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## The first masonry church of the orthodox community in Lviv

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## *The First Masonry Church of the Orthodox Community in Lviv*

Anca Brătuleanu, Bucharest

The collaboration of Polish, Ukrainian, and Romanian researchers who until the 1940s had made several attempts to clarify various aspects related to the civilization of their native territories, naturally resulted from a long series of direct cultural contacts. The recent bibliography has re-established this tradition and this article is meant as a contribution to the efforts that have been made for quite a long time.

Rather unexpectedly, we should say, there were but few who considered their connection to architecture, which subsequently led to some major gaps in terms of both the evaluation of the Romanian built heritage and the definition of the dissemination areas of certain models.

In this respect, the appearance of the church-monastery Golia from Iași, unusual indeed within the Moldovian architectural milieu of the period, has been utterly ignored. If we consider thoroughly all the facts of life preceding its building or contemporary to it, we can find that the 'Golia phenomenon' is a natural reflection of the political, cultural, and even personal relationships that developed within the then Moldovian, Polish, and Ruthenian world. Even if these relationships were much older, study of church architecture from Iași makes us confine our analysis to the moment when the first masonry church of the Orthodox community of Lviv was built.<sup>1</sup> As it appears from contemporary documents and the bibliography related to it, its history outlines some parts of the route the models took both during that period and later; obviously, they covered some areas of the present territories of Poland, Ukraine, and Romania.

A major monument of Lviv is the ensemble of Uspenska (Assumption) Church, located in the Ruthenian quarter of the old town, between the central square and the fortification line.

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<sup>1</sup> We will use the current name of the locality, appearing in Romanian period documents as Liow or Lemberg, while in other documents and periods as Leopoldis and Lwów.

The centerpiece of the ensemble is the Uspenska Church, built in 1598–1631.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it replaced the first Orthodox masonry church, of the same dedication and name, that is the ‘Wallachian Church’, since the Moldavians helped to build them both. Close to the church and communicating with it, there stands a bell-tower, the Korniakt Tower, built in 1572–1578, and the Three Hierarchs’ chapel, completed in 1591.

Built to replace the wooden church destroyed by the fire of 1527, the first Orthodox masonry church was erected with the financial support of the ruler prince of Moldavia, Alexandru Lăpușneanu (voivode of Moldavia during 1552–1561 and 1564–1568).<sup>3</sup> Almost all the researchers of Lviv architecture conclude that the name ‘Wallachian’ given to the new building refers to the sponsor.<sup>4</sup> The sources indicate the years 1547–1559 as the building period and Pietro da Lugano as its architect. ‘The church was ready in 1559, [...] the roof and the interior painting were done in 1565–1566.’ We

do not have much information relating to this first ‘Assumption’ church. It is described as being ‘elegant and sumptuous’ and having an interior decoration in ‘alabaster and plaster ornaments.’ The only preserved image is the one represented on the seal of the Orthodox Stauropegion Confraternity from 1591.<sup>5</sup> A new fire damaged the church in 1571; however, ‘hasty repairs permitted it to be used until it has been rebuilt entirely.’ The analysis of the literature and of its primary sources, as well as architectural arguments, leads to remarks that could modify some of the statements presented above.



Fig. 1. The Assumption Uspenska (Uspenia) church ensemble

<sup>2</sup> According to the sources, construction works started in 1591; at the same time we found serious arguments to place this moment in 1598, as will be shown in the present study. Cf. M. Karpowicz, ‘Uwagi o genezie form i oddziaływaniu cerkwi wołoskiej we Lwowie’, *Ikonotheca*, 13 (1998), p. 169–187.

<sup>3</sup> P. P. Panaitescu, ‘Fundatiuni religioase românești în Galitia’, *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice*, 1 (1929), pp. 1–20; see also note 2, where the author quotes the mention made by Izydor Szaraniewicz in: *Vremennik*, 1885, p. 137; the same statement, in L. Onyszcenko-Szweć, *Lviv: wędrówka starówką miasta. Przewodnik architektoniczny*, Lwów 2003, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Panaitescu, *op. cit.*, p. 2, reproduces the church inscription stating that Alexandru Lăpușneanu ‘had begun and built’ the Assumption church; the same information is provided by P. Krasny, *Architektura cerkiewna na ziemiach ruskich Rzeczypospolitej, 1596–1914*, Kraków 2003, p. 71, and I. Zhuk, ‘The Architecture of Lviv from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 24 (2000), p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> Panaitescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2, reproduced after Izydor Szaraniewicz, reproduced later by G. Mândrescu, *Architectura în stil Renaștere la Bistrița*, Cluj 1999, p. 63.

