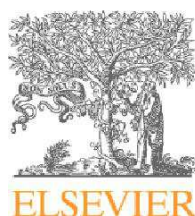
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# Sommaire

## ARTICLES ET ÉTUDES

MĂDĂLIN-CORNEL VĂLEANU, LUMINIȚA BEJENARU, SERGHEI COVALENCO, ION TENTIUC, VITALIE BURLACU, CODRIN LACĂTUȘU, **PRELIMINARY DATA ON THE CHILD'S TOMB. DISCOVERED IN THE PALEOLITHIC SITE OF COSĂUȚI (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA)**.....7

CONSTANTIN PREOTEASA, **CARACTERISTIQUES DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT DES SOUS-CARPATES DE LA MOLDAVIE DURANT DE L'ÉVOLUTION DE LA CULTURE CUCUTENI**.....17

DOREL MICLE, ANDREI STAVILĂ, **GEANGOȘTI-HULĂ, ROMANIA: A GUMELNIȚA SETTLEMENT ON THE BANKS OF THE DÂMBOVIȚA RIVER. NON-INVASIVE RESEARCH RESULTS**.....33

## NOTES ET DISCUSSIONS

FLORIN GABRIEL PETRICĂ, MIHAI CLAUDIU NĂSTASE, **AN UNCOMMON ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY: AN INCISED BLUEPRINT OF A CHURCH ON A BRICK FROM PRINCE BRÂNCOVEANU'S ARCHITECTURAL COMPLEX OF POTLOGI** .....47

NORME DE REDACTARE..... 53

PRINTING NORMES ..... 57

CERTIFICATIONS POUR INCLURE ANNALES D'UNIVERSITÉ VALAHIA TARGOVISTE, SECTION D'ARHÉOLOGIE ET D'HISTOIRE DANS UNE SÉRIE DE BASES DE DONNÉES ..... 61

## **An uncommon archaeological discovery: an incised blueprint of a church on a brick from Prince Brâncoveanu's architectural complex of Potlogi**

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**Abstract.** *An uncommon archaeological discovery: an incised blueprint of a church on a brick from Prince Brâncoveanu's architectural complex of Potlogi.* The archaeological discovery that makes the subject of our paper regards the identification of an incised rectangular blueprint of a church on a brick found in the courtyard of Potlogi Palace. Churches such as this, dating from the times of Prince Constantin Brancoveanu, all similar in plan can be found in Potlogi, Mogoșoaia and Doicești. It is a distinct possibility that even one of those mentioned above could be represented on the brick in question. We consider, however, based on a short historical context described in this material, that could be the case of St. Nicholas church from Făgăraș, a corollary of Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu's political ideology, which core was the figure of Prince Mihai Viteazul.

**Key-words:** church, incised blueprint, medieval age, Potlogi Palace, Romania

Our short paper mainly aims to provide a general presentation and description of an exceptional medieval age artefact discovered during the archaeological research carried out within the premises of Potlogi Palace, Dâmbovița County, Romania. These archaeological investigations were a step in the process of obtaining the rightful approvals from Ministry of Culture and National Cultural Heritage for the development and completion the project of restoration and reconstruction Potlogi Palace architectural complex („Restaurarea și valorificarea durabilă a patrimoniului cultural precum și crearea /modernizarea infrastructurii și utilităților conexe, în zona ansamblului brâncovenesc Potlogi comuna Potlogi, județul Dâmbovița” – “Restoration and sustainable upgrade of cultural heritage and setting up / modernization of infrastructure and related utilities, in the area of Potlogi Palace architectural complex, Potlogi commune, Potlogi, Dâmbovița County” ).

Under these circumstances, the Archaeological Service from the Ministry of

Culture and National Cultural Heritage was requested for preventive archaeological research permits (no. 198/2010 and no. 55/2012). The research team was lead by Ph.D. Gheorghe Olteanu and the members of the research team were: Ph.D. Ovidiu Cîrstina, Ph.D. Diaconescu Petru Virgil, Mihai Claudiu Năstase, Cheosea Felician and Ph.D. candidate Florin Gabriel Petrică (G. Olteanu et al., unpublished report).

