

A BRIDGE OVER TIMES – THE HISTORY AND MODERNITY OF CHORAL CHANT IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF BESSARABIA, FROM CREATION TO RECEPTION

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SUMMARY. This study aims at highlighting the choral chant in the Orthodox church of Bessarabia. Sacred music is a cultural area that covers the fundamental human values able to build and to perfect the complex cultural approach of human life. The spiritual history of Moldavia is definitely marked by an ancient original musical art, incorporated in an infinite gamut of emotions.

Keywords: Sacred music, Bessarabia, Moldova, Bessarabian composers, choral chant

Sacred music is a cultural area that covers the fundamental human values able to build and to perfect the complex cultural approach of human life.

Music comes from the very depths of human beings, bringing to light the spiritual background and virtues that are specific to the nation it belongs to.

In general, sacred music, as with the other areas of a nation's culture, is defined as such based on the moral, political, social, historical, philosophical and aesthetic values.

The spiritual history of Moldavia is definitely marked by an ancient original musical art, incorporated in an infinite gamut of emotions.

Added to the popular Melos, with roots in the farthest prehistory and antiquity, new musical layers have got structured over time, constantly increasing and diversifying the sound landscape.

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Byzantine music is a constitutive part of the artistic and cultural past of Moldavia. It was the starting point, which has evolved over time, of Romanian sacred music. Being part of the cultural past of Romanians, it has developed and has been passed down in the traditional spirit of this nation.

Until 1812, the history of Bessarabia cannot be treated separately, because it overlaps with the history of medieval Moldavia. It passed through the same historical events as the entire history of Romanians, since the oldest times until the beginning of the 19th century, when it was abducted by the Tsarist Russian Empire. The territory between the Prut and the Dniester rivers, named in 1812 Bessarabia, designated an entity that was delimited from a geographical and political-administrative standpoint, based on the spatial-temporal dimension of the historical evolution of the Romanian people.

Bessarabia or the country of the Wallachian prince Bessarab was the southern part of the medieval Principality of Moldavia and covered the territory between the Danube Delta and the Dniester River mouth.

The tragedy of Bessarabia was a consequence of the Russo-Turkish war of 1806-1812, which led to its annexation to the Tsarist Russian Empire. In 1812, the Russian diplomats bribed the Ottoman diplomats and extended the name of Bessarabia to the entire territory between Prut and Dniester, for the purpose of disguising such annexation and creating a new geographical and historical identity, to mask its historical belonging to the Romanian Principalities. Bessarabia was, is and will be a Romanian territory. Here is what our great national poet Mihai Eminescu wrote regarding this territory: "As regards all the events that have occurred so far, we see that one insistently repeats that Bessarabia is among the provinces won by Russians by sword, from Tatars and Turks. (...) Bessarabia has never belonged, either in full or in part, to Turks or to Tatars, but to an established, independent state, even if weakened and whose lands were trespassed, the state of Moldavia. Moldavia was the landlord of the place and, if the representatives of the Moldavian State, the Princes, became so weak that the right was devoid of might and unable to defend itself, this is by no means proof that Moldavia has ever waived such right. For a right can be lost only with the formal agreement on losing it. But whether such agreement is obtained under duress or determined by State-related grounds, or based on any other reasons, such right cannot be changed or destroyed, unless we give it up. (...) To utter the name of Bessarabia means to protest Russian domination. The name Bessarabian and Bessarabians existed a long time before the moment when this land became Turkish land; this name by itself stands for the entire history of a nation."²

² Mihai Eminescu, *Bessarabia. The name and her extent*, in Timpul, March 3, 1878.

In 1818, tsar Alexander I granted Bessarabia local autonomy, whereby a *local upper council* was set up, formed of *vice-king, governor, vice-governor and two advisers*, appointed by Petersburg. The decisions were made in two languages: Romanian and Russian. The entire civil administration was in the hands of the native population.