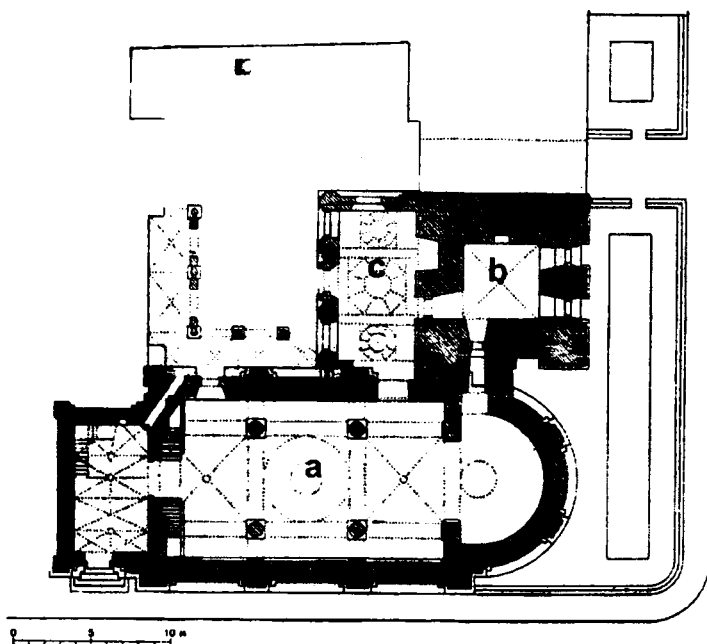


Fig. 2. The Assumption (Uspenia) church ensemble  
(after *Arhitectura Ucrainskoi SSR*, Moskva 1954)

- a. the present church, built 1598–1630, on the place of the first masonry church
- b. Korniaht Tower, built 157–1580
- c. the chapel of the Three Hierarchs (or Balaban), completed in 1591, repaired in 1671

We have to question the financial support of Alexandru Lăpuşneanu. Based upon the church inscription from 1559, all researchers state that the Romanian ruler provided all the funds, from the beginning to the end of building activity. But even P. P. Panaitescu – who writes that Alexandru Lăpuşneanu replaces the wooden burnt church with a new one, in stone, ‘at his expense’ – reproduces a fragment of a letter of the Stauropegion Confraternity from 1592, mentioning that he provided ‘almost all the money’ spent for the building of the Assumption Church. Moreover, in a letter dated February 12, 1558, his first letter addressed to the Lviv Orthodox community, the voivode himself clearly points out that his help is meant to complete an edifice already under construction.

Several other letters on the same subject follow until May 28, 1559.<sup>6</sup> After this date, Lăpuşneanu writes less often to the beneficiaries of his donations. Looking at all this correspondence, one can state that the Moldavian ruler supported the building of the church in

<sup>6</sup> The letters regarding the church building and consecration, sent by Lăpuşneanu to the Lviv Orthodox community, are dated as follows: February 12, July 5, July 6, July 22, August 25 and 26, December 27, 1558; February 23, May 28, 1559.



Fig. 3. Alexandru Lăpușneanu  
(after Corina Nicolescu,  
*Mănăstirea Slatina*, Meridiane,  
București 1966)

the first stage, between February 12, 1558, and the day of its consecration, August 15, 1559. It is obvious that this period did not overlap the 1547–1559 interval, generally accepted as being the period of building of the church erected at Alexandru Lăpușneanu's expense. Questions naturally arise regarding the correctness of the generally considered building period or regarding the building works which the Moldavian prince really financed.

Some answers could be found in the above-mentioned letters sent by Alexandru Lăpușneanu to the Lviv Confraternity before the church consecration.<sup>7</sup> The letters evidence the fact that the voivode was constantly kept informed about the work's progress. Obviously, it was not only the letters of the Orthodox community that provided the information. His main sources were the 'reports' of his own delegates;<sup>8</sup> one of them – whose name is unknown – seems to be permanently present on the building site. 'We have at this building one of our servants', writes the Moldavian ruler to the king Sigismund August.<sup>9</sup> It is plausible that this 'servant' was not only a provider of information; he could be the one who implemented the princely orders regarding the future shape of the church, maybe a master builder or an 'ispravnic'.<sup>10</sup> This could explain the accurate references to materials and building details contained in Lăpușneanu's letters, proving a precise knowledge of the architecture he was financing, as well as of the work's progress.

In the same respect one should notice that, beginning with July 22, 1588, the voivode involves himself in the acquisition of materials, such as bricks; more often, he insists on

<sup>7</sup> The voivode's letters offer an extremely valuable piece of information regarding the sponsor's relation with the funds administrator and with the builder, as well as for the way all those assumed their own obligations for the construction and the use of a church building, following 'the Christian traditions established from centuries', E. Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, Supliment II, vol. 1, București 1887, pp. 220–222.

<sup>8</sup> Beginning with February 1558, the voivode sends the first money for the church by his men who have also the task 'to see the building site' (Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 205–206); in July, the money is sent 'by Simeon', another Moldavian, (*ibidem*, pp. 207–208); in July too, 'Anton, priest from Suceava' returns from Lviv and informs Lăpușneanu about the stage of works at the building site, (*ibidem*, pp. 209–210); in October 1559, after the church consecration, Lăpușneanu receives news regarding the church from his own envoy, named Burla (*ibidem*, p. 216).

<sup>9</sup> Letter from August 25, 1558, Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 214–215.

