

NESSEBAR. A CULTURAL-BALKANIC PARADIGM.
THE PERENNIAL PREVALENCE OF CULTURE*Angelica Pușcaș¹*

Nessebar, a multi-millenary settlement (2000 years BC), synchronous to the period of maximum flourishing of the antique cities, a period approximately incumbent to the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC in the Middle East, respectively to the 2nd and 1st millennia BC in the Mediterranean hinterland, blends a diachronic succession of various cultures and civilizations (Thracian, Classical-Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Slavic, Ottoman, Bulgarian), a reality that will place it in the hierarchy of certain fabulous cultural topoi. Through its uniqueness, connected to the most significant spatial concentration of places of worship, related to the number of inhabitants, Nessebar is today a living legend. The unique cultural and religious heritage of Nessebar, intimately tied to the tumultuous history of the Balkan area, has essentially marked and determined the shape, size and value of the establishments. We can thus follow in a chronological perspective, through the churches, the rise and fall of the economic and political climate, these being “signs” strictly materialized up to the level of the force of the resources, competence and disponibilities the community had. To this day, the city preserves more than a hundred private architectural ensembles from the period of the “*Bulgarian National Revival*”. Built at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, these belong to an original style of architecture, defining for the “*Black Sea Style*”. The pattern exposes an evolution on two levels, supported by a ground floor built of stone, with an irregular shape imposed by the trajectory of the streets – with which they are often in a homogeneous continuity. The upper floor, built of wood, had a much wider extension, generously cantilevered above the street. The conclusions highlight the fundamental cultural meaning of our approach, which traverses an ascending path from *periegesis* towards *exegesis* and afterwards, to *hermeneutics*.

Keywords: balkanic spirituality, multicultural stratigraphy, sacred geography, religious architecture, civil arhitecture, tradition, ,UNESCO heritage.

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НЕСЕБЪР. КУЛТУРНО-БАЛКАНСКА ПАРАДИГМА. ВЕЧНОТО ГОСПОДСТВО НА КУЛТУРАТА

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Резюме: Несебър е хилядолетен град (2000 г. пр.н.е.), развивал се едновременно с процъфтяващите до 3-то и 2-то хилядолетие пр.н.е. антични градове в Близкия изток, както и с тези от Средиземноморския хинтерланд, чиито възход в развитието им е през 2-то и 1-то хилядолетие пр.н.е., съчетавайки последователно различни култури и цивилизации. Чрез своята уникалност, свързана със значителна пространствена концентрация на религиозни обекти, днес Несебър е жива легенда. Уникалното културно и религиозно наследство на града, непосредствено обвързано с бурната история на балканския регион, по същество е белязано и обусловено от облика, размера и значимостта на тези обекти. Това ни позволява да проследим в хронологичен ред нивото на икономическото развитие на населението, живяло в града през отделните периоди. В Несебър са съхранени повече от сто архитектурни ансамбли от периода на Българското Възраждане. Построени в края на XVIII и началото на XIX век, те принадлежат към оригиналния архитектурен стил, наречен „черноморски стил“.

Ключови думи: Балканска духовност, мултикултурна стратиграфия, религиозна география, религиозна архитектура, гражданска архитектура, традиция, наследство на ЮНЕСКО

INTRODUCTION

We will set up the page, within the context of the fabulous Nessebar, incursions from the millennial history and multiculturalism of this exceptional settlement, which exudes tranquility, freshness, and very importantly, the personality of a united community. Here, the belief set the human being in an upright position, has charged it with signs and meanings. Fortifications, churches, houses, landscape architecture..., everything contributes to the genesis of certain unique cultural itineraries, which fosters dialogues, openings, in a space befitted to universality. The preserving and perpetuating of the traditions for centuries, is exemplary, as in its whole, Nessebar is a living museum where people are experiencing normality, in an atmosphere charged with spirituality and traditional ethos. Confirmation is decisive. In 1956, Nessebar, as a whole, was declared by the Bulgarian Government, an architectural and archaeological monument, because in 1983 – at the 7th session of the “World Heritage Committee” – held in Florence, to be added on the list of cities belonging to the UNESCO heritage.

THE BALKAN SPACE. EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY. ETHNICAL STRATIGRAPHY

There are places charged with grace, deliberately forged historically within the mystery of a profound spirituality, and Nessebar is rightfully placed, just like a module within “the Infinity Column” of Brâncuși, a universe in which the strong multicultural shades of the Balkan space (of the Medieval Age) are knit together, not

without major disturbances, within a geospace specifically woven between identity and alterity.

Being a multi-millenary settlement (2000 years BC), synchronous to the period of maximum flourishing of the antique cities, a period approximately incumbent to the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC in the Middle East, respectively to the 2nd and 1st millennia BC in the Mediterranean hinterland, blends a diachronic succession of various cultures and civilizations (Thracian, Classical-Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Slavic, Ottoman, Bulgarian), a reality that will place it in the hierarchy of certain fabulous cultural topoi.

An initial argument supporting the evolution of sedentarization within the territories bordering the western shore of the Black Sea, integrated geographically as “the Thracian trunk”², it is generosity provided to us by the archaeological production, of the Neolithic Age (approximately 1900-1700 BC), exhumed during some phases of intense investigations, physical “documents” preserved until today, in the Archaeological Museum located in the ancient city.

