

The Image of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky and the Exhumation His Relics (II)*

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Abstract

This paper represents the second part of a more developed study and presents the exhumation of the precious relics of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky from his tomb, located in the Princely Church of Neamț Monastery, as well as the causes of depreciation of his bones, traditions from Neamț related to the grave and exhumation – in light of the historical reality, the restoration of the tomb, as well as putting the relics in a reliquary for veneration.

Keywords:

Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, Neamț Monastery, engravings, portraits, icons, grave, exhumation, holy relics, traditions, historical reality, worship.

III. The Tomb of Saint Saint Paisius and the Liturgical Events

III.1. Liturgical Celebrations

After the death of abbot Paisius, his disciples never forgot that day of November 15, the day that has caused so much loss and sorrow. Their spiritual pain and the regrets could be externalized only in the moments of remembrance of their spiritual father. About the commemoration of the forty days after his death, we did not find any note, but it is known that by the end of 1794, one of his disciples drew up, beside the *Mourning over the Tomb*¹, in verses, also the *Service* for the canonization².

* Resuming the text from *RT* 98 (2016), nr. 3, p. 88-129.

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¹ < Ioan Diakovski hieroschem. >, “The Mourning over the Tomb”, in: Paisius from Neamț, *Autobiography and Lives*, pp. 409-412.

² < Ioan Diakovschi hieroschem. >, “Service of Saint Paisius”, in: Paisie from Neamț, *Autobiography and Lives*, pp. 415-448. The author was known as “[...] a man with high education and

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These two texts in Slavonic and Russian included in his original manuscript, dated with the year 1794, is kept at the Hermitage Saint Elijah from Athos. Until getting there, it was firstly multiplied³, and in 1836, printed at Neamț in Slavonic. It was translated into Romanian by Chiriac the spiritual father from Secu and then multiplied. After a late copy of the Romanian prototype, made in 1858 by hierodeacon Calistrat⁴ and kept in the Library of the Monastery Noul Neamț, father Paul Mihail published, in 1992, for the first time in Romanian the text of *Service of Saint Paisius*⁵.

At the commemoration of one year from the death of the abbot Paisius – Thursday, November 15, 1795 – Isaac the Teacher says a lofty and comprehensive *Word*⁶ of praise, in which he shows the transfigured life of his father and the deeds through which he led to deification those who wanted to follow his example, both in his lifetime and after his dormition. From this word, we understand that their sorrow was still quite profound, because they could hardly stop crying in those moments of remembrance, reality highlighted by the words: “[...] our faces are sad, sorrowful, slimy and covered with grief, so that we don’t have enough tears to cry [...] Today is the day that has caused us that abhorrence, which so far and still until we are, maybe, I and those like me sinners we will never redeem”⁷. Although, on the one hand, they were convinced that their father “rests with the saints of God and he delights with seeing Him”, on the other hand, however, they were entitled to be sorrowful because they lacked the one who was “as another Moses”⁸ of the Romanian people and had achieved “the golden age of the Romanian Orthodoxy”⁹. The author of the word manages, until the end, to change their condition through his outstanding oratorical gifts and the content, synthetic but

theologian, former preacher in the Cathedral Saint Sophia in Kiev, who was abbot’s close disciple, who died four months after his death and he was buried in the same monastery” (Paul Mihail(ovici), *Mărturii românești din Bulgaria și Grecia (Romanian Testimonials from Bulgaria and Greece)*, Kishinev, 1933, p. 56).

³ Paul Mihail reported two copies: Slav mss. 203 BMN and Slav mss. 33 BMM (Paul Mihail, “Slavic Manuscripts in Collections from Moldavia”, II, in *Romanoslavica*, Bucharest, XIX (1979), p. 61).

⁴ De la el, s-au păstrat numeroase manuscrise copiate și păstrate în BMM; for this, see Paul Mihail, “Romanian manuscripts in Metropolitan of Moldavia Library”, in *Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava*, no. 1-2, 1976, pp. 47-48.

⁵ Until 1992, the moment of the generalization of the cult of Romanian and foreign saints, it was not known that this service existed and was used in the Romanian manuscripts (Paul Mihail, *Slujba (Service)*, p. 139).

⁶ < Isaac the Teacher >, “Word over the Grave of our Blessed Father Paisius, archimandrite and abbot of the Holy Monasteries Neamț and Secu” (= < Isaac the Teacher >, “Word over the Grave”), in: Paisius from Neamț, *Autobiografia și Viețile*, ed. 2015, pp. 397-407.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 397-398.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 399, 402.

⁹ Nichifor Crainic, *Curs de teologie mistică (Mystical Theology Course)*, p.150.

comprehensive, through expression like: “To dance with the angels as an earthly angel and heavenly man, with the prophets like a prophet to celebrate, with the Apostles like an apostle and preacher of truth, with the martyrs as a martyr and who the wounds of Christ on his body always wore, with the blessed as one of the same habit with them eternally to rest”¹⁰.

These memorial services were held every year according to the Orthodox monastic tradition preserved until today. They were celebrated by the congregation where each lived and they presupposed a requiem at the tomb after the Divine Liturgy and a repast in honor of the commemorated in the monastery refectory.

No doubt, this was done at the Neamț Monastery in the case of abbot Paisius, without anyone to record these moments, being a tradition that is respected today in the monasteries of Moldavia. But, for the one that was made as another Moses of the Romanian people, these liturgical events were followed not only by the disciples from Neamț, but by all the disciples of Paisius, no matter where and in what position were, living their lives in Christ, as bishops, abbots of monasteries, hegumens of sketes, hieromonks servants in the monasteries of nuns or simple servants and inhabitant in the Orthodox monastic establishments of different nationalities.

Moreover, the traditional services of commemoration constituted the manifestation of conscience for the disciples who followed him in deed and word, because: “[...] rightly is for us - emphasized Vitalie the monk - and all too rightly, always to remember and seeing his ending and his words and actions, to follow him, the worthy of remembrance”¹¹. Often, the monks followers of Paisius remembered the abbot, whether they lived in Moldavia and reached more often the Lavra from Neamț, or they were in other countries, from where, however, on some private or group pilgrimages, they had good opportunities to worship his tomb, raising services of veneration and asking him for help in their prayers. Most of these events were not recorded because they were part of the discrete spiritual life of each monastic communities. These must have been the reasons for which during the nineteenth century there were no records on any official commemorations either, which - certainly - existed at least annually at his grave, except perhaps only on the centenary of his dormition from November 15, 1894, when “[...] in the great church dedicated to the Holy Ascension of the Lord of the Lavra from Neamț, was celebrated the Divine Liturgy and a memorial service at the tomb of abbot Paisius by three Romanian bishops namely: Iosif Naniescu, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava, residing in the city of Iași, Silvestru Bălănescu, Bishop of

¹⁰ < Isaac the Teacher >, “Word over the Grave”, ed. 2015, p. 405.

¹¹ *Viața lui Vitalie*, (*Life of Vitalie*), f. 154, ed. 2015, p. 352.

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Huși and Dositei Predeanu from Botoșani, the vicar of Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava, with a great crowd of faithful”¹².

A few years after this celebration, arrived, from his birthplace, an official delegation of clerics headed by the Bishop of Poltava, who, together with the high priest Narcis Crețulescu - abbot of the monastery - and an important group of ministers, celebrated the Divine Liturgy and the Lamentations at the tomb of abbot Paisius. On this occasion, the visitors gave the monastery an icon of the Virgin, covered in silver, wrapped in an embroidered towel, both inscribed with this text in Russian: “Prayers of remembrance at the grave of the great Abbot, Archimandrite Paisius Velichkovsky (1722-1794), born in Poltava, from the Most Reverend Bishop John of Poltava, the deaneries Teodor and Iustin, fathers Vladimir, Petru and Grigorie, deacons and psalm readers from the Cathedral dedicated to the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God from Poltava, where served the father, brother, grandfather and the great grandfather of the blessed abbot. Year 1905, July, 5”¹³.

III.2. The Tradition of Venerating the Tomb

Another visible form of veneration of Saint Paisius was the so-called order of the grave, according to which both the monastic congregation and lay faithful had to make a prostration in front of the tomb when entering the church. It was once with the funeral, first, a liturgical manifestation of veneration of the great abbot, free and natural and subsequently became a practice respected by everybody. Therefore, the need was felt for the new entrants into the congregation from Neamț, who have not met Abbot Paisius to be represented his image. Thus, it was arrived quite early that at the head of the abbot to be placed his portrait together with a votive light always on, and the ordinance be recorded as a tradition of the monastery.

About this, father confessor Andronic, for a special moment that he lived on November 27, 1869 recorded: “Going to the holy Monastery Neamț [...] and desiring to enter the great church [...] and entering, and going forward, I prayed at the tomb of His Beatitude our father abbot Paisius Velichkovsky, making prostrations

¹² Gh. Samurean, “Archimandrite Paisie Velichkovsky (on the anniversary of a hundred years from his happy dormition)”, in *Ruschii Palomnic*, 1894, p. 779; Eugen Th. Procopan, *Paisie Velichkovsky*, Kishinev, 1933, p. 85; Fr. Paul Mihail, “Abbot Paisius from Neamț Renewer of Monasticism”, in *Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava*, no. 5-6/1962, p. 416. It is still curious why the information does not appear in any contemporary Romanian publication! It is possible that this news, like that on the four interventions on the crypt of Saint Paisius on which we will discuss, be false.

¹³ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 292^r.

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according to the ordinance but because of the multitude of the people that was there, I could not get closer to kiss his tomb [...] ¹⁴ and his icon, which is always at the head of his tomb, above which continually burns the candle” ¹⁵.

This tradition followed in the nineteenth century was highlighted even by Bishop Narcis Crețulescu, who shared some resentment toward Abbot Paisius. However, in 1890 he shows that his disciples “[...] buried him in the great church, putting him [stone of] marble, icon and candle, with the custom of worshiping it with prostrations” ¹⁶ and that: “Nowhere in our country is another tomb so revered as the tomb of Paisius from M(onastery) Neamț. I have done in my life many prostrations to him, out of habit, although I doubt in recognizing him all the facts he is assigned by his followers from the Russian bank” ¹⁷. Reaching the writing of the monastery inscriptions in 1906, and describing the tomb, and how personally fulfilled the order of the congregation to it, he showed: “At the head, up on the wall, is placed the portrait of the abbot, a large painting on oilcloth [where] a candle burns continuously. Some time ago the custom was that whoever was passing by the grave to make a prostration out to respect, so I, Narcis, did it also with all the present parents” ¹⁸.

Another testimony on the preservation of this tradition is that of Professor Constantin Tomescu, who, in his monograph about Neamț Monastery, from 1942, recalls it under this form: “Above the tomb, on the wall is a painting hanging with the image of Paisius, and a candle that burns continuously. A small tablet of cardboard attached to the wall comprises in Latin, the text of the inscription on the plate. According to tradition, which is still respected, the monk entering into the Holy Altar, must make a prostration next to the grave” ¹⁹.