These conditions could not last, given that the Tsarist Russian Empire's policy consisted of the deprivation of nationality and in the Russification of Bessarabian Romanians. In 1828, tsar Nicholas I suspended the autonomy of Bessarabia and designated it Bessarabia Region, and, subsequently, Bessarabia Governorate (Province), managed according to Russian laws. During the same period, he issued a decree whereby he launched a Russification policy through administration, schools and churches, banning the Romanian language in all official institutions. The purpose of the Tsarist Russian Empire was complete subjugation of Bessarabia, destroying little by little the strongest fortress of people – *the national conscience*. Thus, between 1828-1830, most native boyars that were part of the autonomous administration of Bessarabia withdrew to Moldavia from the right side of Prut, whereas the boyars that remained there were helpless against the rule of the Russian Empire.

The annexation of Bessarabia to Tsarist Russia had disastrous effects on the cultural, spiritual, economic and social life of the Romanian people inhabiting this land. *School and church* were used as weapons of deprivation of nationality. Taking advantage of the fact that there was no organized, state-subsidized education system in Bessarabia at that time, the Russians introduced their system, based on the Russian language and tradition. The urban environment underwent a more accentuated Russification process than the rural one, given that most cities became centers of the political, religious and cultural administration of the Russian rule, whose policy consisted in the infiltration of society with foreign elements, inadequate for the Romanian people. Only in villages, by monasteries, there remained some schools teaching in the Romanian language. The Romanian rural environment kept almost intact the national culture and spirit throughout the Tsarist Russian Empire rule. It preserved thus its specific and original features, while the Russians that settled there were determined to adopt the culture and tradition of the native people.

Besides the state education system, there was also the private family education – as a form of dissemination of knowledge, preserving Romanian traditions, but accessible only to wealthy families that, in their turn, were summoned by the state and church authorities to send their children to study in official schools, where all the subjects were taught in Russian language.

Interested in the old Moldavian traditions of public education, Metropolitan Gavriil Banulescu set up in Kishinev an *eparchial school* and a *seminary*, asking the Holy Synod from Petersburg the approval to have such institutions

teach, besides Russian, the native language and Latin, for the purpose of imparting the word of God so that everyone would be able to understand it.

In January 1813, he opened the Seminary in Kishinev, with teachers from the country, from Russia and Ukraine. At the beginning, the subjects were taught in Romanian, but later, following the official suspension of Romanian language in institutions, the teaching was done entirely in Russian. 10 years after the creation of the Seminary, the Metropolitan set up a *Religious School* where were trained, for four years, the candidates for the Seminary. Such schools were also set up in 1869, at Ediniti and in Hotin county.

Besides schools, Metropolitan Gavriil Banulescu-Bodoni established the *Printing press of the Metropolis of Kishinev and Hotin* (1814), as well as the *Bessarabia Section of the Russian Biblical Society*, which was directly responsible for the publication of the Romanian Bible at Petersburg in 1819.

To set up the printing press, the Metropolitan submitted in September 1813 a request to the Holy Synod of Petersburg, motivating the need for such printing press by the lack of spiritual awakening books for clerics and laymen, as well as by the lack of religious books. Due to such deficiency, the churches in Bessarabia had to acquire church books from Austrian counties. Thus, in May 1814, the Synod of Petersburg approved the establishment of such a printing press, imposing, however, several interdictions. The printing press operated, with short breaks, until 1822, when the Archbishop Serghie Leapidevski shut it down, motivating that Bessarabia no longer needed service books in Romanian language.

While Metropolitan Gavriil Banulescu-Bodoni led the church, the printing press published an impressive number of books. A mention from those times stated that, between 1815-1820, several 19,320 various church books in Romanian were printed. Thus, despite the restrictions of the Holy Synod of Petersburg, Gavriil Banulescu-Bodoni succeeded to print more books in Romanian than in Russian, most being translated from Russian by his care.

The church books in Romanian from Bessarabia were different from the ones printed in the same language in the Romanian territory outside it, by being imbued with the Russian orthodoxy spirit.

Other two major achievements of Metropolitan Gavriil Banulescu-Bodoni were the construction of the *Metropolis of Kishinev* (1817) and of the *Sobor Cathedral* (which was finished by his follower, Bishop Dimitrie Sulima).

Not contesting that he was influenced by Russian culture, constraint by the Russian tsarist forces, Metropolitan Gavriil remained in his heart loyal to his people: he was a fierce defender of the interests of his people, he fought for and obtained the local autonomy of Bessarabia; thanks to this, in courts were preserved for a time the Romanian Code of Calimachi, the rules of the place, the ancient customs and the native language. Further, he built

the foundation of the Romanian culture in Bessarabia, under Russian rule, which contributed substantially to the preservation of the Romanian spirit in this territory.

