

**THE PLACES OF WORSHIP WITHIN IAȘI CITY
– STRONG TOURISM PILLARS AND WITNESSES OF THE CITY
TERRITORIAL EXPANSION –**

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Abstract. For Romania, one of the most important elements that sustain tourism is the cultural and the historical heritage. Among this, the monasteries and the churches are the most representative because the Romanian people are characterized by a profound sense of religiosity. That led to the construction of many places of worship that impress nowadays with their age, architectural style, murals and iconography and also with their stories and their importance in the daily life of the community. Studying and analysing their history and their geographical position can bring us precious information about the territorial evolution of the city and about the role they played among years.

Keywords: *religious heritage, Iași city, territorial expansion, urban tourism*

1. Introduction

In ancient times, the Romanian communities had a simple organization, based on tradition and religion and then slowly evolved from smaller groups of people to bigger ones, from principalities to voivodeships that led eventually to superior forms of social organization. This general process of development was also followed by the Moldavian communities and, once the independent feudal Moldavian state was founded, some important economical centres emerged and evolved into urban settlements such as Cotnari, Târgu Frumos, Hârlau and Iași. These towns together with several villages near the border with Vaslui and Suceava formed the Iași County as it is known today (Chelaru C., Gorincioi P., 1980).

Moldavia, as all the other Romanian regions, was repeatedly forced to defend itself against the migratory nations and for centuries fought against the Ottoman Empire and defended proudly the Orthodoxy, the official religion of Romanians even today. This religiosity manifested all over Moldavia and the land of Iași made no exception. As a result, every village, no matter how small and unimportant it seemed, had at least one church that played a very important role in the life of the community. The following map took into account the current numbers of churches and monasteries as there are officially presented by the Institute of Cultural Memory and was realised using the cartography software PhilCarto 5.05.

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As it can be easily observed, there is not even one commune or town without at least one place of worship, fact that proves once more the importance of the Church in the life of the communities. The city of Iași distinguishes immediately as it has the largest number of churches and monasteries and it is followed by Târgu Frumos, Hârlau and Pașcani towns.