The artefact that makes the subject of our presentation is a building brick on which was traced a plan of a church (fig. 1, 2). Its discovery was done during a surface survey in the courtyard of the palace, it was recovered fragmentary, broken into two halves. Despite that it kept most of the incised elements which allowed a rather easy restoration. This does not undermine the effort and the skills of our colleagues from the Restoration Laboratory of National Museums Complex “Princely Court” Târgoviște, Daniela Iamandi and Andrei Scărlătescu, whom we thank once again\*. The size of the object studied is part of the typological format bricks used in the construction of buildings in the whole

architectural complex built here by Prince Brâncoveanu and its dimensions are 29x15x4 cm. The church, incised in raw slurry is 24x7 cm and space components of this construction are: porch 7x3,5 cm .; narthex 5x5 cm; nave 4x5 cm. The altar is represented as a triangle, 4 cm and 5.5 cm at the base. isosceles sides. Measurements were made on the inside wall of the church having a thickness of 1.5 cm, the hatched with oblique lines.



Fig. 1 - Photography of the artifact – brick with a church incised sketch

As the plan suggests, it is an elongated rectangular church without side aisles so, and plotted almost like a ship. The first question, otherwise normal, is related to the identification of this church.

Typological the object that makes the subject of our study, with its dimension: 29x15x4 cm, is the same as the bricks used in the construction of buildings of the whole architectural complex Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688 – 1714) raised in Potlogi. The church, incised in raw slurry is 24x7 cm and its represented space components of the construction are: porch 7x3,5 cm; narthex 5x5 cm; nave 4x5 cm. The altar is represented as a triangle, with a 4 cm base and 5.5 cm for the isosceles sides. All measurements represent inner dimensions of the spaces, the walls of the drawn church have a thickness of 1.5 cm and they are hatched with oblique lines.

As the blueprint suggests, it is an elongated, rectangular church therefore without aisles, resembling on its graphical representation more with a ship. The first question, otherwise normal, is related to the identification of this blueprint with an existing or perished church and it can not be, in our opinion, sought than between the churches with rectangular planning raised by the great prince (fig. 3-5) (for the typology and the chronology of this type of churches see N. Ghika-Budesti, 1936). Since Potlogi Palace was built between 1697-1698, and certainly the brick in question comes from one of the buildings of this architectural complex, it comes somehow natural to think of a church that was already in a constructional process at that date or was to be built somewhere around the year 1698.

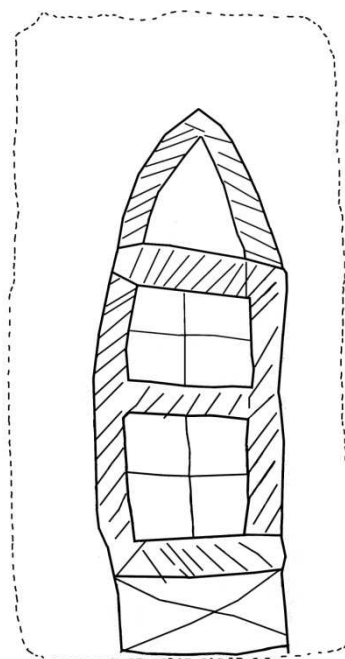


Fig. 2 - Drawing of church's incised blueprint (by restorer Andrei Scarlatescu)

The year 1698 was rich in constructions for Prince Brâncoveanu, it was the tenth year of his reign, as well. The new princely courts were meant to represent the peak his constructive efforts and this year Potlogi Palace was completed as well as a new painting for the Grand Princely Church of his summer residence Târgoviște.

Beyond the mountains, in Transylvania, Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu initiates another constructional process, starting in the years 1697-1698, from Sâmbata de Sus, his grandfather's

**An uncommon archaeological discovery: an incised blueprint of a church on a brick from Prince Brâncoveanu's architectural complex of Potlogi**

estate, Preda Brancoveanu to Făgăraș, where previously there had been a church founded by Prince Mihai Viteazul (1593 - 1601). About last prince's chronicle states: "in this year His Highness sent Neagoe pitariul Măjăscu in Transylvania, in Fagaraș, to finish the church, which foundations were started since last year, all on His expense. For Christians there did not had a church of their own and many prayers had they sent for it before and His Highness did not shirk from this divine task, more than that He happily answered their prayers and sent His envoys to build a large and beautiful church, in remembrance and honour of the great miracle worker, St. Nicholas Mirlicheischii " (R. Greceanu, p. 498).

