

THE TOPONYMIC HERITAGE OF BUCHAREST. HAGIONYMS – AN ADMINISTRATIVE ACT WITH SPIRITUAL CONNOTATIONS

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ABSTRACT *Today's city developed around the prince's residence as well as around churches and monasteries. These places were the first administrative nuclei, especially since the Church had been, in the days before the first Civil Code, the keeper of most administrative functions, including indexes of dwellings, persons, births, marriages and deaths. Bucharest's toponymic heritage, an expression of the city's identity, must be preserved, being a mark of the history of each administrative division. This means it is necessary to compile an explanatory atlas of Bucharest streets, which must be well known by the local administration. The present study focuses on a thematic segment: streets bearing names of saints (hagionyms). Given that the number of streets bearing hagionyms is considerable, we shall divide the list into following categories: streets named after churches built before the 20th century, streets bearing religious names attributed to them in the first half of the 20th century and streets named after important figures of religious life. This classification centers on the public factors which determined the attribution of the respective names. We shall draw out a phenomenological analysis of the concept of public administration from a historic perspective, mentioning correlative political, artistic, religious and sociological aspects.*

KEY WORDS: *toponymic heritage, church, street, history*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: K 23

The toponymic heritage of Bucharest, an expression of spiritual identity, must be protected in order to ensure knowledge about the specificities of each administrative

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division within the city, their means of organization and the manner in which these specificities influenced territorial partition.

Rediscovering the significance of Bucharest street names, their history and spiritual wealth, is the main issue which brings about the need for an explanatory atlas as an aid for the public administration. Toponymic heritage should be known and promoted by those engaged in local administration, helping protect the nuclei around which city life evolved and performing analyses of future development. Aside from that, the succession of Bucharest street names is an interesting object of study for historians and for the general public.

If at first the city had developed around the princely court, later on it would expand mostly around churches and monasteries. These were the first administrative nuclei, especially given that, prior to the first Romanian Civil Code, the Church was in charge of most administrative functions, keeping records of buildings, inhabitants, births, marriages and deaths. The history of Bucharest is therefore tightly connected to the history of its churches. One cannot imagine the history of the city without its churches, many neighborhoods having formed around places of worship and being named after them. Along with the rest of the city, places of worship have seen flooding, earthquakes, epidemics, foreign occupation and demolition.

The present study focuses on a thematic segment: Bucharest streets bearing names tightly connected to religious life. The list of such streets is quite vast, therefore we shall divide it into three categories: streets named after places of worship, streets bearing religious names and streets bearing the names of important religious figures. This classification can be further expanded according to the administrative organization of each historical period and decision factors from within the local administration who gave the streets their names.

In discussing the abovementioned thematic segment, we shall start with those streets bearing names of saints (hagionyms). These names are connected to the consecration of specific churches, some of which have disappeared, others still in existence on or near the respective streets, despite historical hardships such as earthquakes, fires and demolition. We shall sketch a phenomenological analysis of the concept of public administration from a historical perspective, mentioning related political, artistic, religious and sociological aspects, all while selectively listing several important hagionyms related to the best known Bucharest churches.

Some names are still in place, keeping their form since the apparition of the roads they are assigned to, mainly names pertaining to local history or points of interest. Because in Romanian settlements the church represented a nucleus for the development of the community, within nearly every neighborhood there is at least a street bearing the name of a place of worship.

Sfântul Constantin (Saint Constantine) church, built mid-18th century in the immediate vicinity of Podul de Pământ (currently Plevnei road), gave its name to the street connecting Plevnei road to Cișmigiu park. Only between 1987 and 1991 was its name changed to Călimănești. A historical monument, the church itself is part of the 1st Protohiery and is located at no. 33, Sf. Constantin street. As can be read on the consecratory inscription, written in Cyrillic script above the main entrance portal, the place of worship was erected 1785 by members of local guilds, probably on the site of an older church: „in the days of Prince Mihail Șuțu Vvd., during the Metropolitanate of his

Holiness kir Grigorie, september 1785". The church was renovated 1861, 1880 and 1919. It is a small church, 19.5 x 7-9 meters in dimension, with very thick walls, polygonal apses and an octagonal spire, covered in metal plating, situated on the nave. Mural frescoes cover a surface of 750 square meters. Within the church, its founders, Constantin Beșleagă and his wife, are shown together with one of their children. Paintings were executed after 1918 by Costin Petrescu, 1960 by Grigore Stoenescu and restored by a team led by Claudiu Moldoveanu between 1995-97.

