

Identification

<u>Nomination</u>	Painted churches of northern Moldavia
<u>Location</u>	Moldavia
<u>State Party</u>	Romania
<u>Date</u>	28 September 1990

Justification by State Party

The exterior painted walls of this group of churches in northern Moldavia constitute a unique phenomenon in Byzantine art and a masterpiece of mural art. They are of exceptional aesthetic value, covering the entire exterior facades of the churches and forming a perfect symbiosis between colour and architecture. At the same time the colours used blend perfectly with the surrounding landscape (criterion i).

This technique of painting the exterior walls of churches was adopted later elsewhere in the region (criterion ii).

In European art of the period, the mural painting of the northern Moldavian churches is a unique phenomenon. In terms of the art of Romania, this group of churches constitute a specific phenomenon, from the point of view of architecture as well as painting (criterion iv).

History and DescriptionHistory

Moldavia became an independent state in the 14th century, achieving its apogee during the anti-Ottoman crusades of Stephen the Great (1457-1504) and Peter Rares (1527-38, 1541-46). This also produced a cultural flowering, the most remarkable manifestation of which was the series of churches with painted exterior walls. A general Christian tradition of decorating the exteriors of churches was adopted and extended in Moldavia to the extent that the entire external facade was covered with paintings. This had its own specific iconography, dominated by certain obligatory themes - the Church Hierarchy, the Last Judgment, the Tree of Jesse.

The monuments that are the subject of this nomination form a compact and coherent group in chronological terms, all being built in the 1530s and 1540s, during the reign of Peter Rares. They are all within a 60km radius of Suceava, the residence of the Moldavian princes of the period, and none appears to have been built after 1552.

Description

The Church of the Holy Rood, Patrauti, built in 1487 by Prince Stephen the Great, was pillaged by Cossacks and Tatars in 1653 and by Poles in 1684 and restored by Prince Nicolas Mavrocordat in the early 18th century. It is a small three-apsed building consisting of a sanctuary, a naos crowned with a high drum, and a narthex. The monumental interior mural paintings represent the Passion Cycle. Of great political significance for the period when it was painted is the scene of the Cavalcade of the Emperor Constantine. Almost the entire composition of the Last Judgment has been revealed on the western facade.

At the Church of St George of the former Voronet Monastery, also founded by Stephen the Great, the naos and sanctuary were painted between 1488 and 1496 and the narthex in 1552. It is a three-apse structure, like the preceding church, and has an exonarthex added in 1546. There are two bands of blind niches surmounting the exterior walls. The interior murals (15th century) represent the Passion Cycle. The walls and the vault of the exonarthex are entirely covered by the 365 scenes of the Menology (Calendar of Saints). The exterior murals depict traditional scenes - the Church Hierarchy, the Tree of Jesse, the Acatist Hymn (apart from the final Siege of Constantinople), and the famous Last Judgment, which covers the entire western wall.

The Church of the Beheading of St John the Baptist, Arbore, was built in 1503 as the residence of the Governor of Suceava, Luca Arbore, who was buried there in 1522. The church was decorated at the order of his grand-daughter in 1541 and became the village church when the family died out. It is rectangular in plan. The Arbore family is represented twice - in a votive tablet on the west wall of the naos and by funerary portraits in the narthex. The high quality of the interior paintings continues on the exterior.

The three-apsed Church of St George, Suceava, formerly the Metropolitan Church, is now the catholicon of the Monastery of St John of Suceava. It was begun in 1514 by Prince Bogdan the One-Eyed, son and successor of Stephen the Great, and finished by his son Stephen the Younger in 1522. It was the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia until the late 17th century. Between 1898 and 1910, it underwent extensive restoration. The interior paintings, although somewhat darkened, have exceptional plastic qualities. The exterior paintings of 1534 only survive on the west and south facades, and depict the four traditional themes. They are exceptional by virtue of their monumental composition, elegant silhouettes, harmonious colours, and perfect Cyrillic inscriptions.

The Church of St Nicholas and the Catholicon of the Monastery of Probota, one of the earliest Moldavian monasteries (founded before 1391), was built by Prince Peter Rares in 1531 as a family mausoleum. All the paintings are contemporary with the church with the exception of those in the sanctuary, repainted in the 19th century. It is three-apsed with an impressive use of the interior space. The exterior mural paintings, which are in a poor condition, show evidence of the

hand of a master in their outstanding composition and remarkable use of colours.

