

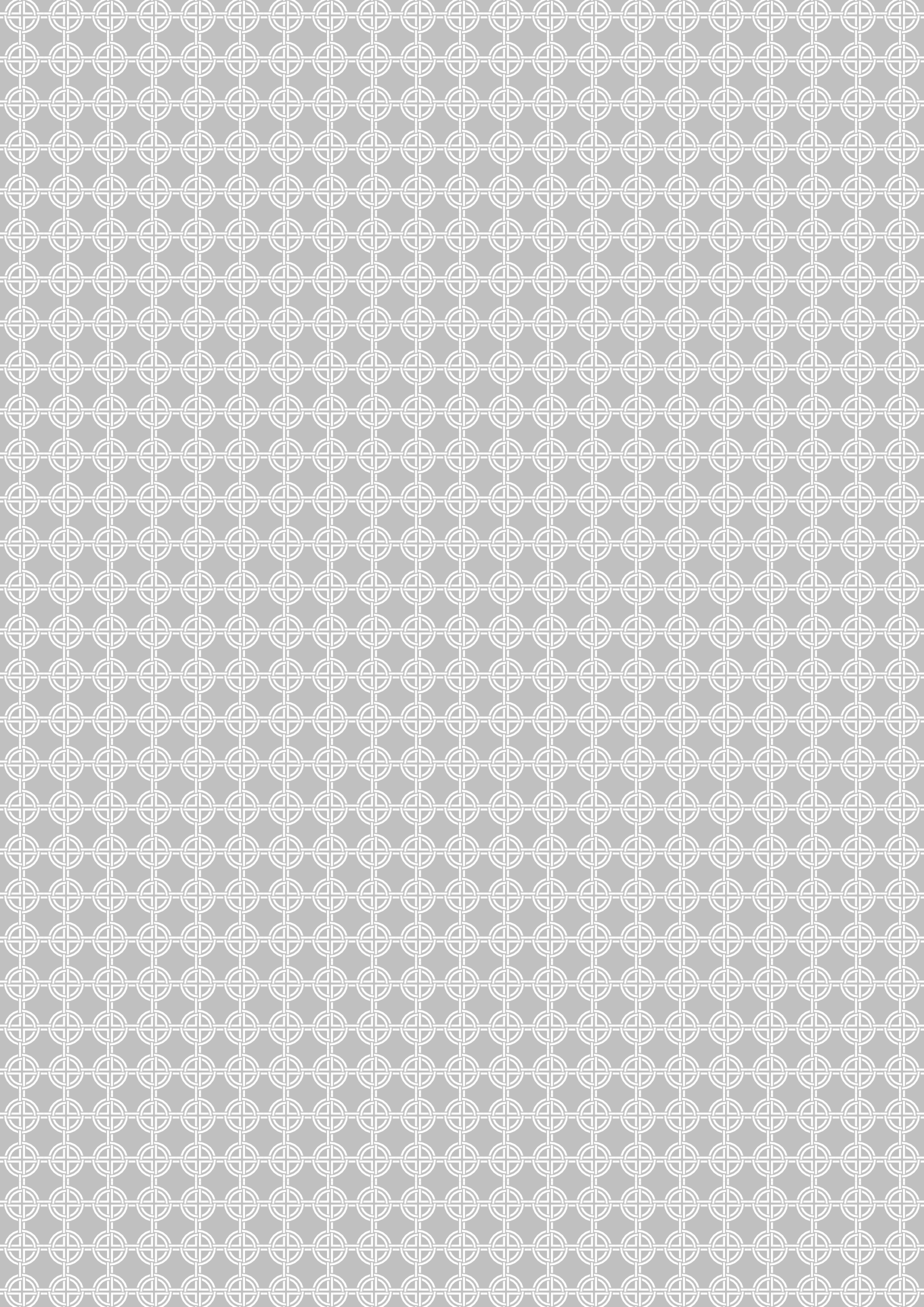
# MUSEIKON

A JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS ART AND CULTURE | REVUE D'ART ET DE CULTURE RELIGIEUSE

1 / 2017



Muzeul Național al Unirii, Alba Iulia



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Mother of God surrounded by Apostles,  
Joachim and Anna. Icon, first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century,  
from the Greek-Catholic church in Terlo (Ukraine),  
nowadays in the National Museum in Cracow /

Mère de Dieu entourée des Apôtres, de Joachim et  
d'Anne. Icône de la première moitié du xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle,  
autrefois dans l'église gréco-catholique de Terlo  
(Ukraine), aujourd'hui dans les collections  
du Musée national de Cracovie (Pologne).

*Credits / Cliché :*

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(cf. p. 59).

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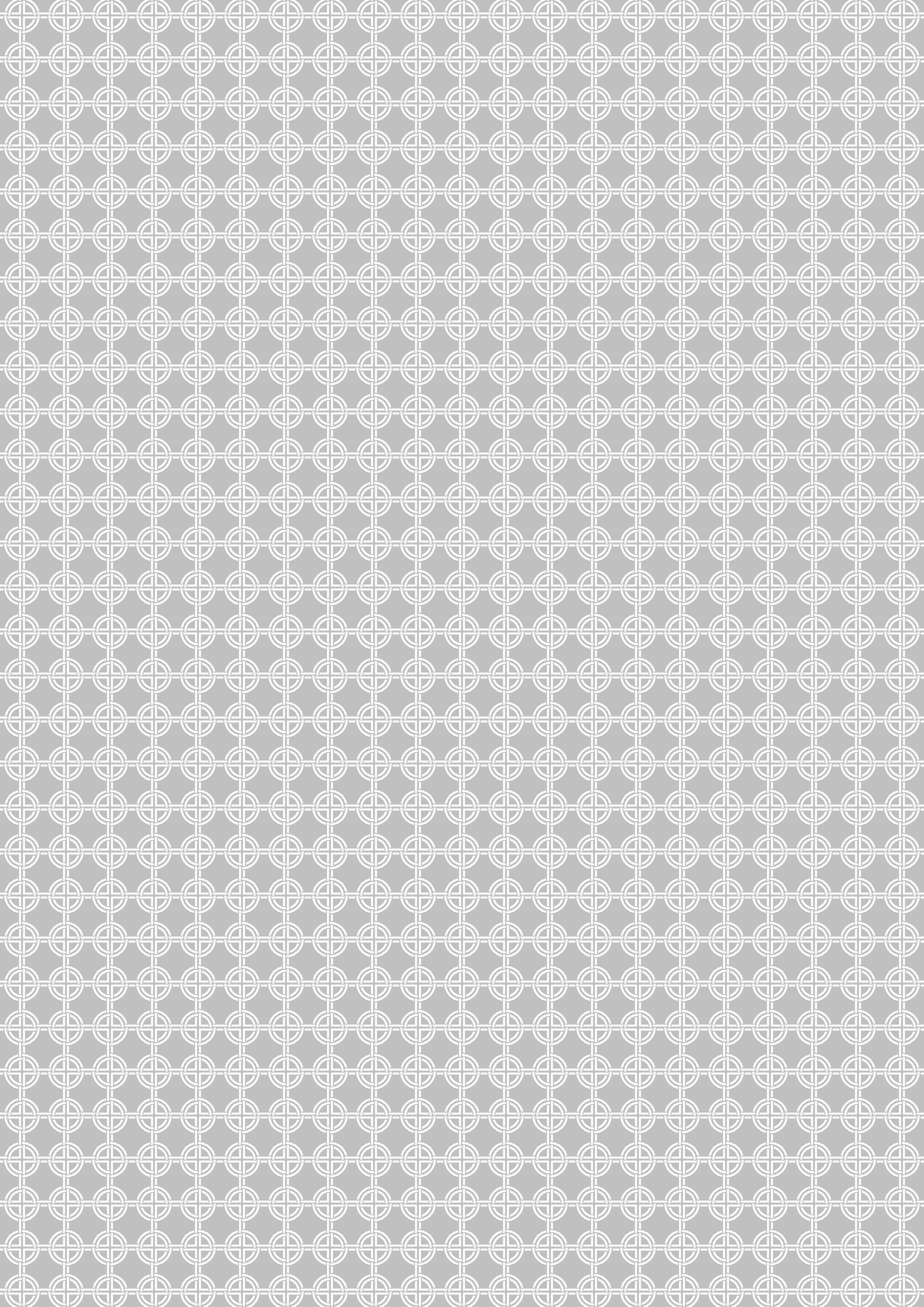
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**studies**



**études**



# *New Information on the Dating of the Murals of St. Nicholas Church in Ribița*

## *A Hypothesis<sup>1</sup>*

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RÉSUMÉ: Bien que la restauration de l'église de Ribița (région de Hunedoara) eût démarré aux années 1994-1995 et qu'elle soit encore inachevée, les travaux de décapage des peintures murales ont mis en lumière un certain nombre de nouvelles données permettant à formuler certaines hypothèses sur la datation des peintures murales. Poussée par le désir de corriger la lecture erronée – prise comme telle par les historiens de l'art – d'une inscription récemment découverte, l'étude est devenue un examen critique des informations données par les textes slavons conservés dans l'église : de l'inscription de la peinture votive, des inscriptions de nature votive de l'au-dessus et du voisinage immédiat de l'image de Saint Jean-Baptiste (toutes les trois dans le registre inférieur de la paroi sud du naos) et d'une inscription récemment découverte (dans la partie nord de la voûte de l'autel, entre les représentations de deux évangélistes assis). Le caractère fragmentaire de ces inscriptions et l'examen critique de leur contenu ne permettent que de formuler des hypothèses au sujet de la datation de l'ensemble des peintures murales : que ces hypothèses soient confirmées ou non, nous allons le savoir lors de l'achèvement des travaux de décapage, de nettoyage et de restauration des fresques. Le détail de la peinture votive avec l'indication de la date chronologique lue par Silviu Dragomir comme l'année 6925 (=1417) ne figure pas dans la photo d'avant 1930 qui accompagne son étude. L'historien roumain s'est probablement basé sur la transcription de l'inscription faite en 1869-1870 par le prêtre de Ribița, juste un an avant la publication par Ödön Nemes des informations à propos des fondateurs de l'église et des inscriptions indiquant l'année 1404. L'année de l'inscription fragmentaire de l'autel n'a pas été conservée, mais des informations qui existent encore semblent indiquer l'année 1393 étant la date à laquelle on a réalisé au moins la décoration murale de l'autel, sinon toute la peinture de l'église (seule la fin de la restauration des fresques peut apporter des preuves claires et concluantes pour avancer une formule plus précise au sujet des étapes de la décoration). L'examen épigraphique et paléographique des peintures et des textes de l'église ont indiqué l'existence d'au moins deux « mains » individuelles: l'inscription votive et les inscriptions avoisinées aux images des saints rois hongrois se distinguent à la fois entre elles et par rapport aux autres inscriptions de l'église. Les informations fournies par les quatre inscriptions au caractère votif ont conduit à l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'ensemble des peintures murales a été matérialisé par la volonté de plusieurs donateurs qui ont contribué financièrement (à hauteurs différentes !) simultanément ou consécutivement : ce qui imprime un caractère cumulatif à l'acte fondateur – chose loin d'être isolée dans les cas des Pays du Criș et du Hațeg.

MOTS-CLÉS: peinture murale, slavon d'église, épigraphie, paléographie, donateur.

