

## THE MONASTERY OF “NEW NEAMȚ” – THE SACRED RIVER THAT FLEW IN THE OCEAN OF ROMANIAN HISTORY

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**SUMMARY.** *Sacred music* is a field of culture that comprises the essential human values, which are able to build and perfect the complex cultural undertaking of the human life; it is an emotional illustration of the spirit. Through the truth it embodies, sacred music aspires to reflect man's secret, inner soul. This is a part of the people's psychic and spiritual life, through the feelings and the attitudes that it transmits.

Moldova's spiritual history is irrevocably marked by an ancient, original musical art, incorporated into an infinite emotional scale.

Monasteries – a testimony of the oldness and uninterrupted continuity of the Romanian life on Bassarabian lands, as well as of the ethnic, historical, geographical, political, linguistic and religious unity between the Bassarabian Romanians and the Romanians from the entire Romania – a unity that has been undividable, unalienable, visible, resilient, perennial and prodigious through the ages, until today.

Founded in 1864 by the monks departed from the old Monastery in Neamț, the new Monastery of “*Noul Neamț*” (meaning New Neamț) took over not only the designation of the oldest, richest monastic foundation in Moldova, but also the ancient traditions of this outstanding century-old cultural centre.

The 30 Slavonic and Romanian manuscripts from the 14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries that Father Andronic brought along from the Neamț Monastery in 1861, on his arrival in Bassarabia, were the basis for the foundation of the Monastery's Library, as well as for the setup of catalogue of manuscripts stored in this monastic settlement.

The discovery and in-depth analysis of each manuscript have helped complete the lists of works created by the psalms, more or less notorious. Moreover, they have led to a better understanding of the religious musical life from the old Moldavian monastery, of the beginnings of choral singing.

The importance of this fund of manuscripts lies in not only its musical and historic worth, but it also testifies the unity in musical culture of Romanians everywhere.

**Keywords:** sacred music, monasteries, Bassarabian monasteries, manuscript, Moldova.

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truth it embodies, sacred music aspires to reflect man's secret, inner soul. It is part of people's psychic, spiritual life, through the feelings and attitudes it transmits.

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Byzantine music is an integral part of Moldova's past of art and culture. It has been the cornerstone for the creation and development of Romania's sacred music. Being a part of the Romanians' cultural past, it has developed and spread in their specific traditional spirit.

We all have a Creator, yet we have all developed in our own way, following our own, God-given path. Striving not to remain in the shadow, we have always tried to bring our past to light, to clean up our "springs", which set off into big rivers, flowing into the "ocean" of history.

All Romanians should also know the history of Bassarabia, as we are all Romanians, of the same blood.

By living the present, we talk about the past, because the latter prevents us from forgetting who we are, where we come from and where we are headed.

All the peoples have their own values and treasures: *Egypt* affirms itself through the *pyramids*, *Greece* through *Mount Olympus*, *Rome* through *Trajan's Column*, and we, *the Romanians*, through our *monasteries*, *religious music*, *crosses and voivodes*. The only way to affirm ourselves is through the prayers we address to our Lord, through music. The music of psalms, hymns, odes...

Monasteries – a testimony of the oldness and uninterrupted continuity of the Romanian life on Bassarabian lands, as well as of the ethnic, historical, geographical, political, linguistic and religious unity between the Bassarabian Romanians and the Romanians from the entire Romania – a unity that has been undividable, unalienable, visible, resilient, perennial and prodigious through the ages, until today.

The reforms from 1859 instated by ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza, stipulating the introduction of the Romanian language in churches and the immediate shift to choral singing, as well as the "secularization" (confiscating) of monastic assets, led to discontent amongst the monastic clergy. This was because many of the Romanian monasteries were limited the right to further own the immense manors that had belonged to them; another reason was the fact that all the monks who had turned to choral singing without the approval of the monastic authorities were kept from taking part in the sacrament. The secularization of monastic assets also affected the monks from Neamț, who, according to the reform, would have lost a considerable part of their manors, only six of them being situated in Bassarabia. Hence, discontented and terrified by the situation, a group of monks from Neamț, led by Teofan Cristea and Hieromonk Andronic Bălan-Popovici broke away from the community, leaving the large monastery built by Voivode Mușat. They settled at the Chițcani monastic manor in Bessarabia, located on the Nistru riverbank.

Requesting refuge from the Russian Czar and from the religious authorities, as well as the blessing of Antonie, Archbishop of Chișinău, to remain in Bassarabia and to set up a new monastery, the refugee monks were bestowed these rights through a decree issued on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1860. The new monastic establishment was hallowed on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1864 and, through an imperial decree issued that same year, it was considered "*an offshoot of the holy Monastery of Neamț*".