<sup>10</sup> As far as we know, the term is used mainly beginning with the 17<sup>th</sup> century, meaning an intermediary between the sponsor and the master builder. Cf. N. Stoicescu, 'Cum se construiau bisericile în Țara Românească și Moldova în secolul al XVII-lea – prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea', *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei Serie*, 1 (1968), p. 81.

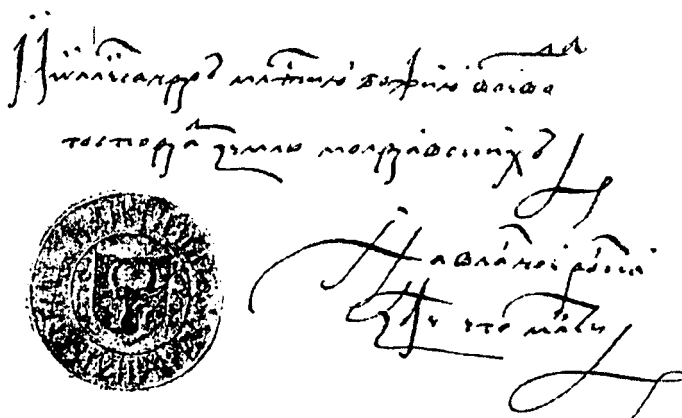


Fig. 4. Alexandru Lăpușeanu's signature and seal  
(after Izydor Szaraniewicz, *Jubilejnoe izdanie w pamiat' 300 liatnago osnovanija Lvoskogo Stavropigijskogo Bratstva*, Lvov 1886)

elements that suggest his preoccupation to finish the building: the church bell and crosses. Regarding the latter, we must quote the phrase used by Lăpușeanu: 'As concerns the crosses that should be on the top of the church, the main one and the one that should be placed at a lower level, send them to us to have them gilded'.<sup>11</sup> It proves the interest he gave to the image and to symbolic elements of the church. Moreover and above all, we find here two pieces of information that could be crucial for defining Alexandru Lăpușeanu's actual role. Thus we know that he dedicates his efforts mostly to the decoration of the upper part of the building: this information could support the hypothesis according to which the voivode is finishing a church already under construction. At the same time, the precise explanation regarding the number and position of the crosses indicate without any doubt a shape typical for Moldavian churches of the period. One can suppose that the nave is covered by a drum supporting a dome or by a cupola closed under a higher part of the roof. In any case, it is clear that the final shape is perfectly known by the voivode, and his 'permanent delegate' could have been deeply involved in its achievement. Under these conditions we can suppose that the ruler prince had in his hands 'a drawing' of the church, a term indicating maybe a plan or a façade, or the plans used to erect the future church.

Alexandru Lăpușeanu writes less often to the Lviv Orthodox community after the church consecration. This is due to the end of the building works, but also to the fact that the Moldavian ruler was overthrown in 1561. Once he regained his place in 1564, the correspondence was re-established. He asks the Ruthenian community to hire workers 'to

<sup>11</sup> Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 209–210.

paint, at our expense, the interior of the church, on all its walls, from top to bottom following the custom, and using good colors in order to obtain a beautiful painting'.<sup>12</sup> This operation is executed in 1565–1566. He also refers to the execution of repairs of the roof and vaults, suffering from the unsatisfactory maintenance of the building.<sup>13</sup> His last letter preserved dates from August 20, 1566.<sup>14</sup> Yet, one can suppose his interventions stopped only at his death, in 1568.

In the same context, one must also pay attention to Petrus Italus' contribution to the building of the Assumption church. All the sources present him as the author of this first masonry church building of the Lviv Ruthenians.<sup>15</sup> He is mentioned later in Transylvania,<sup>16</sup> working at the Evangelical church in Bistritz between 1560 and 1563.<sup>17</sup> His presence in Lviv is mentioned again from 1567 to 1578.<sup>18</sup> It is not unusual to see an Italian architect working in Lviv. The fact is quite normal in the period and the cultural area to which the city belongs.<sup>19</sup> Less plausible is the affirmation according to which Petrus Italus works to the Assumption church for twelve years, from 1547 to 1559. Such a period is far too long to build a church of modest size, as the image of the above-mentioned seal of the Orthodox Stauropegeion Confraternity suggests.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the features of the same image – widely considered as faithfully representing the church as it was in 1591 – put into question the real involvement of a Renaissance architect in planning and building the Assumption Church.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from April 22, 1565, Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 249–250.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from April 22, 1566, *ibidem*, pp. 256–257.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 257–258.

<sup>15</sup> Krasny, *op. cit.*, cited place; Zhuk, *op. cit.*, p. 104, names him as 'Magister Petrus Italus de Luugon or Pietro da Lugano'; the same architect is mentioned earlier in Lviv by Ettore Lo Gatto: 'Gli artisti italiani in Russia', in: *L'opera del genio italiano all'estero*, I–III, La Libreria dello Stato, Roma 1934–1943, p. 96. Cf. S. Kozakiewicz, 'L'attività degli architetti e lapidici comaschi e luganesi in Polonia nel periodo del Rinascimento fino al 1580', in: *Arte e artisti dei Laghi Lombardi*, Como 1959, pp. 413, 414, 417–418; see especially, A. Crivelli, *Artisti ticinesi dal Baltico al Mar Nero*, Lugano 1969, p.40, where the same architect is presented with the different names, being known as 'Castelli (Beccaria) Pietro', called also 'magister Petrus murator Italus da Luugon', 'Piotr Italczyk', 'Castilio Piotr', 'murator regius'. Crivelli supposes that he is the one named later as 'Petrus Crassowski Italus murator Swancar'.