REZUMAT: Deși restaurarea a fost începută în 1994-1995 și este încă neîncheiată, lucrările de decapare a picturilor murale ale bisericii Sf. Nicolae din Ribița (jud. Hunedoara) întreprinse în decursul a 20 de ani au adus la lumină o serie de informații noi care permit formularea unor ipoteze în legătură cu datarea ansamblului mural. Determinată de dorința de a corecta lectura eronată și preluată ca atare de către istoricii de artă a unei inscripții noi, studiul este o reexaminare critică a informațiilor oferite de inscripțiile în slavonă păstrate în biserică: pisană din tabloul votiv, inscripțiile cu caracter votiv de deasupra și de lângă reprezentarea Sf. Ioan Botezătorul (toate trei în registrul inferior al peretelui sudic al navei) și inscripția nouă din altar (partea nordică a bolții, între reprezentările a doi Evangheliști așezați). Caracterul fragmentar al acestor inscripții și examinarea critică a conținutului lor nu permit decât formularea unor ipoteze legate de datarea ansamblului mural care vor fi sau nu confirmate în momentul încheierii lucrărilor de decapare, curățare și restaurare a frescelor medievale. Detaliul anului conținut odinioară de pisană din tabloul votiv și citit drept 6925 (1417) de către Silviu Dragomir nu apare în fotografia de dinainte de 1930 care îi însoțește studiul, istoricul bazându-și lectura pe transcrierea textului pisaniei făcută în 1869-1870 de către preotul din Ribița, cu doar un an după publicarea de către Ödön Nemes a unor informații despre ctitori și inscripții care precizează anul 1404. Anul oferit de inscripția fragmentară din altar nu se mai păstrează, însă informația încă existentă pare să indice anul 1393 drept data la care a fost realizată decorația murală cel puțin a altarului, dacă nu a întregii biserici (numai finalizarea lucrărilor de restaurare a frescelor poate aduce probe certe pentru conturarea unei mai ferme

definiri a etapelor de decorare). Examenul epigrafic și paleografic parțial al materialului din biserică a indicat existența a cel puțin două „mâini” unice, inscripțiile din pisanie și de lângă regii sfinți ai Ungariei distingându-se atât între ele, cât și în raport cu celelalte inscripții din biserică. Informațiile oferite de cele patru inscripții cu caracter votiv au condus la avansarea ipotezei că ansamblul mural a fost realizat din voința mai multor donatori care au participat financiar în măsuri diferite, fie simultan, fie în perioade distincte, fapt care conferă actului ctitoricesc caracter cumulativ, un lucru deloc izolat în Țările Crișurilor și Hațegului.

CUVINTE CHEIE: pictură murală, slavonă bisericească, epigrafie, paleografie, donator.

The village of Ribîța (Hung. *Ribice*)<sup>2</sup> is currently situated in the County of Hunedoara (Romania), but during the Middle Ages it belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary. The settlement was part of the County of Zaránd, an administrative unit that had Șiria (Hung. *Világos*) as its center.<sup>3</sup> The church in the village of Ribîța keeps to this day its medieval dedication to St. Nicholas and represents an important religious monument datable to the late-fourteenth – early-fifteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Even though only some stone carvings attest today to the medieval origin of the monument, which was conceived according to a typology often encountered in the region’s religious (both Catholic and Orthodox) architecture (single-nave church with rectangular, vaulted sanctuary and tall, western tower, Fig. 1),<sup>5</sup> the church in Ribîța is home to a rich medieval ensemble of indoor frescoes. The research on the Ribîța church increased considerably during the last two decades, since the restoration of the monument was initiated. Begun in 1994-1995 with the consolidation of the building and the removal of the architectural alterations to which the church was subjected in 1869-1870,<sup>6</sup> the restoration extended later to the mural paintings. The latter works were initiated in 1994 by painter-restorer Dan Căceu<sup>7</sup> and were later carried on by restorer Silviu Petrescu between 1995-1999 and 2009-2011, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the fact that the restoration of the frescoes is currently interrupted and “the conclusions of the undertaken works and research are not yet published, due to their incomplete character”,<sup>9</sup> the mural ensemble in Ribîța is now greatly uncovered from under the numerous layers of paint which had covered the walls throughout time (Fig. 2).<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, one can safely state that the church’s sanctuary is decorated in its axis with a representation of the *Melismos*, flanked by deacon-archangels, and is supplemented by figures of hierarchs on the lateral walls. The transition to the very deteriorated image of the vault (probably Christ in Glory) is made through cherubs placed above the archangels and through Evangelists (represented seating and probably writing), placed above the Church Fathers. The nave of the church is decorated in its upper register with scenes taken from the Life and Passion of Christ. The Last Judgment is rendered through the randomly disposed scenes of the Sinners’ Torments in Hell (southern wall of the room below the western tower), the Bosom of Abraham (the lower register of the southern wall), and the *Anastasis* combined with the image of the Sinners in the Mouth of the Leviathan (the upper register of the northern wall). The lower register is supplemented by figures of military saints on horseback, the Holy Kings of Hungary, St. Helena, St. Nicholas, St. John the Baptist, St. Panteleimon, pillar and martyr saints, etc. The partially-preserved image of the votive composition depicts the kneeling ktetors (i.e., brothers Vladislavu and Miclăușu with their wives, Stana and Sora, and Ana, the daughter of the former) who offer the model of the church to its patron, St. Nicholas (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> The iconographic, stylistic, epigraphic, and paleographical evidence currently visible inside the church allows art historians to form opinions on some aspects in the history of the monument. These

opinions, however, have a provisional character and only the completion of the much-postponed restoration can provide for new evidence that will support or not the validity of such hypotheses.<sup>12</sup>

The dating of the mural decoration of the church in Ribîța represented the concern (either direct or indirect) of previous scholars. However, the fragmentary character of the information offered by the Old Church Slavonic inscriptions present in the Ribîța church led to various hypotheses placing the murals at different moments during the first two decades of the fifteenth century. The first to express an opinion in this regard was Ödön Nemes who, in 1868, conveyed the information that the church’s frescoes had been painted in 1404.<sup>13</sup> He relied on the church’s inscriptions in *old Serbian* (i.e., Old Church Slavonic), which were still unaltered by the architectural transformations that were to take place one year later. Writing twice on the church in Ribîța, its frescoes and ktetors, Silviu Dragomir stated first, in his 1917 study, that the frescoes had been painted in 1414/5.<sup>14</sup> Later on, however, in his extensive study dedicated to the paintings and ktetors of the churches in





Crișcior (Hung. *Kristyor*) and Ribița, published in 1930, he assigned the execution date of the murals in Ribița to 1417.<sup>15</sup> After he critically examined the information conveyed by his two predecessors, Adrian Andrei Rusu proposed in 1991 “as new and correct dating of the complex of mural painting in Ribița, the year 1414”.<sup>16</sup> This interpretation became doubtful four years later when, following the murals’ uncovering by D. Căceu, a new inscription was brought to light on the northern wall of the sanctuary. Erroneously and without any other explanation, Irina Popa indicated in 1995 that the partially preserved inscription in the altar contained the year 1407.<sup>17</sup>

Because this false information seems to have been unreservedly adopted by recent art-historical scholarship as the execution date of the frescoes of the church in Ribița,<sup>18</sup> its rectification is more than reasonable. Not claiming to categorically and definitively solve the problem of dating the mural ensemble in Ribița, we shall henceforward make several observations which have as their starting point either old (the dedicatory inscription in the votive composition) or new information (the inscriptions uncovered during the restoration of the past twenty years). In doing so, we hope to supplement the existing knowledge on St. Nicholas Church in Ribița with new data, which will allow a better and more nuanced understand-

ing of the monument’s history - whenever the restoration of the murals will be completed.

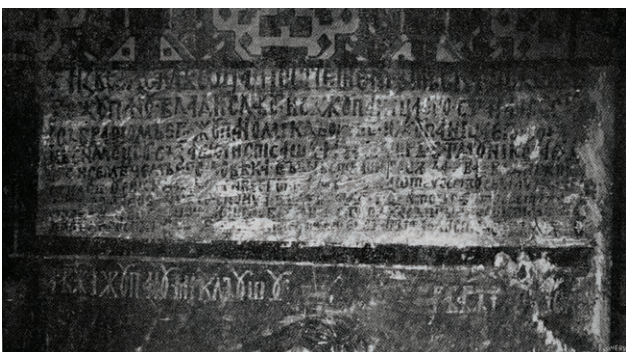
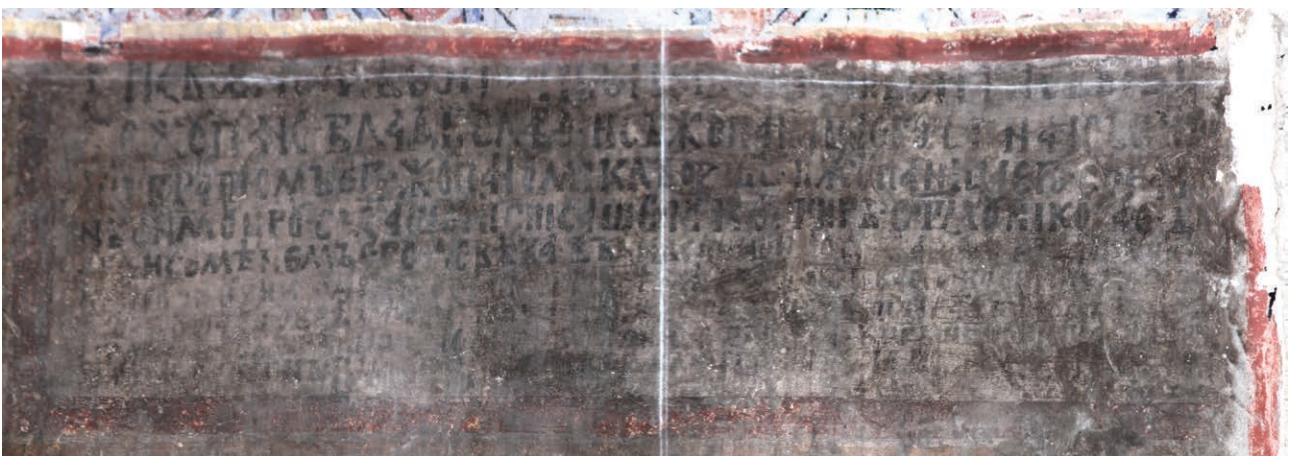
Currently, the church’s main dedicatory inscription, which was included in the votive composition, is only fragmentarily preserved (Fig. 3). A significant portion of its text was destroyed by one of the pillars attached to the walls of the nave in 1869-1870 in order to support the new vault *a vela* which replaced the church’s original ceiling.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, due to the thick layer of soot on its surface, the final four lines of the inscription are now impossible to read (Fig. 4). This coincided with the conservation state of the dedicatory inscription prior to 1985, when Liana Tugearu wrote her study on the murals that were visible at that point in the church.<sup>20</sup> She supplemented the reading that was possible at that time<sup>21</sup> with that offered in 1930 by S. Dragomir, who reproduced “line by line” a transcription made by the priest in Ribița on the occasion of the church’s renovation in 1869-1870.<sup>22</sup> The priest’s copy is in great extent faithful to the actual text of the dedicatory inscription, as it can be recovered either through its direct examination or through the photographs in S. Dragomir’s article, which reflect the inscription’s conservation state before 1930 (Fig. 5).<sup>23</sup> According to these three sources – the actual inscription (Fig. 3-4), the photographs made prior to 1930 (Fig. 5), and the transcription by S. Dragomir of the priest’s copy of 1869-1870 (Fig. 6), respectively –, the dedicatory inscription conveys the following information:<sup>24</sup>

▶ Fig. 1 : St. Nicholas Church in Ribița. Exterior view from the south-east. Credits: Anca Crișan.

▼ Fig. 2 : St. Nicholas Church in Ribița. Interior view of the nave from the west. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.







