

## THE SĂVOIU BOYARS' CULTURAL ROLE

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**Abstract:** In this article the author tries to analyse the cultural role of a local family from the Oltenian aristocracy, the boyars Săvoiu. Still unknown, this family beside Bengescu and Părăianu families in the northern Oltenia, the Hotărani family from Romanați district and the powerful Craiovescu family, played an important role in the history of Wallachia. Their position and prestige is visible also through their patrimonial policy and presence in public space. Their names is associated with the construction of churches in Lupoiaia and Borăscu, as well as with a school in Targu Jiu.

**Keywords:** social history of elites, boyars Săvoiu, cultural activity, churches.

The descendants of the boyars from Oltenia remained in history thanks to some important families: Bengescu, Părăianu and Săvoiu in the upper side of Oltenia, the boyars from Hotărani, in Romanați, the family Craioveanu in the central parts of the area closed by the Carpathians, Danube and Olt and the Glogoveanu boyars in Mehedinți County.

From all these families we chose to describe, in the beginning, the family Săvoiu, who didn't represent too much a preoccupation for the specialists in different areas. Coming from Borăscu, Gorj County, the boyars Săvoiu, who still present an interest for the historians and art historians, were attested for the first time in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when Constantin and Nicolae bought the estate Lupoiaia from Mehedinți County on which they would built later a lordly house and a church.

The successors of the two brothers started, shortly before the breaking out of the Russo-Turkish war from 1769 – 1774, the building of the church with the patron “St. Nicolae” from the village Lupoiaia<sup>1</sup>. The building remained

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<sup>1</sup> Radu Crețeanu, “Însemnări despre istoria bisericii Sf. Nicolae din satul Lupoiaia, comuna Cătunele, raionul Baia de Aramă”, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, year IX, no. 1-2, 1960, pp. 83-84.

unpainted, as the inscription from the entrance in the church reveals, until 1816:

In the name of our Holly Mother and the Holly Trinity, with the blessing of the St. Hierarch Nicolae, during the ruling of our lord Ion Georgiu Caragea, with the blessing of our Bishop Galaction and at the expense and endeavor of these founders, was made this holly Church for their eternal memory: Nicolae Săvoiu, Iacob Săvoiu, Constantin Săvoiu, Matei Săvoiu, Constandache Săvoiu, Ion Ciocănel, Dumitrașcu Săvoiu, Gheorghe Săvoiu and Ion Săvoiu. The painter Simion. 1816 September 14<sup>th</sup><sup>2</sup>.

The church has a rectangular shape, without lateral apses.

*The church porch* has five archways, three in front and two in the lateral side, supported by very simple cylindrical masonry pillars. The arches, united by a wooden tie, have the shape of a deformed trilobite. The church porch that had been walled up with bricks in 1895, was reopened after the works from 1953, reconstructing in the same time the wall that separated it from the narthex.

*The narthex and the nave* are vaulted with a calotte that stands on four arches-groins propped up on consoles. The wall that once had separated the two rooms was pulled down in 1895, excepting a part of almost 1 m, in each side.

*The altar*, separated by the nave through a part of wall that goes till the groin-arch has a niche in the altar and a door where once had been the bishop's niche.

Above the narthex, leaning on a square tambour, is the octagonal steeple. The access to it is allowed on a spiral stairs made of oak beams.

The external decoration is characteristic to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The facades are divided in two by the round frieze between two rows of brick pieces. The inferior part of the walls has no decorative element on it; the upper part is embellished with a string of semicircular narrow arches, with a double round cornice. On the church porch, in the front side, a wider, round niche for the icon of the patron, is surrounded by two joined niches, painted with the Saints Gheorghe and Dumitru. The socle and the cornice, with straight profiles, complete the external decoration of the church.

The windows are modern, the old ones being walled up with masonry. In the nave are two air holes, one on the north side, with sculpted stone frame and perforated rosette and another that lost its perforated stone is on the south side.

On the north wall of the nave are rendered scenes as The Harrowing of Hell, St. Thomas Sunday, The Sunday of the Mirth-bearing Women, The Healing of the Lame Man, but also portrays as that of St. Gheorghe, Dumitru, Nestor and Mercurie.

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<sup>2</sup> Radu Crețeanu, "Bisericile de zid de pe Valea Motrului (Raionul Baia de Aramă)", in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, year IX, no. 1-2, 1957, p. 38.

