

**THE HISTORY OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> MALE GYMNASIUM IN CHISINAU  
AND THE HOUSE CHURCH BUILT WITH IT AT THE END OF  
THE 19<sup>TH</sup> – 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES  
(FOR THE 120<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONSTRUCTION  
OF THE CHURCH)**

<https://doi.org/10.52603/pc22.11>

Alla CHASTINA  
Institutul Patrimoniului Cultural

**The history of the 2nd male gymnasium in Chisinau and the house church built  
with it at the end of the 19th – 20th centuries  
(for the 120th anniversary of the construction of the church)**

**Summary:** The educational institution was opened in Chisinau in 1871. It was transformed into the 2nd Chisinau gymnasium in 1884. There are various documents on the construction of the building of this 2nd male gymnasium during 1892-1893 in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova. Plans and projects for this construction of the building were drawn up by the diocesan architect Demosfen Mazirov.

The educational institution had the right to own a chapel and thanks to the honorary trustee of the gymnasium Constantin Namestnic, a temple was built in the Byzantine-Russian style according to the project of the diocesan architect Mikhail Serotsinsky. On May 19, 1902 it was consecrated. In April 1962, a planetarium was opened in the church building as a center of astronomy. Later it was returned to the Orthodox Church.

Today it is the Transfiguration of the Savior Church (Biserica Schimbarea la Față a Mântuitorului), which is an architectural monument of national importance representing a part of the rich cultural heritage of the Republic of Moldova.

**Keywords:** architectural monuments, gymnasium, church, philanthropist, diocesan architect.

On May 19, 2022, we marked the 120th anniversary of the construction of the Biserica Schimbarea la Față a Mântuitorului (Transfiguration of the Lord Savior Church), which was originally built for the 2nd male gymnasium in Chisinau. The educational institution was opened in Chisinau in 1871 and was originally a four-class gymnasium. In 1884 it was transformed into the 2nd Chisinau gymnasium, which was subordinated to the Ministry of Public Education of the Odessa educational district (Златов 1922: 4). In 1886 Nikolai Alaev became the director of this gymnasium, who devoted 17 years to this educational institution. During this period the 2nd male gymnasium became one of the most well-organized educational institutions, with a high level of cultural and moral upbringing and education. The National Archives of the Republic of Moldova keeps the documents on the construction of the Chisinau 2nd male gymnasium in 1892-1893 (NARM, f. 6, inv. 4, d. 139).

The plans and projects for the construction of the building were drawn up by the district architect Demosfen Mazirov. It's known that he was born in 1839 in Evpatoria and was the nephew of the famous artist Ivan Aivazovsky. In 1865, Demosfen Mazirov graduated from the Imperial Academy of Arts. From 1866 he began his work in Odessa. He was the architect of the Odessa Customs District. In 1870 he became the architect of the Odessa educational district.



Fig. 1. Chisinau the 2nd male gymnasium's building. The projects for its construction were drawn up by the district architect Demosfen Mazirov. <http://oldchisinau.com/>

In 1881-1882 Mazirov received the position of architect of the Novorossiysk University. In 1881 he was a member of the jury for the selection of the project for the monument to Alexander Pushkin in Odessa. Mazirov is the author of the project of the 2nd male Odessa gymnasium at the Staroportofrankovskaia Street in 1886. It was this architect who prepared the projects of the main facade, side facade and longitudinal sections, projects of the basement, 1st, 2nd floors and cross section for the construction of the building of the 2nd male gymnasium in Chisinau. Then these documents were sent to the construction department, which decided that the project was technically drawn up satisfactorily and the estimate was in the amount of about 134,169 rubles and 35 kopecks (NARM, f. 6, inv. 4, d. 139, p. 5). According to archival documents, the 2nd male gymnasium, overlooking the main facade of the central Aleksandrovskaya street (today Stefan cel Mare Boulevard), was built in 1895 (Fig. 1). The solution of the main facade facing the Central Street of Chisinau consisted of three protruding parts. The merchant Gheorghy Pronin, architects Karl Gasket, Gregory Lozinsky, Peotr Starzhinsky, Yakov Uskat and others all took an active part in the construction. In August 1895, an estimate was already approved for the installation