After the death of Metropolitan Gavriil (30 March 1821) until 1918, the Eparchy of Kishinev and Hotin was led only by Russian bishops appointed by the Holy Synod of Petersburg, with the Tsar's agreement. Thus, during such period, the bishop seat from Kishinev was occupied by 12 first hierarchs of the Bessarabian eparchy:

1. Dimitrie Sulima (18 June 1821 – 4 August 1844)
2. Irinarh Popov (12 September 1844 – 17 March 1858)
3. Antonie Sokotov (17 March 1858 -13 March 1871)
4. Pavel Lebedev (23 June 1871 – 6 June 1882)
5. Serghie Leapidevski (21 August 1882 – 12 January 1891)
6. Isakie Polojenski (21 January 1891 – 21 November 1892)
7. Neofit Nevodcikov (12 November 1892 – 26 January 1898)
8. Iacov Peatnitki (26 January 1898 – 12 August 1904)
9. Vladimir Sinikovski (12 August 1904 – 16 September 1908)
10. Serafim Ciceacov (16 September 1908 – 20 March 1914)
11. Platon Rojdestvenski (20 March 1914 – 5 December 1915)
12. Anastasie Gribanovski (10 December 1915 – June 1918).

During the leadership of the first three bishops, in some monasteries and churches, service was still held in Romanian. The conclusion of the Paris Peace Treaty in 1856, following the war in Crimea (1853-1856), resulted in the motherland receiving back the Cahul, Bolgrad and Ismail counties from southern Bessarabia, ensuring for such territories a Romanian church organization, resuming the Romanian language and culture. Unfortunately, though, in 1878, at the Peace Congress of Berlin, conducted following the Russo-Romanian-Turkish war of 1877-1878, it was decided to return to Russia the counties from southern Bessarabia.

During this period, Archbishop of Bessarabia was Pavel Lebedev – a typical representative of Russian nationalism, who acquired a reputation for persecuting everything Romanian. Once in power, he banned the Romanian language in all institutions, as well as in church, he burned Romanian books and excluded from the eparchy all the Moldavian clerics that refused to give up the language, culture and tradition of their ancestors. The situation thus created determined many cultural figures to leave for Romania, among others the composer and conductor Gavriil Musicescu.

The descendant of Pavel Lebedev, Serghie Lapidevski, had a difficult time to put a stop to the emotional upset of Moldavians, allowing them, for such

purpose, to pray in their native language and to re-establish the Archdiocese Printing Press at the Noul Neamt Monastery of Chitcani.

Praiseworthy for the Bessarabian church was the episcopo Iacov Pianitki. His honor created in Kishinev the *Missionary Orthodox Brotherhood of the Birth of Christ*, for the purpose of promoting Christian culture and the related moral and religious education, editing books, brochures and leaflets not only in Russian language, but also in Romanian language, with Cyrillic spelling.

Only few of the first hierarchs of Bessarabian eparchy after Metropolitan Gavriil Banulescu-Bodoni succeeded to attract Bessarabian Romanians. Being Russians, not knowing the traditions, customs and language of the Romanian believers, they were an effective support of the Russian Empire authorities within the process of Russification of Bessarabia (which deepened in the second half of 19th century).

During the difficult Russification period, the living flame of the Romanian spirit continued to burn in the monasteries from Bessarabia – powerful spiritual centers, where the nation's chronicles and church books, true monuments of culture and art, were written. Most of them were established in the 18th century. Since the time of their establishment and throughout the 19th century, they brought their Christian and Romanian work among the believers. The documents kept in the Archives of Bessarabia mention the existence of the following monasteries: *Varzaresti, Hincu, Soroceni, Chipriana, Condrita, Harjauca, Carbovatul, Raciula, Frumoasa, Tiganesti, Tabara, Curca, Chirova, Coselauca, Saharneea, Calarausanca, Jabca, Dobrusa, [Caratura, Cosovatul, Lometa, Rezina, Soroca, Ciura, Borzesti, Butuceni, Cucuruzeni, Fantana Doamnei, Hartopul, Gradiste, Galita, Ignatei, Pestera, Poiana, Popauti, Rasca, Rudi, Verejeni], Cetatea* and the new *Noul-Neamt* monastery, established in the second half of the 19th century.