On the upper sides of the church porch are painted four scenes from St. Nicolae's life, among which three can't be found in any of the churches from around, nor in the explanations regarding the Byzantine paintings, the painter drawing his inspiration directly from the saints' lives.

The church was entirely repaired in 1859 and later in 1953-1954 when the church porch was reopened, the wall that separated the porch and the narthex was built and the vaults were repaired<sup>3</sup>.

Another member of the family Săvoiu, Constantin<sup>4</sup>, built in 1865 on Dealu Mare (a place known in that area as Cioaca lui Surcel) the monastery with the patronage "The Assumption of the Virgin".

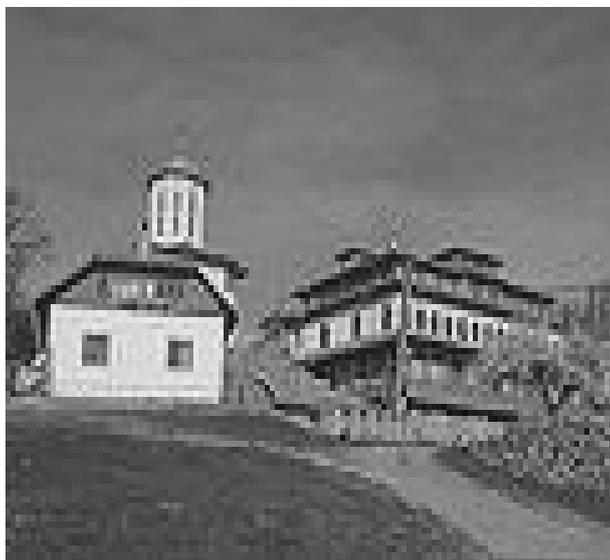
From the architectonic point of view, painted by Nicolae Popescu<sup>5</sup>, the church follows the neoclassical structures with three gables, a semicircular hall and an octagonal tower with arch-shaped frame on the windows. The cover of the church was made of copper. On the east side, beneath the altar, in a burial vault that allowed access, were, according to the desire of the founder, the Săvoiu family's coffins.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Named by Alexandru Ștefulescu "great landlord and philanthropist", he had estates at Lupoaia, Borăscu, Groșerea and Urdari. Besides these, he also had a mill on the river Jiu and a cement factory at Gura Văii. He took part to the Revolutions of 1848. After the defeating of the Revolutions he had to leave the country and to go in exile to Vienna where he met Gheorghe Magheru. He came back in the country in 1853 he spread the news that all the revolutionary immigrants are in Vidin and are preparing a new revolution for the spring of the next year (DANIC, fond *Ministerul de Interne al Țării Românești*, Serviciul Administrativ, dosar 2/1854, f. 8-25; Leonid Boicu, *Austria și Principatele Române în vremea războiului Crimeii*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1972, p. 136). On December 21<sup>st</sup> 1853, the leader of the Gorj County announced the Minister for Internal Affairs that the reactionary Constantin Săvoiu was arrested. Yet, he escaped but he had to go back again in exile. Returning in 1857, he was elected with 16 votes in the Ad-Hoc Assembly of Wallachia along with the patriarch Gheorghe Magheru (30 votes) and the cavalry commander Zamfir I. Broșteanu (26 votes) as a representative of the liberal current (*Documente privind unirea Principatelor*, vol. I, *Documente interne (1854-1857)*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1961, p. 526). He was elected several times as deputy (1867 and 1883) and senator (1899) of Gorj (Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, *Elia liberală românească (1866-1900)*, București, Editura All Educațional, 1998, p. 171, 207, 234). He was a member of the Steaua lui Sever freemasons' lodge (*Școala târgujiană - Biografii și destin*, Târgu Jiu, Editura Gorjeanul, 2005, p. 160)

<sup>5</sup> Lavinia Popica, "Familia Săvoiu", in *Litua. Studii și cercetări*, IX, 2003, p. 302.



1. Church from Dealu Mare

The church from Dealu Mare worked as a particular church of the boyars Săvoiu, who built it and took care of it, until 1914. After this date, through a decision of the Holy Synod, the church was declared a hermitage, a succursal monastery of the monastery Strâmba-Jiu. In 1977 the church was closed and the cult objects were shared between the monastery Strâmba-Jiu and the church from Borăscu.