For the next period father professor Ioan Ivan, as archdeacon at Neamț Monastery and as a dweller there most of his life, in a house of the monastery, gives us some last references about this rule and the gaps in its compliance, showing: “Early on it was placed a candle in the niche on the wall that separates the narthex

¹⁴ *Viața lui Andronic (Life of Andronic)*, IV, ff. 237^v-238^r.

¹⁵ *Viața lui Andronic (Life of Andronic)*, IV, f. 233^r. We do not think it was a coincidence that Melchisedec, bishop of Lower Danube, publishing in the same year 1869 an *Oratory*, introduced to its end a *Calendar-Sinaxar*, completed with several Romanians saints, including Saint Paisius as “asceticism re-organizer in Romania” with the date of the commemoration November 15 (Nestor Metropolitan of Oltenia, “Bishop Melchisedec Ștefănescu on the Romanian Saints”, in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română (Romanian Orthodox Church)*, 1-3/1992, pp. 125-130).

¹⁶ *Viața lui Narcis (Life of Narcis)*, f. 134^r; typed edition 1984, p. 239.

¹⁷ *Viața lui Narcis (Life of Narcis)*, f. 135^v; typed edition 1984, p. 241.

¹⁸ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 210.

¹⁹ Constantin Tomescu, *Scurtă povestire istorică despre Sfânta Mănăstire Neamțu (Brief Historical Narration about the Holy Monastery Neamț)*, Neamț Monastery, 1942, p. 39.

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from the burial chamber and burned continuously until the period after 1944. It was re-lighted between the years 1966-1970, after which again has not been lit until December 1989. The reasons are too well known²⁰.

After his official canonization by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988, and its adoption also by the Romanian Orthodox Church in June 20, 1992, at the first service after this moment, the portrait of Abbot Paisius was replaced with his icon, placed, this time, in the eastern part of the tomb. On this occasion - mentions the same father “[...] the candle which was out, for a while, from understandable reasons, was re-lighted at the tomb of Saint Pious Paisius, and the prostrations in front of his tomb were done again, beginning with the example of His Eminence Metropolitan Daniel²¹. Moreover, the reactivation of the cult of Saint Paisius has experienced new dimensions along with the manifestations of the symposium dedicated to the bicentennial from the death of Saint Paisius, from November 15, 1994, organized at the Lavra from Neamț, when Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina decided that this day of each year to be the date of meeting of all the abbots and abbesses from the diocese in a monastic synaxis, being considered at the same time, as starting day of the monastic schools from the monasteries, according to the model of the schools of Paisius from Dragomirna, Secu and Neamț, which started activities each year on November 15 and ended on Lazarus Saturday²². During these synaxes which are maintained until today and they have been extended every three years to the other dioceses from the Metropolitan, the heads of monasteries and, sometimes also of the hermitages, besides the contact with the paisian spirituality, can serve in the chapel dedicated to *Saint Paisius from Neamț*²³ built in 1996 in the metropolitan residence from the monastery and, also, can visit the museum organized by the monastery in honor of the saint²⁴, which was inaugurated by the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on October 13, 1997, in the context of the festivities commemorating 500 years of existence of the Princely Church from Neamț.

²⁰ Deac. prof. Ioan Ivan, “Annexes, notes and illustrations”, in: *Life of Blessed Paisius from Neamț*, p. 146.

²¹ *Idem*, “Introduction”, in: *Viața Cuviosului Paisius de la Neamț (Life of Blessed Paisius from Neamț)*, p. XIX.

²² Daniel, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina, *Vocație și destin filocalic la români (Philocalic Vocation and Destiny at the Romanians)*, in: *Românii în reînnoirea isihastă (Romanians and the Hesychastic Renewal)*, Trinitas Publishing, 1997, p. 15.

²³ Archid. prof. Ioan Ivan, “Introduction”, in: *Viața Cuviosului Paisius de la Neamț (Life of Blessed Paisius from Neamț)*, p. IX.

²⁴ Archid. prof. Ioan Ivan, “500 Years of Consecration of the Church of the Ascension from Neamț Monastery”, in *Cronica Episcopiei Hușilor (Chronicle of the Diocese of Huși)*, III, 1997, p. 402.

IV. Exhumation of the Holy Relics

We do not know which were the reasons for which, at the time of the reconfirmation of the canonization of Saint Paisius by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, was not considered the exhumation of a man who for a while, during days and nights along with his disciples turned their cells often into a spiritual Tabor, living in contemplation and godly ecstasy. It is known, however, our lack of interest, of the Romanians, to preoccupy ourselves about our saints, underlined suggestively the Saint Metropolitan Dosoftei of Moldavia. To this reality is evidently added the warfare of the unseen enemy, which hates both the good and the man, in this respect also. Because, if in the case of Saint Paisius, the spirits of darkness, disturbed so much by high contemplative experience, on the one hand, fought to no longer give any importance to his grave, on the other, led war lest his holy relics to be brought to sight and bear testimony about their holiness in order to be venerated by Christians. This explains why the body of the Apostle practitioner of Jesus' prayer, in the highest form, with universal resonances, was forgotten in the ground for 219 years, until 2013, when his holy bones were exhumed.

This was done on the initiative of the management of Neamț Monastery²⁵, to which His Eminence Metropolitan Teophan acceded, acting as on *September 23, 2013* to investigate the tomb of Saint Paisius from the Princely Church of Neamț Monastery by a joint commission composed, on the one hand, of delegates of the Diocesan Centre Iași²⁶, on sacramental and cemeteries line, and, on the other, of the Directorate for Culture Neamț²⁷, on specialized technical line.

IV.1. Loosen the Paving and Opening the Crypt

In the presence and under the supervision of this committee, a team of fathers from the monastery²⁸ executed for the first stage the following works: dissolution of the marble pavement around the funerary stone (fig. 24), with full recovery of the marble plates; the removal of the concrete screed and the old brick pavement

²⁵ AMB, Investigation of the grave of Saint Paisius from Neamț, file 3/2014 (= AMB, file 3/2014): Address no. 282/August 26, 2013, f. 6r.

²⁶ AMB, file 3/2014: Temei Sector Exarhat no. 10186/September 7, 2013, announcing the name of the diocesan delegates: arhim. Nichifor Horia, diocesan exarch, archim. Luca Diaconu, exarch of the area and archim. Benedict Sauciuc, abbot of Neamț Monastery (f. 7r).

²⁷ AMB, file 3/2014: Address no. 315/September 13, 2013, with acknowledgment of receipt and the presence of delegates through *e-mail* from September 16, 2013, in the person of the Executive Director prof. PhD Dorin Teodorescu and of the archaeologist Ciubotaru Elena (ff. 8r-9r).

²⁸ It is about the monks: Vasian Isachie, Serafim Vasilache, Grigorie Ciulinaru and hierom. Filaret Teodorescu - as a photographer, helped by the worker Stănoaea Gheorghe from Pipirig, as well as the photographer Claudiu Pântea, delegate of the Cultural sector of the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina.

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(21.5x21.5x5cm), assembled with mortar from sand and lime (fig. 25a and 25b); dislocation and placement of the tomb stone a few meters forward, in the nave of the church, and the removal of the debris from the crypt above the grave (fig. 26). Reaching this point of the intervention, they were able to do the initial findings, as follows: *the tombstone*, located at the south-west corner of the present nave, was placed after the burial directly above the crypt; *the crypt*, located at minus 23cm to zero of the marble pavement (fig. 27), was built in the former tomb chamber from the Princely Church and located at 1.62m from the south wall and 1.10m from the western one; *the vault* was found closed with only one row of bricks, on a surface of seven rows and having along the two sides, north and south, a *décroche* of 16cm, due halving of the masonry. In the middle, it had a small leak (4x5cm), covered with two shards without plaster (fig. 28), at the removal of which, those present felt a smell of sweet savor²⁹.

Breaking down a vaulted crypt is not quite a simple thing if it is desired, as in our case, the retrieval, if possible, of the entire ceramic material. Therefore, first, it was enlarged the existing breach and through it were made the first photographs of the inside (fig. 29). There were removed carefully nine horizontal rows of brick from the vault, however leaving intact a section of 67cm from the eastern side, then there were also made the findings necessary for this phase.

Regarding *the funerary material* from the inside, firstly, was found that it was intact and unmoved, evidenced by the position of the formwork, the coffin partly covered by it and a small amount of plaster detached from the crypt vault along with the arch, which now was fallen over the coffin. In the big picture, dominated by dark color of the degraded wood, stood out the textile facings with silver thread turned blue, wherewith originally was adorned the coffin (fig. 30).

Secondly, *the crypt* - with an interior space of 210cm, length, 80cm, width, 75cm, height, at the keystone, and 55cm, at its inception - was built, as it was natural, in two phases: before and after the funeral. In the first phase, they were built of brick (28x13x6cm, fig. 31), the vertical walls and the interior pavement, and after the funeral, the cylindrical vault, being supported by an arch supported on the western wall of the crypt with semicircular termination, and in the eastern part on a specially built arch on the side walls of the crypt, only a single row of bricks of the same size. This resolution is because, in the eastern end of the crypt, it does not have a vertical wall of its own, but it is bonded by the eastern wall of the stone foundation of the church, from the tomb chamber which is bound to the crypt.

The vault was closed after the funeral, but when exhumation were found materials different from those of the building itself, namely: a larger sized brick (32x6x6

²⁹ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 30, 2013, no. 14162/November 28, 2013, ff. 22^r-23^r. The document preparation was entrusted by the Diocesan the to exarch of the area.

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m)³⁰ and a more consistent lime plaster, just for the seven rows necessary to clogging a hollow of 45cm, measured at the underside of the canopy (fig. 32). In this space, of seven rows, bordered by above mentioned décroche - which is due, as we shall see, to a subsequent intervention on the crypt - the craftsman completed the construction of the vault filling the masonry joints with fluid lime paste, which entered into all the gaps between the bricks to the wooden arch, thing inferred from the testimony kept on the backing bow of the formwork, in the eastern part of the crypt, where the lime paste passed also through the support, flowing down into the crypt over the coffin (fig. 33). The interior pavement of the crypt was soaked by water, and its brick even moistened, which allowed to be sectioned with the spatula³¹.

IV.3. Removing the Funeral Material

Reaching the sensitive and emotional moment for everyone present, monks, priests, men of culture and photographers, the removal of the funerary material from the crypt, was agreed that a priest to do it and, as of those present were no volunteers, the Exarch of the area had to descend into the crypt. This being put on his epitachelion, after his blessing for the celebration together with the parents present of the *Akatistos of Saint Paisius*, entered the crypt and, with the utmost attention, he began to draw out, first, the semi-rotten and wet wooden part, originating in the former arch (fig. 34) and from the coffin lid. With the finding that the relics were impaired and not in the state expected by some, the particular emotional charge was accompanied by a dramatic one, because some of those present withdrew, showing their dissatisfaction and saying, before convincing themselves about the reality, that it is not the body of Saint Paisius in the crypt. Those remaining³² around the crypt had the opportunity to do more remarks about the funerary material. Firstly, they could see the saint's coffin, on which hieroschemamonk Nicolae recorded in November 17, 1794: "they made a coffin and clothed and adorned it, because it was to lay in it the pearl or better to say the priceless diamond"³³. Then it was ascertained partially, but satisfactory, how the

³⁰ This use of another type of brick can be interpreted differently in terms of the date of clogging of the crypt: operation could have been made both at the time of the funeral, in the context of escaping the situation from under control because of the large number of those present, as well as after the funeral, at any other time, difficult to determine in the absence of contemporary testimonies.