of a stone fence around the building of the 2nd Chisinau gymnasium in the amount of 6,978 rubles 67 kopecks, compiled by the Bessarabian provincial architect Lozinsky on August 21, 1895 (NARM, f. 6, inv. 4, d. 139, p. 72). In September, the junior lower manager Yakov Uskat submitted a revised estimate for the construction of a fence around the gymnasium building, which was also approved by the Construction Department. In 1911 a special gym was added to the building (NARM, f. 6, inv. 4, d. 986). This happened under the director of the gymnasium M. Yanko. It's known that on March 22, 1903, the director of the gymnasium sent to the Construction Department for approval a plan on 4 sheets with copies for the construction of a gym for the building of the 2nd gymnasium, as well as an estimate compiled by the architect Mitrofan Elladi in the amount of 23,563 rubles 20 kopecks. On June 1911, the gym was started and completed by December 1 of the same year, in principle, a long-determined extension of the gymnasium in terms of its size (10 fathoms in length, 4 ½ fathoms in width, 3 fathoms 2 arshins in height) landscaping and equipment with the necessary instruments, one of the best in the entire educational district. The cost of the gym building exceeded 10,000 rubles (Златов 1922: 29). In the First World War, from the winter of 1916-1917 the gymnasium housed the military headquarters for the supply of the Southern Army. It was a time when pre-conscription training of students became mandatory. The so-called labor squads were organized of student volunteers, who were supposed to help the families of the Motherland defenders, as well as participate in the harvest. During this difficult time, the director of the gymnasium was Vasily Yurasov (1914-1917) was replaced by Pavel Schumacher. From February 20 to December 4, 1917, a surgical hospital was located in the building of the 2nd gymnasium. During this time, classes were held in the second shift at the 1st male gymnasium and the women's gymnasium named after Nagovskaya. On December 19, 1918, Alexander Oatul was appointed the director of the gymnasium and was supposed to restore the building after the military events of 1914 and the Russian revolution of 1917, when there was a hospital in the gymnasium. On October 9, 1919, a decree was adopted on the nationalization of the 2nd gymnasium, when the number of Romanian lessons was increased from 38 to 48 hours per week, Russian became optional. Later, Lyceum No. 2 was renamed the Military Lyceum of the King Ferdinand the First (Liceul Militar Regele Ferdinand I, as well as Mihai Viteazul) (Fig. 2).

Most likely, due to the fact that the building, located on the main street, was an administrative building of impressive size, it was decided to transfer it to the Central Committee of the Party. In the photograph, where the building of the former gymnasium was not yet destroyed, you can also see the sports field of this educational institution. The strongest November earthquake in 1940 damaged the gymnasium, but the collapse was more than partial. The renovation of the building lasted until the summer of 1941.

The Second World War finally completed the history of the building of the 2nd Men's Gymnasium, which was badly damaged in July 1941. After this war, like many other buildings in Chisinau, the gymnasium building was demolished. A local branch of the KGB was built in its place.



Fig. 2. Lyceum of the King Ferdinand I (Liceul Militar Regele Ferdinand I, as well as Mihai Viteazul). <http://oldchisinau.com/>

Today, it houses the Information and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova (Fig. 3). As for the construction of a house church at an educational institution, the question was raised in 1895, simultaneously with the construction of its own building for the 2nd Chisinau male gymnasium. Initially, the amount of 15,000 rubles was supposed to be used for the construction of an extension to the main building of the gymnasium from the side of the courtyard of a separate small two-story building, in the lower building of which there was to be a gymnasium, and in the upper building – a house church.



Fig. 3. The building of the Information and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova. Photo of the author.



Fig. 4. The 2nd male Gymnasium's Church the in Chisinau. Plans for the construction of the building were prepared by the diocesan architect Mikhail Serotsinsky. <http://oldchisinau.com/>

But later the original plan was changed. In 1899 the honorary trustee of the gymnasium, Constantin Namestnic, wrote a statement to the Construction Department about the desire to contribute 35,589 rubles 11 kopecks in order to build a separate church building, and according to his conditions the temple had to be named after the holy and equal-to-the-apostles kings Constantine and Helena.