The Tsarist Russian Empire implemented its Russification policy not only in urban and rural churches, but also in monasteries. For such purpose, the archbishops of Kishinev appointed, as monastery abbots, Russian and Ukrainian monks. Foreign abbots forced the monks to learn Russian and to hold service in this language. In view of studying Russian language, by monasteries were established monastery schools, where courses were taught in Russian. Monks were very indignant: "The opening of Russian schools by monasteries was welcomed by lower rank brothers – young monks, novices and by the neighboring population; but, almost in all monasteries, this was received with ill will by the brothers.

The reforms made in 1859 by the Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, providing the introduction of Romanian language in the church and the direct adoption of choral chanting, as well as of the secularization of monastery wealth, caused the discontent of monks, due to the limitation of rights held by many Romanian

monasteries to own the immense estates belonging to them and due to preventing from the Eucharist all the monks that adopted choral chanting without the approval of ecclesiastic authorities. The secularization of monastery wealth affected also Neamt monks, who, according to such reform, would have lost a substantial part of their estates, of which only six were situated in Bessarabia. Thus, being discontented and frightened by the situation created a group of Neamt monks, led by Teofan Cristea and the hieromonk Andronic Balan-Popovici, separated from the others, leaving Musatlavra, and settled on the monastic estate Chitcani from Bessarabia, situated on the Dniester riverbank.

Asking protection from the Russian tsar and from religious authorities and the blessing of the Archbishop of Kishinev, Antonie, to remain in Bessarabia and to establish a new monastery, the refugee monks obtained such rights under a decree issued on 8 December 1860. On 13 January 1864, the new monastic establishment was consecrated by a priest, being considered under an imperial decree issued the same year “*an offspring of the holy lavra of Neamt*”.

The new monastery called “*Noul Neamt*”, established in 1864 by the monks that left the old Neamt lavra, took over not only the name of the oldest and richest monastic establishment of Moldavia, but also the secular traditions of this important cultural center. The monastery abbot, Teofan Cristea, adopted the traditions and the rules established by Saint Paisie of Neamt. Continuing the usual customs of Neamt, the monks of the new establishment took over also the old Paisian tradition of religious music, providing for the chanting by the ordained clergy in two languages: from the right side in Slavonic and from the left side in Romanian.

Neamt monks brought with them and kept here numerous and invaluable old Romanian manuscripts, documents and books.

The important figures that built the foundation of the new monastic establishment and left their print on the performance of its activity were the hieromonk **Teofan Cristea** and the hieromonk **Andronic Balan-Popovici**.

Teofan Cristea (1812-1884), born in Suceava, was the first abbot of Noul Neamt monastery. In 1828, when he was 16, he became a monk in the old Neamt lavra. During his life, he made two important trips that contributed to his becoming a priest – to Athos and to Jerusalem. He was proficient in many languages, knowing Greek, German and Slavonic to perfection, in virtue of this fact making a series of important translations into Romanian language. Some of his holograph writings and translations are kept in the library of Noul Neamt. Teofan Cristea had special musical abilities, becoming a known chanter of psaltic music and one of the best chanters - disciples of Visarion Protopsaltul, an eminent representative of the Musical School of Neamt. A part of the treasure

of musical manuscripts from the Noul Neamt library and from the National Archive from Kishinev were brought by this talented and eminent chanter. Thus, Teofan Cristea greatly contributed to the acquisition by Noul Neamt library of musical manuscripts written by Neamt chanters Iosif and Visarion, which were unknown to us when presented. Having perfect mastery of the printing art, he held for several years the position of inspector of the printing press from Neamt. Thanks to his entrepreneurial qualities, he stood out as an administrator of the estates of Neamt and Secu monasteries in Iasi, and, starting from 1858, of the ones in Bessarabia.