By grounding ourselves within the outlined parameters, even since the 2nd millennium BC, the establishing of the *city/fortress of Mesembria* appears to be a natural occurrence, in the southern half of the western shore of the Black Sea³ – named after the Thracian founder, *Melsa*, followed by the suffix *bria* (meaning city, in the Thracian language). The selection of the location – not at all coincidental – was conferred by its strategic parameters, a well sheltered bay, with predominantly quiet waters, out of which a lilliputian peninsula emerges (850 m long/300 m wide), with an average altitude of 15 m and linked to the continental mainland by a frequently flooded narrow isthmus (about 400 m long/30 m wide). The laced shore allowed the development of two small harbors, in the western extremity of the peninsula, located roughly parallel on the northern, respectively, the southern fronts. Likewise, the climate, moderately temperate, with Mediterranean influences, imposes itself as a progradation factor of inhabitation and development of certain specific activities.

Regarding the economic practices, we can view this early stage of social organization from the perspective of the farming activities (the cultivation of cereals, grapes, vegetables), to which fishing in the coastal areas, as well as handicrafts are attached, though in an “early stage”, and very possibly trading, either on the dry land or on water. The two ports represent clear evidence and reliability in this respect. It is likely enough, after considering these factors as functional, we should grant the Thracian fortress, a predominantly residential status (see in the modern era “chamber cities”), or, by approaching a more daring thesis, the function of the command center: military, commercial and spiritual. Implicitly, *Melsa* leads us to this conclusion, a

² In antiquity, Thrace stretched out from Mount Olympus, in the south, up to the Danube, in the north. Introducing here the phrase “maternity of the place”, we can speak of legendary musicians such as Orpheus and Musaeus, or of Democritus, originally from the Abdera fortress, along with the sophist Protagoras, the poet Nikaenetus, of the philosopher Anaxarchos, or the historian Nearchos. (a.n. – *author's note*).

³ “When referring to the Black Sea, its ancient Persian name was Axaena (“benighted”). The Greeks interpreted this name by a folk etymology, into Axenios, namely “the unwelcoming sea”, hence the subsequent hydronym of wider popularity, Pontus Euxinus. The local populations kept instead, the epithet “black”: Romanian - Black Sea, Bulgarian - Cerno More (according to Peter Dan Idu, p. 16, Dimitrie Cantemir Publishing House, 2000).

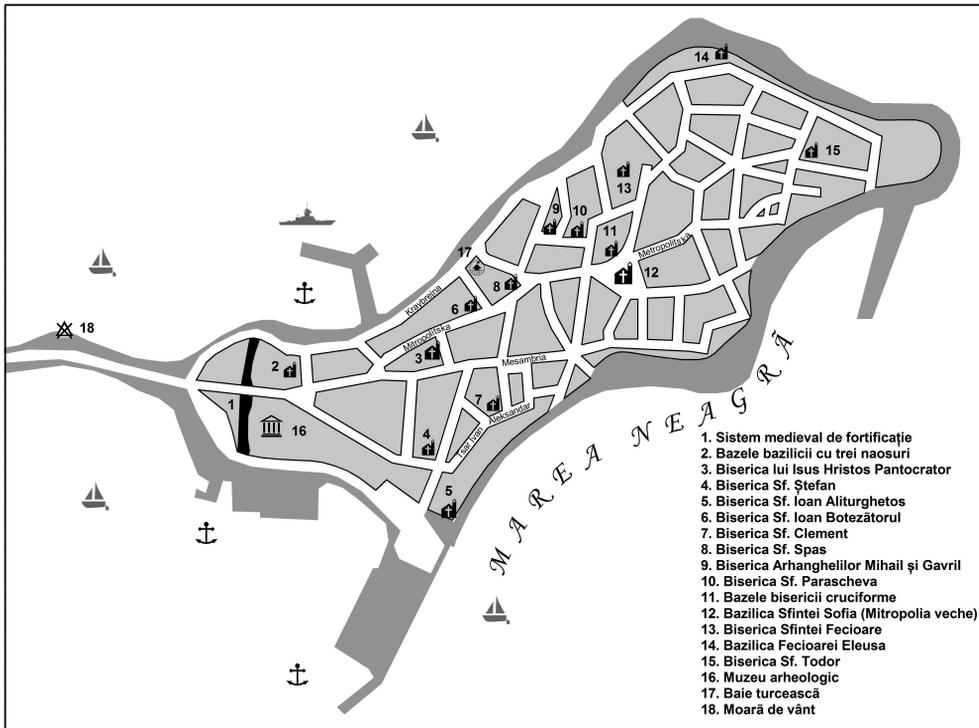


Fig. 1. The map of Nessebar Peninsula; cca. 1:10.000

skilled strategist, a certified fact, along with the diversity of archeological artifacts and the presence of fragments of the first fortresses.

Active movements of population (since the second half of the 1st millennium), from the east or north of the Danube, will cause severe conflictual states, either with the Persians led by Darius, or with the Scythians – from the northern steppes of the Black Sea. A special moment is recorded in the year of 326 BC, when an open conflict takes place with the great Empire of Macedonia. The death of Alexander the Great (unexpectedly occurring on July 13, the year of 323 BC) will leave one of his generals – Lysimachus – as the King of Thrace, defeated during the years of 300 BC by the king of the Getae, Dromichaites.

