We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

6,900
Open access books available

185,000
International authors and editors

200M
Downloads

Our authors are among the

154
Countries delivered to

TOP 1%
most cited scientists

12.2%
Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?
Contact book.department@intechopen.com

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.
For more information visit www.intechopen.com



Chapter

Cultural Heritage of a Three Centuries Old Wooden Church

Patricia Săsăran, Ancuța Țenter and Lorelay-Diana Jianu

Abstract

The responsibility, decisiveness and aim of the villagers from Drăghia, Maramureș county, Romania, in preserving their three-century old wooden church is a model worth following by other communities, considering the density of such monuments in this region. The church is the testimony of the values and faith of the community there. Unfortunately, weather and history's imprint lead to a visible degradation of the place of worship in its structure, architecture and paintings. The community got involved and took steps to obtain funds in order to save the church. Thus, in 2006 the church was restored and saved. However, the interior paintings are in a state of severe degradation, and they also need urgent restoration and conservation. The efforts of this simple community and its fervent struggle to preserve this heritage are astonishing. The fact that they considered the church as the most valuable legacy they can leave their descendants is to be appreciated.

Keywords: cultural heritage, sustainability, cultural patrimony, cultural identity, church, community

1. Introduction

The wooden church dominated the first era of religious buildings on the entire territory of Romania. Symbol of human life, it is the main place where life unfolds on spiritual, individual but also collective coordinates. The founding of a church was and remained an exemplary action, which is kept in the conscience of each community [1]. In the following we will present a case study based on the wooden church from Drăghia village and how this place of worship was kept until today, thanks to the villagers who saw in it a heritage and felt responsible for its salvation.

2. Presentation

2.1 Historical presentation of wooden church

Drăghia is a village in the Land of Lăpuș, in Maramureș county. The first mention of the village dates back to 1393 with the Hungarian name of Dragusfalva [2]. It was mentioned in the document that on the 13th of October 1392, in Gilău, members of the Bánffy family of Losonc split between them certain holdings, among which Dragusfalva [3].

IntechOpen

The historian Kádár József mentions that between 1541 and 1546, the territory of Drăghia belonged to the lord of the Ciceu citadel, Petru Rareș of Moldova. He claims that the name of the village Drăghia comes from the name of voivode Drag. The recorded names of the village over the years varied as follows: in 1553, Dragia; 1586, Dragie; 1608, Dragialy; 1629, Draghie; 1733, Brugia; 1750, Dregie; 1787, Dregye; 1850, Dragya and Dregyie; 1857, Dragyia; and 1890, Dragosfalva [4].

The village is remarked by the presence of a wooden church (**Figure 1**) built in 1706, as testified to this day by the Latin inscription found left of the entrance: *Anno 1706 D. 14 obrys.* It is under the patronage of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel, and today, it is part of the Lăpuș Deanery, belonging to the Orthodox Episcopate of Maramureș and Sătmar. It is made of oak wood, harvested from the oak forest found higher up from the church, and was paid for using donations from the villagers.

The master builder was Both Griga, as attested by the inscription found above the entrance: *Ботх Грига Мѫщиръ*. To this day one can see the following inscription on the holy doors: *Ячастъ помань аѲ пътйть Тома Опришъ ший соаца са Мариє ший* [...], which tells us that the church was painted in 1797 by Petre and was paid for by Toma Opriș and his wife, Maria; their sons Filip and Ștefan; and his sister Teodora Anisia.



Figure 1.
Holy Archangels Church, Drăghia.

The painter was church singer Petre Diacul from Preluca, who also painted the churches from Răzoare and Rușor. The painting is in folk-art style with baroque features, much like most other wooden churches in the area [5]. Another year found on the doors is 1773, probably the year that the altar was built. In the middle of the nave's dome, there is a painting of the Holy Trinity, the Father being depicted as "the Ancient of days" holding a globe in his hand inscribed with the year 1857. The church might have been partially repainted at that time. Thus, the collective memory is maintained through the various inscriptions and dates marked on the wood, which place us to a certain time and offer us information that speaks about founders, masters, contributions to the building and decoration of the church, and repairs or changes [1].

2.2 Monument characteristics

The church is 12.40 m long, 4.45 m wide, 7.50 m high at the ridge and 15.50 m high at the tower's spire. The base and the walls are all made of oak beams placed on a dry-laid stone foundation [6].