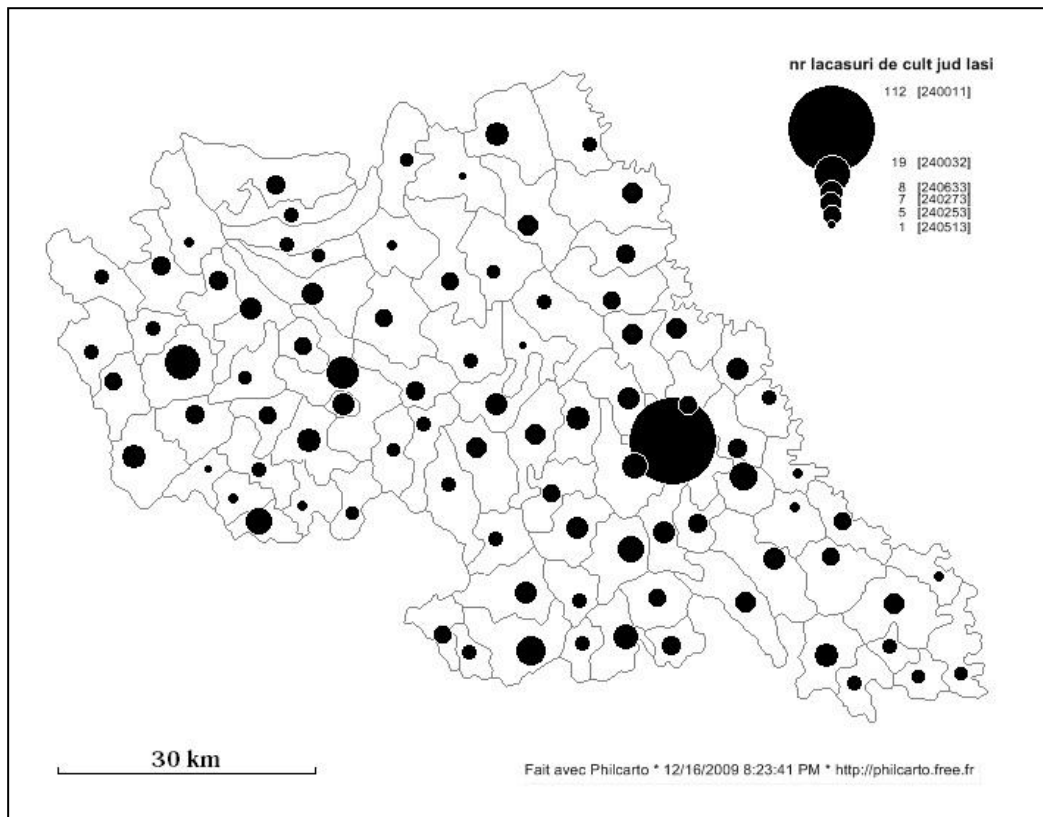


Figure 1: The Territorial Distribution of the Places of Worship of Each Commune within Iași County

Today, as in the past, the church is seen like a true *centrus mundi* of the entire society, having, besides a favourable geographical position, a strong authority among citizens. This is one of the reasons why the communities tried to build unique and imposing churches that became nowadays important tourist attractions. These churches and monasteries are not simple buildings as many of them played a very important role in developing the settlement and also preserve evidence of the changes that marked the life of the community.

The historical region of Moldavia is especially known in the whole world because of its beautiful places of worship among which, the monasteries of Bucovina, are the most famous as they are part of UNESCO heritage. The city of Iași, the cultural capital of Moldavia, is also known for its places of worship, holding more than a hundred churches as the previous map had already showed.

The main purpose of this article is to present in an interdisciplinary manner the evolution of the churches and monasteries of Iași city, combining the tourism aspects with history and territorial planning.

2. The beginnings of Iași

The city of Iași benefited of a very favourable geographical position being situated on a commercial crossroad that connected Poland to the Black Sea and also made connections between the Moldavian fortresses like Hotin and Cetatea Albă (White Citadel). Moreover, the valley of the Bahlui River offered optimal life conditions so, as the archeologists excavation proofs, the core of the settlement was situated on the lower terrace of the river.

The year 1408 is considered to be the official birth year of Iași city even if the archaeologists had already proven that these lands had been populated since immemorial times. Great historical personalities marked the existence of the city and among them it is absolutely necessary to name one of the greatest rulers of Moldavia, Alexandru cel Bun (Alexander the Kind) who signed in 1408, the oldest document that contained the name of Iași, document that became the incontestable proof accepted by all the historians that the city existed and that it was a strong economical centre of those times. Steven the Great, Alexandru Lăpușneanu and Dimitrie Cantemir are just a few examples of important Moldavian rulers that marked the city. The royal citadel it is officially mentioned in 1434 and all the rulers made great efforts in order to maintain and improve the citadel. In 1565, Alexandru Lăpușneanu decides to move the Moldavian capital from Suceava to Iași (towards the centre of the Province) and that led to a more accentuated economic growth.

Until 1408, Iași was the stage of many conflicts, earthquakes and fires that destroyed important parts of the city. Only the churches survived as they were built with stronger materials than the civic houses offering nowadays important clues of the city's past. There are also voices that state that the monasteries and churches were located so that they could offer protection in case of wars and other conflicts.

Even if in Iași there was the prince's citadel which, at least in theory, could have offered protection in times of war, it was also known that the Ottoman Empire wouldn't have let the Moldavians to take too many security measures so, the churches may have acted like small citadels undercover. Very interesting is the fact that many monasteries were dedicated to Sinai or Athos Holy Mountains that transformed Iași from the capital of Moldavia into a true capital of Eastern Orthodoxy (Iftimi S., 2008).

3. The places of worship within Iași city – tourism attractions and witnesses of the city territorial expansion

This part of the article presents the evolution of the churches from 1300 until now, by intervals of one hundred years. This way, it was easier to cover the most part of them as well as to mark them chronologically on a map. As Iași has more than a hundred churches they will be presented in a synthetic manner.