The Church of the Assumption of the Virgin of the former Monastery of Humor dates back to before 1415, but the present structure was built in 1530 by the great Logothete Theodore Bulberg and his wife, Anastasia, "at the wish and with the help" of Prince Peter Rares. The monastery was dissolved in 1786. It exhibits certain architectural variations from the traditional three-apsed monastery church, such as the lack of a drum over the narthex. The Prince and his family are depicted in the votive painting in the naos. Notable paintings include the Virgin Platytera on the vault of the narthex, the Last Judgment in the exonarthex, and a series of traditional themes depicted in the exterior murals.

The Church of the Annunciation of the Monastery of Moldovita, a 14th century foundation, was rebuilt by Alexander the Good (1400-32), but the present structure is from the period of Peter Rares (built in 1532, painted in 1537). The enclosure wall and the princely residence were reconstructed later. It is very similar in form and decoration to the Humor church, although more conventional in design. In view of the similarities in both subject matter and style, it is believed that the same master may have been responsible for both churches.

Management and Protection

Legal status

Ownership of monastery and parish churches is vested in the monastic communities and local parishes respectively. All come under the authority of the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava.

Management

Management of all the properties is the responsibility of the respective communities and parishes, working in association with the national Directorate of Historic Monuments, Ensembles, and Sites (Ministry of Culture) and the Departmental Commission for the Historic Monuments, Ensembles, and Sites of Moldavia. Conservation and restoration work is supervised by these organizations, under the general control of the national Directorate, as provided for in Decree No. 91/5 of February 1990. Funding comes from central and local government bodies.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

Some restoration and conservation work was carried out at the Church of St George, Suceava, at the end of the 19th century during the period of Austrian administration. In the inter-war years there was also work at the Arbore and Probota properties under the aegis of the Historic Monuments Commission.

Major structural restoration works were carried out from 1960 onwards at all the properties. Since 1971 work has been in progress in restoring the mural paintings with UNESCO support. The exterior paintings are at risk from climatic conditions (strong winds, high rainfall and humidity) and, in the case of Suceava in particular, from industrial pollution, and as a result a programme of continuous monitoring and conservation is now in operation. This work is coordinated by the Commission for Historic Monuments, Ensembles, and Sites of Moldavia and supervised by the Departmental Heritage Office, Suceava. The national Directorate of Historic Monuments, Ensembles, and Sites is responsible for the allocation of finance in relation to the priorities for urgent action.

Authenticity

The churches of northern Moldavia retain a high level of authenticity as a result of the intensive research and conservation effort to which they have been subjected since World War II.

Evaluation

Qualities

This group of churches is outstanding by virtue of the fact that they are elaborately decorated not only inside but also on their exterior walls, which makes them unique in Europe. They represent a relatively short-lived but remarkable cultural phenomenon in 16th century Moldavia which has no parallels.

Additional comments

At the 15th Session of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee, held in Paris in June 1991, examination of this nomination was deferred, since the Bureau felt that it was necessary for it to be afforded satisfactory legal protection, particularly with regard to the proposed protective perimeters. An ICOMOS mission visited the properties in the autumn of 1993 and reported that adequate protective measures are in place.

The work of conservation and restoration of these remarkable monuments that has been proceeding since 1971 with international support is an outstanding example of coordination in the conservation of the cultural heritage.

