

BOOK REVIEWS

Valentin CIORBEA, *Mănăstirea Dintr-un Lemn – un complex monahal unic în România. Monografie istorică*, Editura Academiei Oamenilor de Știință din România, București, 2020

The monasteries of the Orthodox Church have been playing a very important role in the history of Christianity and in the life of the Church. The word “monastery” quickly reminds us of the monks in Egypt and the Holy Land, of the monasteries of Mount Athos, but also of the historical monasteries in our country.

Through the love of our Savior Jesus Christ and the Mother of God, each monastery has its own past and history, whether it is a monastery of monks or nuns.

As it is known, the Râmnic region is rich in monastic monuments erected by voivodes, hierarchs, nobles and Christian laymen.

My episcopal ministry for a while in Râmnic (2009-2017) occasioned various stops at the monastic settlements, together with those close to me. This is how I received a visit from Professor Dr. Valentin Ciorbea (Mr. Ciorbea, was my professor of Contemporary Universal History in the fourth year at college, at the “Ovidius” University of Constanța), who discovered the significance of the Dintr-un Lemn Monastery and the contribution of General Paul Teodorescu to the revival of this monastic center.

Professor’s working visits to Râmnic led to the organization of conferences with the participation of the Church and Romanian Army, to the establishment of the Research Center for the Orthodox Church’s cooperation with the Romanian Army “General Paul Teodorescu”, to the publication of the “Mission” Magazine, and to other interesting results, the last of which being the appearance of the volume entitled *Dintr-un Lemn Monastery - a Unique Monastic Complex in Romania. Historical Monograph*.

This monograph is the result of a long and sacrificial research carried out by the famous historian at the Dintr-un Lemn Monastery, the Râmnic Archdiocese and the National Archives of Romania, the State Archives of Râmnicu Vâlcea, as well as the National Institute of Heritage.

Published in bilingual edition (Romanian and English with the translation made by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nicoleta Stanca) and in special graphic conditions at the Publishing House of the Academy of Romanian Scientists in 2020, the volume dedicated to Dintr-un Lemn Monastery shows the expressive importance of the monastery over time, emphasizing the peculiarities of this monastic complex in the historical frame of Romanian monasticism.

From the voivode Matei Basarab and Preda Brâncoveanu, from Șerban and Ștefan Cantacuzino, and later General Paul Teodorescu, until the time of the pastorate of Archbishop Gherasim Cristea (1984-2014), the founders and benefactors of the nunnery were placed for eternity in the light of faith and the book of life.

The monographic work includes six chapters with subchapters, the author highlighting all stages of the evolution of the monastery until today.

In the first chapter entitled “In the beginning was the legend”, the professor describes the history of the place where the monastery was founded, Frâncești, then continues with the description of the “little church out of a wood”, underlining the importance of the miracle working “Icon of the Mother of God with the Baby Jesus Christ” (15th century), the most precious treasure of the monastic settlement.

In the second chapter the author exposes the changes made at the monastery between 1634-1864, emphasizing the contribution of the founders, the elements of church architecture, the influence of the Austrian occupation (1716-1739) and the period between the Holy Hierarch and Martyr Antim Ivireanu’s pastorate at the Bishopric of Râmnic Noul Severin (1705-1708) until the Holy Hierarch Calinic from Cernica (1850-1868), in whose lifetime the Secularization of the monastic possessions by the law promulgated by the ruler Alexandru I. Cuza took place.

The ecclesiastical course of the monastery between the moment of secularization and the establishment of the communist regime (1863-1947) is presented in the third chapter. Here the author shows the difficulties and responsibilities the monastery went through, considering the War of

Independence, the First World War, the Union of 1918, the interwar period and its renewal through the care of General Paul Teodorescu, former Minister of Air and Navy (1938-1940) and Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of National Defense (1937-1938). The monastery became a place of prayer and remembrance of the airmen and sailors of the Romanian Army. After important contributions made in the field of development of the Romanian Army (Aviation and Navy), having saved from ruin the Dintr-un Lemn Monastery and being accused and condemned by the communist regime, General Paul Teodorescu retired to the Dintr-Lemn Monastery, living there until the end of earthly life, in 1981. The author also describes the roles of the abbesses of the monastery at that time, the most important being the sacrificial service of the abbess Paisia Vasilescu.

The fourth chapter presents the life of the monastery during the communist regime until today, highlighting the difficult times the nuns went through, as was the application of Decree 410/1959, which demanded the exclusion from the monastery of nuns and sisters under the age of 65. Through the providence of God, the prayers of the nuns and the goodwill of the founders, the monastery came out strong from communism and continued the missionary-pastoral and cultural-social activities in a new dimension of the free Romanian society.

The patrimony of the monastery made of the existing churches and the religious and cultural objects, together with the presentation of the Memorial House “Archimandrite Dr. Chesarie Gheorgescu” are the object of the exposition of the fifth chapter of the monograph.

In the sixth and final chapter, the impressions and appreciations of the pilgrims who have visited the monastery over time are reported. Also, the important achievements in the last years within the Diocese of Râmnicu and the Dintr un Lemn Monastery are shown, such as: setting up the Research Center for the Orthodox Church’s cooperation with the Romanian Army “General Paul Teodorescu”, publishing the “Mission” Magazine and organizing many conferences with the contribution of the Church, Romanian Army and “Ovidius” University of Constanța. The soul of these actions and works is Professor Valentin Ciorbea, to whom I gave my support from the beginning of all activities, with a lot of love, involvement and sacrifice.

The fact that the monastery became a place of remembrance and worship of the Romanian Aviation and Navy was underlined by organizing the jubilee of the 80 years (1939-2019) and signaling in the pages of the monograph. Of course, the author did not forget the portraits of the nuns, or the spiritual fathers who lived in the famous monastic settlement. The list of abbesses who led the monastery concludes the scientific and spiritual presentation of the monastic complex from Dintr-un Lemn, the author showing among others the role and fruitful work of the abbess Emanuela Oprea (1984 until today), as well as her contribution to the monograph of the monastery.

Through the care and effort of Professor Valentin Ciorbea we have an exceptional monographic work, which has spread throughout the country and around the world, and can be read by Romanian and foreign readers in major libraries worldwide, as bilingual publishing facilitates access to all the history and spiritual-cultural beauty of a monastery contemporary with the discovery of the new world and the development of Europe out of a wood, that is, through the Cross.

The author's motivation persuades us not to stop here, but to read and be pilgrims to the Dintr-un Lemn Monastery: "After accepting the challenge we followed the purposes of the Research Center of the Orthodox Church's cooperation with the Romanian Army «General Paul Teodorescu» and the "Mission" magazine that we have been promoting for almost 9 years under the auspices of the Academy of Romanian Scientists and the Archdiocese of Râmnic, working hard to organize scientific, editorial and military ceremonial events, through which we are fulfilling of General Paul Teodorescu's will to highlight the unique role of this Holy Place in Romanian monasticism, as a monastery of the Aviation and Navy for 80 years and recently of the 30th Guard Brigade "Mihai Viteazul".

We congratulate the author for his research and the composition of the historical Monograph of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery, asking the Lord Jesus Christ and the Mother of God to reward the professor's effort, and preserve the Monastery as an authentic monastic center, citadel of faith and Orthodox spirituality and welcoming host for pilgrims.

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