

## HERALDIC REPRESENTATIONS FROM THE "STAVROPOLEOS MONASTERY" IN BUCHAREST

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***Abstract:** The study aims to highlight the engraved or carved blazons and coats of arms that exist at the Stavropoleos Monastery in the capital of Romania, Bucharest. For the elaboration of the present study, we have investigated the building of the monastery church and the funeral stones supported by the outer walls of its enclosure. Regarding the actual description of the different types of heraldic signs, we have complied with the norms of heraldic science and the recommendations of the former International Sigillography Committee. We have taken into account the interest that these heraldic vestiges may exercise upon specialists, teachers, students, students, but also for tourists. We have considered that such heraldic vestiges, used over time as ancestors, can serve both to a better understanding of historical phenomena and to decipher the symbols by which they have expressed their thoughts and aspirations. Our study is an impetus to detect, analyze and include these testimonies of the past in the scientific circuit.*

***Keywords:**monastery, church, coat of arms, blazons, heraldry.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Stavropoleos monastery, located right on the Stavropoleos street in Bucharest today, is a great tourist attraction. The church of the Stavropoleos Monastery (figure 1), dedicated to St. Archangel Mihail and Gavriil (Dumitrescu, 1907; Iliescu-Palanca, 1940), was erected during the second reign of Nicolae Mavrocordat, on October 30, 1724 (the date of the pisan), by the egumen of Ioanichie (Dumitrescu, 1907; Simionescu, 1931; Iliescu-Palanca, 1940; Constantinescu et al., 1994; Stoica et al., 2005; Diaconescu, 2006; Văetiși et al., 2008). Its name comes from the fact that, in 1726, its founder was elected metropolitan of Stavropola (Dumitrescu, 1907; Iliescu-Palanca, 1940; Constantinescu et al., 1994).

At this institution, tourists can discover the architecture, painting, sculpture, coat of arms, logos and other material traces that refer to this objective to be visited.



Fig. 1. Monastery Church (front view)

In our study we have insisted on the description, reproduction and symbolism of the elements composing the coats of arms and blazons which, reflecting the historical epoch in which they were created, can contribute to the highlighting of the artistic activity of the emitters and engraving craftsmen, constituting a rich source for the art and sculpture of the Middle Ages and from the modern era.

## METHODOLOGY

Regarding the method used in this study, we have gone through the following steps:

1. Identification of the Stavropoleos Monastery in Bucharest where such heraldic compositions are located;
2. Visiting this edifice and researching the heraldic vestiges reproduced on the balustrade, door, iconostasis and on some funerary stones inside it;

3. Analysis of the coats of arms, blazons and, on a case-by-case basis, of the inscriptions containing them, in accordance with the heraldic norms, with the recommendations of the former International Sigillography Committee and by using epigraphy (due to inscriptions on the funeral stones), as well as by using paleography (Dictionary, 1982) (for deciphering some of the texts written especially in Romanian, with Cyrillic characters);
4. Bringing these testimonies of the past to the awareness of the interested public, through different manifestations, visits, specialized studies, as well as by promoting, for tourist purposes, the ecclesiastical heraldic testimonies and the Stavropoleos Monastery.

## RESULTS

**A.** The church comprises, on the western side, a porch added during the works executed in the years 1729-1730 (Constantinescu et al., 1994). The porch has five trilobate arches (with the central lobe in the brace), three in front and two in the sides, supported by six stone columns, four in front and two, bound, in the masonry. The columns, on cubic bases adorned with rhododendron flowers (symbol of elegance and beauty), are adorned with acanthus branches (the symbol of mastery/ self- control and of overcoming the vicissitudes of life), which are long, oblique, disposed as follows: three to the left and three to the right. The columns, finished with Corinthian capitals, are united, in front, by a bannister on which there are, carved by piercing, in three rectangular frames (Simionescu, 1931; Constantinescu et al., 1994), in the lateral ones, two lions (see figure 2 and figure 3) (Văetiși et al., 2008) (symbol of power and witful alertness) (Velculescu et al., 2001), rendered in full and in profile, surrounded by acanthus; these lions are displayed in creeping posture, with open mouth from which six teeth are seen, three up and three down, standing on the hind legs, with the tail past between them, with the front paws extended in front, and in the central one, comprising on the inner flanks, there appear two /branches of acanthus finished with flowers placed in the upper corners, ant at that place, the battle of Samson with the lion is represented (figure 4) (Constantinescu et al., 1994; Dinu, 2015), namely: the lion rendered with open mouth, standing on four paws, with the tail passed between the legs and with its snout touching it a drink rbat (Samson), rendered entirely, in profile, with a beard, wearing a long coat to the knees, heated with a belt, riding the animal and pulling it, with both hands, from the top of the mouth. According to the researcher Dan