<sup>16</sup> Zhuk, *op. cit.*; Mândrescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–64.

<sup>17</sup> C. Budinis, *Gli artisti* in: Ungheria, in: *L'opera del genio italiano all'estero*, La Libreria dello Stato, Roma 1936, p. 159, 'Petrus Italus, architetto Luganese. Ricostrui la chiesa di Bistritz in Transilvania'; G. Sebestyén, *Renașterea*, Meridiane, București 1987, pp. 45, 154; A. Kovács, *Bistrița. Biserica evanghelică*, Sf. Gheorghe 1994; Mândrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 65; L. A. Mangiarotti, *Architetti e architetti militari*, I–III, in: *L'opera del genio italiano all'estero*, La Libreria dello Stato, Roma 1936, vol. 2, p. 439, presents him as being the same person as 'Pietro da Lecco' or 'Petrus Italus o De Lago de Como', but places his activity in Bistritz in early 1500, information that should be reconsidered; Crivelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Crivelli, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> For this subject see L. Réau, *L'art du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance en Pologne*, in: *La Pologne*, (1936?), p. 19; J. Zachwatowicz, *L'architecture polonaise*, Arkady, Varsovie 1967, pp. 147 and following.

<sup>20</sup> One must also take into consideration the features of the Lviv climate, leading to the fact that – even if built up to a certain level – a building construction falls into ruin if it is not finished in one or two years or protected by a temporary roof, according to the work in progress.

At first glance, the church represented on the seal by its southern façade has eclectic architecture, combining elements of different origins. However, the analysis shows that the façade could be read as being split into two large areas, different in style, separated by the cornice: the masonry body and the roof.



Fig. 5a. The Stauropegeion Seals, general image (after Izydor Szaraniewicz, *op. cit.*)

The silhouette of the masonry part, its elements and their position make up a coherent image, obviously very similar to the façades of churches representative of Moldavian architecture from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. One should notice specific elements like the buttresses, including the oblique ones placed on the western limit of the façade, the eastern apse, the number and the position of the windows, the horizontal line of small niches positioned under the roof.

In other words, up to the cornice, the drawing reproduces a brick Moldavian church having three interior spaces – narthex, nave and altar – following a single axis. Two cupolas placed under the roof and arranged along the church axis probably cover the narthex; four windows on the southern and northern façade follow the transverse axes of each cupola. One or more windows should admit the light through the western façade too, whose limits are two oblique buttresses. The nave is of relatively reduced size, illuminated only through two opposing windows, and probably has its lateral apses made as curved niches in the thickness of the wall, also following the above-mentioned Moldavian layout. The limits of each apse are marked on the exterior side by two buttresses, meant to support the charge of a cupola or of a drum with cupola. The line of small niches placed under the roof, as well as the southern position of the entrance, should have the same source.



This image deciphered as the representation of ‘a Moldavian church of the 16<sup>th</sup> century’, as – of all the researchers – only P.P. Panaitescu notices,<sup>21</sup> confirms by its coherence the image’s conformity to the building represented. However, the seal drawing contains two elements that do not belong to the same vocabulary: the frame of the entrance and the cornice placed under the line of the small niches. Their shapes and positions, as well as the sumptuous interior decoration already mentioned, could be considered as contributions of Renaissance architecture. As for the upper part of the building, it bears the mark of another intervention. The three thin drums, ‘arranged along a single axis’,<sup>22</sup> do not have any connection to the spatial suggestions provided by the image of the lower part of the church. As was already mentioned, they should be attributed to the Ruthenian tradition, and one should notice that their composition is coherent in itself only if we look at it from this point of view. One can conclude that the seal image represents the Assumption church as it looked in 1591, bearing witness to the three stages of construction the edifice had had before this date.

Questions also arise concerning the period in which the church functioned. The building works are finished and the church enters into service after the date of its consecration, August 15, 1559, yet, the interior painting is not even begun. Two years later, Alexandru Lăpuşneanu accuses the Lviv Orthodox community of neglecting the building.<sup>23</sup> Yet its condition should have been satisfactory, while the same community asks in 1564 the voivode’s help to finish the bell tower whose construction, as they say, has already started near the church.<sup>24</sup> In addition, we know that the same year the body of the former Moldavian voivode Stefan Tomşa is buried inside the church.<sup>25</sup> The fact that in 1565 Lăpuşneanu himself or-



Fig. 5b. The Stauropegiion Seal, image of the church (after Izydor Szaraniewicz, *op. cit.*)

<sup>21</sup> Panaitescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 1, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Zhuk, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 220–222, Lăpuşneanu’s letter from June 20, 1561.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 242–243. We can suppose that the bell tower was planned to be built simultaneously with the church, since Alexandru Lăpuşneanu orders two bells in July 22, 1558; one of them was destined to the Lviv Assumption church and should have the name ‘Alexandru’ engraved, in both Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, see Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 209–210, 214–215.