ЦРКВЬ ИМЪ ОУДАН ПОСТИШНИИ СНА И СВЪРШЕ-  
 2. БР ЖЕПАНЪ ВЛАДИСЛАВЪ І СЪ ЖЕПАНИЦА ГОСТАНА СЪ СІ(ОМЪ .....)  
 3. И СЪ БРАТОМЪ ГРОЖДАНЪ МИКЪВШЪ И ЖЕПАНИЦА ЕГО СОРА( .....)  
 4. И БРАТЪ ЦРЪ СЪЗНАДЪШЪ І НЕПІСАШЕ МАНАСТІРЪ СЛАВЪ НИКОЛАЕ Д( .....)  
 5. ЕГО И СВЪТІИМЪ ЕГО ДО ВЪКА ВЪ ДНЬ СТРАШНАГО СЪДЪ ДЪА ВЪ ДНИ ЖИВЪ(ИВНА .....)  
 6. ОУФРІКЪ ДА БЪДІТЪ СНЪБИ ЕГО И СЛАВЪ( .....)  
 7. ( ..... ) СКОНЪ А ВЪ СЪБОТА І ПОДЪСТА( ..... )  
 8. ЕТАНА ДА СВЪРШІШЕ. ДА И НИ ПО БЛАГОДАТНО СЪТЪ ДЪА СВЪРШІ( ..... )  
 9. ОШЪ ДВАГОСИНЪ ВЪ БЪТЪ ЗУКЪ МІЦА ЮНИ І СВЪРШІШЕ И НЕПІСА СЕ РЪКЪ( ..... )



- (1) † извлѣ[ни]мъ ѡца і поспешѣ[ни]емъ с(ы)на и съврѣше[ниемъ с(вѣ)таго д(оу)ха...]
- (2) ...]ре жупанѣ владиславѣ и съ жупаница его стана и съ с(ы)н[омъ его...]
- (3) і съ вратомъ его жупанѣ миклаѡушѣ и жупаница его сора и [...]
- (4) н(є)в(є)сн(о)мѣ ц(а)рѣ създашѣ и списашѣ манастирѣ с(вѣ)т(о)мѣ николает д[...]
- (5) ...и семѣнемъ его до вѣка въ д<ъ>нь ст[ра]шн[а]го съда х(ри)става въ дни ж(и)к[моу(н)а] кралѣ...]
- (6) зн[ата]го ѡрикѣ да **вѣдет** с(ы)н(о)ве его и семѣ[немъ его и] ѡтчествоѣ его [...]
- (7) [...]сконча **въ сѣбота 5 п(о)ста** [...]
- (8) [...]стана да съврѣшише а ѡни по вл(а)годатію с(вѣ)таго д(оу)ха съврѣш[...]
- (9) **попѣ драгосинѣ в<ъ> лѣт(о) 5цѣ м(ѣ)с(а)ца юли 15 съврѣши с<е> и исписа се рѣк[о]ж** [...]
- (1) † *By the will of the Father, and the help of the Son, and the accomplish[ment of the Holy Ghost...]*
- (2) [...] *jupan Vladislavu, and with his jupanița Stana, and with [his] so[n...]*
- (3) *and with his brother jupan Miclăușu, and his jupanița Sora, and [...]*
- (4) *to the Heavenly Emperor, have built and have painted the monastery to Saint Nicholas [...]*
- (5) *... to his offspring in eternity, in the day of the terrible judgment of Christ, in the days of [King] J(i)c[mund...]*
- (6) [...] of [...] known,<sup>25</sup> *to be charter to his sons, and [to his] offspr[ing, and] to his patrimony [...]*
- (7) [...] *finished in the sixth Saturday of fasting [...]*
- (8) [...] *stana*<sup>26</sup> *to finish, and they, with the benediction of the Holy Ghost, have finished [...]*
- (9) *priest Dragosin, in the year 6925 in the month of July 15, it was finished and it was painted by the hand [...]*

The information present in lines 7-9 is in great extent non-verifiable and the year, assumed by S. Dragomir to be 6925 (1417), was already lost when the photograph of the dedicatory inscription was made, i.e., prior to 1930 (Fig. 5). Even though he relied on a single source (i.e., the transcription made by the priest in Ribița in 1869-1870, which he examined only once in 1911),<sup>27</sup> S. Dragomir gave two different readings on the two occasions he referred to the dating of the church's murals. First, in his 1917 study, when he mentioned that the church had been built by *Voivode Vasile (!)* and his brothers (!), he indicated the year 1414/5.<sup>28</sup> Later on, in his 1930 study, he transcribed instead the year 6925 (1417).<sup>29</sup> The disparity between S. Dragomir's two readings proves that the detail of the year was unclear in the priest's 1869-1870 copy itself, a transcription which was examined by the historian either directly or through a mediator. Moreover, the transcription of the year 6925 published by S. Dragomir is itself incorrect, its author having replaced the letter Ц with numerical value 900 with the letter Ч with numerical value 400 (Fig. 6). This fact was not caused by the typographical limitations of the time, as the letter ц features several times in the text of the dedicatory inscription, e.g., in the words **ѡца** (line 1), **жупаница** (line 2), and **ц(а)рѣ** (line 4), where it is correctly transcribed. This inconsistency is found also in the transcription of the word **м(ѣ)с(а)ца** which follows the year (line 9), where the letter ч replaces again the letter ц – **мѣсѣ**; the same mistake is found once again in the transcription of the word **жупаница** (line 3), which is instead written **жупаниѣ**. One can also add to these fluctuations the incorrect transcriptions **миклаѡшѣ** instead of **миклаѡушѣ** (line 3) and

**ѡтчество воу** instead of **ѡтчествоѣ** (line 6), as well as the lack of the word **зн[ата]го** in the transcription which is visible in the photograph taken prior to 1930 (line 6, Fig. 5). All these disparities between the transcription published by S. Dragomir (Fig. 6) and the dedicatory inscription in its ante-1930 state (Fig. 5) point out to the fact that the historian did not confront the two sources, nor did he subject them to a close and critical examination.<sup>30</sup> Even though Dragomir states that the transcription of the priest had been sent to the Consistory in Sibiu "on the occasion of the 1869-70 repairs",<sup>31</sup> the transcription does not contain in lines 2-6 any supplementary information besides that which is currently preserved. This means that the transcription that was available to the historian had been in fact made after the dedicatory inscription's partial covering (and subsequent destruction) by the pillar meant to support the new vault of the nave, that is, after 1870.

There is, however, an account on the church in Ribița, its inscriptions and founders made before the destruction of the western side of the dedicatory inscription. In 1868 (that is, several years prior to the priest's copy), Ö. Nemes, probably the descendant of one of the lines of the noble family in Ribița,<sup>32</sup> published a short note on the monument of his native village. He illustrated it with a north-western view of the church which lacks the large windows created several years after.<sup>33</sup> Ö. Nemes drew attention to the age of the church in his native village which he dated to the year 1404 on the basis of two inscriptions in *old Serbian* (i.e., Old Church Slavonic) which existed at that point, one on the northern side and the other on the southern side (of the nave most likely). The author offered a summary of their content in Hungarian.<sup>34</sup> According to these inscriptions, the church had been built in 1404 under the shepherding of Pope Gregory and Anastasius by brothers Matia, Vladislav (И), Nicolae de Ribice, and daughters Ana and Ioanca as a sign of gratitude that King Sigismund returned to them the properties lost by the founders' father Vladislav (I). Ö. Nemes also noted that the latter had been previously punished (at an unspecified time by the informant)<sup>35</sup> by King Sigismund, who confiscated his estates due to a *nota infidelitatis* towards the Hungarian ruler. The sons of this Vladislav (I) received them back *nova donatione mediante* in 1404 from the same King Sigismund.

➤ Fig. 3 : Votive composition. Lower register of the southern wall of the nave. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.

➤ Fig. 4: Detail of the dedicatory inscription in its current state. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.

◀ Fig. 5: Photo of the main dedicatory inscription showing its state before 1930. Source: Dragomir 1930, fig. 12.

◀ Fig. 6: Transcription of the main dedicatory inscription, made by the priest in Ribița sometime after 1870. Source: Dragomir 1930, p. 253.

Even though it is not attested by written sources,<sup>36</sup> the confiscation of the properties followed by their recovery in 1404 is highly possible. This even more so as it follows the period when a series of Transylvanian noblemen, in their quality of *familiares* of *voivodes* Nicholas Csáki and Nicholas Marcali (1402-1403), rebelled against King Sigismund of Luxemburg (1387-1437) and supported the claims to the Hungarian crown of King Ladislas of Naples.<sup>37</sup> In his attempt at gaining them on his side during the conflict, King Sigismund generously rewarded the townsmen and lower noblemen, including a number of Romanian Orthodox noblemen in the area.<sup>38</sup> Between August and September 1404, these noblemen received charters confirming their land possessions, putting them in possession, or exempting them from taxes as a reward for their loyalty and services brought to the king.<sup>39</sup> Having managed to overcome all adversity by the Spring of 1404 and having been certain of his victory, King Sigismund also forgave those who had been against him during the conflict and who had laid down their weapons within the required interval.<sup>40</sup> To this category of noblemen (who had their properties returned and their previous state restored) could also belong the brothers in Ribița, whose recovered properties had been previously lost by their father Vladislav (I). Such a hypothesis is also supported by the information conveyed by the now-fragmentary dedicatory inscription, but which Ö. Nemes knew before its irreparable damage. First, by using a formula which is often encountered in church inscriptions, the text mentions an event which happened “in the days of [King] J(i)c[mund]” (i.e., Sigismund of Luxemburg, line 5).<sup>41</sup> One line below, the dedicatory inscription records a charter for someone’s sons, offspring, and patrimony (line 6). This information can be interpreted as a reference to the presumed royal donation that had been customarily granted through a charter (Урикъ) issued by King Sigismund. Further on, the inscription also records the accomplishment of a certain thing “in the sixth Saturday of fasting” (line 7). It is impossible that this thing/event coincided with the completion of the church’s construction and painting – which is ostentatiously mentioned (four times) towards the end (lines 8-9) and which had happened on July 15 (line 9) –, because this latter date does not correspond to the sixth Saturday of any period of Summer fasting (line 7), that is, neither to the fasting of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul (finished on June 29), nor to that of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God (started on August 1). Subsequently, it is possible that the dedicatory inscription, before its partial destruction in 1869-1870, originally mentioned two distinct events happening at different moments of time:<sup>42</sup> first, the properties’ recovery by the noblemen of Ribița, most likely in 1404 (lines 5-7), and second, the completion of the church’s construction and painting (lines 8-9) at a certain date (now unknown). This date was very likely partially preserved in 1868, when Ö. Nemes could only read the first year, assigning to it the construction and painting of the church.<sup>43</sup> Being an event with major significance in the existence of the Ribița noble family, it is possible that the charter’s acquirement in 1404 was mentioned in the dedicatory inscription as a sign of remembering the royal generosity. This mention was equally understood as the two brothers’ way of showing their gratitude towards the king, of remembering how they overcame a difficult moment in their family’s existence, and of making sure that their possessions will not be at risk again.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, on a closer look, one can easily notice that the partially-preserved dedicatory inscription reveals a striking difference between its upper half with tall, elegant letters (lines

1-5) and its lower half with small, crowded, and almost cursive letters (lines 5-9, Fig. 3-4). This disparity can be indicative of the fact that the dedicatory inscription was remade or only updated in 1404 (or shortly after), so that it reflected the change of social and legal status of the noblemen of Ribița, who had regained the king’s favor and recovered their family’s lost properties.<sup>45</sup>