³¹ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 30, 2013, no. 14162/ November 28, 2013, ff. 23^r-24^r.

³² Remained apart from the committee members, several parents from the monastery community, namely: archim. Constantin Chirilă, archim. Eftimie Camil, protos. Ambrozie Ghinescu, hierom. Filaret Teodorescu, hierod. Iustinian Iojă, the abbot of the Hermitage Braniște and the monks Serafim Vasilache, Vasian Isachie and Grigorie Ciulinaru (AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 30, 2013, no. 14162/November 28, 2013, f. 24^r).

³³ *Cronica lui Nicolae (Chronicle of Nicolae)*, f. 30, ed. 2015, p. 385.

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coffin was made, adorned and placed in the crypt, as well as the condition of the entire archaeological material.

Therefore, *the coffin*, where was the body of the pious, was placed in the crypt at the time of the descent exactly in the center, on its axis, remaining between the coffin of 1.9m length and the vertical walls, a space of 10cm on the east side and another 10cm on the west side, resting on four bricks, two at one end and two at the other end; it was worked in fir wood and joined together by means of a “dovetail”, with blinds and wooden pegs (fig. 35); the cover was decorated on the outside with a cross surrounded by the classical symbol ΙΣ ΧΣ ΝΙ ΚΑ (fig. 36), in Greek capital letters by means of a gallon with silver thread, caught with brass tacks (fig. 37), used in the same manner also for the perimetrical edge of the coffin, and its interior was lined with a silk cloth.

The bones were decalcified, fragile and largely milled, presenting themselves as a white wheat flour, but found still and arranged equidistantly corresponding to the anatomical position (fig. 38a and 38b). In some areas of the skeleton, they were stuck together with the clothes from the wooden racks of the coffin. Fragments of the skull and partially of the jaw were found and identified in the culion, on which was stuck on the inside, the very rich hair, with the scalp and on the outside, the kamilavka (fig. 39). This position is explained by the fact that when the coffin was fragmented under the neck area where the bricks were placed, the skull fell back, fragmenting itself.

After being recovered most of the hermit analav and the silver pectoral cross, Byzantine model (4x2.8cm, fig. 40a and 40b), with semiround ends, received at tonsure, was continued the removal of the culion with the fragments of bones and hair mentioned, being placed in larger vessel to be investigated and recovered after leaving the crypt. Then, using a “genius” shovel, was removed the part of the column, along with the wooden case under the skeleton, the ribs and pelvis, from where it was recovered the leather belt (fig. 41a), without the clasp or buckle, but provided with a cord, with which it could be fitted on the body (fig. 41b). Finally, it was taken out the last part of the skeleton, the legs to the knees, where were identified fragments from the leather footwear, the socks made of wool, the cloak and analav, partially milled bones and glued to the textile and including two knee caps (fig. 42)³⁴.

IV.4. Selection and Identification of the Funerary Material

A first selection of the funerary material recovered from the crypt of Saint Paisius was made in the evening of September 23, 2013³⁵, and the inventoried

³⁴ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 30, 2013, no. 14162, f. 25^r.

³⁵ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 23, 2013, no. 11398/ September 30, 2013, ff. 10^r-13^r; Minutes, September 30, 2013, no. 14162, f. 22^r-28^r.

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bones were analyzed and identified the next day by a committee³⁶ which found that this were authentic fragments of “a human skeleton in advanced state of decay, male and of an adult age”³⁷. On this occasion, were given to the National Museum Complex from Iași also the first pieces of textile, leather, wood and metal³⁸, to research and preservation³⁹.

A new research operation was made by another committee⁴⁰ on September 27, 2013, when, after the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Princely Church of Neamț Monastery “[...] were selected and identified new bone fragments, wood, metal, hair and fabric⁴¹, of which other funerary pieces were delivered for research and conservation to the same mentioned institution”⁴². Having completed this action, the entire funerary material, inventoried and grouped to date in five categories was placed carefully in two chests on which were applied seals of the Archdiocesan Center with the signatures of the committee members⁴³.

In the first category were inventoried bone fragments from: skull, jaw, collarbone, chest area, vertebrae, pelvis, hands, feet, ankles and feet, which in their turn were grouped into two parts. The first, consisting of fragments that are in a special state of conservation, and second, in the ordinary state. Regarding the first part, one could see that on the surface of the skull fragments, of various sizes, twenty two in number, are still preserved small portions with undecomposed skin and hair. Also, the hair of the head recovered at a rate of 80% was preserved with the scalp, and from the small bones of the hands, out of the twenty-three fragments, the carpal and metacarpal were partially preserved completely with leather and had a dark color.

³⁶ The Commission was made up of: archim. Nichifor Horia, archim. Benedict Sauciuc, fr. Zaharia Adrian, Diocesan inspector from Church administrative sector, Department of cemeteries, monuments and funeral services and PhD. Simona Ionescu, Medical Examiner at the Institute of Forensic Medicine from Iași (AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 24, 2013, no. 11399/ September 30, 2013, ff. 16^r-17^r).

³⁷ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes din September 24, 2013, no. 11399/ September 30, 2013, f. 17^r.

³⁸ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes of handing over from September 24, 2013, no. 11400/ September 30, 2013, f. 15^r and Minutes from September 25, 2013, with the same number. Through these documents, archim. Benedict Sauciuc handed over these fragments to the Exarch of the Diocese archim. Nichifor Horia, and this, in his turn, to the specialists Camelia Marian, textile restorer and Mirela Băileanu, biologist (ff. 18^r, 19^r).

³⁹ AMB (Archives of Monastery Bistrița), file 3/2014: Minutes, September 30, 2013, no. 11402, f. 29^r.

⁴⁰ The Commission was composed of: His Eminence Teophan, fathers exarchs archim. Nichifor Horia and archim. Luca Diaconu, as well as archim. Benedict - abbot of the monastery (AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 27, 2013, no. 11401/ September 30, 2013, ff. 20^r-21^r).

⁴¹ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 27, 2013, no. 11401/ September 30, 2013, ff. 20^r-21^r.

⁴² AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 30, 2013, no. 11402, f. 29^r.

⁴³ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, September 30, 2013, no. 14162, f. 27^r.

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Among the most important common bones, were identified eighteen larger and smaller fragments from the jaw, a femur and the two leg knee caps. To these are added various small bone fragments in number of twenty, unidentified and a quantity of bones milled and mixed with fragments of hair, textiles, wood and humus.

From the second category, were identified textile fragments from the: cloak analav, potcap, kamilavka, stockings, gallon and traces of silk cloth, wherewith was dressed the coffin. In the third category were recovered metal objects, such as: silver crucifix with cord, Byzantine model, tacks of brass, that has been used to attach the gallon to the coffin and monastic clothes hooks. From the category of the wood, was reconstituted the coffin (80%), which was restored and exhibited in the monastery museum (fig. 43), and in the latter category, the one of the fragments of leather, was fully recovered the belt.

These first results of the exhumation were brought to the attention of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel by His Eminence our Father Theophanes, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, in a letter⁴⁴, in whose received response was shown: “Waiting for the results of the scientific research, which do not exclude the possibility of two different saints for whom was used the same tomb, and the need to correlate all the data with the unknown saint from Neamț Monastery, we have the belief that the final results of this work will enhance the clergy and faithful pilgrims devotion to this monastic hearth”⁴⁵.

After this correspondence the concerns of the Diocesan Centre Iași, on the research and conservation of funerary materials resulted and inventoried at the moment of the exhumation of the holy relics of Saint Paisius continued by appointing a new commission⁴⁶, which, meeting at Neamț Monastery, according to their assigned tasks, proceeded to “[...] selecting the funerary material into four categories [...] recovered in order to properly preserve and put them into the relicvary; the textile and wood material packaging in order to sent it for preservation and research to the National Museum Center of Iași and the selection of two bone fragments, an incisor and a fragment from a radius in order to be handed to radiocarbon analysis to determine the period of dating”⁴⁷. As expected, the results of this investigation have not helped much because, being the case of a buried at the

⁴⁴ AMB, file 3/2014: Metropolitan letter, no. 12603/October 25, 2013, ff. 30^r-31^r.

⁴⁵ AMB, file 3/2014: Metropolitan letter, no. 12027/October 29, 2013, f. 32^r.

⁴⁶ This was composed of: archim. Luca Diaconu, archim. Benedict Sauciu, protos. Iacob Todică, secretary of Neamț Monastery and Simona Ionescu, specialist anthropologist from Forensic Institute from Iași (AMB, file 3/2014: Temei Sector Exarhat, no. 13483/November 15, 2013, ff. 35^r-36^r).

⁴⁷ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, November 22, 2013, ff. 37^r-38^r. Followed the handing over to the Center for Conservation and Restoration of National Museum Complex from Iași, for the purpo-

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end of the eighteenth century, the remains were placed, in terms of dating, within a extended period of time⁴⁸.

Among the funerary objects recuperated through restoration and exhibited in the museum of Neamț Monastery are included: the Silver Cross with all its cord, received by the saint at tonsure, the belt without buckle and several fragments of the coffin, the kamilavka, the analav, gallon, brass tacks and hooks from clothes.

V. Possible Causes of Depreciation of the Holy Relics

After the exhumation of Saint Paisius, especially given the state of impairment of his holy relics, it was requested the investigation of the potential causes which led to this state, which means, on the one hand, determining the illness of the Saint, and on the other, clarifying the historical information on the grave and the geotechnical investigation of the crypt area in correlation with the ambient interior atmosphere in which were the holy relics during the period of 219 years.

V.1. The Sickness of Saint Paisius

Starting from the information on the shaky health of the abbot Paisius, mentioned above, wherein it is not revealed his illness, we try to answer the question that is inclined to ask himself the reader of the texts of abbot Paisius: What could have been the illness of Saint Paisius, skipping the problem of his fragile native nature, as on the circumstances and causes that had caused certain illnesses to him, which could have affected every man, not only him?

The main evidence in response to this, remained from the Greek Constantin Caragea, who, being present at the feasts of Neamț Monastery, in 1780, and wanting to see the abbot Paisius and worship the miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary, in his notes after describing his portrait, he shows that “[...] although in age and suffering from *podagra*⁴⁹ (author’s emphasis), he would take out the icon alone along with his heir”⁵⁰.

se of restoration and conservation of the fragments from the coffin of Saint Paisie (AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, November 28, 2013, f. 39^o).

⁴⁸ The fragments collected were sent to research by anthropologist Simona Ionescu, in Poland, from where has not been received a specialized document which relate to.

⁴⁹ Podagra, n.f./podagre (from the Greek *Pous*, *podos* = leg, *agra* = atack) feet gout (cf. Valeriu Rusu, *Dicționar medical (Medical Dictionary)*, Bucharest 2001, p. 738); “The gout, s.f./gutte: illness caused by a disorder of the metabolism of purines: the uric acid, terminal product for the degradation of purines, accumulates in the blood (hyperuricemia), then, in the form of small crystals of urate (sodium, calcium, potassium, ammonium), precipitates in the joints and especially in the cartilaginous tissue” (*ibidem*, p. 481).