<sup>25</sup> A. H. Golimaş, *Un domnitor, O epocă, Vremea lui Miron Barnouschi Moghilă, Voievod al Moldovei*, Bucureşti 1980, p. 121.

ders the interior mural painting, as well as the information that the operation finished in 1566, are further arguments for the good condition of the church.<sup>26</sup>

However, probably during the winter of 1565–1566, the upper part of the building is damaged<sup>27</sup> and one can suppose that the rain water of the spring of 1566 also endangered the newly completed interior painting. Repairs are paid for and probably executed.<sup>28</sup>

It is generally asserted that a fire destroys the church in 1571. However, we have to assume that some repairs keep it in use after this date: the body of another former Moldavian ruler, Ioan Potcoava, is buried here in 1578.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the sources maintain the year 1572 as the moment when the building works at the tower start, financed by Constantin Korniakt. Would he have done it, if the church could not been used as a place of worship? It is hard to believe, since the declared role of the bell-tower is to shelter the church bell. Equally, one could ask if the two architectural objects – the bell-tower and the church – would be still represented on the Stauropegon seals in 1591. It is more likely that during this year the church should have been in use, even if it required some repairs. This hypothesis could explain why the decision to rebuild the church is taken only in 1591, after the consecration of the newly built Chapel of the Three Hierarchs.<sup>30</sup> We can suppose that from now on, religious services are usually held in the Chapel, and that the church is used only occasionally for another seven years. It is worth our while to read the letter Luca Stroici sends to the Lviv Confraternity in 1598. The logothete manifests his discontent because, instead of repair works financed by his master Moldavian voivode Ieremia Mohyla, the Ruthenians began its demolition.<sup>31</sup> The text suggests that Lăpușneanu's church is still in a condition to be 'restored' even in 1598.

The hypothesis that the first masonry church of Assumption functioned later than the fire of 1671 is supported, even indirectly, by the vaulting system of the Chapel of the Three Hierarchs. Even though its three domes are rebuilt in 1671,<sup>32</sup> they are supported by the 'intricate system of arches'<sup>33</sup> that - as one should notice – must have belonged to the first stage of the building, finished in 1591. The structural composition of these arches, their 'intricate system' is an interpretation of the 'stepped arches' of the vaulting system, a characteristic

<sup>26</sup> Panaitescu, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> In his letter from April 22, 1566, Lăpușneanu asks the Orthodox community to look for good builders who have 'to cover all the church with good quality bricks'; the phrase indicates that the vaults are damaged too'; see Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 256–257.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>29</sup> C. C. Giurescu, D. C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor*, 2, București 1976, p. 309.

<sup>30</sup> *Lviv, Sightseeing Guide*, Lviv 1999, p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

<sup>32</sup> *Arhitectura Ucrainskoi SSR*, Moskva 1954, pp. 10–15; Zhuk, *op. cit.*, cited place, indicates the same date of the vault's reconstruction, accompanied by the name of its sponsor, Alexie Balaban, from whom originates the name of 'Balaban Chapel', the second name under which the building is known, see G. Kos, R. Fedina, *Vulița Russka u Lvovi*, Lviv 1996, p. 88.

<sup>33</sup> Onyszczenko-Szweć, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

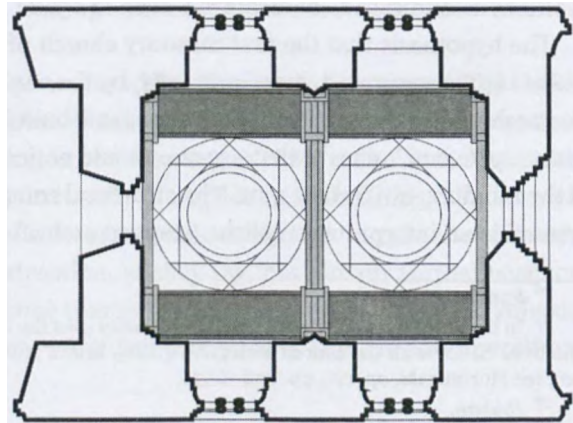
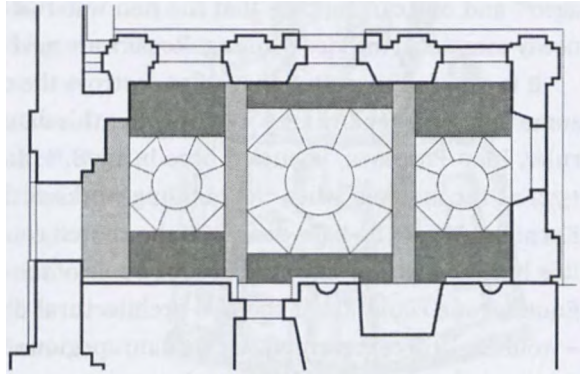


Fig. 6. Similar system of 'stepped arches' supporting a cupola:  
up, Lviv, Three Hierarchs Chapel, 1591; down, Moldavia, Probota church, narthex, 1530

of Moldavian architecture only.<sup>34</sup> Or, as the architect of the chapel is not a Moldavian,<sup>35</sup> the source of this structural composition could not be different from that of the adjoining church. One can conclude that the latter preserved its original vaulting system in the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> We think there are sufficient arguments to agree with the idea that Lăpușneanu's church survived longer than was generally acknowledged. More precisely, it certainly did function from 1559 to 1591 and it still existed – probably used intermittently – after 1589.