In periods of time overlapping many of these events (1400-1700 BC), significant events of great impact occur with “the Aegean civilizations”. The destruction of the Minoan Civilization under the Achaeans, the invasion from the north of the Dorians (around 1200 BC, etc) will cause, on many levels, irreversible cultural decreases, surmounted by new paradigms⁴. Another landmark of geo-demographic importance and

⁴ The first invasion of the Achaean in Crete (around 1400 BC), temporally synchronous with the Arian invasion in the Northwest Indian subcontinent, will result in the extinction of the Minoan Civilization, a process followed by the consolidation in the Peloponnese of a new central pole, Mycenae, surrounded by powerful city-fortresses: Argos, Pylos, Athens (founded by the Ionians), Thebes, Sparta (a.n.).

of extraordinary habitat, is the triggering of the great Greek colonization (8th-6th centuries BC), a movement that will place the expansion of urban planning in the Mediterranean western coast of the Black Sea to higher quotas, where we can appeal to the genesis of the *Pontian Civilization*, imprinted by specific features, given the likely mix of Thracian-Getic mental geography, with Greek patterns, see the metropolises of *Miletus*, *Histria*, *Tomis*, *Dionysopolis* (Balchik), *Megara* –with *Callatis* and *Mesembria* (Dorian dialect); respectively the Ionian Archipelago with *Odessos*, *Anhialo* and *Apollonia*. The fact is that this backbone of Greek city-states⁵, will take the organic leap into the horizon of a universal culture and civilization, either the classical Greek or the Hellenistic one.

Given the topic of this research and leaving aside *Callatis* (nowadays *Mangalia*), also founded by the Dorians, we focused our attention on the fortress city of *Mesambria*, which marks out at the beginning of the 6th century BC (510), the coming of colonists from *Megara*, *Byzantion* and *Kalhodon*, a feature that will singularize it as the only urban Dorian settlement, circumscribed by the Ionian cities: *Odessos-Varna*, *Anhialo/Pomorie*, *Apollonia/Sozopol*.

Extremely fast and efficient, *Mesambria* synthesizes the entire classification of attributes of a polis by excellence, which for centuries and in a state of geo-political tranquility, will invest it with the status of a powerful city, with an exceptional economic dynamics, doubled by a pleasant architectural aesthetics, a way of living in which training was honoured, and the *agora* (see the western city centre, marked currently by the church of Jesus Christ Pantocrator), with highly important philosophical, literary, urbanistic, administrative, political, etc. debates, represented the central pole of the community.

The magnitude and diversity of their handicrafts (the ongoing ceramic⁶ production, stone carving and in other materials, the processing of textile fibers and of wool, of animal skins, the preservation of fish for export, the manufacture of ornaments and weapons, etc.), the existence of a heavy-industry – the ports serving as bases for the construction of ships, but particularly, the advent, beginning with the 5th century BC, of the first silver and bronze coins, and later of the gold ones (found at the archaeological sites from *Haskovo*, *Šumen*, *Veliko-Târnovo*, *Silistra*...) certifies stable commercial relationships with all the cities on the Black Sea, in the Mediterranean Basin: *Athens*, *Delos*, *Pergamum*, *Tanagra*, *Corinth*, *Miletus*, *Megara*, and so on, up to *Egypt*.

Moreover, the prosperity of the polis, most likely associated with a demographic growth, leads to the establishment of a satellite colony – *Novlohos* – currently called *Obzor*. As such, for centuries, the Dorian *Mesambria* enrolls in an ascending evolution, even when during the 2nd century BC – on the background of the restructuring of

⁵ The fundamental particularity to define the polis, beyond the territorial and political unit, or the demographic one (in most situations, the population being concentrated in the limit of a few thousand inhabitants), is the “lineage” unity, synonymous to the “intimate community” of origin, respectively of an anthropogeographic cultural system (a.n.).

⁶ On shore, as well as in the vicinity of the Sea, amphorae of various sizes and shapes were discovered, with seals dating from the 6th century BC. This is a confirmation of the fact that the dynamics of the trade (especially with grain, oil, wine, products of bee-keeping, etc.), indicate superior parameters, and from this point, the ennoblement with the attribute of *merchant center* or in other words, of *commercial agency*, becomes a natural enterprise.

the Center-periphery relations in the Mediterranean, the Roman hegemony will impose itself as the supreme authority throughout the entire Mediterranean world, thus instilling the universal empire of Rome. In these circumstances, the Greek colony will consume a time threshold, the year of 72 BC, representing the pacifical establishing into the conquered territory – of the Romans, a first linguistic resonance, being consecrated under the name of *Mesemvria*, the Latin term which under the autochthonous Thracians was *Mesembria*, and later, under the Greek occupation, *Mesambria*. The gambling arenas, part of the customs of relaxation specific to the Romans, were hosted by the Greek theater, often accompanied by street events, public square meetings and the practice of rituals in the newly built temples and altars.

The basic interest remains focused on the strategic values of the place, reconsidering it as an important outpost in Rome's military strategies, targeting new conquests, by default those found north of the Danube. From the commercial point of view, the practices of the city remain the same, but somewhat in the shadow of the new center powered by the Romans, *Anhialo* (Pomorie).