By this constructional effort across the mountains, Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu placed himself in the lineage of his illustrious predecessors on Wallachia's throne, protecting materially and spiritually the Orthodox Church in Transylvania (M. G. Abrudan, 2014).

Moreover, as we shall see, the prince wanted saw himself as a follower, at least

ideologically, of the earlier Prince Mihai Viteazul's politics. Moreover, in addition to his family estate from Sâmbăta de Sus, whose architectural components will undergo substantial transformation in the years 1698 - 1701, the prince will rebuild in the same period, another two churches, whose first founder was Prince Mihai Viteazul (R. Greceanu, p. 46).

These churches are those from Ocna Sibiu and Făgăraș, first built in 1701, the latter being built, after long delays, in two stages in the years 1697 and 1698.

The church from Făgăraș was built on the west of Făgăraș Fortress, by Prince Mihai Viteazul, at a date that can not be determined exactly, probably soon after the year 1595. Its existence must have been quite short, since in 1617 Gabriel Bethlen, Prince of Transylvania, mentioned it at past tense. Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu's intentions to restore the church, started since 1694 but they have not been achievable earlier than 1697, when the foundations stone was put first (R. Greceanu, p. 43).

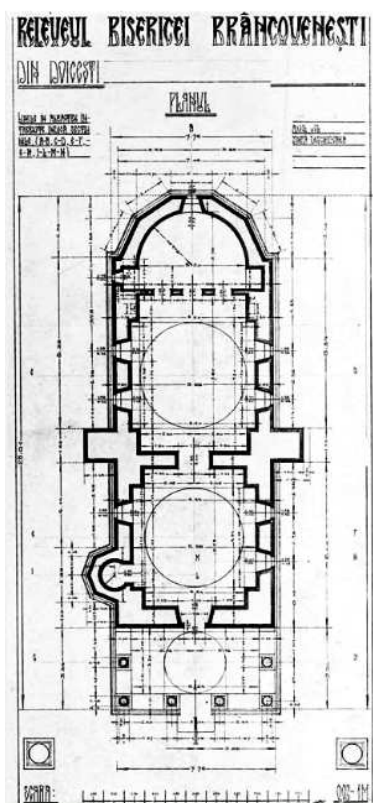


Fig. 3 - Blueprint of Doicești Church (after N. Ghika-Budesti, 1936 – sketch CI).

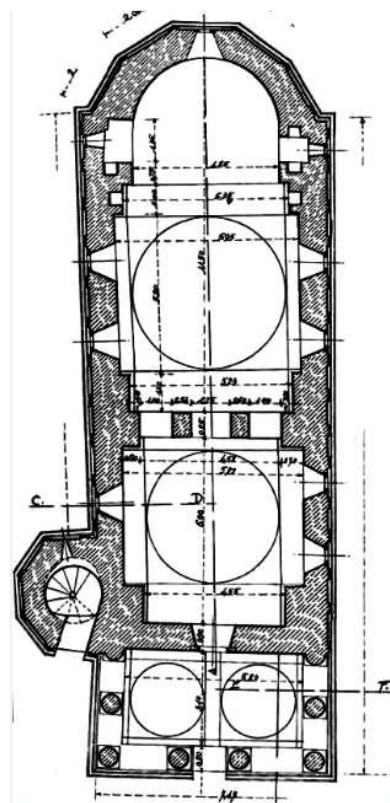


Fig. 4 - Blueprint of Mogoșoaia Church (after N. Ghika-Budesti, 1936 – sketch CIX).



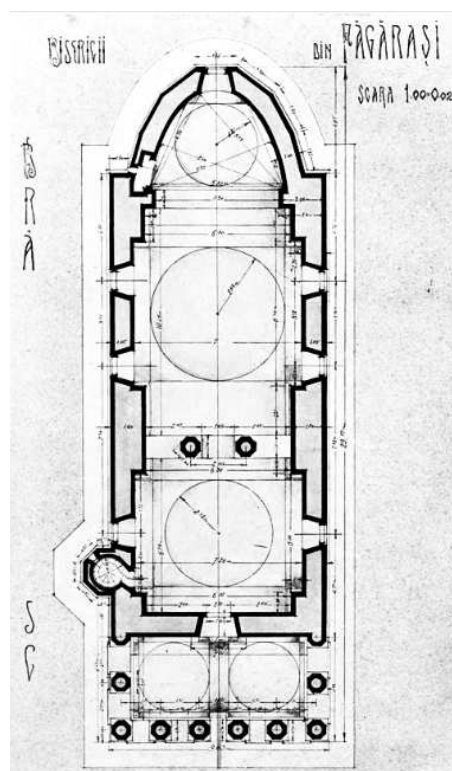


Fig. 5 - Blueprint of Făgăraș Church (after N. Ghika-Budesti, 1936 – sketch CVII).