⁵⁰ *Hurmuzaki*, XIII, supl. I, p. 98.

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So, Saint Paisius illness, from which he was aware that he will suffer until death, because he himself perceives as “the last and the final of bodily infirmity”, is called by Constantin Caragea gout, which would mean lower limbs gout, “[...] metabolic disease characterized by increased concentration of uric acid in the blood and by storing the urate at the small joints, especially at the big toe from the foot”⁵¹. Gout is a disease most often *hereditary*, which usually starts by *gastric disorders*, headaches, migraines, neuralgia, pain evident in the small joints from feet and produces at the wrists and ankles, but also at the ears, some swellings or hard lumps of calcium, less painful, but very annoying. When we encounter these manifestations, we can talk about the so-called *acute gout*, inflammatory, regular, which may escalate and end in a chronic form. *The chronic gout* is found in cases where the pains in the wrists are growing, the feet, knees, hands deform the emergence of *small or larger bumps, of liquid consistency that can break* or harden due to deposition of salts of sodium urate, urate and calcium phosphate under the skin. People with chronic gout *weaken quickly because of digestive disorders*, cardiac and renal⁵².

Probably it was the same disease that concerned also the erudite hieromonk Dorotheos Vulismas, whoe, in his correspondence with Abbot Paisius, in the post-script of his last known letter, from August 13, 1785, he addressed the following words: “But please, again, my beloved father, do not overlook the excellent pharmacy of the head physician and philosopher kyr Alexandru Kasimi, to use the simple and non-burdensome things determined by him; for surely I think you’ll find them very useful also against *the puncture wounds from the skin* (author’s emphasis) and from many years [which] wind you relentlessly”⁵³.

It can be seen therefore that the observation of the ban Caragea had been correct, concerning the illness of Abbot Paisius, because most of its symptoms, can be found related in the texts on Paisius.

Also, considering the precarious health of the saint, we see that even from his youth, his foot and ankle were swelling his when he made great efforts, walking far away on his pilgrimage, crossing several villages and forests of Ukraine to reach Kiev: “Because I had never walked so much on foot - shows abbot Paisius - it happened now that my left leg hurt very much and my soles and ankle swelled. Because of the great pain I could walk only slowly, stepping on heels, and pausing

⁵¹ Ph.D. Vasile Bianu, *Doctorul de casă sau Dicționarul Sănătății (The Doctor from Home or Health Dictionary)*, Buzău, 1910, pp. 347-348.

⁵² Cf. *ibidem*, p. 347.

⁵³ Archdeac. prof. Ph.D. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Dialogul epistolar al starețului Paisie Velichkovsky cu eruditul ieromonah Dorotheos Vulismas (The Epistolary Dialogue of Abbot Paisius Velichkovsky with the Erudite Hieromonk Dorotheos Vulismas)*, in *Revista Teologică (Theological Review)*, no. 4, Sibiu, 2011, p. 309.

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often to rest either standing, or lying down, because of which my road companion caught a hearty cold. Seeing that I walk very slowly, he wanted to abandon me many times, but seeing how I asked him in tears, he with mercy never abandoned me. When it happened to encounter on the way villages, we rested there for two or three days until my leg deflated and the pain disappeared, but as we began walking again, again my pain started and my foot swelled. But after a while, considerably long, I felt coming down on me, the unworthy, God's unspeakable mercy, the pain ceased, the leg deflated completely and now I was able to walk easily"⁵⁴.

After the crisis of the foot pain, reaching with great effort at the Hermitage Rijestev, he got his first *acute gout attack*, which began with gastric disorders and lasted for more than a month, about which, he tells himself: "[...] such an illness hit me that I could not retain in the stomach any food, but anything I ate, I soon threw out. A month or more [of illness] brought me in such an asceticism and exhaustion of the body, that even though I was not lying in bed, because of the great weakness I could barely walk. But I prayed to God not to let me end my life there, because I just couldn't bear the thought to die in that place"⁵⁵.

Further evidence that this was his main inherited illness is the predisposition of Plato to eat grapes hungrily, condition manifested especially at the Hermitage Trăișteni where father Dometie, the Primate of the hermitage and has given him the duty of guarding the vineyard. On this occasion, he ordered - testifies abbot Paisius - "[...] lest I dare to eat grapes until I take at least a piece of bread in my mouth, and after I eat it he allowed with blessing to eat grapes before meals and after meals as I please. [...] He gave me such a blessing, like a loving parent, knowing me powerless and realizing that my desire to eat grapes is very high and thinking that will not stop in any way [...] until I would not be satisfied. [...] And I fell into such an addiction of eating grapes, that I did not want any other food. And when I came to the hermitage, at the refectory, I ate very little because I was bloated with grapes which I freely ate with great relish. And because in whole that time until the harvesting of grapes, I only tasted a little bit of other dishes, I fell into a great bodily weakness and my face was weakened as in an illness"⁵⁶.

This tendency to eat grapes, is one of the symptoms of the disease, in healing of which among the treatments that were known in ancient times and recommended, were others: grape cure, autumn crocus teas, drinking plenty of fluids, milk, coffee, bed rest etc.⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ < Abbot Paisius >, *Autobiografia (Autobiography)*, in: Paisius from Neamț, *Autobiography and Lives*, p. 153.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 153-154.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 211-212.

⁵⁷ Cf. dr. Vasile Bianu, *op.cit.*, p. 348.

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By the end of his life, the form of acute gout arrived to degenerate because of asceticism and lack of treatment into a chronic one, embodied in the wounds he had throughout the whole right side of the body, which is why he performed his work as a translator lying in bed, surrounded by books and manuscripts: “All day long the blessed straighten out the spiritual affairs and those from the outside - highlights the schemamonk Mitrofan - and all night long and wrote toiling himself yarn beyond nature. If he hadn’t been strengthened by the grace of God he would have been impossible for the human nature to endure such trouble. Moreover, he was ill and suffered a lot from the wounds. Because he had wounds on his whole right side, on his belly and leg, and could not sleep on that side”⁵⁸.

This illness, assumed a thorn allowed by the care of God, as a sign of his election by God and as support for other virtues and charisms, was until his death a martyr’s crown of abbot Paisius, received as the power of God, who antinomically “is perfected in weakness”. The holy, through the patience and magnanimity with which he bore this thorn, he crowned discreetly his temporal life and, especially, the the everlasting one.

V.2. Geotechnical Factors

A second cause of the depreciation of the holy relics of Saint Paisius is represented by the external factors of the environment and the environmental condition where remained after the funeral, the body Abbot Paisius for two centuries and nearly two decades. In establishing these external factors, the SRL Company Drincon from Botoșani, represented by the spouses professor Verona Zaharia and engineer PhD. Constantin Zaharia, undertook on March 30, 2014, at his grave a geotechnical research.

The specialized work have resulted in two drillings, first conducted inside the church, in the burial chamber, near the the crypt of Saint Paisius, to a depth of 3.1m from the current floor, and the second one, in the historic premises of the monastery, at 6.5m away from the church wall, on the southern line, inside-outside, of the tomb and at a depth of 4.6m.

From the chemical analyzes carried out by Laboratory of the Agency for Environmental Protection from Botoșani, on the samples taken with these drillings, for detecting pH indicators nitrates (NO_3), nitrites (NO_2), electrical conductivity, sulphates (SO_4^{2-}) and chlorides (Cl), and other physical analysis, the geotechnical team has determined that the grinding process of the holy relics is due to: “the fluctuating groundwater action⁵⁹ loaded with acidic ion resulting from the depos-

⁵⁸ *Viața lui Mitrofan (Life of Mitrofan)*, ed. 2015, p. 302; Cetfericov, *Paisie starețul (Paisius, the Abbot)*, p. 287.

⁵⁹ The vertical fluctuation of the groundwater, depending on the meteoric waters fallen in the area, made that the interior of the crypt to be flooded around 30-50cm from its flooring (AMB,

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its around the church; and the action of the rainwater fallen around the church, which through infiltration reached the bottom of the crypt and due to the high load of ion SO_4^{2-} , *had an intense action of dissolution of the calcium from the bones*, producing the *grinding* (^{author's emphasis}) and secondary deposits of gypsum crystals ($\text{CaSO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$) on them⁶⁰.

Correlating these results with the actual condition in which the relics were found at the date of the exhumation is confirmed that, firstly that the ceramic material of the crypt was wet, with the partial exception of the vault, and its lower part and the floor were soaked and moistened, that the brick could be severed with the spatula, as already signaled. Secondly, the existence of crystalline molecules in all the bone fragments were found by the exhumation board members, but, unable to find an explanation on the spot, the fact was not recorded.

These causes are added also the development of anaerobic microorganisms in the space of the crypt⁶¹, especially starting from 1883 when, it was covered and sealed with a marble pavement fitted with a waterproof cement mortar.

VI. The Tradition of Exhumation and the Historical Reality

VI.1. Historical References on the Grave

The dominant virtue of Abbot Paisius as high and holy spiritual father led the congregation from Neamț to bury him in the the most important place from the church to remain, even after passing into eternity, into communion maintained visually through his grave.

On the evening of November 15, 1794, the fathers from Neamț Monastery had to determine the place of burial of the Abbot Paisius. They did not have much choice, because the most important room for burial for the main founders of the princely church was the tomb room, very small in size, at that time, where were buried on the north side Prince of Moldavia Ștefan II, dead in 1447, and on the southern, captain Moise. The latter, being in the service of “great mercenary captain” at Neamț Fortress, became one of the founders of the Neamț Monastery through his mother, the tribeswomen Tofana Rochinstru from Soroca, who - with her son the seneschal Ilie⁶² “[...] in 1703, November 14, gave Neamț Monastery

file 3/2014: Crypt of Saint Paisius from Neamț Monastery, geotechnical comment, by prof. Verona Zaharia and PhD. Constantin Zaharia, f. 54^r).

⁶⁰ AMB, file 3/2014, f. 55^r. The existence of the sulfate ion in a proportion of 875 mg/l around the church and of 700 mg/l around the crypt produced an intense aggression on the bone material (*ibidem*, ff. 54^r-55^r).

⁶¹ AMB, file 3/2014, f. 55^r.

⁶² < Visarion the hieromonk >, *Diptych of the Founders of Neamț Monastery, 1846*, Rom. mss. 190, BMN, with the title Introduction typed, and then written by hieromonk Visarion (*cf.* f. 166^v)

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four estates, namely: Visoca, whole village, Crâșcăuți, whole village, Cotova, whole village, Burdujăni, the fourth part of the village. [...] These estates are all in one place, with ponds, mills, forests and many fields [...] are bought by Moisi, the eldest son of Tofana who was great mercenary captain and in the battle with the Polish from Neamț Fortress, in the first reign of Prince Constantin Duca, died and he was buried inside, in the church of Neamț Monastery. For his blood shed on the ground of his homeland let's say all: *May his memory be eternal!*"⁶³

Because of his sacrifice for the country, he was buried in the church crypt of Neamț Monastery, in the most privileged place: beneath the southern window of the room. Here, however, in 1794 the fathers have decided to be buried Abbot Paisius "[...] in the tomb of the Captain Moise, in the first porch, in the crypt [...]"⁶⁴, as it was called in time the burial chamber.