As shown by A. A. Rusu,<sup>46</sup> besides brother *Mátyás* (Matia), the other names mentioned by Ö. Nemes find their confirmation, on the one hand, among the lay characters depicted in the votive composition and, on the other hand, among the names recorded by the dedicatory inscription or by the inscriptions next to the ktetors’ heads.<sup>47</sup> These are brothers *Vratisláv* (Vladislavu) and *Miklós de Ribice* (Miclăușu), and daughters *Anna* (Ana, Vladislavu’s daughter) and *Johanka* (probably Stana/Stanca, in fact Vladislavu’s wife) Thinking that there was enough space for Matia’s name to appear before Vladislavu’s (thus, accepting implicitly the names’ order as indicated by Ö. Nemes) and noticing that S. Dragomir’s first version of 1917 referred to a *Voivode Vasile* (!) and his *brothers*,<sup>48</sup> A. A. Rusu accepted Matia’s role of brother to the two noblemen of Ribița, but overlooked his absence from the votive composition.<sup>49</sup> This judgment, however, cannot be reconciled with the information conveyed by the votive composition which is not a random depiction, but rather one which is meant to accurately communicate by means of both image and text the reality of the religious foundation act. Votive compositions, therefore, faithfully record the hierarchical relationships between actors, as well as each ktetor’s degree of effective participation in the actual religious foundation.<sup>50</sup> Judging by the lay characters’ hierarchical perspective in the votive composition – St. Nicholas’ stature is bigger than the laymen’s and laywomen’s, who decrease in size according to their importance –,<sup>51</sup> as well as by the fact that only Vladislavu touches the model of the church and is the only one called ktetor by the accompanying inscriptions,<sup>52</sup> it is Vladislavu who played the main role in his family’s religious foundation (Fig. 3, 20). Moreover, this situation probably also reflects the hierarchical relationship between the two brothers. Even though they were equal heirs of their father’s property, it was only Vladislavu, as the older brother, who enjoyed the status of new head of the family after 1404, when the two brothers recovered the properties which were previously lost by their father for this infidelity towards the king.<sup>53</sup> Vladislavu is followed by his younger and smaller-in-size brother Miclăușu, whereas their wives (Stana and Sora, respectively) and the former man’s daughter (Ana) piously and passively witness the act of offering the church to its patron saint (Fig. 3, 20-22). The three female characters therefore play a secondary role, being depicted in the votive composition as a consequence of their kinship with the two men, and not as a consequence of their effective involvement in the religious foundation. Because the relationships between lay characters have not been faithfully conveyed in the 1868 account (only Ana is Vladislavu’s daughter, but not Stana, who is his wife, whereas Sora is not mentioned at all), it is very likely that Ö. Nemes did not strictly observe the order of recording these characters in inscriptions either. He offered in fact „a summary of the actual dedicatory inscription, thus eliminating the stereotypes and religious formulae”.<sup>54</sup> Following the inner logic of the text and of the image, it is impossible that Matia were mentioned in the dedicatory inscription before Vladislavu, that is, before the one who is represented in the votive composition as the main ktetor of the church. Matia’s quality of brother to the two noblemen of Ribița





- ▲ Fig. 7: Holy Kings of Hungary (Sts Stephen, Emeric, and Ladislas). Lower register of the northern wall of the nave. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.
- ▼ Fig. 8: Word *κράλη* ('king') accompanying the fragmentary representation of St. Ladislas. Lower register of the northern wall of the nave. Credits: Vladimir Agrigoroaei.
- ▼ Fig. 9: Fragmentary inscription above the representation of St. John the Baptist. Eastern side of the southern wall of the nave. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.
- ▲ Fig. 10: Supplicatory inscription next to the representation of St. John the Baptist. Eastern side of the southern wall of the nave. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.

been built in 1404 under the shepherding of Pope Gregory and Anastasius.<sup>56</sup> This double occurrence has been previously interpreted as “the display of the a knowledgement of two religious hierarchies and authorities, one western, and the other one eastern”.<sup>57</sup> The mentioning of an ecclesiastical authority in the context of church inscriptions is sometimes encountered in the Byzantine and Byzantine-Slavic world, but the recording of a political authority is far more frequent.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the two authorities mentioned in church inscriptions serve as the ktetor’s acknowledging of the legitimizing political and ecclesiastical structures, and play the role of validating the ktetor’s religious foundation by the effective political and ecclesiastical structures.<sup>59</sup> However, the mention of two hierarchs, one Catholic and the other one Orthodox, together in an Orthodoxrite church is a unique occurrence (if true).<sup>60</sup> Basing his judgment on the scholarship available to the archaeologist in the early-1990s, A. A. Rusu has incorrectly shown that the chronological framework within which the religious monument can be placed is formed, on the one hand, by 1387-1412 (i.e., the period during which a hierarch Athanasius/Anastasius occurs successively as Metropolitan of Severin, Argeș, and Metilene, respectively), and on the other hand, by 1406-1415 (i.e., the period of Pope Gregory XII’s pontificate).<sup>61</sup> However, according to recent research, it is uncertain whether Athanasius was later on the Metropolitan of Metilene (until 1412),<sup>62</sup> because the hierarch had completely disappeared from public life after December

should be equally dismissed, because the only place where he could have been represented within the votive composition was the western side of the image, which was destroyed in 1869-1870 by the creation of the south-western window of the nave. Provided that Matia was indeed included in the votive composition, his possible quality was that of son of one of the two noblemen, most likely of Vladislavu and Stana, whose son with unpreserved name is mentioned in the dedicatory inscription (line 2).<sup>55</sup>

Another important information conveyed by Ö. Nemes is that, on the northern wall (of the nave, most likely in the proximity of the representations of the holy kings of Hungary and the military saints on horseback), at that time there was another inscription mentioning the fact that the church had







AN 1

AN 2

AN 3

AN 4

AN 4

AN 5





1403 or August 1405, most likely as a consequence of his and other metropolitans' failure to depose the Patriarch of Constantinople, Matthew I (1397-1410).<sup>63</sup> Accordingly, the shepherding years of the two hierarchs (1387-1403/5 and 1406-1415, respectively) no longer coincide. This fact, together with the unprecedented, joint mentioning of the Orthodox and Catholic hierarchs in an Eastern-rite church, makes the authenticity of the information conveyed by Ö. Nemes doubtful in what the northern-wall inscription is concerned. Additionally, this information presents a series of new challenges for the dating of the mural ensemble in Ribița.

After having examined the fluctuating reading of the year offered by S. Dragomir in 1917 and 1930, respectively, the graphical features of the year's transcription published in the 1930 study, as well as the information previously conveyed by Ö. Nemes in 1868, A. A. Rusu offered the year 1414 "as new and correct dating" of the mural ensemble in Ribița.<sup>64</sup> In reality, however, this matter can no longer be categorically decided. As it can be seen in the ante-1930 photograph (Fig. 5), the year contained by the dedicatory inscription was lost at that point. After he consulted the same source in 1911, namely, the inscription's transcription made shortly after 1870 by the priest in Ribița, S. Dragomir achieved two diverging readings: 1414/5 (6922/3, i.e., **СЦКБ** or **СЦКР**) and 1417 (6925, i.e., **СЦКЕ**),<sup>65</sup> respectively. Only several years earlier (1868), when the dedicatory inscription's conservation state should not have been much different on its eastern side,<sup>66</sup> Ö. Nemes had offered a first, but different reading: 1404 (6912, i.e., **СЦКІ** for January-August).<sup>67</sup> Subsequently, one can assume that, between 1868 and 1870, the conservation state of the year in the final line of the inscription was rather precarious. This fact led to ambiguous readings/transcriptions, the equivoque being perceivable in S. Dragomir's publishing of the transcription itself (Fig. 6). Setting aside the first letter which cannot be other than **С** with a numerical

value of 6 or 6000, and the second one which, even though wrongly transcribed (**У** with a numerical value of 400) cannot be other than **Ц** with the numerical value of 900, the other letters designating the year's tens and units pose a number of problems. If the passing of the time has led to the blurring or fading of some of the signs' outlines, then the third letter could be either **К** (tens' digit with a numerical value of 20, as it appears in the transcription) or **В** (units' digit with a numerical value of 2, as Ö. Nemes seems to have read it). The outlines of the two letters are indeed similar and one could easily pass as the other in a badly-preserved inscription. As it can be seen in the transcription, the fourth fragmentary letter preserved with certainty only its vertical line, being thus interpreted by Ö. Nemes as **І** (10), and by S. Dragomir first as **В** (2) or **Р** (3) and later as **Е** (5). Subsequently, confronted with incomplete information, both Ö. Nemes and S. Dragomir – the latter relying at different moments on the same transcription by the priest in Ribița – tried to reconstruct the missing or unclear Cyrillic letters of the year. According to each of the readers' skill, one can explain all three different readings emerging from the uncertain character of the preserved information: 1404 (6912, i.e., **СЦКІ** for January-August); 1414/5 (6922/3, i.e., **СЦКВ** or **СЦКР**); and 1417 (6925, i.e., **СЦКЕ** for January-August), respectively.<sup>68</sup>

The year's detail in the final line of the dedicatory inscription has not survived and, therefore, one can no longer examine it critically in order to accurately establish the date of the church's building or painting. However, other inscriptions uncovered during the restoration of the past twenty years seem to suggest the possibility of distinct stages of decoration, as well as that of donors of mural painting other than those indicated by the votive composition. Near the triumphal arch and above the representation of St. John the Baptist on the southern wall of the nave, there is a severely damaged inscription, isolated by a red frame. It currently reads only: [...]**А** **ІК**[...] / **СА**[**АВ** ... **ВО**] **ГОУ** **ВЪ** **ВЪ**[**ЦЕ**...], that is, [...] / *gl[ory ...] to [G]od in eter[nity...]*. This inscription probably recorded another important event in the history of the church in Ribița (Fig. 9).<sup>69</sup> Near the right arm of the same St. John, there is another inscription invoking the forgiveness of sins for a certain Dobroslavu (unattested by written sources) and of his unnamed wife: **МОЛЕ (!) РАБ(Ъ) В(О)Ж(Н)І / ДОБРОСЛАВОУ /**

◀ Fig. 11: *Inscription next to an Evangelist (upper register) and two Church Fathers (lower register). Eastern side of the northern wall of the sanctuary.* Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.

▼ Fig. 12: *Detail of the inscription. Northern wall of the sanctuary.* Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.







▲ Fig. 13: *St. Nicholas Church in Densuș. Detail of the painter's signature. Credits: Vladimir Agrigoroaei.*

▼ Fig. 14: *St. Nicholas Church in Densuș. Painter Ștefan's signature next to a serving deacon on the eastern side of the lower register of the sanctuary. Credits: Vladimir Agrigoroaei.*



и подругиѣ / єго в(ог)ь да / п<р>оститъ(ъ), that is, *the servant of God Dobroslavu and his wife asks (!) to God to forgive* (Fig. 10). This supplicatory inscription attests the involvement of another character in the church's decoration, someone other than those appearing in the votive composition. By means of his material contribution sponsoring the execution of this votive image, Dobroslavu entrusted his and his wife's spiritual salvation to the intercession of the depicted St. John the Baptist. Another inscription, it too fragmentarily preserved and located on the northern wall of the altar, within the frame between the sitting figures of two Evangelists (Fig. 11),<sup>70</sup> was first noted in 1995 by I. Popa, the restorer specifying only that the inscription contained the year 1407.<sup>71</sup> However, this fragmentary inscription lacks precisely the year which has been irreparably lost; the remaining text reads: [...с(в)а т(ар)]о възн(есен)іє г(оспод)а н(а)ш(ε)го / [и(с)ов]са χ(р)ист)а .єі. лѣт(а) [шц...], that is, ... *Ascension of our [Hol]y God / [Jesus] Christ 15 the year [69...]* (Fig. 12).