3.1. Iași churches between 1300 and 1500

As it was already mentioned, the year 1408 is considered to be the official birth year of Iași but there are still some scientists that state that the year 1395 which is carved on the front wall of the Armenian Church is the true year of Iași historical attesting. As the Armenians used a different calendar the historians decided to take into account the document signed by Alexander the Kind in 1408 as it was a more palpable document.

Concerning the fact that the Armenian Church is considered to be founded in 1395, as there is no other historical attestation of it, and because the Saint Sava Church, which stands right next to the previous one was probably built at the same time or even earlier it was decided that this first two hundreds of years of Iași beginnings to be analysed together. Besides these two churches there is a third one and the last that was built in this period of time and this is the Saint Nicolae Domnesc Church which was founded by Steven the Great.

All these three churches had important roles over time as St. Nicolae Domnesc was for hundreds of years the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and marked the centre of the burg as it was located next to the royal citadel while the other two churches were flanking the peripheral areas of the city. It is easily to understand why the Armenian Church was built at the periphery as foreigners could not claim to build anything within the centre of the burg. The first years of St. Sava Church are not very well known but there is certain that it was built by Moldavian monks that returned from Jerusalem and looked for a quiet place for their new church so this is probably the reason why they choose also the peripheral area. All these three churches not only that impress with their history but also are of rare beauty, “must see” for any tourist that comes here.

It is also very important to mention that the burg din not extended around the citadel as in the south-west and south there was the Bahlui River and many swamps and in the east there was the small river of Cacăina where people threw all their garbage. As a result, the burg extended more to the northern and western part but the citadel was still considered the centre, the heart of the burg even if it had a position rather peripheral.

The reconstruction of the limits of the living area of those times was possible by summing this information and correlating them with the archaeological discoveries. The following map, taken from the book “Iași until the middle of 17th century” by Al. Andronic (and modified in Adobe Illustrator CS5) is very concluding.

3.2. Iași churches between 1500 and 1600

This new century brings four new churches of great importance even today: Galata, Frumoasa, Tălpălari and Socola. Galata Monastery was built outside the burg, on the homonym hill by Petru Șchiopu and it looks like a fortress as it was often used as prince’s residency. Beside its attractiveness, Galata Monastery offers a panoramic view of Iași. Frumoasa (The Beauty) Monastery was built by Melentie Balica and the name derives from its beautiful location as the church was surrounded by a lake and offered true moments of relaxation. Socola Monastery was built by Alexandru Lăpușeanu and its name derives from the Slav word “socol” which means “hawk”. The monastery was situated in the middle of the forest and there was also a hawk nursery as the Ottomans used also to ask as tribute, besides money, these birds. Tălpălari Monastery was built by Iordache Cantacuzino at the end of the main city road where the leather tradesmen guild settled. As a result, this guild took care of the monastery and gave the actual name as “Tălpălari” derives from the word “talpă” which means “sole” referring to the fact that they also made leather shoes (Vasilii V.D, 2004). What is important to mention is that besides Tălpălari Monastery which was located in the burg, the other three were located far from it as they served also for other purposes besides the religious ones: defence, relaxation, hawk nursery so, only Tălpălari could give us clues about the burg dimensions. In this period, Iași population started to grow very much as many craftsmen came from the neighboring rural areas to take advantage of the existing market (Baileanu, 1964). As Iași also became the new capital of Moldavia many foreigners came here to extend their

businesses and many guilds were organized. These guilds usually frequented one church that represented them and Tălpăari is considered to be the first of this kind.