After the death of Teofan Cristea (1884), abbot was elected one of the monk leaders, Father Andronic, who became later, in 1890, archimandrite of the new establishment. A scholar, an assistant and continuator of Teofan Cristea, Father Andronic drew up a series of works, contributed directly to the cultivation of the spirit of the old spiritual center, making use of a good (...) which contributed directly to the writing of his historical works. For centuries, invaluable manuscripts in Slavonic, Greek, Latin and Romanian were collected at Neamt monastery.

In one of his chronicles, Father Andronic mentioned that, in 1859, the number of manuscripts in the Neamt monastery library reached 1671 copies.

The young priest Andronic evinced a special patriotic attitude, signing together with Dionisie Romano, the future abbot and episcopo, the approval for the creation of unification committees, preparing the Union of 1859.

After the events in 1859, being persecuted by authorities, he withdrew with a group of Neamt monks, settling, on 1 November 1861, on one of the Neamt monastery estates, situated in Bessarabia. Father Andronic brought with him two coffers of books, among which 30 manuscripts in Slavonic and Romanian, written in the 14th – 19th centuries and many bearing the mention of their origin: "From the Holy Monastery of Neamt brought here" as well as several of his works written in Neamt, copies of princes' documents and decrees, which helped him to compile and write a series of books in Bessarabia.

Among the pearls brought from the Neamt treasure was also the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God, which, after it was gold plated, by the diligence of Father Andronic, was named the *Large Icon of the Mother of God from Vovidenia*.

The last chronicler of the 19th century, Father Andronic left in trust to Noul Neamt library over 60 books written in his hand. Most of them are original works, dedicated to the history of monasteries, especially Neamt, Secu, Noul Neamt, and to the historical and cultural events in Moldavia. In such works, we can find also interesting data related to the history of music and the musical life of previous centuries.

Thanks to the work of this tireless and eager treasurer copier, the composition treasure of the musical school from Neamt from the second half of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century has been preserved until today.

Proof of the existence of a blooming cultural life in the field of sacred music and of an invaluable spiritual heritage is the catalogue of manuscripts drawn up by abbot Andronic in 1884, containing 142 Slavonic and Romanian manuscripts in 2,272 books printed in Slavonic, Russian, Greek, Latin, French and Romanian.

The 30 Slavonic and Romanian manuscripts from the 15th – 19th centuries brought from Neamt Monastery by Father Andronic in 1861, when he arrived in Bessarabia, formed the foundation of Noul Neamt Monastery library, as well as the basis of the preparation of the catalogue of manuscripts found in this monastic establishment.

From such a small number of manuscripts, but of immense value, the large number of manuscripts and books in the Noul Neamt Monastery library was reached by virtue of their donation and acquisition by its librarian, Father Andronic.

A considerable number of monastery manuscripts were prepared in the second half of the 19th century, in a period when the manuscript tradition in Moldavia, which was overwhelmed by printing, was on the brink of disappearance. Noul Neamt Monastery is considered one of the last centers of manuscript books in the 19th century.

At the end of the 19th century, in Bessarabia, operated over 20 monasteries and small convents, all having their own library and archive. After the second world war (1945), all the monasteries were closed, except only for Japca Monastery that continued to operate for a while. As regards the manuscripts and books in the libraries and archives of such monasteries, nothing is known. Supposedly they were burned, destroyed or maybe some manuscripts are still being kept somewhere.

Archive documents inform us that most of the valuable documentary materials from the state institutions, from monasteries and churches, as well as the entire monastic wealth, inclusively the book fund, were removed to Romania, and, in 1945, were returned, under the decision made by a special Soviet-Romanian commission. The lists of such materials have been kept up to the present, but, unfortunately, their trace disappeared, given that we do not know any details. An exception to this remains only the Library and Archive of Noul Neamt Monastery. In 1959, after the interruption of activity of Noul Neamt Monastery (for political reasons), its archive and library entered, in 1962, the secret fund under inventory no. P-2119 (closed to research) of the State Archive of the Social Soviet Republic of Moldova. The secret storage

of manuscripts made some national and international researchers draw the conclusion that the manuscripts from Noul Neamt Monastery were lost, like all the others.

One can discuss the cultural level of a people only after researching the valuable national cultural-artistic heritage, created over centuries. O significant part of such heritage consists of both musical and literary manuscripts – true monuments of national culture, invaluable assets of the cultural-artistic past. They contain real values of past civilizations, reflecting the fruitful activity of scholars, musicians and performers, who, in different ways, contributed to boosting and revitalizing the creative and performing activity of their time.