The death of Emperor Theodosius I, in the year 395 – followed by the division of the Empire between his sons⁷ produces balance rupture, triggering the economic, cultural and demographic forces – in the favor of the Oriental branch of Constantinople – a sphere of influence where *Mesemvria* will integrate in a most natural way.

A tremendously flourishing period follows next, set on a matrix well articulated in opportunities, under the Byzantines, the city, more than ever, developing its economic and strategic personality. By virtue of their advanced engineering, fortifications are rebuilt, using bricks manufactured in a special manner in Constantinople, bricks used alongside local building material (conchiferous limestone, sandstone etc.), and in the walls of the first orthodox places of worship. The water drainage system is also restored, and new volumetric analyses are applied to the ports, able to deal with some higher tonnage vessels – engaged in major trade, the favorite routes targeting Constantinople and Venice.

The fact is that for nearly a thousand years, this rich town, altogether, through its merchants, will mark ups and downs closely connected to the great Slavic migration (the 6th century AD); the founding of the first Bulgarian State in 681 (by the populations coming from the central Asian steppes); endless battles between the Byzantines and Bulgarians (see the chronological table); the conversion, in the year of 864, of the Bulgarian Tsar Boris to Christianity; the individualization of several strong leaders, on the stage of the Balkans, founders of political formations, responsible for radical mutations – see the Bulgarian-Wallachian Tsardom of the Assen dynasty (at the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th century) or the Serbian Nemanid dynasty.

The reason I analyzed these specific settlements in this study, is the multiple similarities (primarily the commercial and architectural ones) with the city of Nessebar, but also the actual presence of the Vlachs on the northern coastal pastures, where they used to descend in order to spend the winters, in the valleys beginning from the eastern extremity of the Stara Planina Mountains (the Balkan region).

⁷ Flavius Arcadius - emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire (the capital - Constantinople); Flavius Honorius - Emperor of the Western Roman Empire (the capital - Ravenna) (a.n.)

ECCLESIASTIC HERITAGE. RELIGIOUS CONFIGURATIONS.
A COMPILATION OF STONE CARVED IMAGES
OF THE BYZANTINE-ORTHODOX HERITAGE

Perhaps, for starters, we should talk about the Christian state of mind of *the place and of the inhabitants*, which in itself represents a spiritual and historical background for nearly two millennia. St. Andrew must be mentioned, nicknamed the *Apostle of the Wolves*, who in the 1st century AD, “labours” in evangelizing a geospace formed of cognate lands, the Pontus Euxinus and the Aegean Sea: Bithynia, Scythia Minor (present day Dobruja), Thrace, Hellas – reaching the Peloponnese – where he will be crucified in Patras. Following his footsteps, doubled by those of St. Philip, archeology comes to meet us with the prints of dozens of basilicas (without mentioning here the places of extreme hesychastic harshness), evidence that can also be unfolded at the origins of the legend of the 40 basilicas of Nessebar. However, through its uniqueness, connected to the most striking spatial concentration in places of worship, related to the number of inhabitants, Nessebar is a lived out legend and you, dear traveler, lost in wonder, on the narrow streets, fascinating, by far, through their rich embellishments “with all sort of things”, the feeling is that you do not even take steps from one to the other, but that you “sweep from one to the other”.

Returning to the practical side of history, it is mandatory and objective to appeal to a bundle of stimulating factors, such as: the institutionalization of Christianity under Constantine the Great (see the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, in 325); the great basileus personality of Justinian (527-565), the author of the revolution in the art of Byzantine architecture (see St. Sophia); the stage of economic and cultural revival during the time of Tsar Ivan Alexander – followed by the exceptional period of prosperity associated with the 13th -14th centuries; The housing of the old town by the local seniors – especially the merchants – well situated financially; also the safety ensured by the geographical place – a thread that will permanently coordinate us in this endeavor.

Less favorable centuries are those from under the Ottoman rule. Part of the fortifications and aqueduct systems are destroyed, the effervescence of the Christian architecture clearly fades, this specific situation being applied to the civil constructions as well. The lifestyle traverses other paths, if not symbiotically, at least in acceptance with the established oriental civilization.

It is still being built, but more modestly, in the local style, and with more improvised raw material. A truthful warning is, by far, the *Church of St. Spas* (the beginning of the 17th century), built by a wealthy merchant. The appearance is of a “*poor virgin*”, yet altogether pure. One small nave, with smoky walls, deprived of any decoration and with a barely sketched apse, is encased with a low roof in two apses. However, the interior is decorated with fresco paintings, in the late Byzantine style. The vivid colors confer privacy and a special brightness to the space. Related to this aspect, we should keep in mind, the extremely important rich fresco adornments of the Church of St. Stephen, according to the Byzantine iconography, (15th -16th centuries) or the spiritual rounding of other places with icons, pulpits, iconostases, frescoes, and so on, all holding a profound orthodox depth.