On November 16, 1794, the fathers "[...] began to dig a hole in the memorial, on the right side, with great sorrow and sighing"⁶⁵, exhumating, at the same time, this captain, but without taking his remains out of the church, but as it has now been found, at the time of exhumation, they wrapped the remains in his mantle and have them reburied in a new pit dug in the northern profile of the original pit, which they scooped horizontally, not to break the pavement of the church⁶⁶. On the same day the disciples of Paisius continued to build up the crypt "[...] with bricks [...], on the third day, on Friday, they made a coffin and dressed and adorned it [...]"⁶⁷, and at the end of the funeral service, on Saturday on November 18, late afternoon "[...] placing the holy relics in the tomb they paved the tomb with bricks"⁶⁸.

From this moment began obviously the veneration of the tomb of Abbot Paisius with his remembrance as a great and, in many respects, unique spiritual father. Among the visible signs of this veneration we include, first, the marble tombstone, with which his disciples marked the tomb and, then, the introduction of the ordi-

(= BMN, Rom. mss. 190), (f. 237^v); Narcis Crețulescu, *Istoria Sfintei Monastirii Neamț (History of the Holy Monastery Neamț)*, t. IX, Rom. mss. 5698, BAR, f. 87; BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 214^r, 358^r.

⁶³ *Sinodical Sfintei Monastiri Neamțul*, 1873, Rom. mss. 195, BMN (= BMN, Rom. mss. 195), f. 68^v. The correct year can be found in BMN, Rom. mss. 190, where it appears under the form: *ΛΒΤ ρζαί <1702> ηοεμβριε Δΐ* (f. 237^v).

⁶⁴ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, ff. 210, 214, 235, 358, 359.

⁶⁵ *Cronica lui Nicolae (Chronicle of Nicolae)*, f. 30, ed. 2015, p. 384.

⁶⁶ From here, they could recover on the occasion of the restoration of the crypt, when the tomb was found, fragments from his cloak and the cap as captain, in very good condition. They were restored and then exhibited in the museum of Neamț Monastery. (AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, March 20, 2014, ff. 45^r-46^r).

⁶⁷ *Cronica lui Nicolae (Chronicle of Nicolae)*, f. 30, ed. 2015, p. 385.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 62, ed. 2015, p. 393.

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nances in the behavior of the believers at the time of their entry into the monastic church, which we have talked about.

The tomb stone, the work of monk Iulian⁶⁹, the brother of the spiritual father Dionisie from the monastery, wrought after the funeral with great talent, was inscribed with a bilingual Slavic and Romanian-Cyrillic text, arranged in two columns and having this content: “Here lies our blessed father abbot Hieroschemamonk and Archimandrite Paisius, the Ukrainian, who came from Mount Athos in Moldavia with 60 disciples and many brothers here gathering and the community life through himself has renewed, and so to the Lord he went, in 1794, November 15, in the days of the faithful Prince Mihail Șuțul, and of His Grace Iacov”⁷⁰.

From the manuscripts found in the monastery library we find that the current floor around the tomb is from “[...] 1883, when the church was paved all over with white marble brought from Constantinople”⁷¹. This was done from the funds of the monastery, completed with those from the faithful⁷², being executed by “the venerable Hieroschemamonk Vasian”, hegumen of the Hermitage Pocrov⁷³, during the abbotship of Archimandrite Timotei Ionescu (1860-1887). This final paving was laid with mortar concentrated in cement over an older one, made, as it was found during the the exhumation works, from square brick laid with mortar of sand and lime (fig. 44). According to the same unpublished sources, the ceramic pavement was made between 1828-1830, when abbot Dometian (1823-1834) made several interventions on the princely church, including the interior pavement, fact which later was recorded: “Before, the church was paved all over with large square bricks made here in the monastery by abbot Dometian, a strong brick, which can not be found anywhere”⁷⁴.

In these two rows of flooring was embedded the tombstone of Saint Paisius at the time of initiation of the research work on his tomb (fig. 45), both, the marble, with its concrete screed and the brick one, being found compact, with no trace of further intervention (fig. 46).

⁶⁹ He is author of several works, of which are known: the stone of Abbot Paisius, 1794 (BMN, Rom. mss. 171, ff. 208, 210), The Inscription of the Old Xenodochium, 1796, and Royal Silver Candlesticks (BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 326); see this information, but incomplete, also in Narcis Crețulescu, “Inscriptions from Neamț Monastery”, in *Arhiva (Archive)*, no. 3/1910, p. 137.

⁷⁰ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 208. This stone, carved in white marble (154x50x18cm) was concealed 10cm underfloor, and 8cm has remained above the profile.

⁷¹ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, ff. 254-256.

⁷² BMN, Rom. mss. 195, f. 42^v, 47^v, 48^r, 55^r, 56^v, 66^v, 102^v, 103^r.

⁷³ Constantin Tomescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 87.

⁷⁴ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 256.

*The Image of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky and the Exhumation His Relics (II)***VI.2. The Tradition of Exhumation**

According to monastic tradition in Moldavia, monks, regardless of the rank occupied in the administration of the Church, are buried, at least from the early nineteenth century, having “[...] a brick engraved with the name, rank and year of death [set] instead of the pillow under his head”⁷⁵.

In Neamț Monastery and other monasteries that have adopted the practice of exhumation, this was done seven years after death⁷⁶, when the bones were moved to “[...] the crypts of the necropolis, and the calabashes (skulls), but the whole were put in closed cabinets with glass panes, to preserve in history for the offspring. On the head was written the name, rank and year of death and so sit in a row next to each other all their heads in the lockers marked according to letters⁷⁷ [...] each skull with its brick”⁷⁸. Due to this practice, the place of monastic and lay personalities tombstones, buried in the porch and narthex during 1750-1896⁷⁹, was changed the very moment of exhumation and for most older buried in the narthex, they were covered in 1883 with the existing marble pavement⁸⁰. Exception to this practice was made in the case of Ștefan II, Prince of Moldavia, placed at the time, in the northern niche of the burial chamber and the one of abbot Paisius, remained in its place⁸¹, his tomb being the only one that the worshipers respect by a ritual of honor. This must have been the reason why the tomb of Saint Paisius was exempted from the exhumation.

However, corroborating the results of the exhumation from 2013 and some oral testimonies of the elderly parents from Neamț recorded by Bishop Narcis Crețulescu, remained unpublished, can accepted that, at one time, there was an intervention also on the crypt of Saint Paisius.

In this regard, wishing to respond to the legend of identification by some monastic media of abbot Paisius with Peter the Great⁸², published in 1890 by Con-

⁷⁵ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 258; Rom. mss. 139, f. 99^r.

⁷⁶ ANN, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1775: “18 lei and 7 bani I gave to a bishop who served the Divine Liturgy for the late bishop Ionichii”, at 7 years from his death, that is 1776 (f. 12^r); BMN, Rom. mss. 171, ff. 236, 278; BMN, Rom. mss. 139, f. 2.

⁷⁷ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 236.

⁷⁸ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 278.

⁷⁹ For the eighteenth century are found 15 names listed in the register of the crypt - the majority from the eighth and ninth decades and one from 1750 (BMN, Rom. mss. 193, ff. 6, 12, 16, 28, 36, 48, 52, 60, 72) - and the others, until no. 547, are from the nineteenth century, the last being from 1896 (f. 84^v).

⁸⁰ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, ff. 254^r-256^r, 363^r.

⁸¹ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 363^r.

⁸² Peter the Great (1672-1725) was not contemporary with abbot Paisie. The core truth of the legend is that his daughters, Elisabeta and nun Maria, had spiritual connections with him and with

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stantin Bilciurescu, which ended with the conclusion that “[...] in 1831 the Russians stole the bones of abbot Paisius from his grave, they put they put the stone back on the empty grave and closing those bones in a coffin of gold, they sent it to Russia”⁸³, Narcis Crețulescu testifies:

“I, the author, as a dweller who is living here, many times I’ve heard and I’ve investigated this, in many ways to see the truth in it [...] and talking to the Romanian parents from then and with some Hungarian parents or other nationalities, they say [...] that in 1831 or 1832, Metropolitan Veniamin Costache from the instigation of Count Kiseleff came at the Neamț Monastery intending to exhume abbot Paisius Velichkovsky [...] They made in the evening the Vigil and the next day a great funeral feast [...]. Then they dug the tomb of Paisius, did it secretly. Here the opinions of the monks differ.

Some say that: the metropolitan took the bones and gave them secretly to Count Kiseleff, who put them in a suitcase and left with them, carrying them as the bones of abbot Paisius, the Ukrainian. Others say that they did open the tomb, but they did not take the bones because they were molten and from the burial until then had passed over 37 year. They hardly found a few strands of hair, rags of clothes, the prayer rope, the brick, the belt buckle and a rest of periman. Others say that the body was whole, with all clothing and at the opening of the pit, they came so as not to take him out, «because he does not want to end the worship of the Virgin», that is, if they exhumed the abbot, then people would worship Saint Paisius and not the Virgin Mary as before (the spiritual father Naftanail was high ecclesiarch, he walked into the grave from the order of the Metropolitan Veniamin)”⁸⁴.

The author supplements these information elsewhere showing that “I, the author, received a few strands of hair from the beard and some rags taken from his coat by abbot Naftanail. I gave them to ruler Filaret Scriban Stavropoleos), and the tomb was closed as no longer walk in it”⁸⁵.

Neamț Monastery and that, at a certain moment, was opened the crypt of the abbot, possibly in the presence of General Pavel Kiselev (1788-1872).

⁸³ Constantin Șt. Bilciurescu, *Monastirile și bisericile din România cu mici notițe istorice și gravuri (Monasteries and churches in Romania with some historical notes and engravings)*, Bucharest, 1890, p. 171.

⁸⁴ *Viața lui Narcis (Life of Narcis)*, f. 146^v; typed edition 1984, p. 265.

⁸⁵ *Viața lui Narcis (Life of Narcis)*, f. 135^r; typed edition 1984, p. 240.

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One of these testimonies came to be taken up and amplified by Gheorghe Samurean, who, at the beginning of a note of the chronic dedicated to festivities that were held at the centenary⁸⁶ from November 15, 1894, he said that: “The body of the blessed abbot Paisius Velichkovsky, whole and unchanged, rests in the crypt from the large church dedicated to the Holy Feast of the Ascension from the Lavra of Neamț”⁸⁷, and at the end of the text, after reminding about a possible canonization by Romanian Orthodox Church Synod, he added: “His body was found incorrupt according to last testimonials in the year 1872, as well earlier in 1846, 1853 and 1861”⁸⁸.