Unfortunately, due to many interruptions, a substantial part of novel documentary materials of great value was lost without trace, given that Moldavia, as mentioned by chronicler Grigore Ureche, was always “in the path of all evils”.

A valuable sector of the library of Noul Neamt Monastery an increasing number of researchers make use of is the *old musical book* and *psaltic music manuscripts*. Some of them provide details about the oldest stage in composing melodies, a period in which only the text of chants was written, indicating the voice, time and a model based on which the music to the text was composed. This phase of improvisation of some melodies based on voice, time and model is well represented in the fund of manuscripts of this monastery, starting from the 15th century. Examples in this regard are: *Mineiele* of 1448-1449, *Irmologhion* of 1827, *Octoih cu canoane la pavecernita* of 1816, *Octoih mare* or *Paraclitikiand Octoihmic* of 1836, *Triod* of 1833, *Penticostar*– 1834, *Mineielecelor 12 luni* – 1845-1847, etc. The way of performing them contributed immensely to the process of Romanianization of church chants. The first musical prints in psaltic notation or in Guidonian notation in Romanian, as well as the Greek ones in psaltic notation met a great success, besides the ones in Petersburg synodal notation, the evidence being their use. Among these can be mentioned the works of Macarie Ieromonahul, printed in Vienna in 1823, of Suceveanu, printed in Iasi and at Neamt Monastery in 1848 and 1856-1857, of Nectarie Frimu, printed in 1840 and 1846, etc., important data about such manuscripts being found in the ten volumes of the *History of Noul Neamt Monastery*, written by Father Andronic. There the author reveals all the forms of religious music performed in the monastery – *monodic* and *choral*. The first category includes oral creations and the ones with Cucuzelian and Hrysantic notation, while the choral one – the creations written in a form that is specific to Russian music in Petersburg notation or in the byzantine one. The ten historical volumes cover the vast period from the establishment of the monastery until the post-paisian epoch (1846-1886), a period of great historical and cultural achievements: choral chanting became a norm, and books were printed in Russian, Romanian, Greek, in various notations. At the monastery, the chant was

performed in the oral form, based on the two semiographies: *psaltic* (Cucuzelian) and *linear* (synodal of Petersburg). The existence of Russian, dated and undated, musical manuscripts, with linear notation, is evidence of the fact that choral music was performed in the first half of the 19th century. Among the undated chants we have such as *Octoechos* and *Triodion*, chants for wakes and liturgies, etc. Among the dated ones, we should mention *Irmologhion* written by Justin Monahul in 1819. This creation contains several local chants: a German polyeleos (from Neamt Monastery), a Kiev chant and a Wallachian Cherubic Hymn. The Manuscript *Randuiala privegherilor si la liturghie (The order of vigils and at Mass)*, written in 1850 by the hierodeacon Dometie Paulov, contains all the verses sung by the pew and a Kiev chant. Another hierodeacon, Amfilohie, wrote a choral manuscript in Russian, which ended with the traditional chant *Multi ani traeasca*.

We can get information about musical manuscripts by studying the catalogue prepared in 1884 by Father Andronic. After comparing this with the current catalogue kept in the National Archive of Moldavia from Kishinev and with the one in the monastery archive, reestablished at the initiative of archimandrite Dormedont, many musical manuscripts and prints were found missing, among them also the printed works of Anton Pann.

The books printed in Romanian, most of them with linear notation, are acquisitions made by the librarian of Noul Neamt Monastery. This category contains transcriptions in Guidonian notation based on the psaltic one, made by the following composers: Gavriil Musicescu, Gheorghe Dima, Grigore Gheorghiu. Among these, there are: *Anastasimar* with the chants of divine service of Saturday evening and Sunday morning, for eight voices used in the Romanian Orthodox Church, printed in Leipzig during 1884-1889, at the printing press of C. G. Röder; *Randuiala vecerniei de sambata seara a celor opt glasuri (Saturday evening vespers of the eight voices)*, printed in Leipzig in 1883; *Randuiala Sfintei Liturghii cu toate cantarile si troparele trebuitoare (The Rite of Holy Mass with all the necessary hymns and troparia)*, printed in Leipzig in 1885. The only book of this kind coming from Neamt is *Divina Liturghie a Sfintului Ioan Chrisostom (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom)*, of 1860, and printed by Ioan Cartu in 1865, in Bucharest.