He also arranged for a family crypt under the floor of the church (Кудрявцева 2018). On behalf of philanthropist Namestnic, the plans for the construction of the building were prepared by the diocesan architect Mikhail Serotsinsky. As for the activities of this architect, according to archival documents, in 1878 he was appointed diocesan architect of the Chisinau diocese, in 1879, for his length of service, he became a collegiate assessor. He was dismissed from his post on September 27, 1883 and was retired until October 8, 1897, when he was again appointed to the post of architect for the diocesan office. On September 5, 1905 he was transferred to court advisers. On October 4, 1905, Mikhail Stepanovich Serotsinsky was dismissed from his post, due to the fact that "by the highest order of September the 3rd, 1905, number 34, he was appointed junior architect of the Construction Department of the Bessarabian Provincial Board" (NARM, f. 6, inv. 4, d. 1065, p.1-2). On August 18, 1900, the Construction Committee signed a contract with the executor Stepanov in the amount of 38,500 to complete the construction of the church by November 1, 1901. Provincial architect Karl Gasket and diocesan architect Mikhail Serotsinsky carried out the technical supervision of the construction of the church. On August 27, 1900 in the presence of the honorary trustee Constantin Namestnik, representatives of the Construction Committee, teaching staff and students of the gymnasium, the foundation of the future orthodox temple was laid. The author of the iconostasis was the Master S. Kirillov. Artistic works were done by the Ukrainian artist Mishchenko, and all the ordered images were exact copies from the icons of the Saint Vladimir Cathedral

in Kiev, executed by the famous artists: Vasnetsov, Nesterov, Svedomsky and others. The bells for the gymnasium's church were made at the Olovyanishnikov factory in Yaroslavl. As for the sacristy and the necessary utensils, all this was purchased at the local church utensils store of Baburova, who donated many, moreover, quite valuable things in memory of her late husband (Златов 1922: 63). On May 19, 1902, the Church of the 2nd Male Gymnasium was solemnly consecrated by His Grace Jacov in the presence of the cathedral clergy, the leadership of educational institutions, local authorities, honorary representatives of the nobility and many other guests (Fig. 4). According to the Bessarabian provincial news from the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, 1902, this church was built relative to some designs and sketches of the architect Tsiganko (Бессарабские губернские ведомости 1902, № 111). But for today this information has not been found in the archival documents yet. According to the shape of the building, the temple is a Greek cross with four pillars, on which the circular drum of the dome rests. The building is built in the Russian-Byzantine style. There is a porch with columns in front of the entrance. The first church warden was Constantin Namestnik, the builder of the gymnasium church, but in 1902-1905, while he was ill, he was replaced by the Bessarabian vice-governor Ustrugov and the teacher of the 2nd gymnasium Yakov Baskevich. The Pedagogical Council elected him to this position immediately after the death of Constantin Namestnik on November 5 1905, and until the autumn of 1919, he served as church warden, a total of 14 years. Then, until the spring of 1921, this position was filled by the landowner Tsanko-Kylchik and later by the candidate of law at Moscow University Vladimir Hertsa, who initially took an active part in the life of the gymnasium and of the church.



Fig. 5. Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord (Biserica Schimbarea la Față a Mântuitorului) in Chisinau. Photo of the author

In April 1962, a planetarium was opened in the church building as a center for promoting knowledge in astronomy and earth sciences (Кишинев. Энциклопедия 1984: 404). In the demonstration halls, with the help of modern technology, one could see how space stations and ships were moving and study different constellations, observing the planets, eclipses of the sun and moon, listening to lectures on astronomy and astronautics. But a fire in 1990 caused the closing of the planetarium. Ultimately, the building was returned to the Orthodox Church and was subsequently renovated.

Today it is the Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord, in Romanian Biserica Schimbarea la Față a Mântuitorului (Fig. 5), and is an architectural monument of national importance. This building is included in the register of historical and cultural monuments of the municipality of Chisinau, representing part of the rich cultural heritage of Moldova.

#### **Bibliography:**

National Archives of Moldova (NARM), f. 6, inv. 4, d. 139.

National Archives of Moldova (NARM), f. 6, inv. 4, d. 986.

National Archives of Moldova (NARM), f. 6, inv. 4, d. 1065.

Златов Г.Ф., при участии Якимова В.С. и Мелеги К.Г. Кишиневская 2-ая прогимназия. Краткий исторический очерк. Выпуск 2. Кишинев: Типография М.Э. Бланка, 1922, 83 с.

Кишинев.Энциклопедия. Кишинев: Главная Редакция Молдавской Советской Энциклопедии, 1984, 573 с.

Кудрявцева Е. Удивительная история Кишиневского храма Преображения Господня. <https://locals.md/2019/udivitel'naya-istoriya-hrama/>

Освящение церкви при Кишиневской 2-ой гимназии. В: Бессарабские губернские ведомости, 1902, 21мая (3 июня), №111.

**Data about the author:** Alla Ceastina, (Chișinău, Republica Moldova), doctor of Arts and culturology, senior scientific researcher, Institute of Cultural Heritage,  
e-mail: [chastinalla@gmail.com](mailto:chastinalla@gmail.com), ORCID: 0000-0002-7288-1252