Another reality, that we cannot surmount, is the perpetuating of Christian symbolism in favor of the ecclesiastic architecture, during the entire Ottoman rule. No

Church has ever been converted into a mosque, a nearly ubiquitous practice, and understood in a natural manner of decisions related reversal of poles. In this direction, we should extend a special analysis, extremely cautious and delicate and in terms of a certain exactness of high moral attitude. Therefore, the unique cultural and religious heritage of Nessebar, intimately tied to the vicissitudes of the Balkan area, has essentially marked and determined the shape, size and value of the establishments. By virtue of these annotations, we specify that, at present, the existence of 15 ecclesiastical monuments, of which 13 are fully preserved, the traces of time, however, allowing themselves to be decrypted, while two other (St. Sophia and the Blessed Virgin Mary Eleousa churches – 5th century, respectively the 6th century AD), imposing through the monumental imprints, everyone's imagination being able to work on visualizing them as they were originally.

In terms of timeline, in conjunction with the architectural unit, an examination of the churches of Nessebar emphasizes three distinct phases. A first period, corresponding to the 5th -6th centuries AD, which we may call the *early-Byzantine* period, presents basilicas with a central nave, flanked by two or even three pronaoses. *The Old Episcopal Residence* (St. Sophia) together with the foundations of the *Basilica with three naoses* from the proximity of the isthmus, respectively the *Basilica Virgin Eleousa*, located on the northeastern coast, are very illuminating in this matter, absolutely impressive through the generous size of the proportions, an aspect that closely verifies the exceptional dynamism of the Justinian Era, when the New Eastern Empire reaches its first peak of territorial development and extension.

Maintaining the correlation with the highest levels of flourishing of Byzantium, the second stage – defined by the *medieval architecture*, is synchronous to the Macedonian Dynasty (9th – 11th centuries AD). The state of mind, perceived in a higher register, is conducted by clear architectural reliefs and concurrently nuanced. The nave of the basilica, whose structure preserves it – through a double leveling – the Church of St. Stephen, also known as the New Episcopal Residence (10th – 11th centuries), is accompanied by the austere priory, yet elegant of the Church of St. John the Baptist (9th – 10th centuries), built on the plan of the cross type basilica and which is distinguished by its high cylindrical dome.

A particular observation, both for this period, as well as for the later, is the lack of edifices built with a dome, the elongation being given by the cylindrical spires, or octagonally faceted, shaped on the top level with splendid arcades, an aesthetic created using various dimensions (height, aperture) and by the chromatic game granted by the alternation between the red color of the bricks, the white color of the polished limestone and the emerald green of the enameled discs.

The third stage, developed between the 13th and 14th centuries, completes plenarily, the artistic culmination. Is the most fertile period in the building of churches in the so-called pictorial style. Also now, within the geospace of continental proximity, monastic complexes appear involved intellectually in the formation of the future patriarchs of Bulgaria. Magnificent establishments appear on the small peninsula, one after another, all religious monuments currently of great emotional impact. The ornamentations of a subtle refinement, inspired from the art of the mosaic, generate in this way, surprising metamorphoses. Among the most brilliant achievements we nominate the following churches: of *Jesus Christ Pantocrator*, *St. Paraskeva*, of *Archangels Michael and Gabriel*, of *St. John Aliturghetos* and of *St. Todor*.

Hereinafter, by leaning on a complex of causative factors (chronological, spatial, economical, historical, architectural, local diligences, etc.) we selectively continue with a succinct-descriptive presentation regarding the elements that singularizes them as component parts of these monuments.

*The Church of St. Sophia*⁸ – *the Old Episcopal Residence or the old Mitropolity Church (the 5th – 6th centuries AD)*. No matter how compressed the built space of old Nessebar proved to be, you won't find it hard to distinguish the two markets of "command" that polarized the early urban. One of them, geometrically positioned in the center, houses the most impressive local religious edifice and among the most important ones of the Byzantine-Balkan territories.

As a matter of fact, the time when it was built and the worship of the "Righteous wisdom", surmounts a simple coincidence with the valences of the Justinian Era, marked in its identity by the millennial symbol of the "Christian world": the Cathedral of St. Sophia from Constantinople. Another aspect that reinforces the high social alleged values, even if it comes from the field of civil built heritage, are, not far – in Nessebar nothing is too far away, but everything is found nearby – the public thermal baths, used during the 5th -6th centuries AD, a period when the "calligraphy" of St. Sophia is also perfected.

Today, still, although truncated, the building is relatively well preserved, in its original form. The Basilica, presenting one nave and two wings (about 25-26 m wide) was used not only as an ecclesiastic residence, but also as a decision-making space regarding the administrative and social issues. We may opine that before us we have an establishment with central functions, fulfilled, identically, a few centuries later, by the great cathedrals of Medieval West.

The central nave is twice as large as the size of the wings, being separated from them by massive columns, interposed by semi-cylindrical arcs. The building made of stone and brick presents five large registers, bound with mortar mixed with crushed brick, also adding that during its glorious days it breathed with piety through the paintings that covered its walls, but also solemn boldness through the pavement covered with mosaic, made of colored stones. Massive, yet elegant in daylight, during the darkness of the night, however, it used to metamorphosize into a fiery mountain "temple", just like the "burning bush on Sinai".

