

REVIEWS

Arhim. Benedict Sauciuc, *Obiecte liturgice și odoare bisericesti la Mănăstirea Neamț*, Editura Sf. Mina, Iași, 2017, pp. 471.

Archimandrite Benedict Sauciuc's work, entitled *Obiecte liturgice și odoare bisericesti la Mănăstirea Neamț – Liturgical Objects and Religious Odornaments*, is equally a historical research and a review of the religious cultural heritage of Neamț Monastery, an encyclopedia of cultural artefacts that have been preserved in the monastery. If in his forward to his work, the author outlines the role and importance of church heritage in the contemporary world and the importance of the inalienability of church goods, he goes on also to highlight, in the second part of the work, the monastery thesaurus – understood as inheritance, not as material value, that we must protect and pass on to the future generations.

After a *Preface* by Father Professor Dr. Viorel Sava, followed by the author's *Forward*, the volume continues with the first part, in which the author deals with the monastic

life at Neamț Monastery throughout the time, monastery that, „since its founding until the establishment of the communist regime in our country, has fulfilled an important cultural and artistic role in the life of the Orthodox Church and of our people” (p. 73). Thus, after geographically locating the monastery, the first chapter, entitled *Neamț Monastery. Orthodox Culture and Spirituality*, outlines the history of Neamț Monastery that the author harmonizes with detailed elements regarding the architecture, art, painting, memorial sites, the relics and their history.

The second chapter, *Neamț Monastery in the 16th – 18th Centuries*, that the author highlights as being the best known centuries in the documents of the time, briefly presents the life and contribution of the abbots of Neamț Monastery

The subsequent chapter regards the history of Neamț Monastery in the 19th – 20th centuries, period in which the

monastery no longer enjoyed the protection of the rulers or boyars, but underwent forced secularization. Thus, the author briefly deals with the monastic properties and secularization while also depicting the hardships of the life of the monastery during the communist regime for whom “monachism represented a serious obstacle in the construction of socialism in Romania” (p.69). The main events and documents that shaped the monastic life during communism are mentioned, starting with a 1948 phone note that confiscated the lumber factory and a forest area of 14,000 ha, up to the 1976-1989 period in which the regime had an apparently more flexible and tolerant approach. Finally, after the fall of the communist regime, Neamț Monastery begins to restore its former place and grandeur.

The fourth chapter, *Neamț Monastery. A Complex of Spiritual, Cultural and Artistic Values*, is an inventory of the cultural and artistic objects and life in Neamț Monastery, such as manuscripts, books, engravings, cult books, icons, clay objects, printing items, vestments, coins, jewelry etc. The chapter also include a comprehensive list of relics that are hosted at Neamț Monastery.

As the author concludes, Neamț Monastery “is one of the few Romanian monasteries, which, since its founding until now, has provided a rich cultural-religious heritage” (p. 81) while remaining “a place of worship and need where the needy monks have preserved the candle of faith in the Savior Jesus Christ, the monastery having today precisely the role of remembering our Christian-Orthodox, but also Romanian origin” (p.82).

The second part – the most comprehensive one – is rather a high quality album that includes pictures of the aforementioned cultural items, thus observing the necessity that heritage elements benefit from a separate, detailed inventory (Cfr. *Oberländer-Târnoveanu, Irina, A Future for the Past, Good Practice Guide for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage, CIMEC, Bucharest, 2002, CIMEC, București, 2002*).

We hereby welcome this remarkable album and congratulate the author for his endeavour of completing a volume dedicated to the cultural heritage preserved at Neamț Monastery, an inventory of religious items, manuscripts, books, engravings, cult books, vestments that this outstanding monastery hosts.

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