

PROTOPSALTES AND MUSICAL MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE CHEIA-TELEAJEN MONASTERY⁹⁴

Review

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At the beginning of this year, a new book was published, waiting to earn its proper place among the books dedicated to the Romanian music of Byzantine tradition: *Protopsalți și manuscrise muzicale de la Mănăstirea Cheia-Teleajen* [Protopsaltes and Musical Manuscripts from the Cheia-Teleajen Monastery]. Signed by two renowned scholars in the field – Archdeacon Ph.D. Sebastian Barbu-Bucur and Ph.D. Constantin Catrina – the volume is the result of more than a decade of thorough documentation aimed at highlighting the contribution of the protopsaltes, composers and copyists of musical manuscripts who lived in monastic obedience in the monastery at the foot of the Ciucaș mountains, to the spread of kliros

⁹⁴ Archdeacon Sebastian Barbu-Bucur, Constantin Catrina, *Protopsalți și manuscrise muzicale de la Mănăstirea Cheia-Teleajen*, Editura SemnE, Bucharest, 2013, 274 p.

singing in the Romanian language. The close friendship between the two authors and their strong spiritual ties with the monastery where Archdeacon Ph.D. Sebastian Barbu-Bucur embraced the monastic life in 1950 lay at the basis of their scientific endeavour and gave it added emotional weight.

Although the history of the Cheia Monastery began only towards the end of the 18th century (1770), the contribution of some of the monks who lived there during the last two centuries, illustrated in the psaltic manuscripts preserved in the monastery library, is certainly worth considering. And the two authors – both with long years of experience in researching the old documents of Orthodox musical culture – do so with great skill and love for the kliros singers from the Cheia Monastery, in ten studies and appendices covering nearly 300 pages. The titles of the book's sections contain several rarely encountered names in the bibliography of the last decades, by which the authors try to retrace the efforts for the spread of the traditional Byzantine chant set to Romanian text in the church of the Cheia Monastery. Both the novice and the seasoned reader can appreciate the magnitude of this endeavour while reading through the texts that are preceded by extensive titles, similar to the those of the old manuscripts: *Zosi(ma) Zemnicianovič, monah și copist de la Mănăstirea Cheia* [Zosi(ma) Zemnicianovič, monk and copyist at the Cheia Monastery]; *Onufrie Bratu, Ieromonah și copist caligraf de manuscrise muzicale psaltice* [Onufrie Bratu, Hieromonk and calligraphy copyist of psaltic music manuscripts]; *Ieromonahul Calistrat Cernohak, copist și interpret de muzică psaltică* [Hieromonk Calistrat Cernohak, copyist and performer of psaltic music]; *Protosinghelul Gherasim Negulescu* [Protosingel Gherasim Negulescu]; *Arhimandritul Calist Rădulescu, copist și interpret de muzică psaltică* [Archimandrite Calist Rădulescu, copyist and performer of psaltic music] etc. In addition to the monks who were striving to impose the Romanian language in Church, or were completing their musical training at the Holy Mount Athos at the beginning of the 19th century, we also find two well-known names of our time: that of Archimandrite Grigore Băbuș (1915-2008) – abbot of the monastery and later protopsaltis of the Patriarchal Cathedral and Director of the Library of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church for five decades, and that of Archdeacon Sebastian Barbu-Bucur (b. 1930) – renowned scholar of Byzantine

manuscripts, performer, psaltic music composer and conductor, to whom Constantin Catrina dedicates a special chapter in this book. There was only one monk among those included in the volume who was not a monk of the monastery on the Teleajen river: Hieromonk Nil, protopsaltis and composer who lived at the Cernica Monastery in the early half of the 19th century. The authors decided to include information on this psaltis and copyist, along with the description of one of the manuscripts written by him and kept at the Cheia monastery, in order to highlight the documentary value of the monastery's library (to the organization and provision of which Archimandrite Grigore Băbuș had an outstanding contribution).

The structure of each division of the book follows an algorithm that reflects both the authors' experience and their intention to craft more than a work of a historical character. This algorithm includes biographical information and detailed descriptions of the community life led by each monk, the codicological description of manuscripts, a record of the copyist's contribution (taken from the relevant bibliography) and thorough bibliographical references. Facsimiles and appendices containing hymns from the manuscripts complete the portraits of the psaltis or copyist and provide often unique musical materials that are extremely helpful both to church singers and to the researchers interested in the hymns commonly sung at monastery klirosi.

Owing to the numerous appendices containing musical examples as well as compositions signed by the prolific composer Archdeacon Sebastian Barbu-Bucur, the book also serves as a musical anthology illustrating part of the repertoire performed in the Romanian Orthodox Church since the late 18th century to the present. The book includes a selection of the most representative examples from the thousands of pages containing neumes. This selection constitutes a repertoire sifted through the sieve of the psaltes from the Cheia Monastery and regarding which the authors mention: "... the hymns included in these musical manuscripts are the result of a selection compiled by each copyist"; they "... used to be sung in the monks' cells and later at the kliros of the monastery church, as those protopsaltes were also good church music performers" (p. 8). In addition, examination of the manuscripts revealed that "these documents, written «with painstaking attention to detail», contributed to the fostering of a constant

renewal of the psaltic repertoire, even through translations or «Romanianization», as was particularly the case with Hieromonk Onufrie Bratu, who successfully translated many of the monodies composed by Nektarios Vlachos, «the first Romanian Prodromite singer»" (p. 9). The authors placed the Cheia monastery alongside of well known monastic settlements and centres of cultivation of the Byzantine music tradition, showing that "the musical manuscripts thus written by the monks from the Cheia Monastery hold the same importance to us today as the old documents from Neamț and Putna, Bucharest, Târgoviște, Buzău, Athos, etc." (p. 8).

The pages dedicated to the psaltic manuscripts and hymns are complemented, in the opening of the book (after the "Clarifying words" signed by Ph.D. Constantin Catrina), by a "Monastic Chronicle", meant to acquaint the reader with the history of the monastic settlement. The chronicle also includes a full reproduction of a text written in 1934 by Brother Mircea Drăghici from the Cheia Monastery, rendered also in facsimile in the Appendix.

The actual writing of the text was preceded by a thorough work of archival research, consultation of periodicals, lexicons and catalogues, selection of the hymn repertoire intended for printing, and documentation in public libraries and in the monasteries where the monks from Cheia temporarily lived. This enabled a multiplication of the bibliographic references for each of the psaltes included in the volume, which represent an important prerequisite for future scientific investigations. The text pages are accompanied by a fine selection of facsimiles, documents and manuscript pages, photographs of the monastery, psaltes and copyists, all wrapped in a neat layout and presentation.

The study of the manuscripts, the identification of the documentation sources used by the copyists and psaltes of the monastery and the straightforward contact with the community life at the Cheia Monastery have led the authors to the conclusion that the monastic settlement from the Prahova county was an important centre for promoting the Romanian music of Byzantine origin. A perusal of the book along with the examination of the manuscript photocopies and of the rich repertoire of hymns will convince the reader of the truth of this assertion.

Located in the proximity of the Bratocea Pass (formerly an important crossing point between Transylvania and Wallachia), the Cheia Monastery is the place where two of the personalities who faithfully served the Romanian Orthodox Church during the last eight decades entered the monastic life: Archimandrite Grigore Băbuş (who became a monk in 1928) and Archdeacon Sebastian Barbu-Bucur (tonsured as a monk in 1950).