

Abstract

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The pilgrimage to the holy relics of Saint Paraskeva the Venerable in Iași stands today as one of the most significant manifestations of Romanian Orthodox spirituality. Yet, beyond the contemporary image of the vast numbers of pilgrims who journey to Iași each year lies a much older history, gradually shaped through hagiographical texts, liturgical worship, ecclesial memory, and devotion. The present research traces precisely this underlying trajectory, often obscured by the visibility and magnitude of the contemporary pilgrimage: the process through which a cult develops into a pilgrimage, and through which a liturgical tradition spanning more than six centuries comes to shape the spiritual identity of an entire region. The analysis of the sources leads back to the beginning of the fifteenth century, a pivotal period in the ecclesiastical history of Moldavia. It is within this context that a tradition of veneration of Saint Paraskeva began to take shape, more than two centuries before the translation of her holy relics to Iași. Moldavian liturgical manuscripts, hagiographical testimonies, ecclesiastical foundations, iconographic representations, and hymnographic compositions reveal a cult that emerged neither incidentally nor on the margins of ecclesial life, but developed organically through successive stages of consolidation. Tracing this history brings to light connections and testimonies that have hitherto remained insufficiently explored and, consequently, invites a reconsideration of the significance traditionally attributed to the year 1641. From this perspective, the translation of the holy relics of Saint Paraskeva to Iași does not mark the beginning of her cult, but rather the encounter between an already deeply rooted tradition and the physical presence of the holy relics of a saint who had long been embedded in the liturgical consciousness of Moldavia. This encounter, however, decisively altered the dynamics of the phenomenon. The cult acquired a focal point, devotion found a privileged locus for its expression, and Iași entered a gradual process of transformation into one of the major pilgrimage centres of the Orthodox world. From this point emerges the second major trajectory of the research: the crystallisation of the pilgrimage between 1641 and 2025. From its early forms centred around the Monastery of the Three Holy Hierarchs, through the transfer of the holy relics to the Metropolitan Cathedral, the major historical developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the experience of war, the communist period, and the religious revival after 1990, to the unprecedented challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the contemporary reality documented in 2025, the pilgrimage reveals itself as a living ecclesial organism. It adapts to changing historical circumstances without losing its liturgical centre and, over time, transcends the boundaries of a local religious manifestation to become a spiritual, communal, and identity-shaping landmark. Within this historical sequence lies the interpretative key to the entire study: the cult precedes the pilgrimage, generates it, and gives it meaning, while the pilgrimage renders historically visible what the cult has established within the liturgical consciousness of the ecclesial community. Between early fifteenth-century Moldavia and Iași in 2025, there thus emerges a continuity that cannot be reduced to a mere chronology of events. Behind it lies a deeper process through which the memory of a saint traverses the centuries, becomes embedded in liturgical worship, takes root within a people, and ultimately sets hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in motion year after year. The study therefore proposes a historical-liturgical reading of the pilgrimage to Iași that begins not with its contemporary magnitude, but with the roots that made such magnitude possible. What is visible today in Iași represents only the outward manifestation of a history that began long before 1641; reconstructing that history opens a new perspective on the origins, continuity, and significance of the pilgrimage to Saint Paraskeva the Venerable.