The documents provide only partial certainties. However, connected with architectural analysis, they lead to some interesting conclusions regarding the evolution of church architecture, as it results from its building stages and interventions and from their probable authors. This is why I chose to present these conclusions in the terms that seemed to be closer to the correctness of the stylistic suggestions the analysis highlights.

Undoubtedly, the coherence of the composition, as well as the absence of similar structures built outside the Moldavian borders show that the first building of the Assumption church was made by Moldavian master builders, following already established patterns in the Romanian Principality. One can affirm that, at the end of this first stage, in 1559, the Lviv Orthodox church could have been seen as a Moldavian church. Having said that, it owes its name of 'Wallachian' not only to the sponsor's origin, but also to the master builder and the shape it acquired.

Two hypotheses could be considered regarding the building period of this first church; they are both based upon the premise that the erection of such a building could have been done during one or two years. The assumed starting date of the church building in 1547 could be interpreted as a declaration of intention without a follow-up, or as a real beginning of the works that were cut short for some unknown reason.

The first hypothesis takes into account the repeated affirmation of the fact that the Moldavian ruler finished an already started building. It is an initiative of the Lviv Ruthenians about which Alexandru Lăpușneanu learns only on February 12, 1558. At this moment, the church was built up to the roof, following the indications of a Moldavian master builder, hired without the voivode's knowledge not long before, maybe in 1557. Alexandru

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<sup>34</sup> This vaulting system is one of the structural means used to emphasize the gradual rising and tapering of some of the church spaces. It is one of the features defining the character of Moldavian churches from the 15<sup>th</sup> c. to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> c.

<sup>35</sup> The spatiality and the forms do not suggest the contribution of a Moldavian master. According to the opinion of some researchers, the architect of the chapel was Andrej Pidlisnyi [Podlesny]; others advance the name of Krasovs'kyi [Krasowski], neither of them originating from Moldavia, see Zhuk, *op. cit.*, p. 105. According to Crivelli, *op. cit.*, cited place, Crassowski is one of the names under which Petrus Italus is known, and he was the author of 'la Capella di Tre Santi (1578) alla Chiesa Valacca'. The hypothesis is plausible if the chapel building starts really in 1578, the last year when documents mention Petrus Italus.

<sup>36</sup> Zhuk, *op. cit.*, p. 104, considers Lăpușneanu's church as being 'the prototype' of the Chapel of the Three Hierarchs.

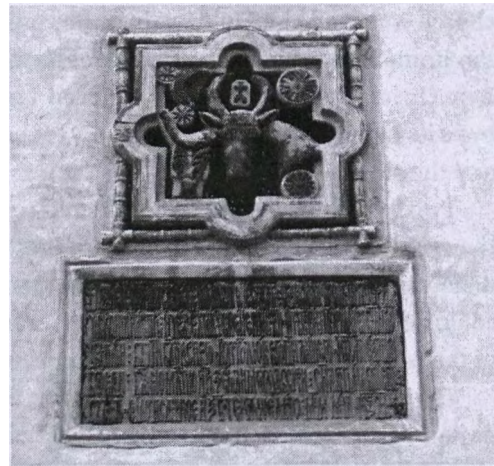


Fig. 7. Moldavian churches  
founded by Alexandru Lăpușneanu:  
up and right, the monastery-church of  
Bistrița, 1554;  
down, the monastery-church of  
Slatina 1558



Lăpuşneanu finances the building works of the upper part of the church: the roof corresponding to the already built brick structure, just as the latter is drawn on the Stauropigion seal. Probably another Moldavian master builder sent by the voivode implements his orders and watches the last works in order to observe the planned lines of construction.

The second hypothesis arises if we admit the fact that the building site was not yet started in February 1558, when the Lviv Orthodox community addresses its first letter to the voivode.<sup>37</sup> Construction could have begun shortly after,<sup>38</sup> with the exclusive support of the Moldavian ruler. He could have hired a master builder and sent him together with the Moldavian delegation to Lviv, in February 1558. This builder could be the same person mentioned – in the letter sent by Lăpuşneanu to Sigismund August – as he was permanently on the building site. One can suppose he was the author of the church project that was known and approved by the voivode, and executed until August 1599.<sup>39</sup>

Both hypotheses suggest a period of construction shorter than the one generally accepted, but more plausible from the point of view of the period building practice: either two years, between 1557 and 1559, or around 15 months, from February 1558 to August 1559.<sup>40</sup> In both cases, the shape of the church finished and consecrated in 1559 is similar to ones built during the same period in Moldavia. Taking into account the fact that these churches were not built following a single pattern, as well as the incomplete information contained in Lăpuşneanu's letters, we have to consider two variants of the building which resulted from this first stage of construction.