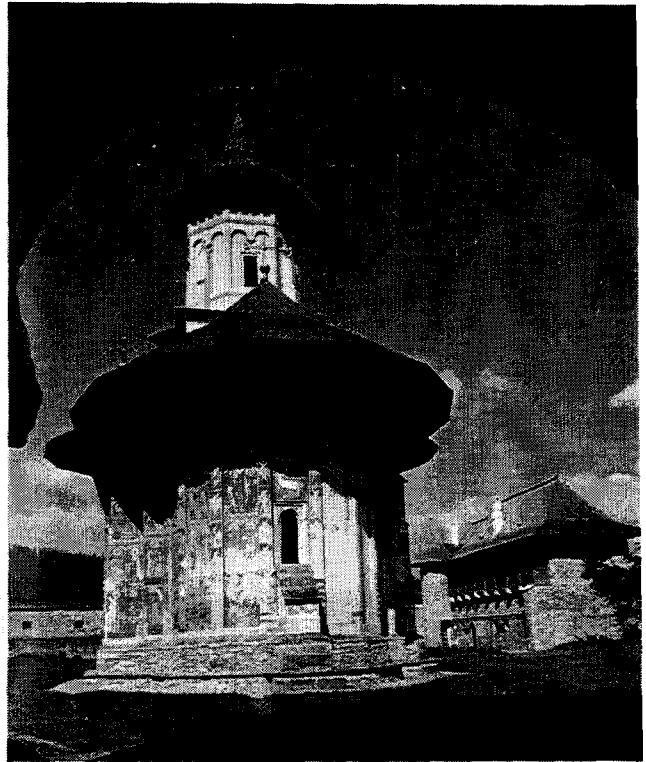
Recommendation

That this group of properties be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criterion i:

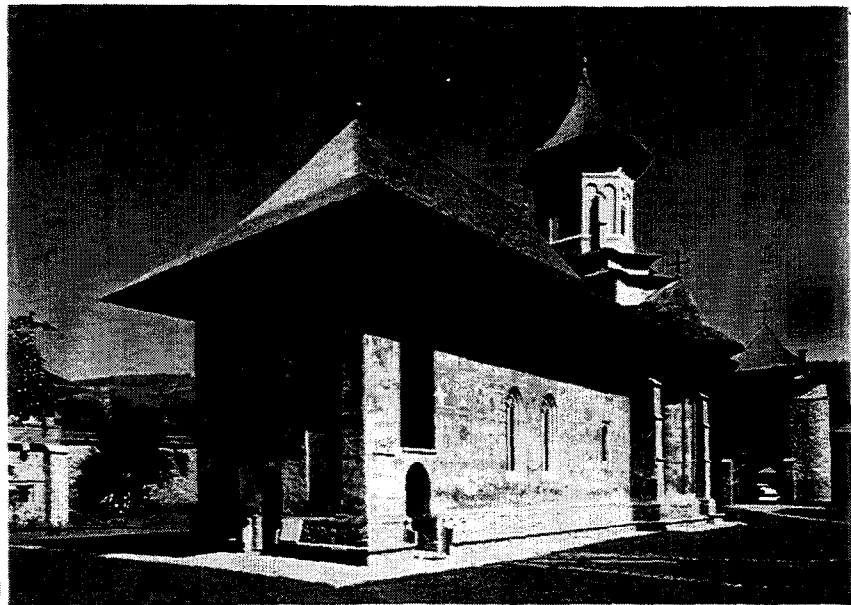
- Criterion i The seven painted churches of northern Moldavia constitute a unique European cultural phenomenon, that of decorating the entire exterior facades of churches with mural paintings of high quality.