The number .єі. (15) in this inscription cannot refer to the year's tens and units, as it has been probably assumed (6915 – 5508 = 1407), on account of the following reasons: (a) the number is clearly isolated by two dots, which makes it to be understood as an entity; (b) the letter а preceding it cannot represent the hundreds, its numerical value being either 1 or 1000; (c) usually, the letters with numerical value forming the year follow the word лѣта (years) and do not precede it; and finally (d) on the damaged area above the word лѣт(а), one can still see the traces of the titla which is rendered as a straight, horizontal line, similar to those above н(а)ш(ε)го or χ(р)ист)а, this fact indicating that the year expressed in letters with numerical value followed the word лѣт(а). Subsequently, the number .єі. (15) cannot be connected with the word лѣт(а), and it does not show the units and tens of a year, that is, of a bigger number composed of hundreds and thousands. The white line surrounding the partially-preserved inscription suggests that the text ended on its eastern side with the word н(а)ш(ε)го (line 1) and the year (now destroyed, line 2). The straight angle formed by this line on its western, lower side indicates that the inscription continued in this area, but probably not for long, as the figure of another

sitting Evangelist formed the pendant of the one visible towards east only in its lower half (Fig. 11). The inscription is, therefore, fragmentarily preserved in its two final lines and it most likely ended with the lost year coming after the word лѣт(а). Judging by the loss of the paint layer in the upper side, which has been previously covered by multiple layers of paint and whitewash, the information contained by the inscription's upper lines seems now to have been irretrievably lost. Considering the fact that the inscription could not extend too much on its western side and that the number .єі. (15) is not connected with the word лѣт(а), it is then possible for this number to be connected with възн(есен)іє (Ascension). This suggests, in turn, that the feast of the Ascension of the Lord happened on a day of 15.<sup>72</sup> This date was important enough for the history of the church in Ribița, being worthy of recording on the altar's northern wall during the execution of the mural decoration of this space. The inscription was painted on the same paint layer and was included from the very beginning in the altar's decorative program. Because the inscription of the votive composition played the role of the church's main dedicatory inscription, the altar inscription had, therefore, only a secondary function. Judging by its placing in-between the figures of two Evangelists who are depicted sitting and writing (currently, only one of them is partially visible) and considering that the text recorded a date, it is not excluded that the inscription also contained initially, in the area either destroyed or found still under modern paint,<sup>73</sup> the name/signature of the painter who executed the altar's mural decoration. Such a hypothesis is suggested by the often encountered practice in Byzantine manuscript painting, according to which the colophon – containing the copyist's or miniaturist's signature, as well as the date of that work's completion – is sometimes associated with representations of writing Evangelists.<sup>74</sup> Even though their iconographic context is different and the formula they use varies, there are many analogies of painters' inscriptions in the Transylvanian Orthodox milieu: the undated signature of painter Ștefan in the altar space of St. Nicholas Church in Densuș (Hung. *Demsus*, before 1443, Fig. 13-14) or the autograph inscription accompanied by date of painter Mihul of Crișul Alb (Hung. *Fehér-Körös*) on St. Gregory the Great's image in the narthex of the Monastery of Râmeț (Hung. *Remete*, probably 1377, Fig. 15-16).<sup>75</sup>

As shown by Sophia Kalopissi-Verti in her typological approach on church inscriptions containing names or signatures of painters, these make use of diversified formulae, but also often record the date of the painter's completion of his work.<sup>76</sup> Even though atypical for Byzantine and



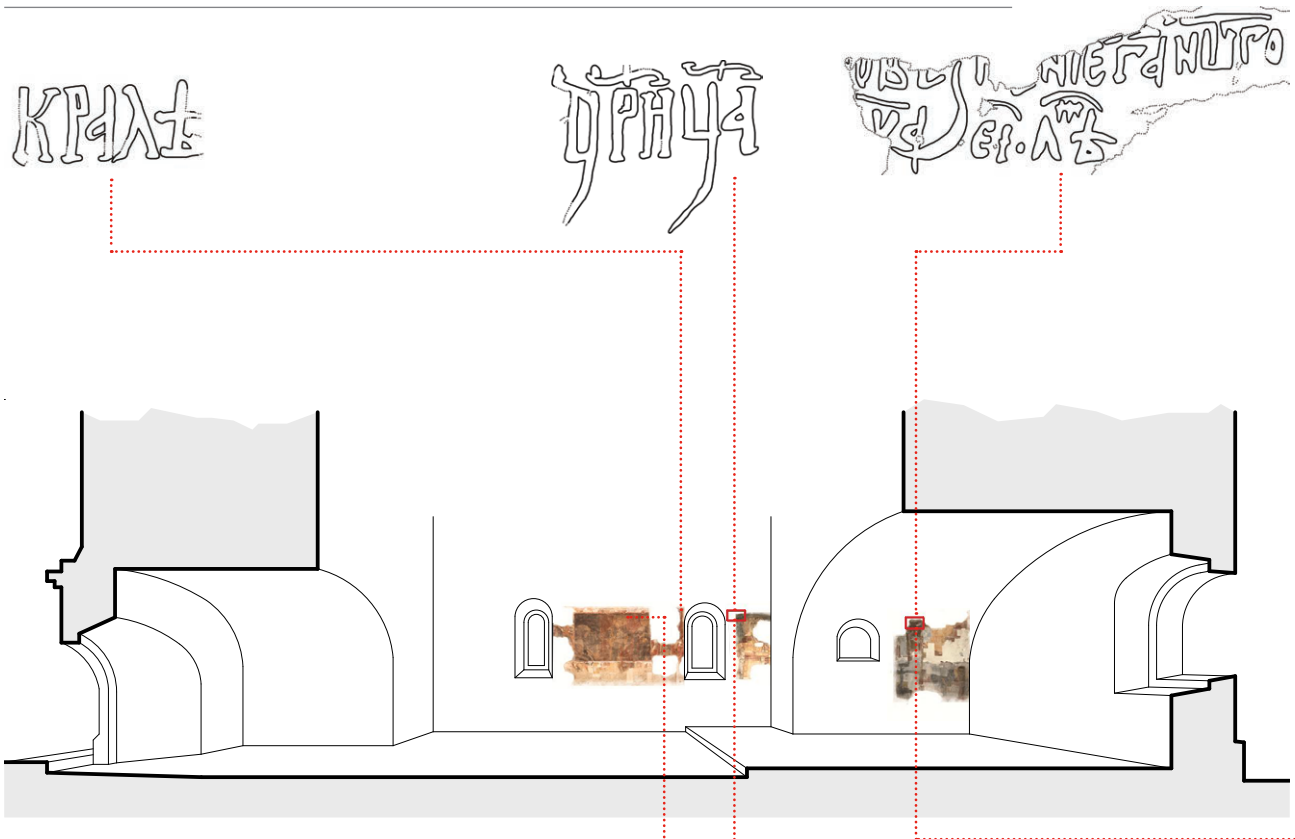
Byzantine-Slavic world, the inclusion of the day and month together with the year represents in fact a formula which is frequently employed by Slavonic church inscriptions in late-medieval Transylvania. Illustrative in this respect are the examples in Râmeț (painter Mihul's autograph inscription, Fig. 15-16), Streisângeorgiu (the 1408 dedicatory inscription), Densuș (the 1443 supplicatory inscription), Sălașu de Sus (Hung. *Felsőszálláspatok*, the dedicatory inscription carved in stone between 1519 and 1536), and, of course, the main dedicatory inscription in Ribîța itself.<sup>77</sup> Less common in the Byzantine and Byzantine-Slavic world, dating an event by means of a formula containing together the day, month, year, as well as a religious feast is sometimes encountered in medieval Slavic diplomatics or chronicle-writing.<sup>78</sup> This practice, in turn, is a specific feature of Latin diplomatics on the territory of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, Latin scribes usually establishing a close connection between a charter's issuing date and a religious event which happened around the moment recorded in the charter's text. It is not excluded, therefore, that the atypical dating formula found in the sanctuary in Ribîța to have been influenced by the Latin diplomatic pattern which Romanian Orthodox noblemen in Transylvania came directly into contact with as a consequence of the royal charters granted to them.<sup>79</sup> Being documents with great authority which confirmed their status and privileges, these charters were cherished enough by their beneficiaries that their meaningful acquiring could be sometimes recorded in the dedicatory inscriptions of their religious foundations, as it probably happen-

ed with the main dedicatory inscription in Ribîța.

Taking into account that the Ascension of the Lord is celebrated 40 days after Easter and that this important feast coincided for both Orthodox and Catholics until 1582, when Pope Gregory XIII introduced a new calendar reform, the only cases when the Ascension happened on a day of 15 (of May) were those when the Easter was celebrated on April 6. This occurred during the fourteenth and fifteenth century only in 1371, 1382, 1393, 1455, 1466, 1477, and 1488.<sup>80</sup> Given that the church's mural decoration can be dated on stylistic grounds to the period between the late-fourteenth century and the first decades of the following century,<sup>81</sup> the only year which the inscription on the sanctuary's northern wall could contain seems to be 1393.<sup>82</sup> From a paleographical and epigraphic point of view, this date is fully acceptable.<sup>83</sup> Certainly, one should any time consider the possibility of a miscalculation made by the author of the inscription on the northern wall of the sanctuary. However, in this case, the chances are considerably reduced for this thing to have happened. The inscription was not randomly added at a later time than the mural decoration, but was made on the same painting layer with the remaining frescoes in the altar, both of them (the inscription and mural decoration, respectively) being therefore coeval. The inscription is painted and surrounded by a frame (now partially preserved) which isolates it from the remaining figurative representations in the altar, the painter having destined it a distinct space within the decorative program's economy from the very beginning. Subsequently, having been made simultaneously with the entire mural decoration of the altar and having allotted to it a precise place in-between the figures of the two writing Evangelists, the date initially contained by the inscription should have referred to an event with special significance either for its author, the frescoes' commissioner(s), or the church's recent history. Given this meaningfulness of the inscription, it is

- ▼ Fig. 15: *St. Gregory the Great and the inscription of painter Mihul of Crișul Alb on the southern side of the door separating the nave from the narthex.* Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.
- ▲ Fig. 16: *Monastery Church in Râmeț. Detail of the inscription.* Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.





very unlikely for a calculation mistake to have occurred.

The epigraphic material of the monument is simultaneously rich and scarce. On the one hand, it provides for a diversity of hands, which is surprising for the church's modest size, and on the other hand, the number of inscriptions belonging to each hand is quantitatively reduced. These facts make the analysis of the material very difficult.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, there is no instance when all the signs of the alphabet are included in the writing of a single master and, therefore, our observations have only a preliminary and partial character. Noteworthy is the fact that none of the scribes was a Slavic speaker, nor were they proficient in the grammar of Old Church Slavonic. All inscriptions are characterized by misspellings, omitted letters, case disagreements and quite exotic abbreviations which are atypical for Slavonic titla.

Following the paleographical exam and comparison of handwritings, it was noticed that some letters have unique features (Fig. 17).<sup>85</sup> The letter  $\lambda$  in the inscription of the holy kings of Hungary has its long, upper part resembling the Greek  $\lambda$ , a feature which is missing in all other handwritings (Fig. 7-8, 17).