The entrance to the church is 161 cm high and 85 cm wide, forcing most people to bow in reverence while entering. The door was painted on the outside with the Archangel Michael, but unfortunately it has faded to the point where you can just make out a shade of the Archangel.

The building plan (**Figure 2**) [7] is found throughout the area, the church being divided into a narthex, nave and altar. The narthex has a polygonal shape, covered with a straight ceiling, above which the bell tower is situated. The ceiling is painted with cherubs, and the walls are painted with images of the Myrrhbearers and of wise and foolish virgins from the Gospel of Mathew. The narthex was where the women would attend the mass [8].

The nave is rectangular, with a dome, and is separated from the narthex by a wall with an opening and a door. The door is painted with two saints and, in the lower part, the tree of life in a pot. The door frame is engraved with symbols such as

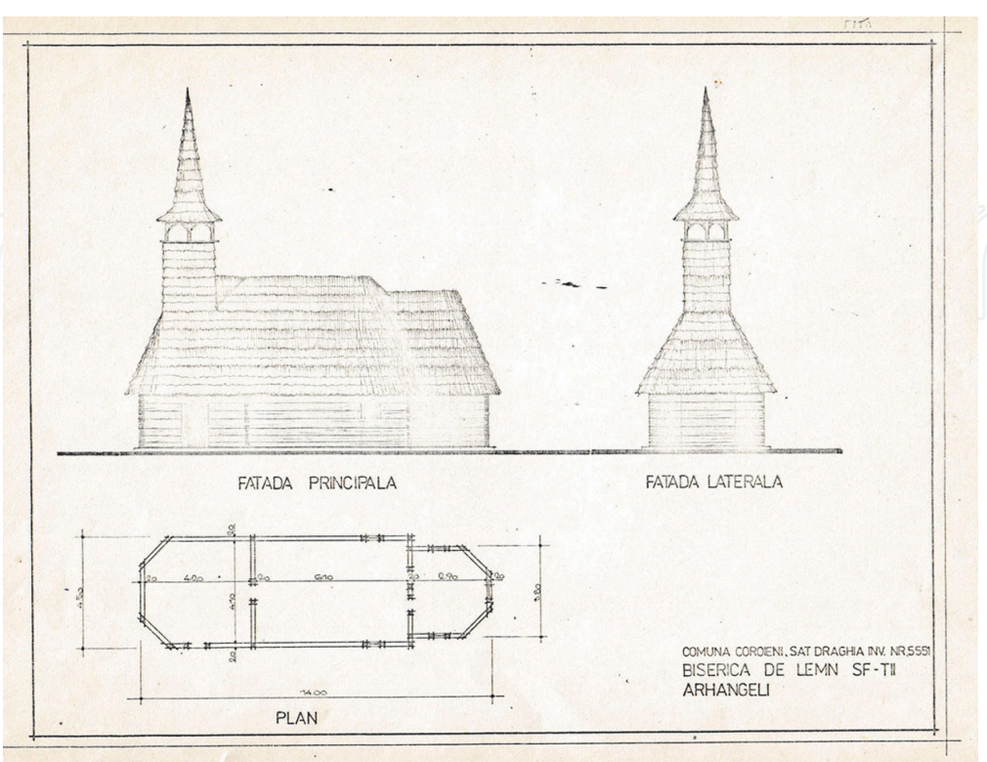


Figure 2.
The building plan of the Holy Archangels Church, Drăghia.

the six-petaled rosette, honeycomb and wolf's teeth. The opening is fitted with small turned columns of various forms that were painted white [9]. Between the nave and the altar is the iconostasis. The altar is in a domed polygonal apse.

After the church was built, the land immediately next to it became a graveyard. In front of the church, there are three stone slabs, two large and one smaller, that were used as tables during the agape feast.

The painting is tempera on canvas and wood and covers the entirety of the church interior. In order to make a continuous painting medium, the painters applied bands of hemp canvas stuck with animal glue to the gaps between the beams and planks. In the altar there is a part of the wall that is entirely covered with canvas, not just the gaps.