ICOMOS, October 1993

Moldovita :
église de l'Annonciation /
Church of the Annunciation



vue générale /
general view

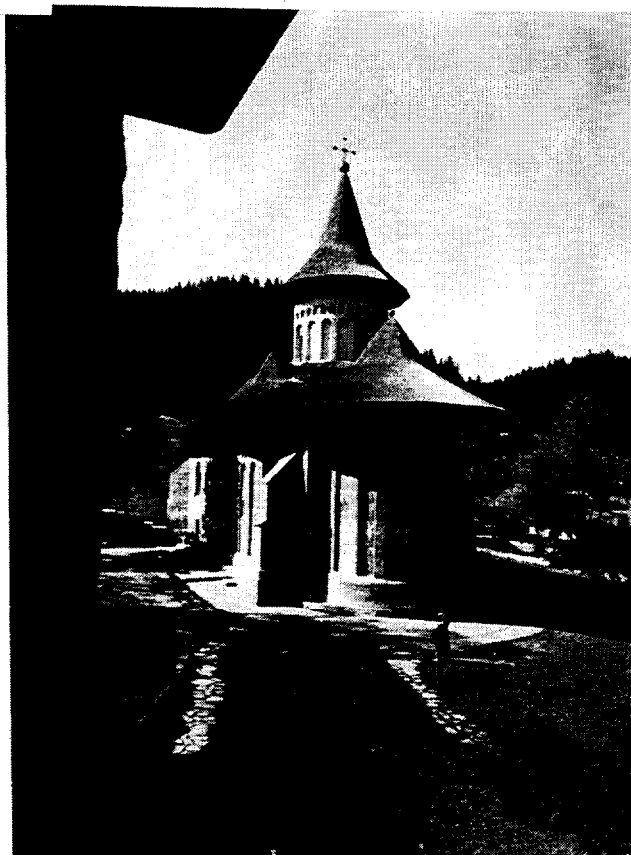


façade sud /
South facade



Hymne Acathiste /
Acathist Hymn

Voronet : église Saint-Georges /
Church of St George



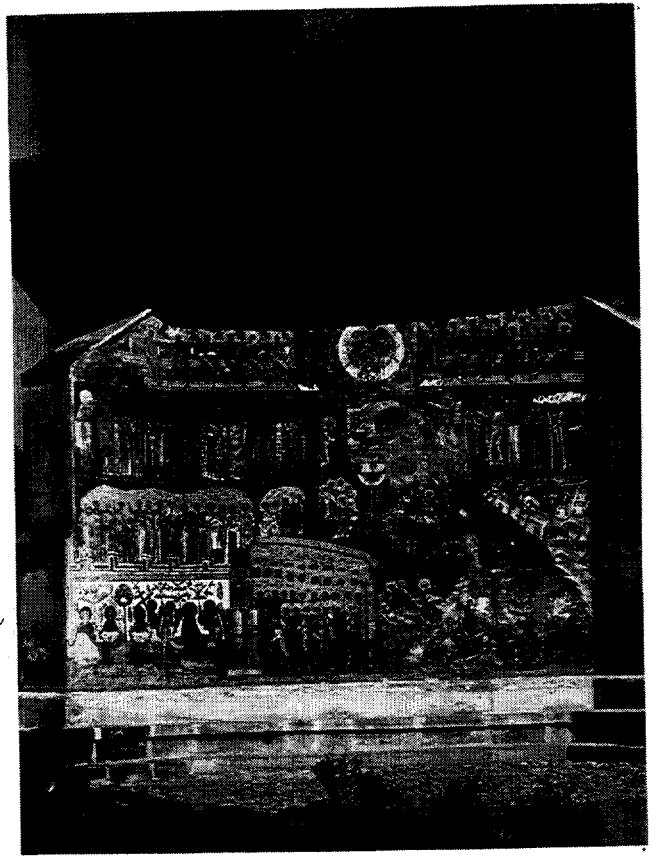
vue d'ensemble /
general view



tableau votif /
votive tablet

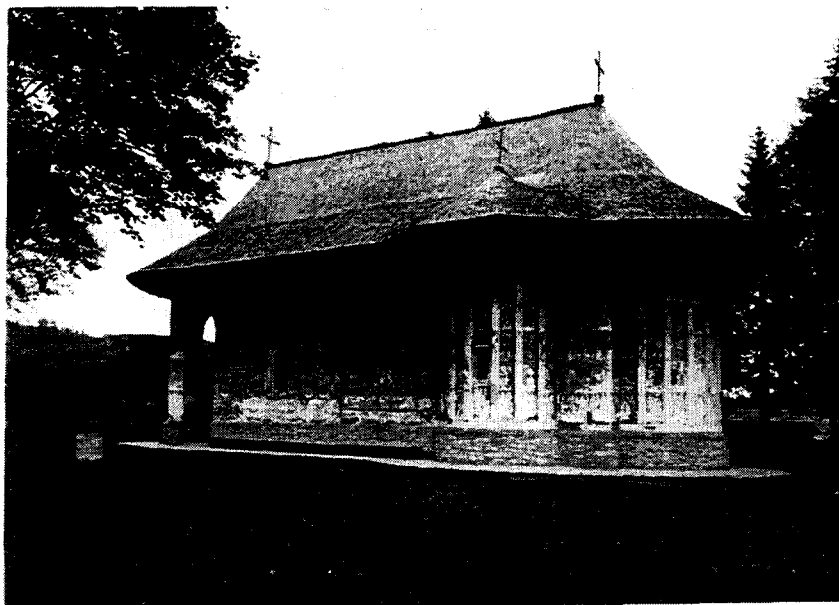
Voronet : église Saint-Georges /
Church of St George