The church's inscription is eloquent in attesting these two constructional stages: "This holy and divine church of the Orient, I, Costandin B. Bășărabu Waywode, Lord and Protector of all the land of Wallchia / For glory and praise of the blessed and contained in three ipostasis and one being Trinity and for St. Nicholas Mirelechii's Bishop wonder-worker whose patron is, from keystone and with all the expense, he founded and built in year 1698 of the world's absolution, in the tenth year of his reign. And it begun in the month of June, the 17<sup>th</sup> day and was finished in the month of September, the 30<sup>th</sup> day in the year - and in there times was steward Neagoe Pitar Rățescu – the year 7206 from the creation of the world, year 1697" (N. Iorga, 1906)

By its planning, the Făgăraș church attracted our attention by default (fig. 5), considering, as a working hypothesis, for the moment, that, perhaps, it is the church represented on brick found in the court yard of Potlogi Palace since is the only building corresponding to this blueprint built by the prince in those years. Another key element that also drew our attention is the close connexion, like true arch over time, that Prince Brâncoveanu achieved, in this way, with Prince Mihai Viteazul, ideological connexion suggested by the political message contented in the votive

portraits gallery located in the narthex above mentioned Grand Church from Târgoviște. In this respect, I presented the paper with the title "Once more on the votive painting from the Grand Church of the princely residence in Târgoviște" during the debates of the scientific session "Brâncoveanu 300. Old capital cities of Wallachia between East and West, Târgoviște, May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014. I tried, on this occasion, dedicated to the memorial of martyr waywode, to demonstrate the political message the prince encrypted in the votive painting containing this portraits gallery located in the narthex of the Grand Princely Church of Târgoviște. He refers, on the one hand, to the anti-Ottoman and unifying political legacy of Prince Mihai Viteazul, ideologically continued by princes of ruling families Craiovești and Cantacuzino and, on the other hand, he expressed the idea of Byzantine imperial heritage, traceable even earlier since the times of Prince Neagoe Basarab (1511 - 1521) and to whom Prince Constantin Brancoveanu was not a stranger.

St. Nicholas church of Făgăraș was built by Constantin Brâncoveanu, on the site of the elder church of Mihai Viteazul, with rather large dimensions of 30x10 m. It has a massive octagonal bell tower on the narthex (N. Ghika-Budesti, 1936). The church has rectangular

**An uncommon archaeological discovery: an incised blueprint of a church on a brick from Prince Brâncoveanu's architectural complex of Potlogi**

shape, with an elliptical apse covered by a spherical dome and on the northern facade the staircase of the bell tower. Ten octagonal pillars bear up an open porch. The windows and doors frames have Gothic profiles and the roof, redone, gives the church a characteristic note in the region's landscape. The church is subdivided into porch, narthex, nave and altar. The shrine's apse is semicircular on the interior and polygonal on the exterior (G. Ionescu, 1937, p. 186).

Returning to Făgăraș church's inscription, we see that it contains, a rather common feature of the inscriptions for the constructional works of Prince Ștefan cel mare (1457 - 1504), mentioning both the beginning and end of the construction works. The second phase, that of 1698, because that is referred to in the text, certainly includes the start date as June 17th.

The date June 17th is present in the painters' inscription of the Great Princely Church of Târgoviște, painted for the first time, as Tereza Sinigalia underlines, during the reign of Prince Mihai Viteazul (T. Sinigalia, 2001). The coincidence of these data, we believe, is not really random, for it is precisely a binder to the illustrious figure of Prince Mihai Viteazul, the above mentioned church of Făgăraș being nothing else but a sequel in the constructional of Târgoviște, the main residence of Prince Mihai Viteazul since the autumn of 1596.

\*The artefact numbers among those c. 700 selected by their exceptional value to be part of the exhibition "Treasures of Romania in China"

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