

BÂRSANA MONASTERY, A GEM AMONG THE WOODEN BUILDINGS OF MARAMUREȘ, ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT. – Bârsana Monastery, a Gem among the Wooden Buildings of Maramureș, Romania. Bârsana monastery was reestablished after the fall of Romanian communism, emphasizing the art of woodcraft in the „Country of Maramureș”. Through the great number and originality of its pieces, all wooden, the Bârsana complex is the most representative and the most valuable site of its kind in Romania.

Keywords: Romania, Maramureș, Bârsana, wooden monastery.

1. GENERAL ASPECTS

The Bârsana complex represents an element of Orthodoxy, built out of wood, as a symbol and synthesis of the wood craftsmanship in Maramureș. “*Wooden churches are things of humility, taken from the root of the tree of God, well anchored in the earth, strong, which ascend to Heaven and reach God, from where the blessing returns to earth through the church’s tower, while we receive it on our knees, praying, on the porch which is identical to that of a house*”

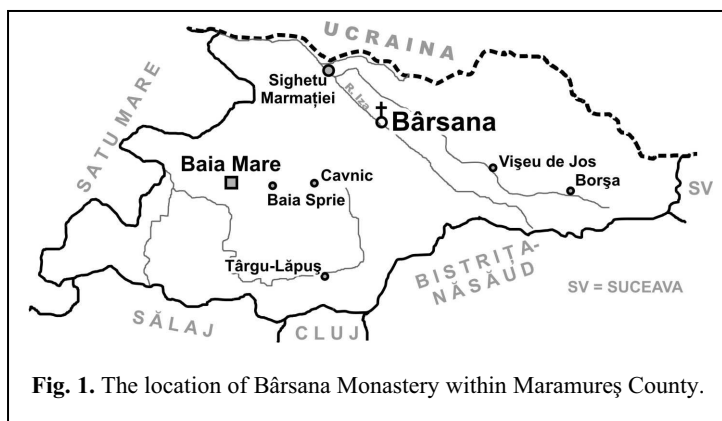


Fig. 1. The location of Bârsana Monastery within Maramureș County.

(<http://www.manastireabarsana.ro/01prezentare-manastiri.html>).

The construction of the monastery began in 1993 and still continues to this day, by setting up new additional spaces (parking lots, sleeping quarters, etc.). Bârsana monastery is a first tier touristic site in Maramureș, being easily accessible by the 186 county road from Sighetu Marmăției. It is suitable for transit tourism and of course for religious pilgrimage, being harmoniously integrated in the local landscape. There are several sleeping quarters, which satisfy all the needs of these types of tourism.

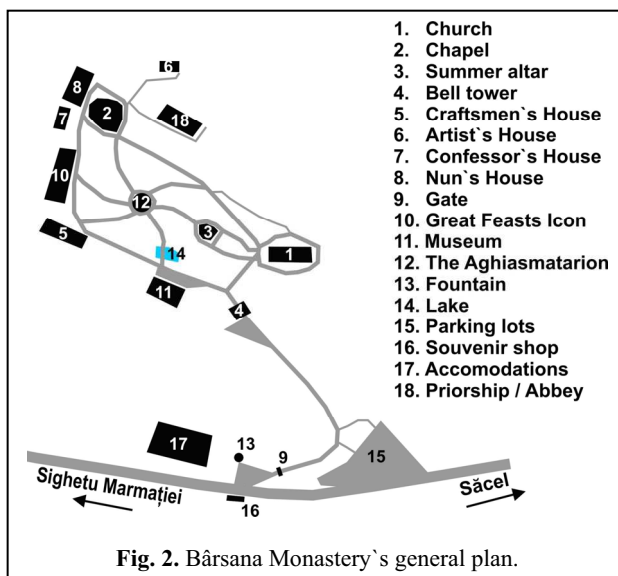
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2. THE COMPONENTS OF THE MONASTERY COMPLEX

As one can see from the plan of the monastery, it has 18 components which are grouped in an orderly and harmonious fashion. The monastery's church represents the main element of the complex, around which the other additional components revolve, each with a specific function and utility.



The church of the monastery (construction period: 1993-1999) is situated in the eastern part of the complex, being used for religious service. It is the spiritual centre as well as the compositional centre of the entire complex. It was designed with the following dimensions: 22.57 meters in length, 12.20 meters in width and 57 meters in height, being one of the tallest wooden buildings in Europe. The building has two stories: the basement and the ground floor. The basement houses the initial church, has only one entrance and it is lighted through 12 small windows, also containing the

“paraclis”. The altar is separated from the rest of the chamber by a wooden rood screen, sculpted in traditional “Maramureșean” fashion. The ceiling is held up by four concrete columns. The basement is built out of reinforced concrete, with thick walls, clad on the outside in stone and in frescos (on the inside) designed and painted by Ioan Botiș. The main church is on the ground floor, has a club shape, with two diagonal niches.

The church contains all the characteristics of an Orthodox place of worship: porch, “pronaos”, “naos” and altar. The porch is made of oak wood with carvings typical of “Maramureșean” art. The porch can be accessed through two side staircases. The tower is placed above the “pronaos” and has a very elongated shape. The fir shingle roof, built in a “sparrow-tail” style, has double eaves and forms a true wooden lace. The iron cross, 7 meters in height and weighing 500 kg, have been lifted on top of the church on a Thursday, 10th August 1995. Now, the church awaits its painter to finish the traditional picture “coat”.