Close to Unirii square, Sfânta Vineri- Hereasca church (demolished 1987) was renowned for its icon of Saint Parascheva, commonly known as Sfânta Vineri (Good Friday), given to the church by the Năsturel family. Currently, Sfânta Vineri square evokes the memory of the church. It has been suggested that, between the 13th and 14th centuries, the site was home to a church dedicated to Saint Parascheva, where the relics of two Romanian saints from the South of the Danube were brought during the reign of Mircea the Elder (1368-1408) after the demise of the Turnovo Patriarchy: Saint Parascheva and Saint Filofeia. Historical fact is that the body of Saint Parascheva would be taken from Târnovo to Vidin, and later to Krusevat, due to the Ottoman threat. Finally, from Belgrade, the holy relics arrive in Constantinople, wherefrom the Prince Vasile Lupu would take them to Iasi, June 13th 1641. A church was built here in the age of Matei Basarab (1632-1654), in the year 1645 by Niță, former great aga, the entire area being known as the mahala (suburb) of Aga Niță or "Aganiță". Sfânta Vineri church, attested in the first half of the 18th century, burned down in 1712 and was rebuilt by the Băleni boyars, who grant the church estates and money for the construction of priestly residences and buildings serving the needy and the sick (demolished 1890). The place of worship was damaged during the 1838 earthquake. According to votive inscriptions, the church was rebuilt and extended to its final dimensions November 25th, 1839, by Constantin Năsturel-Herăscu, nephew of the local ban bearing the same name, being finished by Ioaniche Stavronichie. On this occasion, it was also consecrated to the Baptism of Jesus Christ.

The church was bordered by Vergului road to the north (currently Corneliu Coposu boulevard) and the present-day Sfânta Vineri street to the south.

Once the area was restructured, following the systematizations of 1977-1989, both the position and name of the road are changed. Thus, between 1985 and 1990 Sf. Vineri street is called Lăpușna street. Afterwards, the street would be given back its original name and extended by incorporation of former Decebal street.

A recently built monument marks the site of the former church, and a new church has been built on a site in the close vicinity.

Sf. Anton (Saint Anthony) square is situated in the historic center of Bucharest, near Unirii square, behind the apartment blocks on I.C. Brătianu boulevard, in a space defined by Curtea Veche church (consecrated to Saint Anthony the Great and the Annunciation) and Șepcari street to the west, Manuc's Inn and Franceză street to the south, the extension of Covaci street to the north and Brătianu boulevard to the east. The plot was part of the ensemble of the Princely Court. The court is moved to Spirii hill in the 18th century, where it will be known as the "Burnt Court" due to being destroyed by a fire.

The name of the square reminds of Sf. Anton church, which fell prey to the great 1847 fire which devastated nearly a quarter of 19th century Bucharest. After the fire, the plot is turned into the Flower Market which, together with "Târgul din Lăuntru" (the Inside

Market), formed the former Unirii Market, with commercial halls which were demolished 1977. This is where Podul Târgului de Afară (Road to the Outside Market) started, ending in the other large commercial location, Obor Market.

At the other end of Franceză street, at number 3, we can observe Sf. Dumitru (Saint Demetrius) church, also known as Sf. Dumitru-Poștă (Saint Demetrius of the Post) due to the neighboring Postal Palace, currently the National History Museum. The church was built 1819, on the site of a 14th century church. It is a university church hosting the holy relics of Saints Pantelimon, Haralambie, Antipa and Nicanor.

Between the church's courtyard and the building currently hosting the Comedy Theater lies the street named Sf. Dumitru, which would initially start in Carol street (currently Franceză street) and end in Smârdan street. Following the construction of the Theater building, on church grounds, a new street is formed, connected to Poștei street and receiving the name Bălăceanu. City Hall would later modify this, extending Sf. Dumitru street from Poștei to Smârdan street, thus incorporating Bălăceanu street.

On Sf. Elefterie (Saint Elephtherius) street, we can find the homonymous church built by architect Constantin Iotzu. In the 18th century a bend of the Dâmbovița river was home to a village built around St. Elephtherius' hermitage. Between 1743 and 1744, Maxim Cupetul built Old St. Elephtherius' church, during the reign of Mihai Racoviță. After the course of the Dâmbovița was altered, the river bend disappeared and the village became Cotroceni quarter. The street connecting the church to Podul de Pământ road was named Sf. Elefterie and would cross the modified river course over the Gara Centrală (Central Station) bridge, crossing Gara Centrală square and meeting Plevnei street. Between 1985 and 1990, this street was known as Operei street, due to its vicinity to the National Opera, a structure built 1954 on a site initially meant for a new central train station.