The Church of St. Mary Elousa (the 5th -6th centuries AD). Built on the north coast, today in ruins, and reiterating, I don't know how many times until now, the ergonomics of the space – perceived as a way of living – is organically integrated within the system of fortifications, a feature setting it aside being that it belonged to a monastic ensemble. With a length of 25 m/18 m wide, the construction presents three longitudinal naves, the northern one, barely perceptible, due to the periodical landslides. Several brick tombs were found in this place, archaeological research arguing on the other hand, about its longevity, due to the repeated interventions of restoration. The renowned echo of the name *Virgin Mary Elousa* (in Greek, the loving one) resounds from the belief in a miracle icon of the Virgin Mary.⁹

⁸ No more than two steps away, you'll be able to notice the traces of another sacred "nest". It was the tiny church of St. Dumitru, small just as a modest peasant house. The contrasts are astounding (a.n.).

⁹ The icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary Eleousa is found in the National Museum of History in Sophia, while its impeccable replica, may be admired in the Museum of Archaeology from Nessebar (a.n.).

The Church of St. John the Baptist (9th – 10th centuries). It is the best kept, close to perfection, medieval Basilica. From an architectural perspective, it makes the transition between the early Christian basilica and the cross plan with a central dome. The river stone is the predominant material of construction, in eclectic alternance with the limestone blocks, carved out in various shapes and sizes. This pattern of building in itself seduces by breaking the monotony. A third participating element is the brick, its role being almost exclusively a decorative one. The reasons are austere, yet not lacking elegance, an attribute developed out of a nuanced disposal. The main arch is well shaped, set up very high, above the entry, as well as the gullets, disposed also in flexible arches, at the base of the cylindrical tower. In the upper register, the tower appears marked by low semicircle openings, poignantly highlighted, wrapped by a roof platform. Also at the level of the highly expressive tower we can find two circular brick belts, fitted in horizontal layers, separated by stone rings. The windows, aligned only in the upper part, rather like narrow gaps, split in the thickness of the walls, are also discreetly contoured by the redness of the bricks.

Inside, on the southern interior wall, shaded, yet still preserved, the portrait of the founder can be found (14th century), as well as a scene with the figure of St. Marina (17th century). Inside the altar apse, an old column trunk is what is left of the cross, and in the walls, here and there, you can still observe delicate fragments of Greek art. A special presence is also represented by several icons of patrimony, remarkable due to their age (15th century), the clarity of the colours and the tranquility that is radiated through the icon of St. Hierarch Nicholas. Another religious image that, on the other hand, awakens inner unrest is the one of St. John the Baptist holding his head under his arm.

The Church of St. Stephen – the New Episcopal Residence or the New Mitropoly (10th -11th centuries). It is built out of registers of carved stone blocks, alternating with bricks – which here have an exterior decorative role as well. It has a Byzantine basilica plan, with a high central nave in relation to the lateral wings, which confers to it, in addition to its massiveness, the appearance of a civil edifice with two floors. The fence ¹⁰ – contributes to the completion of the said particularity – entirely from massive stone, built in the local style – the existence of a private garden, and especially the unfolding of a wide “porch” (pronaos), also painted, that in a way retains you in a sort of “pious obedience”, but also in preparation for the royal filling with the sacramental harmony awaiting for you, after opening the heavy wooden gates of the inner “assembly room”.

The analysis of the stylistic particularities reveals that these frescoes were painted by three craftsmen, two of them completing the central and eastern parts, while the western was carried out by the third one. A later work, from the 18th century, is the emotional scene of the “Doomsday”, created in the traditional iconography of the period and that makes close references to the frescoes having the same topic, which brighten the exterior walls of the monumental churches of Bucovina.

¹⁰ It is the only religious monument from Nessebar, where there is a traditional wall of enclosure, covered with a double layer of semicircular tiles resembling to the ones found in the roof of the museum building. The available garden ambient space is also unique, where fig trees, wild grasses and flower beds unfold into a spontaneous, mysterious and refreshing appearance (a.n.).

Another pictorial work, which draws much attention, is the 16th century iconostasis. In the geometric centre of the superior register of the temple, one can observe, through its size, the icon of Jesus Christ Pantocrator, carrying on his head, in an angle, a Baroque style oversized cross, with the crucified Christ on it.

Inside the church, the wooden carved *Episcopal chair*, as well as the ceremonious *pulpit*, also chiseled in wood, in the late 18th century, are still preserved. The few graves covered with large slabs of marble are also of great importance, as well as a magnificent column (the symbol of continuities) – based on a Corinthian chapter, having on top another long chapter, designed with Renaissance subtleties.

Instead of a conclusion, St. Stephen is, certainly, one of the most significant religious monuments of the religious Bulgarian culture, and fresco painting, with hundreds of registers, portraits and icons, require many hours to exhaust the entire iconographical richness.

The Church of St. John Aliturghetos (14th century AD) Located in the immediate proximity of St. Stephen, the Church of St. John Aliturghetos is structured according to the cross shaped basilica, crowning (even unfinished) the absolute excellence of the late medieval style. Still svelte and stylish, with its supple temple-like columns, with elevated domes and large openings with the purpose of filtering the light, it can be compared (keeping the proportions), with the blossoming of the late Gothic style. Built on the southern shore, with generous perspectives over the sea, it captures the entire light, and the decorative components (arcs, domes, consoles, etc.), shaped with great craftsmanship and accuracy, mastering the purity of the fashioned stone and the ornamental ceramic elements. The floor, fashioned in the mosaic style, alternating rhombic shapes, squares and triangles of polychrome marble (white, red and green), and the altar apse is set within a marble frame, carved with vine leaves. In 1913, it was partially destroyed by a powerful earthquake, but until the present day, it is kept as an exceptional monument of the Bulgarian architecture.