The Priorship / The Abbey (construction period: 1995-1996) is a multistory construction of great architectural beauty, a remarkable creative example of traditional architecture. It holds the south-western part of the complex and has four stories: basement, ground floor, first story and attic. The basement is made of reinforced concrete, with 40 cm thick walls, clad on the outside in stone. The ground floor has three entrances: one from the east, one from the north and one from the west. It also has four terraces that front all the main cardinal directions. One can reach the eastern terrace by two staircases. Here is the main entrance through which you reach a hallway. This hallway connects with the hallway from the northern entrance. From the hallway, one can reach the office and the kitchen. On the first floor there are several cells, the library and the chapel, which goes all the way to the attic. The attic also contains cells and a reading room. The roof is made of fir shingle in the same style as that of the church.

“The Summer Altar” (construction period: 1996-1997) is situated at the centre of the monastery premises and holds the holy services on Sundays and on holidays during the warm season, as well as other major services. The summer altar is the architectural element around



Fig. 3. The church.

(Source: <http://www.manastireabarsana.ro/>).

which the whole complex pivots. It is a relatively new architectural element that continues the theme of traditional architecture, typical for Maramureș. Continuing the art of carving wood through local craftsmen, added to a modern canvas, this work managed to become a space of meditation, in which the past connects to the future. The foundation is made of concrete and it is clad in stone. It has a octagonal form with a diagonal of 8 meters and a height of 20 meters, being “crowned” by a wooden dome, supported by two squares, 45 degrees from the main axis. The framework is made of fir wood, while the cover from clapboard.

The bell and the bell tower (construction period: 1998) are situated in the south-eastern part of the monastery complex. Under the tower’s large dome there is an entrance inside the monastery’s premises. The front arch of the dome bears the biblical inscription “*This is the house of God, this is the house of Heaven*” (Genesis 28, 17). On the left side of the bell tower there is a bookshop, while on the right there is a staircase, going up to the bells. The tower, due to its height and grandeur, due to its arch,

makes a lasting impression on the pilgrims that come to the monastery; it creates emotions, devoutness, instills in people souls the fact that, going through this entrance, one enters a sacred space. The tower, the balcony, the cross and the roof are all in perfect harmony with the other elements in the monastery complex.

“The Craftsmen’s House” is a building that houses the craftsmen’s workshops, being situated in the south-western part of the monastery. Its purpose is one of production, since it houses several workshops, at the first ground floor as well as at the first floor. The foundations are continuous, out of concrete, the elevation being made of reinforced concrete and clad in stone on the outside. The walls of the ground floor are made of cement, while the second floor is made of oak wood. The framework is made of fir wood with clapboard covers.

“The Artist’s House” was built in the northern part of the complex and a little bit up the hill, the access being a flight of stairs. It can house people with creative, artistic, preoccupations. The house stands on a concrete foundation, clad in stone on the outside, and has two wooden stories. The ground floor has a front terrace, from which one can enter a hallway and from there into three separate rooms: a bedroom, a bathroom and a living-room.

“The Confessor’s House” (construction period: 1998) was also built considering the fact that every monastery needs a confessor. It is situated in the western part of the complex. In front of it there is a terrace, while inside there are one hallway and three rooms.

“The Nuns’ House” is on the north-western part of the monastery complex and has three stories: basement, ground floor and first floor. The basement contains a storage facility and a power generator, while the next two floors contain cells. The house also has terraces adorned with flowers.

“The Gate” is situated on the road that diverts from the DJ 186 road. Here, local craftsmen erected a typical wooden gate, which symbolizes an entrance into a sacred place, due to the fact that it has a cross carved into it.



Fig. 4. The House of the Great Feasts Icon. (Source: <http://www.manastireabarsana.ro/>).

“The House of the Great Feasts Icon” has three levels, being situated in the western part of the complex. The basement houses garages and storage units. The ground floor contains the kitchen, the pantry and the laundry room, while on the first floor there is a very large open terrace.

“The Gavril de Bârsana Icon Museum and Bookshop” was erected due to the growing number of pilgrims and tourists that are attracted by the traditions and the beauty of the Iza Valley. The museum is situated in the south-western part of the monastery, near the bell tower. Being an objective meant for tourists and pilgrims, it is situated so as to have a direct connection to the access route into the monastery and in order not to disturb the religious activities of the monastery. The architectural concept is based on the attempt to fully utilize the traditional architecture of the area and to integrate the building into the site. The museum is a building structured on three stories. The basement and the ground floor are built on a structure of brick walls and also reinforced concrete, while the first floor is made of wood. The interior is dominated by a large space that goes all the way to the top of the building. The project encompasses spaces for exhibiting icons and books at the ground floor, but also workshops for weaving, icon making at the basement level, while the first floor contains ethnographical exhibits.

All these spaces are built in such a manner that they resemble the image of a peasant's house from Maramureș, the furniture and all the woodwork being inspired from the local villages. The museum also has a place of rest and meditation. The access to the upper floor is done by using two symmetrical flights of stairs. The museum owns scrolls, religious texts and books of great value from the 16th-19th centuries, old icons and a rich collection of traditional art, all these exhibits giving the museum a great spiritual value.

„The Aghiasmatarion” completes the monastery complex, having a central position within the complex. It has four entrances with a fountain in the middle. This resembles the additional constructions next to the Paleochristian churches where the holy water was being held. One can reach this construction by paved alleyways. It has a surface of 32 m² and a height of 9 meters, the floor being made of andesite. The parking lot and the souvenir shop are situated at the monastery's entrance.

The sleeping quarters are comprised of the Bârsana Villa, with 54 places: three apartments with four places, three apartments with three places and 16 double rooms. The food being served to the guests is cooked by the nuns within the monastery's compound, according to the traditional dishes of Maramureș.

3. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS...

The Bârsana Monastery complex is the most representative religious site of Maramureș and represents a synthesis of the superb wood craftsmanship of local men, granting it great touristic potential. The monastery can be visited all year long, having sleeping quarters ready to house the visitors.

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