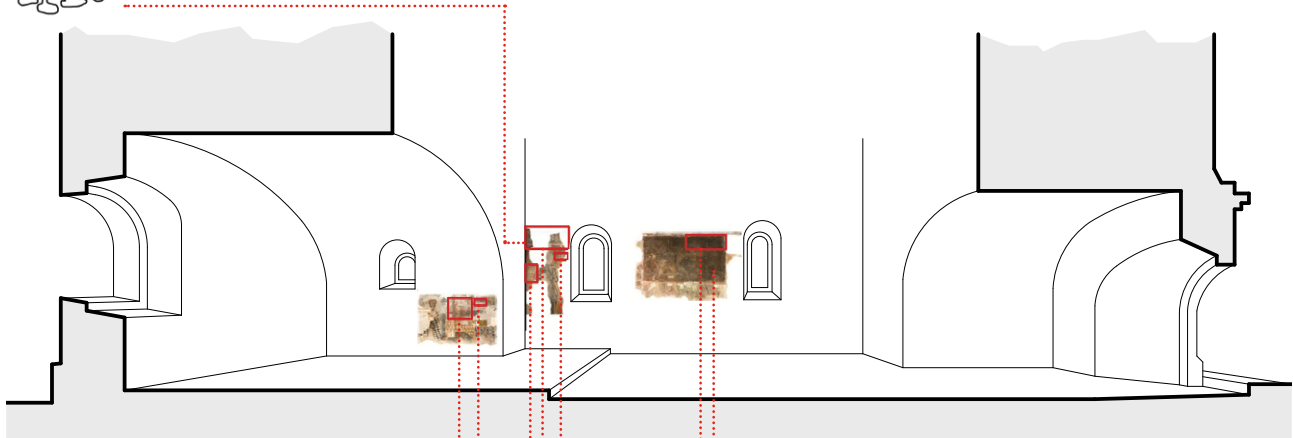
Several manners of writing have been noted for the letter  $\vartheta$ . Some letters are composed of two curves crossing twice, both in their upper and lower parts (the lay characters' inscriptions in the votive composition of the nave, Fig. 17, or the scene of St. Nicholas with Arius in the sanctuary, Fig. 17-18), whereas others are composed of a single, continuous line written from left to right with a downward loop.  $\vartheta$  in the main dedicatory inscription is again composed of a single, continuous line, but is written in opposite direction (i.e., from right to left) and has the left curve more fallen (Fig. 4-5, 17).

$\mathfrak{b}$  has distinctive features: the letters in the Hungarian holy kings' inscriptions have a tall, vertical line and another wavy, horizontal line (Fig. 7-8, 17);  $\mathfrak{b}$  in the dedicatory in-

	Holy Kings inscription:	St. Helena's inscription:
Letter $\lambda$		
Letter $\vartheta$		
Letter $\mathfrak{b}$		
Letter $\mathfrak{b}$		
Letter $\mathfrak{i}$		
Letter $\circ$		
Letter $\mathfrak{m}$		
Letter $\epsilon$		
Titla		

МОЛЕРІ БХІ  
 ДОБРОСЛАВУ  
 И ПОАРУЖИТ  
 Е ГОБЪАД  
 ПРС ПН

Fig. 17: Above, drawing of the word **кралѣ** ('king') in the Holy Kings inscription, the word **ц(а)рица** ('empress') next to St. Helena, the dedicatory inscription of the sanctuary and the Dobroslavu inscription on the southern wall of the nave. In the middle, two cross-sections showing the location of various inscriptions on the walls of the church. The West-East section (left), showing the location of the Holy Kings inscriptions, the one for St. Helena, and the dedicatory inscription in the sanctuary; the East-West section (right), showing the location of the St. Nicolas inscriptions, of the three inscriptions around St. John (dedicatory, Dobroslavu, and denominative), as well as the various inscriptions in the votive composition (dedicatory and ktetors). Below, a palaeographical table showing the letters discussed in the present study. Collage and drawings by Vladimir Agrigoroaei and Anca Crișan using the photos published in this study, a palaeographical table by Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu and Anna Adashinskaya, and the cross-sections published by Tugearu 1985, p. 140, pl. I-II.



Dedicatory inscription (sanctuary):	St. Nicholas and Arius inscription:	St. Nicholas inscription:	Dobroslavu inscription (St. John):	Dedicatory inscription (above St. John):	St. John's inscription:	Main dedicatory inscription:	Votive composition (titles):
Λ		Λ	Λ Λ		Λ	Λ Λ	Λ Λ Λ
	ϣ		ϣ ϣ	ΟΥ		ϣ ϣ ϣ	ϣ ϣ
⚡			⚡	⚡		⚡ ⚡	
				⊥	⊥	⊥ ⊥	⊥
⊥	⊥		⊥ ⊥	⊥		⊥ ⊥	⊥ ⊥
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙ ⊙	⊙		⊙	⊙ ⊙
			Μ			Μ Μ	Μ
Ϝ Ϝ	Ϝ	Ϝ	Ϝ Ϝ			Ϝ Ϝ	Ϝ Ϝ Ϝ
⤿			⤿			⤿	⤿
ϚϚϚ							



scription is very short and its hooked, horizontal line is placed very closely to the triangle's vertex (Fig. 4-5, 17).

The way of writing letter **Ѡ** in the main dedicatory inscription differs from all other manners, its lower loop being rounded and not triangular in shape (Fig. 4-5, 17).

All letters **і** have a round-shaped ornament either in the lower, upper, or middle part of their vertical line, but only **і** in the dedicatory inscription has none of these rounded, decorative elements (Fig. 17).

The letter **о** is written either as two curves (St. John the Baptist's name, St. Panteleimon's name, St. Nicholas' name in the apse, or the inscriptions of the lay characters in the votive composition) or as a loop written from right to left (the dedicatory inscription in the sanctuary, Fig. 12, or the scene of St. Nicholas with Arius, Fig. 18). **о** in the main dedicatory inscription has no distinctive loop crossing, but is written from left to right (Fig. 4-5); by comparison with the sanctuary's dedicatory inscription, it is thinner and its thicker sides are mirrored (Fig. 4-5, 12, 17).

**м** is written in a very elegant, Gothicizing manner only next to the holy kings of Hungary, where it has an elongated, y-shaped middle part (Fig. 7).

The letter **є** is distinctively inclined towards the left in the handwriting of the main dedicatory inscription, but it is inclined towards right in all remaining instances (Fig. 4-5, 17).

The analysis of the epigraphic material in Ribița led to some preliminary conclusions, which may clarify the division of work among scribes/painters. Both in the altar and nave, one can notice at least two hands. First, St. Panteleimon's name, the votive inscription above St. John (Fig. 9), St. Helena's name (Fig. 19), and St. Nicholas' name in the nave are characterized by elongated elements and pointed letters. The corresponding images are grouped in the eastern side of the nave, equally on the southern and northern walls, and on the triumphal arch (Fig. 17). Second, the letters in the scene of St. Nicholas with Arius in the altar (Fig. 18), the votive inscription next to St. John in the nave (Fig. 10), and the Church Fathers in the sanctuary are more rounded and display less decorative elements. One can equally notice unique manners of writing: the dedicatory inscription on the altar's northern wall is cursive and differs from the remaining inscriptions (Fig. 12, 17); however, taking into consideration the change of register (*polustav/ustav*), this could have been written by the second hand. The main dedicatory inscrip-

tion (Fig. 4-5) differs in many respects from the remaining inscriptions: it has stumpy letters, almost no decorative elements, a slight inclination towards the left, and rounded shapes which are found nowhere else. For the time being, due to the compact layer of soot situated on its final lines, the main dedicatory inscription's paleographical particularities are impossible to analyze in this area, but a significant difference seems to occur between the upper (lines 1-5) and lower (lines 5-9) halves. Finally, the short inscriptions next to the holy kings of Hungary (Fig. 7-8, 17) are quite expressive, having very elongated and Gothicizing letters with many decorative elements which are not encountered elsewhere inside the church: supplementary strokes and lines on the verges of the letters' units, wavy lines, as well as separation of words through four superposed dots arranged vertically.

To conclude these observations on the mural paintings of St. Nicholas Church in Ribița, one can safely state that the ensemble has been decorated by the will and financial means of several donors. This fact is clearly indicated by two of the four partially-preserved inscriptions: the main dedicatory inscription in the votive composition records the main ktors of the church, namely, brothers Vladislavu and Miclăușu together with members of their families (Fig. 3-5), whereas the prayer-inscription on St. John the Baptist's votive image evokes Dobroslavu and his unnamed wife (Fig. 10). As Dobroslavu is unattested by written sources, his relationship with the other founders remains unknown. The contributions of these multiple commissioners/donors of the mural painting could have been made either simultaneously or at different moments in time. The latter variant is suggested by the votive inscriptions' hypothetical chronology. The sanctuary inscription seems to offer the earliest date for the church's mural decoration (probably the year 1393); however, judging by its resemblance with others inscriptions inside the church (St. John the Baptist, Fig. 10, or St. Nicholas with Arius, Fig. 18), one can assume that at least part of the nave's frescoes were executed during the same stage. Analyzed from the perspective of its content, the surviving text of the main dedicatory inscription included in the votive

▼ Fig. 18: Detail of the inscription flanking the Holy Chalice in the scene of St. Nicholas and Arius. Lower register of the southern wall of the sanctuary. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.







▲ Fig. 19: Word **ц(а)рица** ('empress') accompanying the representation of St. Helena. Lower register of the northern wall of the nave. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.

composition could have contained two dates. One of them recorded probably the recovering in 1404 of the properties that were previously lost by the noble family in Ribîța, the dedicatory inscription playing thus the role of documenting the royal donation. The other, later date referred either to the completion of the church's decoration with murals, or to the supplementing or partial restoration of the existing mural ensemble.<sup>86</sup> The epigraphic and paleographical evidence points out to the existence of two unique hands which can be distinguished against the background of the other inscriptions in the church: the scribe which had written the main dedicatory inscription (Fig. 4-5) and the author of the inscriptions next to the figures of the holy kings of Hungary (Fig. 7-8, 17), respectively. The dedicatory inscription included in the votive composition is not distinguishable only when compared to the other inscriptions, but reveals also a series of internal contradictions (i.e., differently-sized letters, overlapping and crowded lines, or the absence of spaces in-

▼ Fig. 20, 21 and 22: Details of the founders (Vladislavu, Miclăușu, and Stana). Lower register of the southern wall of the nave. Credits: Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu.



between the lines, Fig. 4-5). This might indicate the partial replacing of an earlier dedicatory inscription, which was made *a secco* and at a time following the presupposed royal donation towards the noblemen of Ribiţa (after 1404). Such hypothetical updating of the inscription was probably intended to reflect the noblemen's change of status,<sup>87</sup> the same statement being valid also for the representation of the holy kings of Hungary that might have been added after the reconciliation with the Hungarian sovereign.<sup>88</sup>

The murals' restoration not being completed and its results not being yet published, what one can currently state about the dating of the mural paintings of St. Nicholas Church in Ribiţa is the fact that these should not be regarded as an ensemble which was created in a single stage by a unique ktetor. They are rather the result of the gradual participation of several donors, who are attested by the votive inscriptions located in various places inside the church. Brothers Vladislavu and Miclăuşu played the main role in the decoration of the church; however, besides them, other secondary, ktetorial instances should be kept in view. For St. John the Baptist's votive image and accompanying, supplicatory inscription to appear,

Dobroslavu and his wife had to play the role of commissioners/donors of the mural painting; they thus supported financially, but to a lower extent, the church's decoration with frescoes. The mural ensemble in Ribiţa was probably subjected to several transformations and additions, some of them having been prompted by the time's political context. The years once recorded (probably 1393 and 1404, respectively) were probably present in the church as composing parts of different votive inscriptions; they referred not only to the execution of a part of mural decoration, but also to significant events in the life of those closely connected to the religious building. Certainly, for the time being, these conclusions only have a hypothetical character, the completion of the restoration works of the murals of St. Nicholas Church in Ribiţa – whenever this will happen – being the only one able to confirm them or not. At any rate, the associative and cumulative character of the ktetorial act/gesture in Ribiţa is a reality that should be kept in mind by future research. Seemingly, this model of religious foundation functioned with predilection among Orthodox Romanians in the Lands of Zaránd and Hátszeg during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>89</sup>

### Notes :

1 The first version of this paper entitled "*Despre datarea picturilor murale ale bisericii Sf. Nicolae din Ribiţa în lumina unor informaţii noi*" was read at the conference "*Date noi în cercetarea artei medievale din România. Ediţia a unsprezecea*", Institute of Art History "G. Oprescu" of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, December 11-12, 2014. We are very grateful to Vladimir Agrigoroaei for his insightful comments and suggestions that helped us develop the thoughts expressed in that paper. For a slightly different version in Romanian of this study, see Năstăsoiu and Adashinskaya 2017.