The category of books in Greek with Hrysantic notation is of special interest. It illustrates the preoccupations of Neamt and Noul Neamt chanters to maintain relationships with the Orthodox Center from Greece. These books are recorded separately both in the catalogue of Father Andronic⁶⁷ and in the current inventory.

Worthy of musicology interest are the 15 byzantine musical manuscripts (Fund 2119R, inv. 4 of the National Archive of Moldova), these being not only the most valuable part of the fund, but also the one helping us to define the

profile of the most important and oldest musical culture cradle from Moldavia – Neamt Monastery. Dating from the first and third quarter of the 19th century, these manuscripts contain chants in Greek and Romanian (in Cyrillic alphabet) with Hrysanticnotation, therefore, they belong to the period of transition from the so-called “old sistima” to the “new sistima”.

The discovery of the fund of manuscripts of the Noul Neamt Monastery was a revelation for the music world, thanks to the novelty, originality, dramatic and emotional power this old treasure was characterized by.

The discovery, knowledge and analysis of every separate manuscript contributed to the completion of the lists of creation of chanters, who were more or less known, and to knowing the religious music life in the old Moldavian monastery, the beginnings of choral chants.

The importance of this fund consists not only in its musical and historical value, but also as a strong argument for the unity of the musical culture of Romanians from all over the world.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as in the first half of the 20th century, several political, cultural and social events took place, which contributed to the creation of the national school of music and to the evolution of Bessarabian composition creation.

Among the most important events in this period, we should mention the following:

1) The intensification of choral movement and the establishment of some schools such as the schools of V. Gaitar, Harmony Society, the Kishinev branch of the Imperial Russian Musical Society.

2) The organization of the three musical education establishments: in 1919, Unirea (Union) Conservatory, in 1928, of the National Conservatory and, in 1936, of the Municipal Conservatory. Remarkable composers, pedagogues and conductors from this period contributed to improving the cultural-musical and the instructive-educative level of the young generation, by building the foundation of professional musical art in Bessarabia. Among these are: Mihail Berezovschi, Mihail Barca, Eugen Coca, Semion Zlatov, Stefan Neaga, Petre Serban, Solomon Lobel, Leonid Gurov and David Ghersfeld. The rising of Mihail Berezovschi in the Bessarabian choral music firmament had a significant impact on its development. Being an expert in national music tradition and an admirer of byzantine music, this composer introduced novel elements in the Bessarabian choral composition art, combining the Bessarabian creation style with the one of the traditional Byzantine music.

Inspired by Gavriil Musicescu, who, in 1895, introduced for the first-time women’s voices in church choral music, Mihail Berezovschi did the same in Bessarabia in 1918.

The 19th century was a period of exploration, when composers worked, with minor exceptions, under the influence of some foreign musical currents.

The 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century is regarded as the epoch of consolidation of a native style.

The development of the professional performing art at the beginning of the 21st century provided an impetus for contemporary composers and conductors such as Teodor Zgureanu, Nicolae Ciolac, Serafim Buzila and Vladimir Ciolac to approach the religious choral music both from a composition and a performing standpoint.

The Hymns of the Holy Liturgy of John Chrysostom, written by Vladimir Ciolac for women's choir for four voices, are, from a stylistic standpoint, a binder that connects the traditions of the past religious music with the contemporary ones.

The composition language of the two Liturgies composed by Serafim Buzila is a complex one, with abundant alterations and modulations in remote tonalities, whose melodies are based on the traditional voices of psaltic music.

The Hymns of the Holy Liturgy of John Chrysostom composed by Teodor Zgureanu present a synthesis of the byzantine monody and of the heterophonic and polyphonic thinking of the composer.

Today, in the churches of Bessarabia, are sung the religious creations of Romanian Bessarabian composers, as well as the creations of Russian composers with the original (Russian) text or with the text translated into Romanian, combining in this way the diversity of styles of homophonic-harmonic religious creation and the one of psaltic music.

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