Assembled in the great aula of the Faculty of Medicine, the Parish Council decided on the 29th of April 1934 to build a new church. Its cornerstone was laid on Sunday, June 29th 1935. Over 36 years, the church was constructed using churchgoers' donations. New St. Elephtherius' Church was consecrated by Patriarch Justinian Marina on the 29th of June 1971, on the feast day dedicated to St. Apostles Peter and Paul. The project was elaborated by architect Constantin Iotzu (1884-1962) and engineer Dumitru Marcu. The imposing iconostasis was sculpted in cherrywood by Grigore Dumitrescu and Aurel Obreja, based on a model from Skopje, Macedonia, being the only such iconostasis in Romania. Its icons are painted by Stan Hermeneanu of Govora, a renowned religious artist. Frescoes inside the church were made by Iosif Keber and Vasile Rudeanu in a neoclassical style. The icon of St. Mary and the Child was painted by Arsenie Boca in the church's altar. Relics of St. Elephtherius were brought December 15th, 2009, from Țigănești monastery. The saint, a martyr and deacon who became Bishop of Illyria at 20 years of age, lived around the year 100 AD and traveled Illyria and Pannonia spreading the Christian belief during the time of Emperor Hadrian.

Before the boulevard connecting former I.C. Brătianu square to Unirii square was opened, the intersection of Lipscani, Bărăției and Decebal streets was known as Sf. Gheorghe (St. George) square. Initially, it was known as Romei (Rome) square, first hosting the Capitoline Wolf offered to Bucharest by the Italian capital. Recently, the she-wolf statue was moved back to the site after having changed location several times.

In Sf. Gheorghe square we can admire the "brâncovenesc" style New St. George's church, built on the site of an older place of worship, evoked by the French traveler Pierre

Lescalopier in the second half of the 16th century (1574). The church was initially wooden, with a stone foundation, after which it was replaced by Dobruș Banul with a brick church, according to historian Radu Greceanu. As Pr. Emil Nedela Cărămizaru, parishioner of Sf. Gheorghe Nou church, would write, historical accounts from the end of the 16th century mention the church, which was famous at the time for its relics, most of which are still kept inside: “the right hand of St. Nicholas, archbishop of Myra and Lycia, sealed in precious silver and decorated with diamonds, given as a gift by Mihail Voievod (Michael the Brave) and Lady Stanca, in the year 1407 (1599), under the Metropolitanate of Eftimie”. During the reign of Antonie Vodă (1669-1672) the church is once again mentioned, being consecrated to the Holy Sepulchre. In the year 1625, as ordered by Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem, a rich and famous Ottoman clerk by the name of Panaiotis Nikusios Mamona rebuilt the church, inspired by the similar place of worship on Stenimachos hill, Chalce island. On this date, a number of annexes were built. Later on, as this church became insufficient, Radu Greceanu writes that during the 17th year of Constantin Brâncoveanu’s rule (1688-1714), as “his Highness could not stand the sight of such a small church in the middle of the town”, the voivode decided to build the most impressive place of worship Bucharest had ever seen, a monument which would last through the ages. This is the present church, a perfect example of refined “brâncovenesc” style, the only one of its kind left standing in Bucharest and the last church built by Brâncoveanu. Among the contributors to the construction of this work of art were the architect Veseleil, the great aga Enache Văcărescu and the famous church painter Pârvu Mutu, founder of a painting school in Bucharest. We can imply that the three craftsmen painted in Hurezi (Horezu) church, the other important place of worship built by Brâncoveanu, were also involved in the project. The consecration of the holy site, June 29th, 1707, on the feast day of Apostles Peter and Paul, was a remarkable event, described by a number of historic writings: in a festive setting, the prince and his family, the great boyars, guildsmen and thousands of locals were greeted by a delegation of spiritual leaders including the Metropolitan of Wallachia, Patriarchs Hrisant of Jerusalem and Gherasim of Alexandria, as well as other religious figures from within the country and south of the Danube. The monumental church was damaged by earthquakes in 1802, 1804 and 1832, as well as the great fire of March 1847. Architect Xavier Vilacrosse Aîné was tasked with restoring the place of worship, his radical changes to the initial shape of the church leading to it being given the name New St. George’s Church. The rebuilding of the church in the original „brâncovenesc” architectural style was undertaken by architect Henrieta Delavrancea-Gibory, daughter of the great writer Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, prof. Ștefan Balș, prof. Vasile Drăguț, pro. Nicolae Stoian, Cristian Moisescu and others. Thus, the church was returned to its former glory, becoming once again an example of art and history, emphasizing the beauty of „brâncovenesc” style, named after the great ruler and martyr Constantin Brâncoveanu of the Basarab dynasty. The voivode’s statue, a work by sculptor Oscar Han, can be seen in front of the church. On the 20th of June 1992 the Sinode of the Romanian Orthodox Church decreed the sanctification of Constantin Brâncoveanu, his sons Constantin, Radu, Ștefan and Matei, and vornic Ianache Văcărescu, martyred August 15th, 1714, in Constantinople, on the day of the Assumption of Mary and the voivode’s 60th birthday.

All of these places of worship left a profound mark on the Bucharest area, as well as its inhabitants, focusing city life into radiant points of interest.

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