The Italian architect was given the task of enriching the architecture of the Moldavian edifice. He must have been the one who tried to attenuate the church's medieval character, by alterations designed to make it to fit in with the new Renaissance style which the urban patricians of Lviv had enthusiastically adopted. Obviously, one cannot do much when the

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<sup>37</sup> It is possible that Volos and the other Lviv Orthodox messengers asking for the Moldavian Court's financial help might have declared that the church was already under construction, just to be more convincing. This hypothesis is suggested by a similar request addressed to the voivode, some years later. In 1564, the Lviv Orthodox community informs Lăpuşneanu that the construction of a bell-tower was begun, asking him to support the completion of it, see Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 242–243. However, no document confirms the beginning of this new building before 1572.

<sup>38</sup> The church construction could have been started earlier in March, more probably in April, as the things generally happened in Moldavia, having a similar climate to Lviv. The information was provided by Voica Maria Puşcaşu, an archaeologist and researcher of Moldavian architecture of the epoch, to whom I would like to express my gratitude in this way.

<sup>39</sup> In summer 1558, the voivode prepares 'all the liturgical objects the church needs, as well as the priest's ceremonial clothes'; he already has 'the icons, the curtains, the vessels' to be used at the church consecration and during its functioning, see Hurmuzaki, *op. cit.*, pp. 209–210, 214–215. That does not mean that the church building is ready. At that time, the custom was that such objects were done simultaneously with the construction of the church. C. Nicolescu, *Mănăstirea Slatina*, Bucureşti 1966, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> A structure, having the dimensions which the drawing suggests, could be built in the interval March–April 1558 – August 1559, covering the period of the correspondence between Lăpuşneanu and the Lviv Orthodox community.

object to be transformed presents a very coherent composition. Thus Petrus Italus adds a Renaissance portal to the façade and a cornice under the small line of niches; probably he also transforms the austere interior, making it 'elegant and sumptuous'.

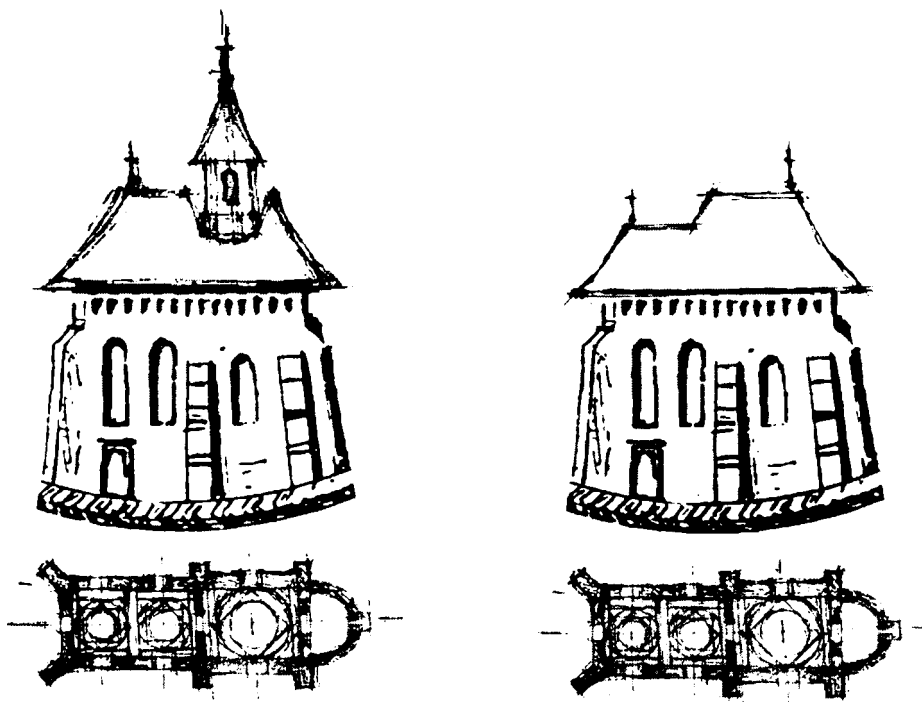


Fig. 8. The Moldavian church, variants of reconstruction.  
Renaissance contribution – the interpretation of Petrus Italus

One has to look at the alterations which Petrus Italus undertakes at the Lviv church, probably in 1558–1559, in direct connection with the very similar ones he executes at the Evangelical church in Bistritza, in Transylvania, in 1560–1563. He uses here – maybe even inspired by his experience from the Assumption church from Lviv – an almost identical repertoire of forms, destined to confer a Renaissance specific elegance to an edifice whose Gothic coherence could not be denied. That is probably why, despite the ‘Lombard-Polish attic’,<sup>41</sup> his works on the façade are limited to the Renaissance portal and a cornice on the western façade.<sup>42</sup> As happens in Lviv, his intervention does not alter the medieval image

<sup>41</sup> Crivelli, *op. cit.*, p. 38; Kovács, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Kovács, *op. cit.*, cited place.

of the building. We can suppose that the interior decoration he proposes at Bistritza, still extant, is similar to the one already done in the Lviv church.