Cernovodeanu, in the heraldry of the Romanian Country/ Tzara Romaneasca, the figure of the lion appears from the fifteenth century, on the objects and documents of the chancery of the rulers (Cernovodeanu, 1977). The supremacy over the other animals and the power of the lion determined its inclusion in the heraldic register (Pastoureau, 2008). In the religious sphere, zoomorphic motifs are elements of the divine world, of lost paradise (Damian, 2014). The bannister, built by Jordan the stucco (signed at the south window of the pronaos) (Iliescu-Palanca, 1940), was ready on November 8, 1733 (the date of the religious service note to be mentioned publicly during the service, the so- called "pomelnic" from the proscotide) (Stoica et al., 2005). The masters, sculptors and painters were from the Brancovian school, among which we may mention: Andrei, Ioan, Marin, Preda, Stefan, deacon Hranite, hierarch Iosif (Stoica et al., 2005).



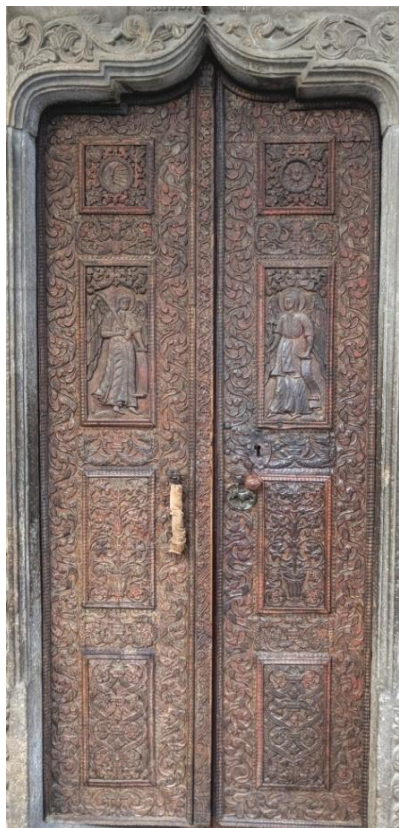
Fig. 2 and fig. 3. Lions on the sides of the bannister of the porch of the Stavropoleos Church.



Fig. 4. Samson's fight with the lion, depicted in the middle of the bannister of the porch of the Stavropoleos Church.



**B.** On the door of the church (figure 5), engraved, for the most part, with plant and floral motifs, there are displayed, besides the Archangels Michael and Gavriil, three coats of arms:



1) on the left side, above, in a round shield, consisting of a garland of laurel branches (attribute of victory), the crescent (symbol of honour, of wealth and nobility) turned around (figure 6) (Dogaru, 1994);

2) on the right side, above, in a round shield, similar to the one above, the sun (symbol of light, abundance and wealth) infigured, with 12 rays (figure 7) (Dogaru, 1994; Teodorescu, 2017);

3) below, next to the door opening handle, there appears another shield, of German type from 1525, with the rounded tip, the slightly edged upper edge, concave on the right flank, loaded with a cow (symbolizing a benefit and gratitude) (figure 8); the first two emblems mentioned above are inscribed in a square (represents a trademark of jurisdiction), with the interior background adorned with acanthus stones.

Fig. 5. The door of the Stavropoleos Church.



Fig. 6. Shield adorned with contoured crescent.



Fig. 7. Shield adorned with infigured sun.



Fig. 8. Shield loaded with a central cow figure.

C. Inside the church, on the iconostasis (figure 9) (Văetiși, 2017), in central position, towards the top, in the center of a belt adorned with plants that end with trefoil leaves, a rare heraldic composition appears: the bicephalous eagle (Dogaru, 1976), rendered entirely, from the front being even wider, carrying on the chest, stomach and tail, a round shield, consisting of a laurel wreath, loaded with the heraldic coat of arms of the Vallahia (Szemkovics et al., 2006; Teodorescu 2016; Szemkovics et al., 2018): the eagle, rendered entirely and in front, with the body turned, the head turned to the right, standing with its feet on a mountain (signifying greatness, wisdom and dignity) and holding in its beak a Latin cross placed vertically (figure 10).