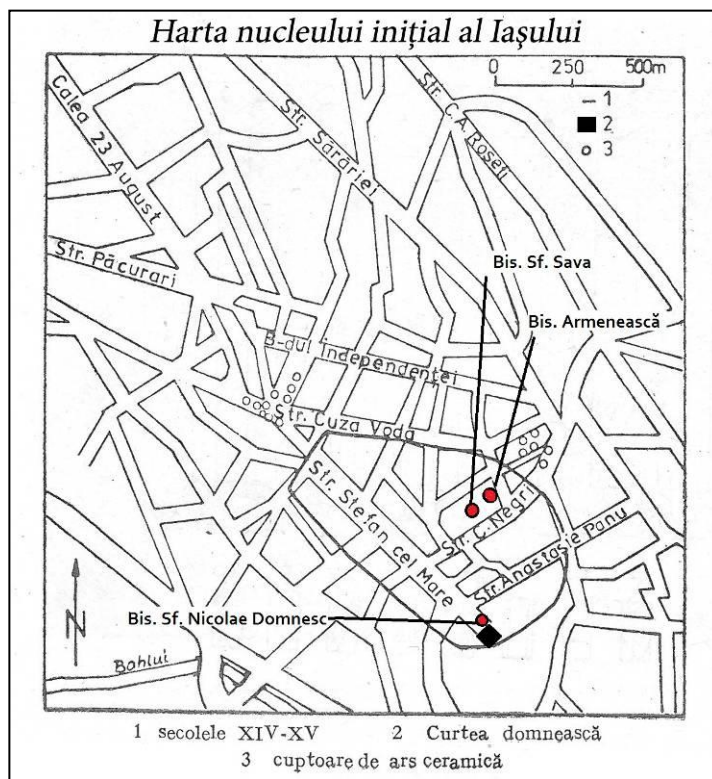


Figure 2: The initial urban core of Iași

3.3. Iași churches between 1600 and 1700

During this period of time the number of the churches that served different guilds grew and that proves that the population of Iași increased very much and the economic life was very strong and diverse. Among these guild's churches we mention Nicoriță Church build by Nicoară Baltag and his wife (belonged to the guild of the carpenters), St. John the Baptist Church founded by Miron Barnovschi-Movilă was associated with the guild of the sextons and Curelari Church that was founded by the guild of beltmakers and shoemakers that also gave the church the actual name as “curelari” is the Romanian plural of beltmaker and derives from the word “curea” that means “belt”. Also, a lot of rich families built different churches or monasteries in order to reinforce their social position and reputation but also to offer their families a place where they could find the eternal peace. As a result, many of these churches became true family necropolis such as Barnovschi, Zlataust or Dumitru-Balș Churches. Cetatua Monastery is one of the most famous places of worship of Iași and it was built on the hill with the same name by Gheorghe Duca and served both as royal residence as well as place of protection and defence against invaders.

3.4. Churches of Iași between 1700 and 1800

In the next hundreds of years Iași followed approximately the same trends as the earlier century as many churches that served different guilds were built. It is very important to mention that the burg just slowly expanded but the economic life kept developing. Regarding the churches, many of them were built near the centre of the burg but also in the north, where many craftsmen had built their homes. Vulpe Church served the craftsmen that processed the fur, St. Pantelimon was preferred by the doctors and barbers, St. Andrew Church belonged to the people that worked at the royal court and Banu Church was for the poor people. St. Lazar Church gives us precious information about the east limit of the burg as it was built right next to a boundary point where foreigners had to pay some taxes in order to get safe inside the city. In this period it was also built the St. Spiridon Church that housed the first hospital of Iași and also it was built the new Moldavian Metropolitan Church.

3.5. 1800 to 1900

In the first years of this century a few churches were built in order to serve some guilds such as St. Steven Church that offered protection to the grocers and The Day of the Cross Church that belonged to the tanners. Many churches were built by the goodwill of some rich and important families of that time so the churches had spread beyond the city's borders envisioning the future trends of the city's territorial expansion. During this wealthy period Iași enriched itself with beautiful places of worship that are nowadays much admired by tourists and also by the Iași citizens such as Barboi or Bucium Churches. Very important to mention is that now, the new Metropolitan Church was finalized and St. Parascheva relics were brought here to the satisfaction of all the Christians believers.

3.6. Iași churches between 1900 till present time

From 1900 till present the Romanian Orthodox Church tried to standardize the territorial distribution of the churches as during the communist regime many new city districts were built, in order to enlarge certain Romanian cities. As a result, the expansion of the territory as well as the number of residents of them came from rural areas as cities offered places of work. So, it was decided to raise the number of the churches as some of Iași's parishes had under their protection thousands of people, which became a major problem. In the next map there are presented by colours the churches that were built in the same hundreds of years and it can be easily observed that the churches build after 1900 are scattered all over the city. In order to verify and to compare the results of this map it was scanned a map from the book "Iași until the middle of 17th century" by Al. Andronic, which was made after the results of many archaeological excavations.