2 Current place names (Romanian) are used throughout the text, the first mentioning of a place being accompanied also by its Hungarian variant that is not repeated afterwards. This does not apply to names of medieval administrative units, for which the historical name (Hungarian) was used instead.

3 Prodan 1960; Bulboacă 2013, p. 24, 31-32.

4 Tugearu 1985, p. 129-130.

5 For the church's ground plan and medieval stone carvings, see: Tugearu 1985, p. 129-130; Rusu 1991, p. 5, 9.

6 For the alterations of the church's medieval architecture happening after 1868, see: Tugearu 1985, p. 130; Rusu 1991, p. 5, 9.

7 The results of this short, but insightful campaign undertaken by D. Căceu are not published; however, significant observations were subsequently made in Popa 1995, p. 21-36, 56-61, 65-75, 86-88, 94-98.

8 The results of the latter campaigns for conserving and uncovering the murals are not yet published; we are grateful to restorer Silviu Petrescu for his courtesy in answering our questions and to Corina Popa for having facilitated this dialogue. According to S. Petrescu (correspondence with the authors on November 23, 2014), the works which he undertook are the following: 1995 – emergency interventions for protecting the murals during the consolidation of the building; 1996-1999 – emergency interventions for the conservation of the murals, which consisted of treatments stopping the biological attack and consolidating the support-layer; 2009-2011 – extensive research of stratigraphy in all of the church's interior divisions for the purpose of determining the order of interventions on the building and its mural decoration.

9 S. Petrescu, correspondence with the authors, November 23, 2014.

10 Only on the sanctuary's eastern wall did the examination of stratigraphy distinguish 12 layers of paint that overlap the frescoes, Rauca 2014b, p. 218-229, esp. p. 225, fig. 17-8. Observations concerning the frescoes' technique, materials, and methodology of execution, as well as the causes and effects of the murals' degradation were also recently made in Rauca 2014a, p. 55-62, 70, 83, 91, 95, 97, 100-101, 103, 106-107, 109-111, 113, 116, 127, 130, 138, 147-149, 151, 153-154, 159-161, 165, 167, 170, 172; we are grateful to the author for having made available to us several chapters of his PhD dissertation.

11 For descriptions and partial interpretations of the church's iconographic program, see: Tugearu 1985; Cincheza-Buculei 1995, with some corrections and additions to be made; Prioteasa 2011, p. 3-4, 35-39, 55-59, 64-65, 67-68, 77-90, 112, 122-125, 150-151, 159, 161-162, 166-167, 169-181, 193-196, 230-236; Prioteasa 2016, p. 30-34, 54-80, 102-104, 114-125, 168-173.

12 In 2012, local authorities took further steps for acquiring the funding needed for the continuation of the murals' conservation and restoration, but these efforts were fruitless until now – information communicated by S. Petrescu, correspondence with the authors on November 23, 2014.

13 Nemes 1868, p. 63-64.

14 Dragomir 1917, p. 18, 25.

15 Dragomir 1930, p. 244-258; ignoring the historian's fluctuating dating, the latter year was also used in Tugearu 1985, p. 138, 147.

16 Rusu 1991, p. 8.

17 Popa 1995, p. 24, fig. 6.

18 This date was accepted with uncritical enthusiasm in: Trifescu 2007, p. 167; Trifescu 2010, p. 39-40. The year 1407 is accepted hypothetically in: Rusu 2003-2004; Agrigoroaei 2012, p. 109 (n. 16), 111, 118.

19 Tugearu 1985, p. 130. According to S. Petrescu, correspondence with the authors on November 23, 2014, the pillars attached to the nave's walls were removed between 1994 and 1996.

20 Tugearu 1985.



- 21 Tugearu 1985, p. 132-133.
- 22 Dragomir 1930, p. 251-253.
- 23 Dragomir 1930, fig. 9-10, 12.
- 24 The parts in red are found only in the 1869-1870 transcription and therefore have an uncertain character. These parts are not visible in the dedicatory inscription, as it is preserved now, nor in the photographs made prior to 1930. We offer here the inscription's transcription and English translation as it has been published in Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 238-240.
- 25 Either "known" as such or a compound word.
- 26 Either the female name "Stana" appearing in line 2 or another word ending in -stana.
- 27 In his 1930 study, the historian mentions that he examined personally in 1911 the copy of the dedicatory inscription, which was then found in the archives of the Consistory in Sibiu (Germ. *Hermannstadt*, Hung. *Nagyszeben*), but that the document was lost ever since, Dragomir 1930, 252-253, n. 1. Although he gathered from the very same document the information published in his 1917 study, the author then mentioned, contrarily, that the copy had been communicated to him by Virgil Nistor, Dragomir 1917, p. 18, n. 3.
- 28 Dragomir 1917, p. 18, 25.
- 29 Dragomir 1930, p. 253.
- 30 The historian's inability to operate with unclear or incomplete information in Old Church Slavonic is indicated also by his elementary mistakes occurring in the transcribing of the inscriptions of the votive composition in Crișcior, Dragomir 1930, p. 242; for these errors, see Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 234.
- 31 Dragomir 1930, p. 252, n. 1.
- 32 Rusu 1991, p. 7.
- 33 Nemes 1868, p. 63-64. It is the merit of Rusu 1991, p. 7-8, for reappraising this information that was available also to Dragomir 1930, p. 246, but who chose instead to ignore it.
- 34 Nemes 1868, p. 64. Southern wall: „Hálálul az istennek emeltük ezen templomot, mert Zsigmond király, az atyánk Vratisláv által elvesztett jószágot ismét visszaadta. Mátyás, Vratisláv, Miklós de Ribice, Anna és Johanka leányukkal építették 1404-ben.” (‘Being grateful to God, we erected this church because King Sigismund returned the goods lost by our father Vladislav. Matia, Vladislav, Nicolae de Ribice, and daughters Anna and Ioanca built it in 1404’). Northern wall: „Építetett Gergely pápa és Anastazius lelkészége alatt 1404.” (‘It was built under the shepherding of Pope Gregory and Anastasius, 1404’).
- 35 Not necessarily in 1404, as noted by Rusu 1991, p. 7, but probably around that year, judging by the political context described henceforward.
- 36 The members of the noble family in Ribița appear in written sources only around mid-fifteenth century; for these documents, see Rusu 1991, p. 7, who assumes that Ö. Nemes had used in his account other documents (now lost) kept in his family's archive. According to Nemes 1868, p. 64, the ktetors' grandfather, *Nexa Theodor* (Neacșa Teodor), had received in 1369 from King Louis I the Great the confirmation of his ownership over the villages of Ribița, Mesteacănu de Jos (*Alsó-Mesztáka*), Mesteacănu de Sus (*Felső-Mesztáka*), Brad (*Brád*), and probably Țebea (*Tértfalva*), that is, the five villages that his son, Vladislav (I), had later lost.
- 37 For the events' chronology and development, see Engel 2001, p. 206-208.
- 38 Gündisch 1976; Gündisch 1977.
- 39 Among these, one can count other church founders too, such as the noblemen of Streisângeorgiu (Hung. *Sztrigyszentgyörgy*) and Crișcior, Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 219; for these documents, see Rusu 1989, p. 40-51.
- 40 This also happened to Nicholas Apafi, the commissioner of the frescoes in the sanctuary of his family church in Mălâncrav (Hung. *Almakerék*, Germ. *Malmkrog*), who was forgiven in December 1403 for having participated in the rebellion against the king; for this document, see doc. no. 1495 in Zimmermann 1902, p. 301-302.
- 41 The formula **ВЪ ДЪНИ** + name + **КРАЛЪ** (or any other title) is most often than not accompanied by the year, but this can be absent, too, in those cases when the dedicatory inscription records multiple events. For the formula's significance, see Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 215-216, where others examples (from both Transylvania and the Byzantine-Slavic world) are discussed; see also Agrigoroaei 2012, p. 114-115.
- 42 For Byzantine-Slavic analogies of dedicatory inscriptions which record other significant events in addition to a church's building and mural decoration, see: the dedicatory inscription above the western door of St. George Church in Staro Nagoričane (1312/3), which records the victory over the Turks of the ktetor, King Stefan Uroš II Milutin; the main inscription of St. Andrew Monastery in Treska (1389), which mentions in detail the land possessions which the ktetor endowed his foundation with, including the chryso-bull where these had been previously recorded; or the inscription above the southern entrance of the Transfiguration Church of the monastery in Zrze (ca 1400), which mentions the various changes of rulership experienced throughout a long period of time by the territory where that religious foundation was located in. For these inscriptions' text, see Stojanović 1902, p. 19, 53-54, 63.
- 43 In the case of those dedicatory inscriptions recording multiple events, it is only the year of the completion of the church's building or painting which is explicitly mentioned, whereas the other events are referred to generally through the formula **ВЪ ДЪНИ** + name and title. Because the year 1404 is mentioned for both inscriptions which he summarized in Hungarian, it is not excluded that Ö. Nemes extrapolated the date existing in the northern-wall inscription to that on the southern wall as well. Although we have no knowledge of dedicatory inscriptions mentioning distinct years, it cannot be excluded that the inscription in Ribița recorded indeed both the year of the church's building and painting and the year of the charter's acquirement by the local noblemen. This is especially so because the formula **ВЪ ДЪНИ** + name and title is often accompanied by the year an event happened in. See in this respect the examples discussed in Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 215-216. As it will be shown later, it is possible, however, that Ö. Nemes interpreted as 1404 the year that was partially preserved in the dedicatory inscription's final line.
- 44 For recording the text or content of notarial documents in Byzantine church inscriptions, see Kalopissi-Verti 2003.
- 45 Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 218-219; certainly, until the votive composition is cleaned and restored, this statement retains its hypothetical character. It is not excluded either that this disparity was caused by the scribe's or commissioners' wish to convey an extensive information in a rather limited space. For examples of updated dedicatory inscriptions, see below (n. 87).
- 46 Rusu 1991, p. 7.
- 47 For these inscriptions, see Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 239-240.
- 48 Dragomir 1917, p. 18, 25.
- 49 Rusu 1991, p. 7.
- 50 See in this respect: Tomeković-Reggiani 1979-1981; Stylianou

1982; Cvetković 2013; Năstăsoiu 2016.

51 Tugearu 1985, p. 133.

52 Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 209-210, 239-240.

53 Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 209-210.

54 Rusu 1991, p. 7.

55 Had the alleged Matia been the two nobleman's brother, then he should have been represented in front of the two wives.

56 Nemes 1868, p. 64.

57 Rusu 1991, p. 7.

58 See the examples discussed in Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 216-217.

59 Ibid.

60 The mentioning together of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, of the King of Jerusalem Amalric I, and of the Latin Bishop of Jerusalem Raoul in the bilingual dedicatory inscription of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem is the closest example we could find. However, this case is not analogous to Ribița, because the recorded secular and religious authorities have been directly involved in sponsoring the church's complete redecoration (1167-1169). For this case, see: Folda 1997, p. 389; Kühnel 2001, p. 359; Bacci 2015.

61 Rusu 1991, p. 7-8.

62 Suggestion made by Laurent 1945, p. 177-9.

63 For this episode, see: Dennis 1967; Kapsalis 1994, p. 52-93; Leonte 2012, p. 30-37. For the Metropolitan of Severin Athanasius, see: Șerbănescu 1970, p. 1212-5; Păcurariu 1980, p. 255; Trapp 2001, no. 389; Preiser-Kapeller 2008, p. 345, 481.

64 Despite the fact that, according to the chronological limits given by the two hierarchs' shepherding and accepted by the archaeologist, this thing could happen only during the 1406-1412 interval, Rusu 1991, p. 7-8.

65 Judging by the fact that the dedicatory inscription records the completion on July 15 of the church's building and painting, the variant **СҮКЪС** (6926) for September-December was probably excluded as unnecessary.