This imaginary information was taken without being checked, by Eugen Procopan, understanding that it was about four “exhumations”⁸⁹ and, later, with the same meaning, by father Paul Mihail, who, wishing, however, to find Romanian contemporary testimonials in the archives of the Metropolitan of Moldavia and not finding anything regarding this moments and those “[...] found out at the exhumations that have occurred over the decades”⁹⁰, places that negative result on the account of the archivist losses during the last world war.

After May 24, 1986, when was the miracle⁹¹ that prompted the exhumation of the remains of the Unknown Saint from Neamț Monastery, the subject of the exhumations, so uncertain, acquired other shades in that his the bones were assigned to Saint Paisius.

In this regard, during the bicentennial of the death of the holy abbot, that is in 1994, the erudite and pious professor Ioan Ivan noted, probably for the first time, this opinion wondering whether this would have been the will of Saint Paisius “[...] who humbled himself also through this way, left as a testament to his disciples”⁹², that is to be buried just below the church path to be trodden under foot

⁸⁶ Given that following a special research we did not find any Romanian source, edit or original, stating the presence of hierarchs of Moldavia during the alleged celebrations from Neamț Monastery from November 15, 1894, we believe that this centenary was not celebrated.

⁸⁷ Gheorghe Samurean, “Archimandrite Paisie Velichkovsky (on the anniversary of a hundred years from his happy dormition)”, in *Ruschii Palomnic*, 1894, p. 779.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ Eugen Th. Procopan, *Paisie Velichkovsky*, Kishinev, 1933, p. 85.

⁹⁰ Fr. Paul Mihail, “Abbot Paisius from Neamț revival of monasticism”, in *Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava*, 5-6/1962, p. 416.

⁹¹ ***, “Un miracle au monastère de Néamțz (Roumanie)” in *Contacts, revue française de l’Orthodoxie*, no. 35/1986, p. 241; Arhid. prof. Ioan Ivan, “Neamț Monastery - Confessions of the Saints. The Miracle from Neamț Monastery from May 24-27, 1986”, in *Candela Moldovei (Candle of Moldavia)*, no. 5/1998 (= Ioan Ivan, “Neamț Monastery - Confessions”), pp. 10-11; Ierom. Petroniu Tănase, *Chemarea Sfintei Ortodoxii (The Call of Holy Orthodoxy)*, Bizantină Publishing, Bucharest, 2006, pp. 181-184.

⁹² Ioan Ivan, “The image portrait”, p. 1.

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by all. In 1998, with the account of the miracle through which was discovered the Unknown Saint the author came back on the same hitherto unsolved problem, highlighting however this time, new aspects of the monastic thinking from Neamț and wondering again: “[...] It would not be ruled out to be the remains of Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky, hidden so as not to be stolen and taken elsewhere? Who knows and how to prove it?”⁹³

A year later, fr. Ioanichie Bălan, although he had placed the Unknown Saint between the saints from Neamț from the fourteenth century⁹⁴, but without showing evidence in this regard, he kept alive the confusion recording it in the first version, that Saint Paisius “[...] had been buried here [under the path] at his request”⁹⁵.

These uncertainties related to paisian grave were found in the congregation of the Neamț Monastery also at the date of the exhumation, in 2013, fed at a time, also by the giving of a fragment of the venerable relics of the Unknown Saint, “identified” with Saint Paisius, to a new church in Bucharest for the latter was chosen as patron.

VI.3. The Historical Reality

So, moving to the analysis of these testimonies can be understood that Narcis Crețulescu, in its original text, talks, firstly, about the presence of the Metropolitan Veniamin at Neamț Monastery during 1831-1832, actually very possible taking into account that we are in the abbotship of Dometian (1823-1834), who - during 1824-1834 - conducted in the monastery several construction and renovation works⁹⁶. These include building since 1826⁹⁷, the Church *Saint George*⁹⁸ and then renovating the large church, by restoring the roof⁹⁹ and changing it by adding other two painted wooden towers¹⁰⁰, repainting of the interior¹⁰¹, by painters Vasilache

⁹³ *Idem*, “Neamț Monastery - Confessions”, p. 11.

⁹⁴ Archim. Ioanichie Bălan, *Sfintele moaște din România (Holy relics from Romania)*, Publishing House of Diocese of Roman, 1999, p. 157.

⁹⁵ *Idem*, *Patericul românesc (Romanian Paterikon)*, 2nd edition, Publishing House of Archdiocese of Tomis and Lower Danube, Galați, 1990, pp. 108-109.

⁹⁶ ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1824, ff. 2^r-30^r.

⁹⁷ ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1824: “15350 lei and 15 parale were given now [December 27, 1826] from the money for the building the Church of Saint George, what we have to give” (f. 12^r).

⁹⁸ BMN, Rom. mss. 190, f. 33^r; < Andronic ieroschim. >, *History of monasteries Neamț and Secu*, VI, 1875, ANRM, fond 2119, inv. 3, file 72, f. 138^v.

⁹⁹ ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1824: “20000 lei were spent until now, this year [1829] building up the oven and the covering of the Church” (f. 20^r), and in 1830 the expense for the roof and clothes was 17.000 lei (f. 21^v).

¹⁰⁰ BMN, Rom. mss. 190, f. 32^r; BMN, Rom. mss. 195, f. 19^r.

¹⁰¹ BMN, Rom. mss. 190, f. 32^r; < Andronic ieroschim. >, *History of monasteries Neamț and Secu*, VI, f. 146^r.

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Chițăscu and Vasile Eliman from Suceava, begun in 1828¹⁰² and ended on June 18, 1830¹⁰³, restoring the floor, the iconostasis¹⁰⁴, carved by craftsman Leon during 1825-1828¹⁰⁵ and strengthening the bell¹⁰⁶. Among these works were placed incorrectly also those of the demolition of the wall separating the nave and the burial chamber¹⁰⁷. In fact, this ill-fated intervention that caused the irretrievable loss of some vintage mural surfaces from the period of Stephen, including also the votive painting took place during the Ukrainian abbotship of Dosithei, when the spiritual father Silvestru, on July 20, 1806, noted: “248 lei, 35 parale were spent for the removal of the wall from the church and with the construction of the belt and of the windows, not counting the 500 lei given by Princess Mărioara”¹⁰⁸.

In the context of this work, the Metropolitan could have been present here, both in June for a service of reconsecration of the church, now completely renewed, at the patron of the monastery, and on 15 November of the years: 1830, 1831, 1832, according to tradition, at the annual commemoration of Abbot Paisius.

In this new context of testimonies, the idea of further intervention on the crypt is accepted, if we take into account that at the time of the recent research on the grave, *the crypt vault was found closed with materials different from those of the building itself*, pe on an area of seven horizontal rows of brick, bounded by a

¹⁰² ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1824: in 1828 was begun the repainting of the church because “was given the earnest 2500 lei to the painter to paint the great church from Monastery Neamț” (f. 16^v), and in 1829 “4199 lei were paid to the painter of Neamț, who painted the great church, but apart from the porch and the entrance hall” (f. 19^v).

¹⁰³ BMN, Rom. mss. 195, f. 19^v; Nicolae Iorga, *Mănăstirea Neamț (Neamț Monastery)*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ BMN, Rom. mss. 190, f. 32^v; *History of Holy Monasteries Neamț and Secu*, Rom. mss. 154, BMN, f. 173^v; < Andronic hieroschem. >, *History of monasteries Neamț and Secu*, VI, f. 146^v; Arhim. Nestor Vornicescu, “Ecclesial-cultural relations between the Neamț Monastery and Transylvania, from the ancient times till around the year 1918”, in *Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava*, 11-12, 1968, p. 687.

¹⁰⁵ ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1824, ff. 9^r, 11^r, 16^r: in 1825, “8514 lei diggers were paid from the money we have to give for making the iconostasis of the great church of Neamț” (f. 9^r), în 1826, “3874 lei were given to Gospodin Leon, from the money from the iconostasis of the great church” (f. 11^r), and in 1828, “were given 760 lei for the iconostasis of the great church from Monastery Neamț” (f. 16^r).

¹⁰⁶ ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1824: in 1831 with 635 lei and 20 parale “They were made for an iron bar to harden the bell from Neamț” (f. 23^v).

¹⁰⁷ BMN, Rom. mss. 171, f. 254. Here, Narcis Crețulescu records this error which was subsequently taken over by: Ștefan Balș, Corina Nicolescu, *Neamț Monastery*, Technic Publishing, Bucharest, 1958, pp. 23, 45, 71; deac. Ioan Ivan, fr. Scarlat Porcescu, *Neamț Monastery*, Iași, 1981, pp. 65, 68.

¹⁰⁸ ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1805-1806: Source for all expenses of the congregation since they put abbot father Dosithei [and] father confessor Silvestru to the pantry, July 10, 1805-July 30, 1806, f. 55^v.

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double décroche, which may be due to a later intervention rather than at the end of the funeral.

Secondly, on the different views of the parents from Neamț regarding those found in the crypt it by the authors of the research, the first version can not be accepted, that the Metropolitan would have given “secretly”, at that moment, the relics of abbot Paisius “to Count Kiselev”, because, according to the results of the recent exhumation, they were found in the crypt, with sufficient undeniable identity, such as: the height, the hair preserved, the clothing specific to the schemamonks, the coffin adorned according to contemporary sources, etc. But the second and third variants, which complement one another, are relevant to the elucidation of this problem, as they answer to some misunderstandings of ours, regarding the funerary material and its state, that I personally removed from the crypt on the day of the exhumation. In this sense, they are accepted as true the facts recorded of an intervention for the opening of the crypt and the fact that no bones were removed within it, because “they were melted”, therefore the authors were able to resume their action at that of taking “from the grave signs of blessing”, that is “few threads of hair from the beard”, fragments of clothes and paraman, the prayer rope, the brick and the buckle, of which some have reached Narcis Crețulescu who, in his turn, gave them to Filaret Scriban Stavropoleos.

Therefore, these testimonies, which refer both to the objects taken from the crypt as blessing and the state of the bones, is important evidence for us because, on the one hand, we have found the bones “melted”, and on the other, *the objects mentioned that have been taken by those in question are the ones we have not found in the crypt at the last exhumation*, actually put then on account of decomposition. Now, in the new context of research, we can say that, as were partially preserved the cotton or silk analav, the wool stockings, the mohair kamilavka and the potcap, there should have been also kept some fragments of the robe, the rasa and the schema. If these were overlooked easier, being placed at the time of exhumation on the account of decomposition, however, remained the curiosity regarding the inscribed brick, the buckles and not clasp, because the belt is not provided with holes, the prayer rope, which had to be there. If in terms of the brick, which, during investigations, we realized that it could miss, because into the crypt of the monastery there are no such copies older than 1800, existing thus the variant that this practice being after abbot Paisius, for the lack the prayer rope, the buckles and the schema however, has remained a question mark, which we believe was answered now.

Another answer came through the information from the much contested high priest, regarding the hair from the beard, story also important in that we found a few threads of this, that could not be mistaken, as compared with his hair a shade of yellowish-white, the beard was glassy white-silver. Therefore, another confir-

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mation that there was an intrusion in the crypt and were taken as a sign of blessing some beard hairs.