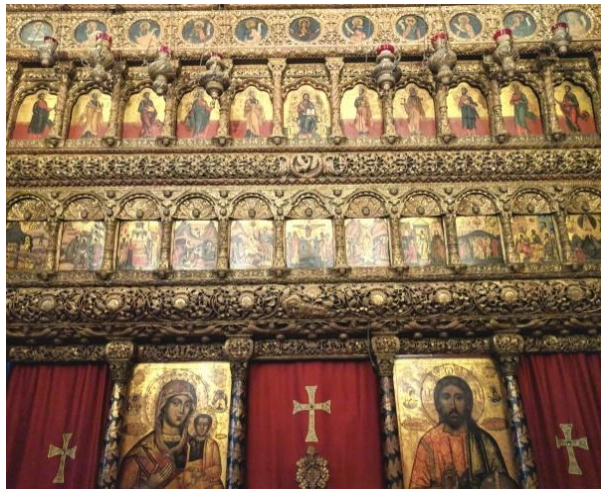


Fig. 9. The iconostas of the Stavropoleos Church (partial view).



Fig. 10. The blazon of the Cantacuzino family and the heraldic coat of arms of the Romanian Country / Vallahia.

**D.** In the precinct (Constantinescu et al., 1994) of the monastery, supported by walls, there are three funerary stones with coats of arms which are embossed, engraved in stone, in excision:

1) on a square-shaped stone, engraving on 36 convergent rays, the bicephalous eagle (the coat of arms of the Cantacuzino family) (Szemkovics et al., 2006; Teodorescu, 2009), crowned, rendered entirely and viewed from front, with wings open and flying downward, holding in claws the signs of power: "the scepter" (signifies a warrior and just spirit) and "the cruciferous globe" (means the world) (figure 11);

2) on a rectangular stone, dating from the end of the 18th century, decorated on the edges with plant and floral motifs, comprising a heraldic composition in the upper register, inscribed in a rectangular border (figure 12); this heraldic composition comprises an oval shield, consisting of two branches of laurel, charged, in the center, with another round shield, with border, loaded with a flower with eight triangular petals, on which another flower with six petals is broached; the shield, based on an arabesque, surmounted by the bicephalous eagle, crowned, holding with the claws two pearly, convex bows, has as support- pillars (animals supporting the shield) two lions (Szemkovics et al., 2006); these lions are depicted in crawling or creeping posture, facing, tongue - out, sitting on the arabesques, with the tails between the legs, supporting the shield with the front paws; above the oval shield, there appears another convex arch, from the middle of which there comes a cross with concave arms, having between the sharp-edged arms the letters (top ones with title) IC-XC / NI-RI, flanked to the right by a buzzard (which symbolizes a righteous man who corrects the vices) positioned in the band (Dictionary, 1982), while to the left by a spear placed in the bar (Dictionary, 1982), both coming out of the same arch (figure 13);

3) on a funerary stone, which belonged to Scarlat Ruset, a great hatman, who died on September 29, 1821; this stone is rectangular, adorned on the edges with acanthus plants with leaves and flowers (figure 14), having at the top, in a rectangular shield, a rare heraldic composition representing the heraldic stem of the Vallahia, which contains the elements: the eagle rendered entirely and in front view position, with its wings open and with its flight downwards, crowned with a closed-up crown, finished with a cross (sign of authority and expression of the strengthening of royal power), standing with its feet on a mountain, holding a seated Latin cross in its beak, which is rendered oblique, in band; the composition is flanked by two branches of oak-tree (attribute of force) and olive-tree (symbol of peace) that intersect at the bottom, in the



sheath; above the shield, in the middle, a pomegranate stands (symbolizing a union of different opinions) (figure 15).



Fig. 11. Crowned bicephalous eagle broaching over converging rays.



Fig. 12. Funeral stone from 1798.



Fig. 13. The coat of arms on the funeral stone in 1798.



Fig. 14. Funeral stone from 1821 of the great hatman Scarlat Ruset.



Fig. 15. The coat of arms of the great hatman Scarlat Ruset.



E. Culture in all its forms is the one that stands out also in the construction of religious settlements in the medieval and modern period. Between them and the Stavropoleos Monastery, considered among the most important achievements of Brancovan art in the country, it represents an attraction, transmitting today, evidence of the culture expressed in architecture, sculpture, painting, heraldic signs.

## CONCLUSIONS

Heraldic vestiges represent a distinct part of the universal cultural heritage. The symbols used and the multitude of information transmitted by these heraldic sources have led to an increased interest in researching these signs.

While designing and accomplishing the study we have taken into account the interest that these emblems/coats of arms and blazons can exercise upon specialists, teachers, students, pupils, but also for tourists. We considered that in the stage of the educational- instructional process from different educational institutions in Romania, the heraldic vestige sources can serve to better understand some historical phenomena, to decipher the symbols by which our ancestors expressed their thoughts and aspirations.

Also, our study constitutes an appeal for the detection, rescue, research and introduction into the scientific circuit, of other heraldic sources of this kind, which have not yet been known.

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