The painting in the nave is badly damaged, many scenes being unrecognisable, with only some spots of colour left. Among the visible images, there are Jacob's ladder (**Figure 3**), the Holy Trinity, Elijah riding to the heavens in his fire chariot



Figure 3.
Painting of angels climbing Jacob's ladder.

and the four Evangelists. The paintings on the iconostasis, being sheltered, are entirely recognisable. The Twelve Apostles are depicted with Jesus as a High Priest in their middle, and at the top of the iconostasis, there is a wooden cross painted with Jesus crucified. Above the iconostasis there is a semicircular opening on the frame, of which there are painted portraits of the six prophets from the Old Testament, while on the other side of the cross, the sun and the moon are painted (**Figure 4**).

In the altar we have the Virgin Mary with the Protecting Veil painted on the dome; above the round window, we have the three Archangels, while on their left and right, we have the scenes of Cain and Abel's offerings. The walls are painted with portraits of 12 great hierarchs, with Melchisedech in front of the altar stone.

2.3 Historical monument

An interest for the past was recorded in the collective memory even from ancient times. There is a certain respect in the popular conscience for old buildings, whether they are from time immemorial or built by recent ancestors. The first writings about the antiquities scattered throughout the three Romanian lands were recorded in the writings of Ion Neculce, Miron Costin and Constantin Cantacuzino-Stolnicul. The history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recorded the first attitudes towards what would later be called historical monuments [10]. The idea of conserving and valuing old buildings of historical value was present in our country even from the Middle Ages. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the documents confirm the existence of a romantic spirit in the Romanian society as well, through its interest for ruins evocative of past glory. In intellectual circles, the idea of protective legislation for the material remains of previous cultures was discussed often. Thus, in 1874 the Boerescu Regulation is passed, which stipulated the founding of "the Commission for Public Monuments". A new law for the conservation of national monuments is passed in 1881, called "The Law for the Conservation and Restoration of Public Monuments", but also "The Law for the Discovery of Ancient Monuments and Objects". In 1913, "The Law for the Conservation and Restoration of Historical Monuments" followed, and the legislative act HCM nr. 661/22.04.1955 deals with "the keeping and usage of cultural monuments", consecrating the passing



Figure 4.
Detached canvas strips.

of the most historical monuments in the property of the state and the selective financial support of only those monuments that are state property [11].

This was the beginning of the interest in saving historical monuments, the wooden church in Drăghia being officially declared one in 1967.

As is the case with most villages, a new church made of bricks was built, the one in Drăghia dating to 1939, and the old wooden church was left nonfunctional.

2.4 Facts

The old church on the hill undergoes, thus, years of relative isolation, particularly during the Second World War. Slowly, the wooden shingles give in here and there, rain seeps in, and a good portion of the interior painting is destroyed forever, while at the same time, the clay soil on which the church is built slowly moves downhill and threatens its existence entirely. During the war there were very few men in the village, many died on the front, and those that were left or returned were either ill or old. After the war, the Communist regime took power and promoted its atheist ideology while at the same time persecuting the various religions found in the country. The regime was against maintaining a place of worship—thus "In those hard times, the Romanian Orthodox Church and other religious creeds were subject to many pressures, intimidations, hindrances, restrictions, and persecutions that lead to many victims and much suffering, both physical and moral" [12]. The village's economic power and workforce were thus weakened. In this context, the wooden church was not repaired for quite a while.

However the parish archives show that the church's administration committee met on the 22nd of August 1942 and had as first curator Sima Constantin "who after finding that all members are present, opens the meeting bringing to the fore the state in which the old church is, and that it wouldn't be Christian for a place of worship, from where for hundreds of years prayers have ascended to our Creator, to be destroyed". The faithful and the committee decide that "the old church should be moved from this dangerous site without being damaged, namely to the place called Holly Garden, found at about 800 m from the edge of the village, and to be installed and covered, and serve as monastery, in order to address further prayers to the Almighty from that place that the faithful from Drăghia called sacred for a long time, having proof of this from the oldest faithful still alive". The document was signed by Sima Ioan, Rad Constantin, Cosma Ioan and Radu Ioan. Being a state of war and under Hungarian administration, this plan could not be carried out, so the church remained on its initial spot.