Thirdly, regarding the authors of the first research of the tomb, Narcis Crețulescu recorded the conclusion of his investigation undertaken into the congregation from Neamț, showing that the spiritual father Naftanail - as high ecclesiarch - entered the tomb by order of Metropolitan Veniamin.

In practical terms, Natanail¹⁰⁹ could do that “secretly” at night, after the Vigil celebrated in honor of the abbot Paisius, assisted by some lay people or even from the congregation, for lifting the tombstone and the opening of the crypt, in the presence of Abbot Dometian, of the Metropolitan, and possibly, as we shall see, of “Count Kiselev”.

After verifying this latest information, we concluded that the Russian general, could have been present in Neamț Monastery, firstly during the period 1827-1828, when he visited Moldavia for researching the state of the country in order to occupy it and then, especially during three time periods from the period 1829-1834, when he was for several months in Iași¹¹⁰, as chairman of the Divans Moldavia and Wallachia. In this respect, one of the monastery’s original stories written before March 20, 1858, indicates that the general was present in Neamț Monastery after the completion of construction of the church dedicated to *Saint George* from the monastery and the beginning of the restoration of the Princely Church. So after Abbot Dometian has completed the first works, came “[...] Russian armies here in this land - show the source -, came Kiselev the one who was ruler of the army, here at Neamț Monastery and, according to the rule, he gave a golden cross to Abbot. Then the abbot started the renovation of the catholic Church of the Ascension [...]”¹¹¹. According to this source it means that the general was present here during the period 1827-1828, if it is considered that the intervention works on big church were started at the latest in 1829.

Intensifying the research in order to establish a more accurate data, we came across a supporting new information also original, of the spiritual father Andron-

¹⁰⁹ The spiritual father Natanael, having good qualities as Slavic singer and being a connoisseur of Russian language, was commissioned by Metropolitan of Moldavia on the occasion of Russian delegations and also, to official services of commemoration great Russian figures (cf. deac. Ioan Ivan, “From the monks relations from Neamț Monastery with the Church and the Russian society in the mid nineteenth century”, in *Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava*, no. 9-10/1963, pp. 620-621).

¹¹⁰ These intervals are: May 8-June 25, 1830; April 9,-July 6, 1831 and January 9-April 11, 1834, when takes place the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldavia (cf. Al. Papadopol-Calimah, “General Pavel Kiselef in Moldavia and the Romanian Country, 1829-1834”, in *Romanian Academy Annals*, seria II, tom IX, section II, Memories of the Historical Section, Bucharest, 1887, pp. 87-88, 95-96, 103-104).

¹¹¹ BMN, Rom. mss. 154, f. 173r.

ic, that frames the presence of Kiselev at Neamț Monastery after a first meeting of the representatives of the monastery with him in June 1830. He shows that during this month monk Grigorie Radul, the monastery bailiff intervened, asking the general, who “ruled also the principalities as prince”, to put in practice the will of the deceased Ecaterina Balș, through which she donated two estates to the monastery. After this story, Andronic continues: “[...] later on, he came also here, at Neamț Monastery and seeing the beautiful monastic ordinance, he donated it ten thousand lei, and to our father abbot Dometian, he gave a golden cross, with a golden chain also, to his everlasting remembrance. The same did also the General Cazacih Boisk David Bișdov who donated two thousand lei to the monastery, and the Russian consul from Iași, Gheorghie Timkovski donated four hundred lei and two beautiful curtains for the holy and miraculous icon [of] Our Lady Mother of God, and his daughter, Anastasia donated one hundred lei, to their everlasting remembrance, as it is seen in the holy memorial of the monastery”¹¹².

By checking this information, we were able to ascertain, first, that the monk Grigorie indeed intervened in writing to Kiselev on June 11, 1830¹¹³, for preparing the succession documents regarding the estates Epureni from Iași and Movila Turcului from Covurlui, bequeathed in ownership to Neamț Monastery by Eliman deceased governor Theodor Balș the Doroșcan and his wife Ecaterina. Then, it was confirmed both the information about the donors from the group Kiselev who, as recorded, were registered into the great diptych of the monastery in 1830¹¹⁴, and the one related to the cross offered by the general, registered in 1834 between the treasures of the monastery, with the note: “golden cross sent by General Kiselev”¹¹⁵ and which currently is at the National Art Museum in Bucharet.

It remained to be determined when the group Kiselev was at Neamț Monastery. In this regard, we have discovered after we have submitted this text to be translated for publication, a correspondence between the General Kiselev and Metropolitan Veniamin. In his letter from May 29, 1831, the General, addressing the Metropolitan, reveals: “In my journeys in the lands from the North, still unknown to me until now, I, among others, have been also at Neamț Monastery, and I feel it as a debt to share with your Holiness how I’ve seen that, beneath our eyes, this sanctuary keeps in justice and good discernment the rules of its founders. Everywhere good order, love of people, help for the poor and the weak, as I have seen in full force.

¹¹² < Andronic hieroschem. >, *History of monasteries Neamț and Secu*, VI, f. 142^r-142^v.

¹¹³ ANI, Neamț Monastery, XXII/79, June 11, 1830.

¹¹⁴ < Andronic duhovnicul > *The great diptych of the monasteries Neamț and Secu*, 1863, ANRM, fond 2119, inv. 3, file 50, f. 64^v.

¹¹⁵ ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 1/1834: Izvod April 1, 1834, f. 1^v; BMN, Rom. mss. 180, f. 4^v; ANNȚ, Monastery Neamț-Secu, file 33/1843: Registry, 1843, f. 3^r; BMN, Rom. mss. 167, f. 3^r.

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Archimandrite Domitian, following his predecessor, guards that equipoise and diligence that make priceless the strengthening, so helpful for the people”¹¹⁶.

Therefore, it should be noted, on the one hand, that these latter documentary evidence partially confirm and complete the information conveyed by Narcis Crețulescu, On the other hand, is a response to our questions from the last exhumation and also the second premise by which to establish the following reality of the facts: the tomb of Saint Paisius was open, in the presence of Metropolitan Veniamin, of General Pavel Kiselev and his companions, most probably on Sunday, May 29, 1831, when the renewed Princely Church could have been reconsecrated and when, finding the bones deprecated, was allowed to be taken, just from the saint’s chest, as sign of blessing, the prayer rope, the buckles of the belt, beard hair and textile fragments from the Schema, cape and rasa.

Regarding the statement of Gheorghe Samurean related to the four discoveries of “the uncorrupt body”, from the years 1846, 1853, 1861 and 1872, which conflicted us the most, can be understood now that “the testimonies” referred to by the author are also made in Neamț, having its origins in one of the legendary variants already mentioned. This new variant we consider it to be false, firstly because none of the information contained in it have been recorded by someone before, neither by the high priest of Neamț, who has been occupied specifically with this topic, as a dweller in the congregation of Neamț and nor buy the spiritual father Andronic, as well as for the reason that there was a hierarchal connection of the Metropolitan Veniamin, recorded by Narcis Crețulescu under this form: “[...] and the tomb was closed as no longer anyone enter in it”.

Regarding the first reason, we have to remember also that Andronicus could not have missed an event of major spiritual importance, such as that of the discovery of the holy relics, at least when we are referring at the alleged exhumation from 1853, he was great ecclesiarch of the Neamț Monastery. He, referring to the holy relics of Paisius, mentions in his work just a personal vision, from November 27, 1869, when he was in Kishinev. Then he saw himself in the great church from Neamț, where, after he prayed at the tomb according to the usual ordinance and being being within the atmosphere of “some very wonderful chants and full of untold joy”, he saw “[...] that above the stone of the grave was a very beautiful and embellished reliquary, and now the tomb could no longer be seen because of the garments that adorned the coffin all around, and in that reliquary were the holy relics of the the blessed father, our Abbot Paisius Velichkovsky, very bright, that I could see our father so beautiful and

¹¹⁶ ANI, Neamț Monastery, XLI/31: May 29, 1831, Iași, published by T. G. Bulat, “Letters from Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi”, in *Metropolitan of Moldavia and Suceava*, no. 5-6/1974, pp. 474-475. This document copied was sent to the Abbot Dometian by the metropolitan, through his letter from May 30, 1831 (ANI, Neamț Monastery, CXII/2: May 30, 1831, Iași; v. și *ibidem*, p. 475).

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with a bright face [as if] he has just died: his face was shining with divine grace, the beard was white clean, his hands were closed as usually on the chest, with his prayer rope in his hands, wearing the cape, with potcap and kamilavka¹¹⁷.

VI.4. Correlations with the Unknown Saint

On the alleged identifications of Saint Paisius with the Unknown Saint, along with the exhumation of the former and the completion of recent research is put an end to any older or newer assumptions that, in the absence of information, at their time were natural.

Therefore, the Unknown Saint, according to anthropological investigations carried out in 2011 by “Francisc Rainer” Institute of Anthropology from Bucharest, was a young man with an age at death of around 25-35 years, with a height of approximately 1.7m, died of a fracture and infection on the left foot and having a “skeleton - recovered at the exhumation from May 27, 1986 - well preserved with few bone surface flaking due to soil conditions”¹¹⁸. The archaeological ceramic material - fragments with a discrete cross incised - set as estimated time in the second half of the fourteenth century¹¹⁹, would indicate the era in which the saint lived.

Regarding the famous tomb of Saint Paisius, marked with his tomb stone, was not found empty, as expected by some, but having a buried *in situ*, so, in his original state of inhumation - with the partial exception of the hermit clothing archaeological inventory - having a height of about 1.75m, a rich capillary adornment and a bony skeleton in the state of degradation, but in a natural anatomical position, with traces of holiness, and which had originally been placed in a coffin of 1.9m length, adorned specifically as a monastic schema made of gallon with silver thread and fixed to the its cover panel.

All these testimonies constitute, according to contemporary sources, defining particular signs of the person of Saint Paisius, about whom is known that he was tonsured into the great schema, while he was at Dragomirna Monastery¹²⁰, by the hieroschemamonk Alexie from Poiana Mărului, because his appearance “at height he was about medium, not very tall [...]”¹²¹, “with long hair and a lot and white”¹²²,

¹¹⁷ *Viața lui Andronic (Life of Andronic)*, IV, ff. 237^v-238^r.

¹¹⁸ AMB, file 3/2014: Anthropological analysis of the bones from the Unknown Saint Neamț Monastery by Mihai Constantinescu, 2011, ff. 1^r-3^r.

¹¹⁹ Ioan Ivan, “Neamț Monastery - Confessions”, p. 11; archim. Ioanichie Bălan, *Patericul românesc (Romanian Paterikon) (Romanian Paterikon)*, pp. 108-109; Ierom. Petroniu Tănase, *op.cit.*, pp. 182-183.

¹²⁰ *Viața lui Mitrofan (Life of Mitrofan)*, ed. 2015, p. 246; *Viața lui Isaac (Life of Isaac)*, f. 154, ed. 1987, p. 550, ed. 2015, p. 333.

¹²¹ *Viața lui Isaac (Life of Isaac)*, f. 153, ed. 1987, p. 549, ed. 2015, p. 330.

¹²² *Ibidem*.