On February 1<sup>st</sup> 1992, the church from Dealu Mare, through a decision of the Oltenia Metropolitan, sustained by Damaschin Severineanu, became once more a monastery.



2. The cells of the Dealu Mare monastery

It was also Constantin Săvoiu who founded in the town Târgu Jiu, where he owned several houses, along with Ștefan Frumușanu, Z. Părăianu and his wife Sevastița, between 1867-1875, the church with the patrons “St. Constantine and Helen”. On the west wall is the picture of the main founder, Constantin Săvoiu and on the walls of the entrance hall, south and north, are the pictures of the founders Ștefan Frumușanu and his wife.

The church was built in the Austrian baroque style and the painting made by Mișu Popp had an oriental influence<sup>6</sup>. The church suffered, along the time, several reparations and modifications. Thus, in 1914, the portico was added and in 1929 the tower was covered and the eaves were enlarged. Reparations were also made in 1942-1943, 1950, and 1965 and in 2002.

This church benefited by many donations made by its founders. Therefore, in 1873, the Săvoiu family gave a silver gilt cup with the following inscription: “Gratitude for mighty God who protected Annette Săvoiu on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1873. Anica, Annette, Constantin, Anna, Constantin, Emanuel, Magdalena, Elena, George”<sup>7</sup>.

The church with the patronage St. Constantine and Helen is situated on Victoriei Street, opposite to the store Parâng. It was preceded by other two churches that had been demolished, to which we shall refer below.

The same member of the family Săvoiu contributed as well to the development of the education in Oltenia. Consequently, on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1855, Constantin informed the magistrate of the town Târgu Jiu that he offers an area from the centre of the town, bought by the Lady Steward Smaranda Călinescu, on which he would build a school for “the apprenticing of the young poor girls from the town and county”. He asked the authorities to give the necessary funds for the payment of two teachers: a Romanian language teacher and a teacher of a foreign language chosen by the community, but also to allow the students to sell the manufactured objects “in all the practical occasions of the household economy”<sup>8</sup>. On February 25<sup>th</sup> the same year, the magistrate of the town presented the proposal of the baker Săvoiu to the ruler Barbu Dimitrie Știrbei who, on August 19<sup>th</sup>, asked the Ephors to “send in a month the plan for the building of mister Săvoiu that is supposed to be raised on the place he had given. When all the material would have been brought there and the foundation started, we shall have been shown, in order to be made public this good action and to

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*; Alexandru Ștefulescu, *Istoria Târgu Jiului*, Târgu Jiu, 1906, p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> Alexandru Ștefulescu, *Încercare de a face o istorie a Târgu Jiului*, Târgu Jiu, 1898, p. 278.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolae Andrei, Gheorghe Pârnuță, *Istoria învățământului din Oltenia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> vol., Craiova, Editura Scrisul Românesc, 1981, pp. 86-87; Gheorghe Gămănesci, Vasile Arimia, Petre Rădulea, *Școala gorjeană în contextul dezvoltării învățământului românesc. Istorie, vocație și profesionalism*, 1<sup>st</sup> vol., Târgu Jiu, Editura Măiastra, 2007, p. 131; Grigore Pupăză, C. Cheznoiu, *Istoria învățământului din Gorj*, Editura Neweast, f.l., 2005, p. 131.

have the proof of our content”<sup>9</sup>. The school first began with two classes of 55 students.

On September 5<sup>th</sup> 1860, the school entered under the administration of the Așezămintele Brâncovenești that contributed to its maintenance, also founding a boarding school.

This boyars’ family contributed furthermore to the improving of an important culture institution. Among these is The Foundation “Alexandru and Aristia Aman”, imagined, according to the desire of the two founders, as a complex center of culture that included a library and a museum with free access for all the interested people<sup>10</sup>. Thus, Emanuil Săvoiu donated to this institution a great number of books<sup>11</sup>.

Through all their accomplishments, the building of churches and schools, the boyars Săvoiu contributed to the cultural development of the region situated between the Carpathians, the Danube and the river Olt.

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<sup>9</sup> Em. E. Săvoiu, “Școala primară de fete, contribuții la istoria învățământului din Târgu Jiu”, in *Litua. Studii și cercetări*, vol. I, 1978, pp. 221-222

<sup>10</sup> Gabriela Braun, Mariana Leferman, Tudor Nedelcea, Toma Rădulescu, *Familia Aman*, Craiova, Editura Aius, 2000, pp. 24-64.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 86.