In 1957 a native priest Petru Radu returns to his place of birth in order to preach, Drăghia being a subsidiary of the Dealu Mare parish back then. The priest gets involved quickly in the salvation of the old church. He planted plum and black locust trees in order to stabilise the soil, and repaired, together with his parishioners, small portions of the roof. In 1960 wider repairs are made to the roof, but the greatest achievement is that from 1967, when the church is included on the Historical Monuments List, under the code LMI: MM-II-m-A-04569, its inclusion being approved by The Directorate of Historical Monuments from the Department of Worship, no. 14301-1514 from the 5th of September 1967. In 1970 all of the church's wooden shingles are replaced with the help of the County Museum. For the moment, the church's existence is no longer threatened. On Wednesday, the 16th of May 1979, "the lightning rod is installed on the church. The lightning rod was obtained thus: Cosma Ioan from Deal, no. 61, from Dealu Mare, the brother of the wife of the sexton from Drăghia, donated a silver coin which I've melted and placed on the tip of a lightning rod that belonged to a foreman from Târgu Lăpuș; the iron rope and the grounding were received from I.R.E.M., and the nails were made by

the blacksmith Boboș Petre. When it was installed, a scaffold was built up to the bells, and from there a ladder was placed reaching the top of the tower. Crișan Gavril, 43 years old, climbed the ladder and installed it. He was a miner at the Paroșeni mine, near Lupeni, but he was on leave those days. A number of men from the village worked at the scaffold, among which Bârtaș Ioan" [13].

Religious life revives as well, as Fr. Petru holds Holy Mass once a month at this altar and celebrates Vespers on the first day of Easter. The patron saints are celebrated on the 8th of November each year, and the parishioners are attending in large numbers on the hill where the village's Christian life truly began.

In 2006, the church turned 300 years old, but it was found to be in a badly damaged state. The terrain just north of the church slid perilously towards the northern face of the church, partly burying it to a height of up to 25–60 cm. This led to the severe degradation of the church's wooden base, and the deterioration of the wooden shingles led to the deterioration of the upper roof framework and of the purlins under the effect of rainwater.

Given this state, the Maramureș county Cultural Directory of Culture declared the church in collapse. A large-scale and urgent intervention was greatly needed. After signalling the state of the church to the Ministry of Worship and Culture, 100,000 RON were transferred from the Government's reserve fund to the fund of the Ministry of Culture. Then the folder was needed to be finalised in order for the money to be sent to the church's account. The Manisa București company, through architect Niels Auner, wrote the project no. 652/2006 *Reabilitare/Consolidare Biserica Sfinții Arhangheli Mihail și Gavriil-Drăghia*. The company Rustic Ltd., Baia Mare, skilled in restoration work, executed the work with a team led by Vasile Dușinschi and administered by Cornel Cușner.

The restoration and consolidation work required numerous interventions. Since the church interior was painted, a protective tent was needed to protect it during the works. The entire roof framework was removed, since it was badly damaged, leaving only the frame of the tower. Then, the entire church was lifted (**Figure 5**), using a jack and wedges, to a height that permitted the foundation work to be carried out.



Figure 5.
The lifting of the church.

Once lifted, the existing stone foundation was dismantled, and a new foundation made of reinforced concrete was poured on the entire base of the church, as well as two crossbeams that would sustain the dividing walls between the three rooms. The stone foundation was rebuilt over the concrete one, keeping the old architecture. The wooden base was replaced with oak beams that were treated to protect them from rot and fire. Some of the beams were dismantled and either restored or replaced. The building was placed on the new base and the new foundation, and then the new roof framework was built. A scaffold was built in order for the workers and materials to easily reach the roof. The old wooden shingle covering was badly damaged by the weather and had many holes made by green woodpeckers, so it had to be replaced, and the birds' access to the tower was hindered using fine-mesh netting. The cross from the tip of the tower was restored as well and placed back in its place. The finishing work was also performed, on the floors and woodwork. The work ended with the installation of the lightning rod.

A wooden gate decorated in Maramureș style was placed at the entrance to the churchyard, and a stone path with steps leading to the church was laid. The churchyard was fenced with a double wooden fence, and exterior lights were placed around the church and on the path.

The work began on the 2nd of November 2006, when the weather was no longer favourable and access to the church was difficult. On the 8th of November, the day of its patron saints, an icon of the Holy Archangels painted by Prof. Costea Constantin from Oradea was sanctified in the churchyard. The Archangels came to the help of the workers, as the weather turned fair almost until Christmas Eve, when the work was completed. During the excavation for the foundation, a stone cross was found, possibly used as a foundation stone. More funds were acquired the following years, reaching a total sum of almost 300,000 RON, thus covering the entire costs of the work.