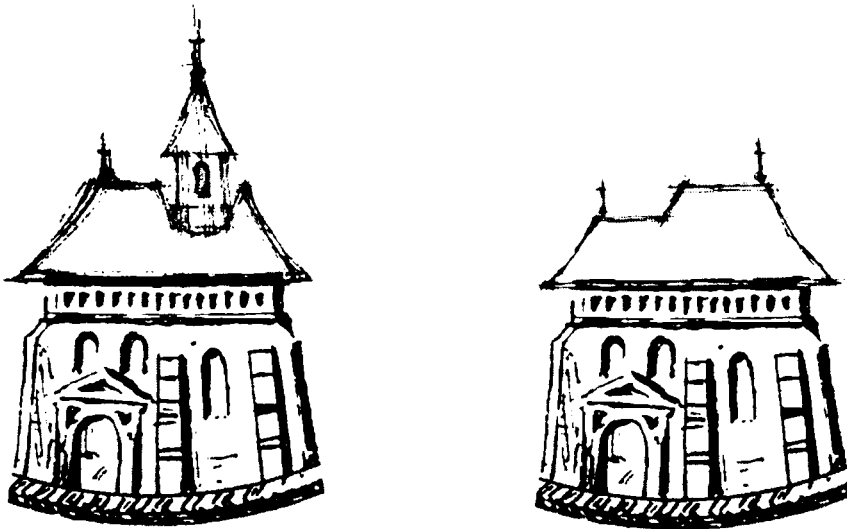


Fig. 9. Results of Petrus Italus' intervention, variants of reconstruction.  
The Rhythenian contribution

The dating of the Lviv intervention in the years 1558–1559 is based upon the supposition that Alexandru Lăpușneanu himself appeals to Petrus Italus, asking him to participate in the construction works of the church. The end of these operations in 1559 could support such a hypothesis, the same year being considered as concluding Petrus Italus's contribution to the Orthodox Church. We have to remember that, also at Alexandru Lăpușneanu's order and only one year before, the work to the church of the Slatina Monastery, in Moldavia, ends. This church includes new elements from the repertoire of forms which the voivode already knows, maybe from his Polish travels, but maybe through Petrus Italus and the architectural modernity towards which he orients the Moldavian ruler.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Not only the church, but the whole ensemble of the Slatina Monastery provides testimony for Lăpușneanu's intention to 'get out from the Medieval Age' in the field of architecture. Thus, he pre-



In April 1566, Lăpuşneanu learns that the roof needs important repairs. He asks the Orthodox community to hire ‘good workers’, who have also to work on the damaged vaults. It is probable that this new intervention consists in the replacement of the nave drum or cupola with a new dome, of a similar size to the ones covering the narthex. Thus, a uniform and unique structure is realized for the new roof, avoiding the previous shape that highlighted the dominant presence of the nave. Some Ruthenian builders could have planned and executed the three equal drums placed along the church axis; they used the symbol of the drum by multiplying it, completely disregarding the volume and the spatial shape such elements generally emphasize. It seems that the three drums are built in wood, ‘false drums’ that could be seen only from the exterior, decorating the upper part of the building.<sup>44</sup> This seems to have been the last important intervention made on the church until its demolition in 1598.<sup>45</sup>

One can conclude that all these building stages could be attributed to Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, who really finances all the building works of the church as it is represented in 1591. We should consider his contribution as very important: it is the first time a Moldavian church pattern is ‘exported’ outside the borders of the province. This could explain also the fame this church enjoyed and preserved over centuries amongst the Moldavian nobility, who would keep on supporting this Orthodox building, even when its shape or the rite changed, becoming a Greek-Catholic worship place.

On the other hand, the final shape of Lăpuşneanu’s church, combining Moldavian and Ruthenian elements, will represent a new pattern adopted in Moldavia for new churches or for the alteration of elder ones. Even if this happens in a later period, one has to notice the presence of similar structures in examples of the minor arts, such as the liturgical object offered by Metropolitan Gheorghe Mohyla to the Sucevița Monastery in 1591.<sup>46</sup> The obvious similarity between Gheorghe Mohyla’s model and the Lviv representation, as well as the same year of their execution could not be accidental. Moreover, it should lead to deeper research work with significant results regarding the artistic connections of the period.

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cedes the Wallachian ruler Petru Cercel (1583–1585), known for his orientation towards Western Renaissance art. Cf. Nicolescu, *op. cit.*; D. Horia Mazilu, *Voievodul dincolo de sala tronului*, Polirom 2003, pp. 28, 59.

<sup>44</sup> This is a supposition, relying on the small dimensions of the drums and the reduced distances between them, that usually could not be realized in brick.

<sup>45</sup> One must stress the fact that none of these conclusions relies on archeological research, since we have no information regarding their execution.

<sup>46</sup> Displayed in the Museum of Sucevița Monastery.



Fig. 10. The image of Lviv church and Gheorghe Mohila's model