66 That is, in the area where the year was found, because the inscription's western side had been covered (and consequently destroyed) in 1869-1870 by one of the pillars supporting the nave's new vault.

67 The same reasoning considering the date of July 15 had led probably to the exclusion of the variant **СҮРІ** (6913) for September-December.

68 If one accepts that the third letter was **к** (20), and the fourth one was composed of a vertical line on its left side, then the possible readings of the year are the following: **СҮКЪВ** (6922, i.e., 1413/4), **СҮКР** (6923, i.e., 1414/5), **СҮКЕ** (6925, i.e., 1416/7), or **СҮКН** (6928, i.e., 1419/20). If the year's third letter was **в** (2), then the fourth letter could be only **і** (10), that is, **СҮВІ** (6912, i.e., 1403/4), or the fourth letter could be absent altogether: **СҮВ** (6902, i.e., 1393/4). For the last variant, see below (n. 82).

69 The inscriptions discussed henceforward have been published in Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 240.

70 Currently, the fresco's western side is either damaged or whitewashed, and only the eastern figure of an Evangelist is visible; on the lower, southern side of the vault, the uncovered fresco fragments attest to the other two Evangelists' existence.

71 Popa 1995, p. 24, fig. 6.

72 It cannot be the date of July 15 recorded by the dedicatory in-

scription (line 9), because this hypothesis would imply that the Easter had been celebrated that year in early July, a fact completely impossible.

73 It is possible, too, that this area's mural decoration (currently whitewashed) was damaged before its covering.

74 For such an example, see fols. 93v-94r of a Gospels book (Cod. 2, currently kept in the Ivron Monastery, but coming from the Holy Trinity Monastery in Esoptron, Chalke, ca 1075-1150), cat. no. 45 in Evans 1997, p. 92, with bibliography.

75 For these inscriptions' text, translation, analysis, and bibliography, see Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 215-216, 230, 236-238.

76 Kalopissi-Verti 1994.

77 For these inscriptions' text, translation, analysis, and bibliography, see Năstăsoiu 2016, p. 235, 237-239, 241, 243.

78 For examples of charters, see: ... **ВЪ ЛѢТО С҃ВНД. МѢСЕЦА АПРІЛЬ • ДІ • ДНЬ ВЪ ВЕЛИКИ И МНОГО-СВѢТЛИ И РАДОСТНЫ ПРАЗДНИКЪ ВЪСКРСЕНІА ХРИСТОВА...** (1346 charter of King Stefan Dušan); **ЗАКОНЪ БЛАГОВѢРНАГО ЦАРА СТЕФАНА ВЪ ЛѢТО С҃ВНЗ ІНДИКТИОНА • В • ВЪ ПРАЗНИКЪ ВЪЗНЕСЕНІА ГОСПОДНІА МѢСЕЦА МАІА • КА • ДНЬ** (King Stefan Dušan's Law of 1349), Novaković 1898, p. 4, 6. For chronicles, see the following example: **ВЪ ЛѢТО 6556. СВЯЩЕНА ВЪСТЪ СВЯТАЯ СОФІЯ ВЪ НОВѢГОРОДѢ НА ВОЗВЕДВІЖЕНІЕ ЧЕСТНАГО КРЕСТА ПОВЕЛѢНІЕМЪ ВЕЛИКАГО КНЯЗЯ ЯРОСЛАВА.**, Kloss 2007, p. 26.

79 See, for instance, a series of formulae appearing in Hungarian Latin charters which have as beneficiaries precisely Transylvanian Orthodox nobleman in the area: *Datum in Wywar, die dominico proximo post festum Assumptionis virginis gloriose, anno domini millesimo quadringentesimo quarto; Datum Tirnavie, secunda die festi beati Bartholomei apostoli, anno domini M<sup>mo</sup> CCC<sup>mo</sup> quarto; or Datum in festo beati Michaelis archangeli, anno domini millesimo quadringentesimo quarto...*, Rusu 1989, p. 41, 43, 46, 49.

80 See in this respect Segui 2013.

81 For the mural painting's bibliography up to 1998, see Porumb 1998, p. 336; for studies published afterwards, see: Agrigoroaei 2012; Prioteasa 2011; Năstăsoiu 2016; Prioteasa 2016. The authors reserve their right to be selective, referring here only to those scholars who, after 1998, brought a real contribution to the knowledge of the mural ensemble, expressing their thoughts within the limits presupposed by the academic discourse.

82 According to the reasoning expressed when examining critically the year's transcription by S. Dragomir (n. 68), the year **СҮВ** (6902, i.e., 1393 for September-December or 1394 for January-August) is one of the possible readings for the date in the main dedicatory inscription. However, according to the information contained by the altar inscription, this refers to a feast happening probably in May; subsequently, for the January-August period, the year's spelling is **СҮА** (6901, i.e., 1393), a variant which, from the point of view of its graphical particularities, is difficult, but not impossible to be accepted for the vanished year in the main dedicatory inscription. Compare in this respect the paleographical features of letter **а** in the dedicatory and altar inscriptions (Fig. 4-5, 12); this letter is composed indeed of a vertical line, but on its right, not left side.

83 According to Christo Andreev (PhD, specialist in Slavonic paleography, Institute of Art Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia), whom we consulted in this respect. We are equally grateful to Christo Andreev for expressing his opinion on the altar inscription and to Emmanuel Moutafov for facilitating this consultation. We should mention, too, that Chr. Andreev made a read-

ing which is identical with ours, the latter not having been communicated previously to him.

84 In the current stage of research, only the inscriptions on the lower register of the three divisions of the inner space (sanctuary, nave, and room below the western tower, respectively) have been examined; the inscriptions of the upper-register, narrative scenes in the nave have been left out due to the accessibility problems they pose. For the time being, our observations concern only the inscriptions of certain scenes; however, we intend to publish in the future the complete epigraphic and paleographical analysis.

85 Even though the paleographical features have been examined for all alphabet signs, we present on this occasion only a selection of the most representative elements.

86 One should note that the years hypothetically contained by the two original dedicatory inscriptions in the sanctuary (i.e., probably 1393 and post-1404, respectively) coincide with the different shepherding years of Metropolitan of Severin Athanasius/Anastasius and Pope Gregory XII (i.e., 1387-1403/5 and 1406-1415, respectively). Such situation rules out the contradiction in the information communicated by Ö. Nemes, and supports the hypothesis that the church in Ribîța has been decorated with frescoes in different stages.

87 The hypothetical updating of the main dedicatory inscription in Ribîța would not be an unique case, direct analogies being encountered in several Cretan churches: names of donors have been

gradually added in the free space after the completion of the inscriptions of St. George Church in Anydros (Selino, Chania, 1323), and Sts Constantine and Helena Church in Voutas (Selino, Chania, first half of the fourteenth century), whereas in the case of the dedicatory inscription of the Panagia Church in Beilitika near Kakodiki (Selino, Chania, 1331-1332), an empty space was deliberately left in the middle of the inscription, so that it could be filled in later. For these examples, see: Lymberopoulou 2010, p. 170, fig. 6-7, and Tsamakda 2016, 230-231, fig. 17-18; the inscriptions are published in Gerola 1932, no. 5, 15, 41, p. 433, 443-444, 462.

88 According to Popa 1995, p. 68, the malachite green pigment has been used only for several scenes in the nave's lower register, namely, the ktetors' votive composition, the Holy Kings of Hungary, and St. George fighting the dragon. One can assume that the three scenes are the work of a single workshop, which created these representations during a single decoration campaign. It is not excluded either that the painters used preferentially this expensive pigment for the most representative and status-conveying depictions in the church.

89 For multiple donors of mural painting in Transylvanian Orthodox churches, see the examples in Densuș, Hălmăgiu (Hung. *Halmágy*), Leșnic (Hung. *Lesnyek, Lesnek*), Sălașu de Sus, Strei (Hung. *Zeykfalva*), and Streisângeorgiu, Năstăsioiu 2016, where an analysis of the model of Orthodox patronage in late-medieval Transylvania is offered.

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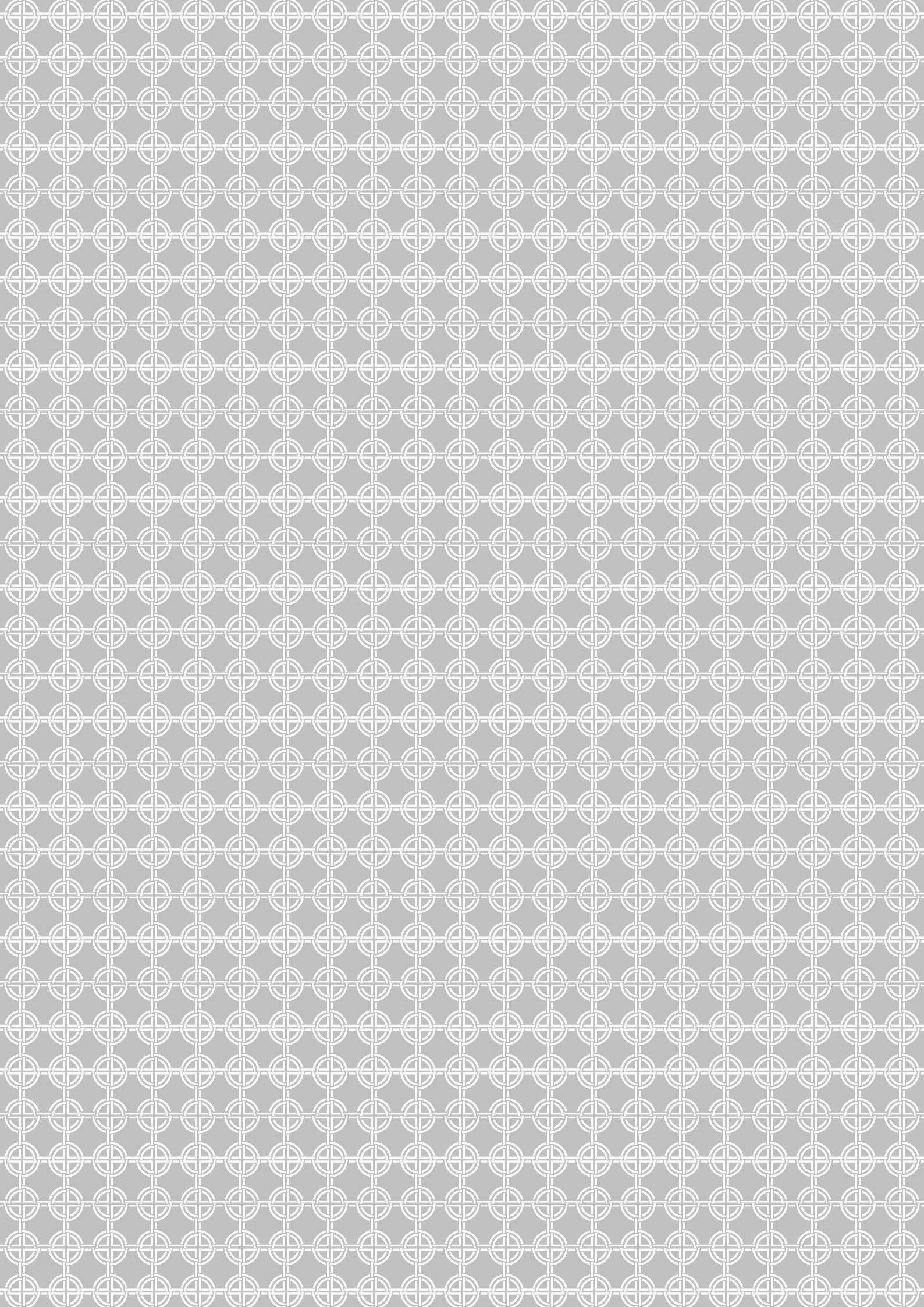
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