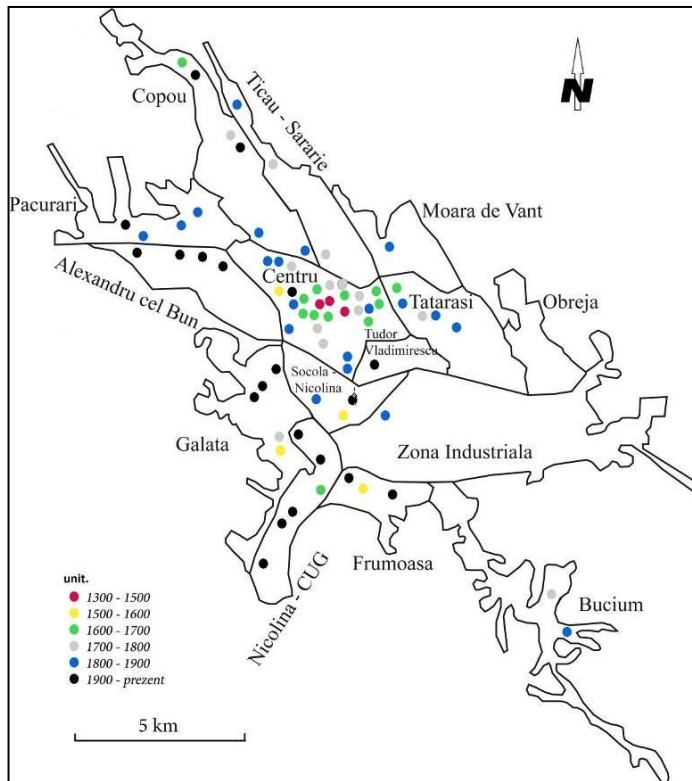


Figure 3: Iași territorial expansion map , by Andronic Al.

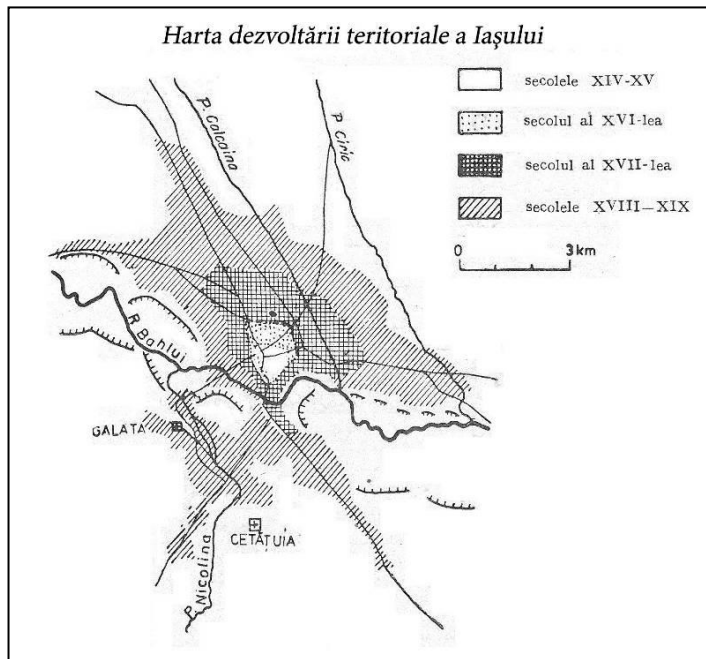


Figure 4: Map of the evolution and territorial distribution of the places of worship from Iași city

4. Conclusions

By analysing the territorial distribution of the places of worship within the city of Iași it was possible to partially reconstruct the ancient city's limits. The churches offer us a lot of precious information about the past and also represent important tourism attractions that impresses through their history and architecture.

Acknowledgments

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