Founded in 1864 by the monks departed from the old Monastery in Neamț, the new Monastery of "*Noul Neamț*" (meaning New Neamț) took over not only the designation of the oldest, richest monastic foundation in Moldova, but also the ancient traditions of this outstanding century-old cultural centre. The Father Superior of the monastery, Teofan Cristea adopted the traditions and organization established by Saint Paisie from Neamț. Adopting the organization of the Neamț community, the monks of the new monastic establishment also took over the old Paisian tradition of religious music, which provided that the "*cliros*" be sung in turn, in two languages: from the right, in Slavonic and from the left – in Romanian.

The New Neamț monks brought along and kept here numerous and precious manuscripts, documents and old Romanian books.

The important figures that set the cornerstone of the new monastic establishment and left a mark in its activity were Hieromonks Teofan Cristea and Andronic Bălan-Popovici.

A living proof of the intense cultural life in the field of sacred music and of a valuable spiritual patrimony is the catalogue of manuscripts drawn up by Hieromonk Andronic in 1884, which comprises 146 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 14<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> centuries that Father Andronic brought along from the Neamț Monastery in 1861, on his arrival in Bassarabia, were the basis for the foundation of the Monastery's Library, as well as for the setup of catalogue of manuscripts stored in this monastic settlement.

Starting with a very small number of yet highly valuable manuscripts, the "Noul Neamț" library acquired an impressive number of manuscripts and books, as they were donated or purchased by its librarian, Father Andronic.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were over 20 monasteries and hermitages operational in Bassarabia, all with their own library or archive. After World War II (1945), all the monasteries were closed, except Monastery Japca, which still operated for a while. Nobody seems to know what happened with the manuscripts and books found in the libraries and archives of these monasteries. Some assume they were burnt up, devastated or, maybe, a few of them are still being kept somewhere.

Archive documents tell us that most of the valuable documentary materials from the state institutions, from monasteries or churches, as well as the entire monastic assets, including all the books, were evacuated from Romania and, in 1945, they were returned, according to a decision made by a special Soviet-Romanian commission. The lists of these materials are still kept to this day, but, unfortunately, their itinerary is interrupted, as we have no details. However, there is an exception in this matter, the Library and Archive of "New Neamț" Monastery. In 1959, as the activity of "New Neamț" Monastery was interrupted (out of political reasons), its archive and library were entered, in 1962, into the secret fund with inventory number P-2119 (research not allowed) of the State Archive of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. The secret storage of the manuscripts led some of the researchers from within and outside the country to conclude that the "New Neamț" manuscripts were also lost, as all the others.

The information found in the "*General Catalogue of Romanian Manuscripts kept in the former USSR*" starts with a description of the manuscript fund of the "New Neamț" Monastery's library. The founders of the new monastic establishment brought in a large part of the books and manuscripts from this fund from the Neamț Monastery: Father Teofan Cristea and Father Andronic. The latter wrote "*The History of New Neamț Monastery*", illustrated with numerous document copies.

Another part of the library contains printed books donated to the monastery, which are mentioned together with the donors' names in the *Diptych of "New Neamț" Monastery*. Some of the names listed are Constantin Botezatu from Chișinău, who, in 1879, donated ten books with *The Lives of the Saints*, a *Book of Hours*, a *Psalter*, the *Holy Bible* and other books in Romanian; in 1884, Mihail Kogălniceanu bequeathed three volumes of "*The Chronicles of the Land of Moldavia*", etc. Some of the manuscripts and printed books were procured and donated to the monastery by Father Andronic, on his return from his journeys to Moldova and Kiev. A significant number of books and manuscripts from the fund belong to this tireless chronicler of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who bequeathed over 60 books of his own writing to the "New Neamț" Library.

After 20 years since the foundation of the library of "New Neamț" Monastery, Father Andronic compiled the *Book Catalogue*, containing all the titles that existed in the library, so that in 1884, it held 146 manuscripts in Slavonic and Romanian and 2,272 books printed in Slavonic, Russian, Romanian and Greek.

A few inventory books were compiled in 1892, 1929, 1934-1938 and 1959-1961, which are presently kept in the monastery's fund, found at the National Archives. The latter contain very little information on the manuscripts.

A lot of monasteries were closed between 1954-1958, among them being Monasteries Curki, Hâncu, Garbovet and Căpriana. Some of the books and manuscripts from these monastic settlements replenished the "New Neamț"

library. All the manuscripts, books and documents from the monastery's library were deposited into the fund numbered P-2119 of the National Archive of the Republic of Moldova. Following a process of systematization and processing, there were compiled a few inventory books, as follows:

- *Inventory book No. 1* – comprises the documents of the monastery's archive between 1860-1962;
- *Inventory book No. 2* – contains 43 manuscripts in Slavonic, between the 14<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- *Inventory book No. 3* – consists of 100 manuscripts in Romanian from the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- *Inventory book No. 4* – comprises 76 manuscripts with musical notes in Greek, Slavonic and Romanian, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- *Inventory book No. 5* – comprising 78 books printed with musical notes in Greek, Bulgarian, Russian and Romanian, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The varied topics of the manuscripts depict valuable events that occurred from the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The worth of the manuscripts stored in the monastic library of New Neamț lies not only in the content of the writings and hymnodies, but also in the manuscripts' footnotes. Hence, from the Gospel manuscript with liturgical content (*Tetraevangeliar*), from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century – early 15<sup>th</sup> century, we find out of the existence of cultural values instilled by the Moldavian chroniclers of Ohrida. Also the footnotes describe the first issue of a manuscript or book, their circulation environment, authors and owners, certain personalities and historical events.