facade ouest, Jugement dernier /
Western facade, Last Judgment

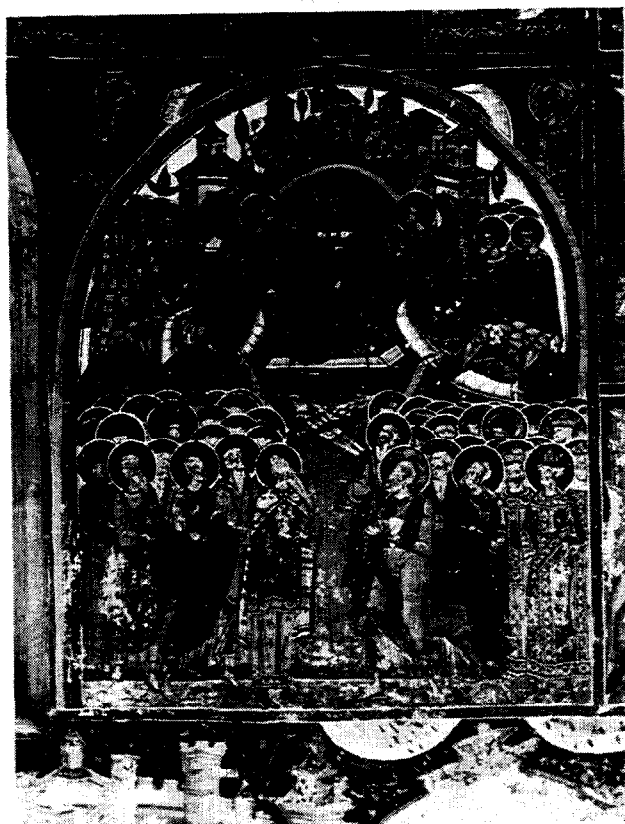


détail / detail

Humor : église de l'Assomption-de-la-Vierge /
Church of the Assumption of the Virgin



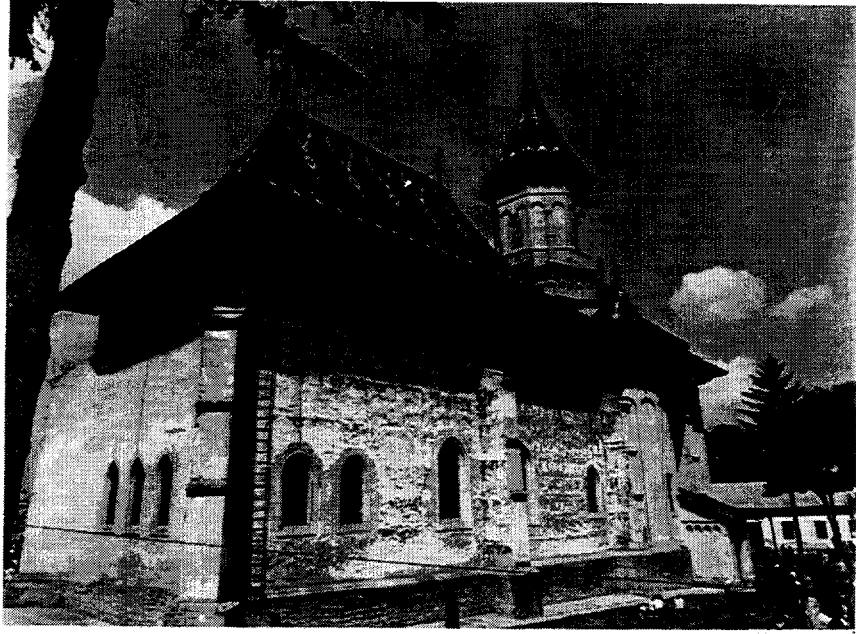
vue générale /
general view



façade sud,
Hymne Acathiste /
Southern facade,
Acathist Hymn

Patrauti : église de la Saint-Croix, vue du sud-ouest /
Church of the Holy Rood, view from the South West





Suceava : église Saint-Georges, Hymne Acathiste
Church of St George, Acathist Hymn



Probota : église Saint-Nicolas /
Church of St Nicholas