In 2011, a team of specialists from Bucharest led by the Prof. Dr. Handrea Dorin, with the help of Marin Coteț iu, drafted the project for the restoration and conservation of the interior painting of the church. The estimated cost for the work was 350,000 RON. In the summer of 2012, a donation of 9000 RON was received and was used for the restoration of the holy doors and for some urgent restoration work in the narthex.

The works done constituted a veritable crown of honour placed on the old trunk of the church as it celebrated its 300th anniversary. The funds were attained thanks to one of the locals, Lucia Radu Stângă (decision no. 597 from the 10th of May 2006, concerning supplementing the budget of the Ministry of Worship and Culture from the reserve fund available to the government in 2006, for the reparation of The Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel Church from the village of Drăghia, Coroieni commune, Maramureș county), and the parishioners helped out with the meals and lodgings of the restoration team. Some gave money donations as well, and others donated the wooden shingles used to cover the church.

It was a great achievement for the villagers, their forefathers' church being granted a new lease of life for a few more centuries. In this same period, the television station Axa TV, from Baia Mare, made two short films about the church, called "The ship on the hill" and "New vestment" by Smaranda Stângă.

Steps are being taken regarding the conservation and restoration of the paintings. The project was drafted and sent to the Ministry of Culture, but the funds still have not been approved.

During the restoration and rehabilitation works from 2006, some planks from the dome of the nave were replaced, as the project supervisor considered them too degraded to be returned to their place. It is possible that there were still some faint paint marks on them which could have helped figure out what was painted on them. In the past, some of the planks from the narthex's ceiling were removed and lost. As a

consequence of rainwater seeping in, the wood and the painting on it were badly damaged. Another cause of damage were the temperature fluctuations between night and day, which led to volumetric changes of the wooden structure that resulted in the chipping and fissure of the paint layer, leading to a complete loss of painting in some large areas. This phenomenon is particularly intense on the southern side of the church, which receives more sunlight during the day than the other sides.

In the current context of climate change and the impact on historical monuments in their conservation area, currently the church is in the attention of specialists from Ovidius University of Constanta, ICECHIM Bucharest and Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca for new holistic investigations through analysis by advanced methods for correct diagnosis. A study was performed to analyse the physical parameters of temperature, humidity, pressure and natural radioactivity by measuring the radon concentration inside the church.

The research team considers that archaeomaterials are a good solution through high degree of compatibility with the original pigments and all materials.

Following the degradation of the binder and the volumetric changes suffered by the wooden support under moisture gain and loss, the paint layer lost its adhesion to the wood, leading to chipping. Significant losses of paint layer are ascertained, even all the way to the wooden support, caused by dusting or involuntary rubbing and hitting on the surface. For example, the areas that were protected by the pews of the cantors hold more paint than those next to them. Still, these areas and the iconostasis have more damage caused by the metal nails driven in the wood.

The partial detachment of the canvas strips (**Figure 4**), stuck to cover the gaps between the planks, led to the exfoliation and loss of the paint layer found on them. Numerous bands detached completely of the support and led to the permanent loss of the paint layer. Furthermore, there are hints of a moderate xylophagous attack that affected the support and led to small losses of paint layers. In some places one can see flight holes caused by xylophagous insects.

Following the ascertainment of the major damages concerning the painting, the specialists proposed the following treatment:

1. Removal of non-adherent deposits
2. Removal of the nails from the support
3. Restoration of the cohesion and adhesion of the paint layer to the support
4. Filling in with new wood
5. Cleaning the back end of the canvas strips
6. Consolidation of the painting on the canvas
7. Application of the canvas strips to the support
8. Removal of the restoration canvas and glue surplus from the surface
9. Insurance of the fish glue and micronised chalk from the edge of the paint layer
10. Gradual removal of the adherent and non-adherent deposits off the surface of the paint
11. Selective grouting
12. Chromatic integration

13. Extermination and prevention of the xylophagous attack

14. Written, photographic and drawn documentation during the restoration work [6]

2.5 Cultural heritage results

Following the efforts of restoration and preservation of the church, today, the church is open for visitors, both tourists and faithful. Only in the summer of 2019, a group of 50 pilgrims, along with some locals, attended the Holy Mass at the church on the hill. This was a joyous event because since the 2006 restauration works, no mass was held in the church. In the last few years, the church was visited by about 100 visitors per year, many of whom from abroad. Most of the time, they are impressed by the church's story but also by its surroundings.