The Churches of the “Archangels Michael and Gabriel” and of “St. Paraskeva” (13th -14th centuries) From the central square, dominated by the imposing silhouettes of the ancient Mitropoly, you sneak up slightly (a few tens of meters) toward the northern coast, where, almost twinned, you are greeted by two other places of worship, of an ecstatic beauty. Their matching goes beyond the close territorial annexation in a temporally synchronous genesis (13th -14th centuries), as well as in architectural similarities, evident in the first half, composed of a string of cylindrical arches. The major differences occur in the upper part, with the *Church of St. Paraskeva*¹¹, having a rectangular plan, of naval type, with a slightly tilted roof, while the *Holy Archangels*¹² expose a magistral dome.

¹¹ The exceptionally decorated facades, enclose on the inside a space of 15 m length/6 m wide. The most spectacular part is the outer decoration, built of limestone and decorative brick combinations. Geometries and solar symbols, a chessboard, a fish tail, and the miniature green enameled ceramic bowls, are all combined together in a genius composition (a.n.).

¹² Built subsequently, it resumes and develops a superior pictorial decoration style on a higher level. With a slim silhouette, given by the high arches, it is covered by a dome built by means of a cylindrical intersection, which encases the entire edifice. It is most definitely, a testimony to the craft of high class and of the wealth invested in the value of the church (a.n.).

The Church of "Jesus Christ Pantocrator" (the 13th -14th centuries). This edifice occupies a special place within the sacred geography of Nessebar. Located in the southern market of the city, the old Greek agora is revealed through its superb monumentality, leaving the impression that everything "spreads out at its feet".

Specifically, it is one of the best preserved churches, in its original form, of the entire Bulgarian heritage. The establishment, as a whole, is defined by a distinguished decorative style, which blends, in select harmonies, the white limestone with various types of brick, presenting from the bottom up, no less than 15 pictorial registers. The merging of the rectangular and triangular and semi-cylindrical motifs, but also with the girdle that imposes the ancient symbol of the swastika, alternating with enameled ceramic rosettes, creates a fabulous complex of great brilliance. Same as a sovereign, it is "crowned" by a main dome, where the decorative subtleties achieve perfection.

In closing this part, consecrated to the religious identity, we specify that currently, services are still performed inside the church dedicated to the "*Blessed Virgin Mary*" (1884), honored as the protector of the city, the day of August 15, overflowing with vitality, colors and splendor.

CIVIL ARCHITECTURE. THE HOUSES OF NESSEBAR

We cannot speak of the vibrating identity of Nessebar in the absence of its houses and everything relating to the aesthetics of the secular civilization. A specific graphics is indicated by the narrow, short streets, paved with large stone slabs, the risk of getting lost, quite predictable, constantly enjoying new surprises. The solid fences also convey a sense of safety and relaxation – where the stone structure is blended with the warmth of the wooden planks, as well as by the reddish-brickly tiles of the roof – and which, viewed from the open sea, lends the illusion of a huge suspended canvas, that ruffles shadows and lights of ochre.

Despite the noise, their silent governance confers relief and detachment, increasing your enjoyment of being there, a state that is magnified on certain narrow streets, often blocked by stone walls and where you feel rather solitary. These are paradoxical moments in time, granted by the same city, the peace of retreating or the sense of freedom of being anonymous in the midst of the crowd. These are components drawing clear particularities to the city of Nessebar, but what makes it unmistakably unique, is the stylistic unity of the homes. Built from so many different materials (as a matter of fact, in themselves they represent a core feature), stone and wood entering a complementarity of great intimacy and fascination.

Up until now, the city preserves over a hundred private architectural ensembles (we are not mentioning here the public civil buildings) from the period of the "Bulgarian National Revival". Built at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, these belong to an original style of architecture, defining for the "Black Sea Style".

The pattern exposes an evolution on two levels, supported by a ground floor built of stone, with an irregular shape imposed by the trajectory of the streets – with which they are often in a homogeneous continuity. The upper floor, built of wood, had a much wider extension, generously cantilevered above the street. That structure integrates multiple valences, resulting from the common need regarding the efficient organization of the space. The freeing of the roads is therefore obtained – a necessary action to achieve traffic fluidity, the comfort of the shade, and also a decorative

graphic effect, occasionally emphasized by the presence in the console, of the massive wooden beams, which articulate the two compartments in a superb consistency. This vertical arrangement and the combination of stone and wood, represents the essence of stylistic unity, a reality that does not justify an absolute uniformity. There are details, such as the size of the building, the more pregnant or secluded output of the upper front, the opening of the windows, certain elements of decor, etc., that bring surprising nuances of diversity into the scenery.