Overall, the fund of New Neamț manuscripts is of great cultural, historic and, last but not least, scientific value, bringing to light the Moldavians' highly spiritual and Christian pursuits, in the past.

A notable sector of the New Neamț monastic library, of increasing interest among researchers, is the *old music book* and the *psalmist music manuscripts*. Some of these provide details about the oldest stage of using the melodic embellishment, a time when only the text of the hymnodies was being written, with an indication of the musical mode, tact and a pattern used for adapting the music to the text. This stage of melodic improvisation based on mode, tact and pattern has been well documented in the manuscripts of this monastery, beginning with the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

We can further document ourselves on the musical manuscripts by studying the catalogue compiled in 1884 by Father Andronic. After correlating it with the current catalogue, kept at the Moldavian National Archive in Chișinău and with the one from the monastery's archive, reopened at the initiative of

Archimandrite Dormedont, there was discovered that many manuscripts and musical printed matter were missing, among these being the printed works of Anton Pann.

The new inventory book contains six docket:

- *Docket no. 1* – contains archive documents from the period between 1044-1059 and 1199, books from the inventory of New Neamț Monastery;
- *Docket no. 2* – contains 43 manuscripts in Slavonic and Russian from the 14<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- *Docket no. 3* – contains 100 manuscripts in Romanian from the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- *Docket no. 4* – describes 76 manuscripts with linear notation, in Russian, from the 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and 14 psalmist manuscripts in Romanian and Greek;
- *Docket no. 5* – contains the presentation of 41 books with psalmist notation from the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, written in Romanian, Greek, Bulgarian and books with linear notation in Russian, dating back to 1846-1900.
- *Docket no. 6* – it is reserved for historical manuscripts.

The catalogue compiled by Father Andronic contains important data on the manuscripts with musical notation and it mentions the following books:

- Book leaf no. 48 - 15 books printed in linear (guidonic) notation, in Romanian, between 1860-1885 (the works of composer Gavriil Musicescu are the most significant in this category);
- Book leaf no. 49 - 2 books printed in linear notation (in Russian);
- Leaf no. 49v - 11 linear manuscripts in Russian, dated between 1819 and the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- Leaf no. 51 – psalm books printed in Romanian between 1823-1863, edited in Vienna, Iași, Bucharest, Buzău, at the Neamț Monastery (among these, one can mention works by Protopsalt Macarie, Anton Pann, Dimitrie Suceveanu, Nectarie Frimu, etc);
- Leaf no. 52 - 19 psalm books in Greek, printed in Constantinople;
- Leaf no. 54 – two psalm books in Slavonic;
- Leaf no. 55 - 16 psalm-book manuscripts in Romanian and Greek, dated between 1823 and the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Of great interest are the books of Greek Byzantine music printed in Slavonic, described at leaf no. 5 from Father Andronic's catalogue.

The books printed in Romanian, mostly in linear notation, are acquisitions made by the librarian from New Neamț. This category comprises transcriptions from Byzantine into guidonic notation, carried out by the following composers: Gavriil Musicescu, Gheorghe Dima and Grigore Gheorghiu.

Especially interesting is the category of books written in Greek, with hrisantic notation. They illustrate the constant strive of both the psalms from Neamț and New Neamț monasteries to maintain the relations with the Orthodox Center from Greece.

Worthy of musicological interest are the 15 Byzantine musical manuscripts (from the 2119R fund of the 4<sup>th</sup> inventory of the National Archives of Moldova). Not only are they the fund's most valuable possession, but they also help us determine the profile of the most important and oldest musical cultural seedbed in Moldova – the Neamț Monastery. Dating back to the first and third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these manuscripts comprise hymnodies in Greek and Romanian (with Cyrillic alphabet) with hrisantic notation. Therefore, they belong to the period when "*the old notation system*" (in Romanian: *vechea "sistimă"*) was changed into the "*new (simplified) notation system*".

The discovery of the manuscripts from "New Neamț" Monastery was quite a revelation to the music world, thanks to the innovation, originality dramatic and emotional force of these ancient jewels.

The discovery and in-depth analysis of each manuscript have helped complete the lists of works created by the psalms, more or less notorious. Moreover, they have led to a better understanding of the religious musical life from the old Moldavian monastery, of the beginnings of choral singing.

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