A special effort was also made for this case research by studying a large number of documents from archives, interviews with locals, specific laboratory analyses and photographs. Currently, there is an ongoing research with preliminary results attesting the advanced degree of deterioration of the building materials and pigments.

The climb to the church calls for sacrifice, its placement on one of the highest points in the village being intentional, so that the climber gets at least a taste of the passion Christ went through while climbing Golgotha carrying his cross.

3. Conclusion

The history of the old wooden church started in 1706 and continues, thanks to a small community in the village of Drăghia, which has great confidence in its future —the church finds part of cultural heritage for their descendants. After going through the hardships of the two world wars and the persecution of the Communist period, the villagers raised funds to repair the damage to the roof and the wooden structure of the church. Due to the involvement of the priest, Radu Petru, and the official recognition of the heritage value, the church is included in the Historical Monuments List, under the LMI code: MM-II-m-A-04569, its inclusion being



Figure 6.
The sequence in the ceiling.

approved by the Directorate of Historical Monuments from the Department of Worship.

On the church's 300th anniversary, its condition was very badly damaged unfortunately. But again with the support of the community and of the Ministry of Culture, the restoration of the church as an architectural structure succeeded.

Unfortunately the funds were exhausted; the mural painting had no chance to be restored. The age of the church and the current climatic conditions lead to an advanced degradation of the painting from the interior of the wooden church (**Figures 6** and 7).

The scientific research specialists from Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and Ovidius University of Constanta express their expert opinions that a new restoration project is required inside the "Holy Archangels Michael and Gavril" Drăghia church, Maramureș county, Romania.



Figure 7.
The sequence in the wall.

The wooden church is, and will remain, the cultural and spiritual heritage of the village and, together with the many other wooden churches from the Land of Lăpuș, forms an important part of the Romanian national patrimony.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Minister of Research and Innovation, CCCDI–UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0476/51-PCCDI/2018, within PNCDI III, ACRONIM: ARHEOCONS.

Conflict of interest

None of the authors have any competing interests in the manuscript.

Author details

Patricia Săsăran[1], Ancuța Țenter[2*] and Lorelay-Diana Jianu[3]

1 Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Maramureș and Sătmar, Romania

2 Applied Environmental Research (CERAM), Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

3 Cellular and Molecular Biology Department, Ovidius University, Constanta, Romania

*Address all correspondence to: ancuta.radutenter@gmail.com

IntechOpen

© 2020 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. CC BY

References

[1] Bratu A. Pictura murală maramureșeană. Meșteri zugravi și interferențe stilistice. ACS, Colecția monografii; p. 39

[2] Suciu C. Dicționar istoric al localităților din Transilvania. Vol. I; 1967-1968. p. 210

[3] Nagy F, Makkai A. Ladislaus: Documenta historiam Valachorum in Hungaria illustrantia, usque ad annum 1400 p. Christum. Budapest: Études sur l'Europe Centre-Orientale; 1941. p. 465

[4] Kádár József. Szolnok-Dobokavármegye monographiája, Dej. Vol. III; 1901

[5] Weatherhead F. Wooden Churches and Their Paintings in the Maramures Region of Romania: A Preliminary Study (Vol. 67, Issue 255). Antiquity

[6] Marin C. Proiect de conservare-restaurare a picturii murale din satul Drăghia; 2011

[7] Plan of the Holy Archangels Church from Drăghia, digital image of building plan, Direcția Județeană pentru Cultură Maramureș. Available from: https://lapus.culturamm.ro/biserica-de-lemn-sfintii-arhangheli-mihail-si-gavril-din-draghia/ [Accessed: 05 November 2019]

[8] Man G. Biserici de lemn din Maramureş. Baia Mare: Proema; 2005

[9] Bilțiu P ş M. Biserici de lemn din Ţara Lăpuşului. Baia Mare: Eurotip; 2017. p. 87

[10] Oliver V. Preliminariile legii din anul 1892 - Fapte istorice, juridice şi deprinderi estetice. În: Revista Monumentelor istorice Nr. 2/1992 Anul LXI. p. 5

[11] Cezara M. Legislația privind monumentele istorice din România; 1892-1992

[12] Revista Monumentelor istorice Nr. 2/1992 Anul LXI. p. 14. Available from: http://patriarhia.ro/suferine-adanci-si-multe-puse-in-lumina-7459.html [Accessed: 08 October 2019]

[13] Radu Petru P. Monografia parohiei Drăghia. Presently found at the priest's family