Returning to the traditional house plan, we point out that the first level, looking like a small fortress, is intended for crafts, trade or storage activities. The fishing gear was kept here, or the agro-vinicultural, artisanal tools, as well as wine barrels, vegetables and fruits. Where possible, outbuildings were built for various uses, or indoor kitchens, for instance having dinner on an improvised table, in front of the gate, alongside the closest people (neighbors, friends, guests...), configures a flexible mental geography, of strongly built community, specific to the coastal areas, and here we make a step forward toward the Mediterranean culture and civilization.

The access to the second level is made on a narrow and steep staircase, an aspect that lends an added flexibility to the edifices. Made of wooden beams, is intended, par excellence, for habitation. In relation to the monolithic ground floor, the first floor displays a completely different aesthetics. The windows are large offcuts, with shutters, showcasing both austere plainness, and stylized decorations, yet never excessive. The space of maximum polarization and functionality (the soul of the house) is represented by the main hall, destined for the entire family and every day household activities. It was the most preferred space for eating, for communion or even pursuing certain activities performed mainly by women: sewing, embroidery, needlework, knitting, weaving, etc. The interior decorations, both of textile, of great variety, and of furniture (some parts carved with Oriental motifs), were seen as reference points for discerning social hierarchy. Clothing had a similar role, but with a much wider exposure, especially garments worn on holidays and special occasions, and it is required to emphasize, at this point, the degree of impact of the female costume (be it civil or traditional), where the quality and price of the fabric, along with items of adornment, reflected the degree of the social status of the "head of the family".

The upper level contained the bedrooms as well, the main kitchen and the smoke house for fish and meat. The interior walls were covered with alcoves and niches, intended to preserve tableware, household instruments or valuable objects of adornment. In smaller niches there were candles for lighting. A special place is occupied by the icons, and sometimes a miniature altar. The manner of arranging of this entire system denotes a common concern for functionality, elegance and harmony.¹³ We conclude this part dedicated to civil architecture, pointing out that the list of monuments is much wider, and the analyzed selection, aimed to outline the personality of a unique and romantic city, established in eternity.

¹³ The information related to the image of a traditional house are easy to obtain, by visiting the ethnographic museum housed inside the Panayot Muskoyani House, built by the rich merchant in the year of 1804. Here, collections of objects and tools used in daily life are preserved, as well as an exhibition of traditional regional costumes. The houses converted into dining places are also promising, these being authentic "gastronomic clubs", and which, the least altered, keep the atmosphere and the subtle fragrance of the solemn houses of Nessebar (a.n.).

INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS. PERIEGESIS, EXEGESIS, HERMENEUTICS, OR ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE CULTURAL MAN

From a different perspective, we could do a turn – in relation to these paradigms – towards other meanings such as *journey, knowledge, understanding* – meanings that are being fashioned within each and every actor, in individualized contents, which, in turn, allow themselves to be shaped into a syncretic formula of levers interconnecting the scientific rigor with the balm of affective emotional character.

The Journey or the Periegesis¹⁴, as the manner or way to knowledge, has always been consciously present within the human spirit; especially in the major civilizations, shaped by means of absorbing within their inner being, places, monuments, achievements that weren't available at home. It is *the dialogue of the Self with the World*, through which it empathically absorbs images, sounds, songs, dances, flavors and cuisines, adornments and costumes, tools, weapons and stories enriching the soul in the act of living.

Knowledge or Exegesis already requires an active attitude of “recognition” of the cultural paradigms, born in other lands and generated in cultures forged in particular, specific circumstances. It is *the dialogue of the Self with Itself*, for in order to know, this always means to have a dialogue with the Other, in order to find out who You really are. No less than this, it requires necessities and scientific paradigms, because knowing the Human Geography is always a methodical, professional and perennial research with regard to Culture and Human civilization.

Understanding or Hermeneutics is the next step in that climb towards the Spiritual. Nothing lasts forever: states and empires, monuments and cathedrals, armies and brilliant generals, kings and emperors, borders and frontiers will be moved or become useless, everything is perishing and will fall into dust in the perspective of History. The only absolute nobility of Man is represented by Culture, that in its universal aspects, is living and it is complete, giving meaning to the existence. It is *the dialogue of the Self with the higher Principles*, in an attempt to find, as much as we are able to understand, the meaning of existence and our mission in this world. No Journey (*Periegesis*), that is experienced, is complete without the lucidity of Knowledge (*Exegesis*), and both must soar towards Understanding (*Hermeneutics*) on behalf of the edification of the Cultural Man.

Therefore, we can opt in favour of the quality of the journey, which shapes the human behavior according to comprehensions and meanings, just as an illuminating orphic trail. The periegesis and exegesis enter a successful relation of complementarity, in a geography where the cultural perennality prevails, becoming quite significant and the need for interpretation and exposition becomes imminent. To travel, to know and to understand what is still revealed, spoken and lived by the present-day city of Nessebar, are just as many steps taken on behalf of the edification of the Cultural man.

¹⁴ The periegesis derives from the Greek term *periêgêsis*, which in Antiquity referred to a “*journey*”, “*a guidance around something*”, the verb *periegeisthai*, “*to direct around*”, “*to indicate around*”, consisting of the adverb *pêri*, “*about*”, “*around*”, “*beyond*” ... and the verb *hegeisthai*, “*to direct*”. (see Robert Beekes, *Greek Etymological Dictionary*, vol. I, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2010, p. 1176).

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