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as he died at the age of 71 years old, 10 months and 25 days and, at the time of the funeral, he was placed in a “reliquary” which his disciples “dressed and adorned it, for it was to put in it the pearl or rather the priceless diamond”¹²³.

Regarding the grave site of Saint Paisius it is clear, according to the documents previously used, that it belonged successively to two persons: to Captain Moise and to the Saint, but, except that the first was buried in a simple grave, and the second, in a crypt marked with tombstone.

Therefore now, based on these results of the research undertaken can be said with certainty that it's about two saints and that between the two graves and the former buried is no connection than that both were buried at Neamț Monastery, have distinct holy relics, which are here exhibited for veneration, but each of them shapes his identity through the features and different eras in which they lived.

VII. The Restoration of the Tomb and putting the Holy Relics in a Reliquary

After completion of the exhumation of the relics of Saint Paisius, was required that his tomb, so important in terms of spirituality, archaeology and history, to be restored and reinstated as value. For this purpose, a restoration project was developed by the architect Octavian Stahie from Piatra Neamț in collaboration with the Monasteries Bistrița and Neamț, verified by the ecclesial Heritage and Construction Sector of the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina and approved by His Eminence Metropolitan Teophan¹²⁴.

Under this project, was executed the restoration work of the crypt and the redevelopment of the tomb of the Saint Paisius, during March 17-April 12, 2014, de către SRL Company Conbas Roman, under the direct leadership of the Director General Engineer Borș Ion Eugen, the coordination of the Exarch and paid by Neamț Monastery. These works, executed with extreme care consisted of: partial decommissioning of the marble floor, sectioning of the crypt, realization of the stand for supporting the tomb stone, natural ventilation of the crypt, conducted through holes from the crypt through the southern wall of the burial chamber till beneath the cover outside the church socket and other holes from the crypt in the church floor, coming out under the wooden pews, restoration and illumination of the crypt, cleaning and placing the tomb stone above the crypt and its closure with roadway glass of 4.4cm, placed in a stainless steel frame at floor level marbled.

It is worth mentioning that in the early partial decommissioning of the floor and of the debris from the top and perimetrical part of the crypt, were discovered

¹²³ *Cronica lui Nicolae (Chronicle of Nicolae)*, f. 30, ed. 2015, p. 385.

¹²⁴ AMB, file 3/2014: Basis Heritage Sector and Church Buildings, no. 2791/54 from March 21, 2014, f. 47^e.

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and exhumed the bones of Captain Moise, together with, as already mentioned, an important archaeological inventory¹²⁵.

On May 19, 2014, in the presence of His Eminence Metropolitan Teophan, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina, of parents exarchs: archimandrites Luca Diaconu and Ioan Harpa, of parents, abbots of monasteries: Neamț, archimandrite Benedict Sauciuc with the congregation, Secu, archimandrite Vichentie Amariei, and of the abbess Dragomirna Monastery, the nun Macrina Săucinițanu, accompanied by a group of nuns, of parents professors Ioan Mihoc, Director of the Theological Seminary, Neamț Monastery and Vasile Păvăleanu, took place *the putting enshrine of relics of our saint blessed father and of God bearer Paisius Velichkovsky from Neamț*.

The Diocesan Bishop was received, according to the ordinance, at 14:00, by those mentioned above, and after the usual worship of the holy relics already exposed for veneration, as well as at the icons in the church was begun *the service of the Akatistos of Saint Paisius* followed by the *Vesper* of the day. Responses to the lectern were given successively by the fathers of Monastery Neamț and by the nuns from Dragomirna Monastery.

In this liturgical setting the holy relics were brought from the diakonikon of the monastery, where they were kept and, after they were unsealed, His Eminence Metropolitan Teophan, helped by the two exarchs, chose nine skull fragments of the saint to be bestowed as a blessing to the monasteries which Saint Paisius has led as their abbot, namely: Simonopetra from the Athos, Secu and Dragomirna, as well as to some Orthodox centers with special meanings for the saint's life, such as: Romanian Patriarchate, Metropolitan Cathedral in Poltava, Pechersk Lavra from Kiev, Monastery Noul Neamț and the Church dedicated to *Saint Paisius from Neamț* from Bucharest¹²⁶.

After fulfilling this spiritual obligation, the Diocesan Bishop introduced relics except the fragments mentioned, in 36 paper envelopes, then placing them in a cherry wood box trapezoidal shaped (120x23x19x16cm), specially made and partitioned into two: in the larger space fit only the envelopes with the holy relics, and in the smallest, the abundant hair of the saint, accompanied by a document referring to them¹²⁷. Then the Metropolitan seal was applied over the heads of the tricolor band wherewith was wrapped the box mentioned and over the following note written by hand by the Metropolitan: "Here are the relics of Saint Paisius of Neamț. In the name of God Almighty I settle this covenant as seal not to broken

¹²⁵ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, March 20, 2014, ff. 45^r-46^r; Minutes, March 26, 2014, f. 49^r.

¹²⁶ The ninth fragment was the one set to be kissed in the shrine of the monastery.

¹²⁷ AMB, file 3/2014: The tomb and the holy relics of Saint Paisie Velichkovsky from Neamț, May 19, 2014, f. 80^r-83^r.

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but by the blessing of the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina, who will be and only in totally special situation. Teophan, Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bukovina. 05.19.2014”¹²⁸.

The sealed box was placed into a wooden temporary casket wherewith was out of the holy Altar in procession to the narthex of the Princely Church, where was completed the ordinance of placing into the reliquary of the holy relics of our saint blessed father and of God bearer Paisius, by their veneration by those present at that particular moment of spiritual joy¹²⁹.

Of the nine smaller particles from the venerable relics of Blessed Paisius, were offered to the Monasteries Dragomirna and Secu, on May 19, 2014, the day of their placement for their veneration in the church of Monastery Neamț, to the Parish Church “Șerban Vodă” from Bucharest, on August 7, 2014, at the request of the parish priest Dinu Pompiliu¹³⁰, to the Holy Monastery Simonopetra from the Athos¹³¹, at the request of the blessed archimandrite Elisei, abbot of the monastery, on the occasion of bringing the holy relics of Holy Bearer of Mir Mary Magdalen at the patron of the Metropolitan Cathedral from Iași on October 14, 2015 and to the Metropolitan Cathedral in Poltava¹³², on November 15, 2016, at the intervention of His Eminence Filip, Metropolitan of Poltava and Mirgrad.

One last point which requires to be highlighted is the manufacture of a gilded silver shrine for the venerable relics of Saint Paisius, performed in the department of precious metals chasing of the Romanian Patriarchate from the Monastery Pasărea, by a group of nuns. This was done on the initiative of Archimandrite Benedict, abbot of the monastery, blessed by His Eminence Metropolitan Teophan, was commissioned by His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel “in the workshops of the Patriarchate as an expression of veneration brought to Saint Blessed Paisius and love for this holy monastery [...]”¹³³. After completion of its construction, the coffin was brought to the monastery on May 20, 2015 by a patriarchal delegation headed by Archimandrite Dionisie Constantin, patriarchal counselor in the Workshops of the Bible Institute and of Orthodox Mission, and on June 8, 2015, the eve of the feast of Ascension of Our Lord, the historic patron of Monastery Neamț, His Eminence Metropolitan Teophan placed in the new reliquary the venerable relics of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky¹³⁴.

¹²⁸ AMB, file 3/2014: The tomb and the holy relics of Saint Paisie Velichkovsky from Neamț, May 19, 2014, f. 83^r.

¹²⁹ AMB, file 3/2014: Minutes, May 19, 2014, ff. 76^r-79^r.

¹³⁰ AMB, file 3/2014: Metropolitan Charter, August 7, 2014, f. 85^r.

¹³¹ AMB, file 3/2014: Metropolitan Charter, October 14, 2015, f. 86^r.

¹³² AMB, file 3/2014: Metropolitan Charter, November 15, 2016, f. 87^r.

¹³³ AMB, file 3/2014: Note of reception, May 20, 2015, f. 88^v.

¹³⁴ AMB, file 3/2014: Note of reception, May 20, 2015, ff. 88^v- 89^r.

Conclusions

The amazing personality of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky from Neamț, which was not surpassed by any other holy Father of the Church during the period passed from him until today, has done and will be subsequently the subject of many concerns of researchers from different fields.

Among the many issues that remain unclear about the person of the Saint Paisius and his movement, was counted also that of his true face transposed into portraits and icons, as well as the tomb and his holy relics, that were the subject of the present approach.

Therefore, after highlighting the context of the personal life of Saint Paisius, in the first part of the paper was presented in the light of the contemporary written sources, his spiritual image, complemented by the physical one, translated by his disciples into engravings, paintings and the first icons, drawing attention to the perpetuation of an image far removed from the real one of the saint and proposing, however, a new transposing in a special icon painted after this approach. Besides a brief presentation of the Romanian paintings of Paisius and their presentation in pictures, some remaining hitherto unique, was made also a new dating for the oldest of them painted at Neamț Monastery.

In the second part after the presentation of the traditions from Neamț related to the liturgical memorial and to the veneration of the tomb, was described the event of the exhumation of the venerable relics of Saint Paisius, giving details based on the documents of the exhumation and as eyewitness, directly involved in this action, all the stages of the research of the tomb, that is: the dissolution of the pavement, the opening of the crypt, the removal and selection of the entire funerary material. At the same time, were highlighted the findings during these actions and the realities of which those present at the exhumation took note, namely: the presence of the Saint Paisius' body in his original inhumation place, having a bony skeleton in an advanced state of decay, but preserving his unmistakable hair of the head complete with the scalp, small bones of the hands complete with skin and several bone fragments from all areas of this impaired skeleton, fragments from his eremite clothing and his coffin specially adorned by his disciples. Also it has been made reference to the fragments recovered by restoration, which were later exhibited in the museum of Monastery Neamț.

The condition in which the bones and the crypt were found imposed, in part three, the development of an investigation to determine the possible causes of their depreciation and clarifications regarding the grave. Among these causes, firstly, was presented – as likely possible – the metabolic gout illness of Saint Paisius, and then, through a Geotechnical research, was detected in large quantities in the soil

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structure around the church the presence of, of acid ions, which, being engaged by rainwater arrived in the crypt of the saint, produced an intense aggression on the bone material in a post-burial period of 220 years. To these two main causes, was added also the presence of the bones in the said period in an anaerobic atmosphere, found during the exhumation interventions and the restoration of the tomb and confirmed by historical references related to the pavements of the Church.

In the last part of this presentation, in the absence of historical information to answer the question of previous intervention on the crypt of the saint, after the presentation of the tradition from Neamț related to exhumation and submission of the texts to a critical evaluation, was found “seed of truth” from which started the creators of fantasies and were removed some erroneous perceptions regarding the grave. This truth has been established by corroborating the results of the exhumation with the unique information of this tradition and it resulted in this conclusion: there was only one intervention on the crypt of Paisius, on May 29, 1831, in the presence of Metropolitan Veniamin Costachi and, probably, of General Kiselev, when, the bones being found deprecated, were taken as a sign of blessing only from the chest of the saint, only some fragments of clothing, beard hairs, the prayer rope and the buckle of the belt, and the tomb was closed, rebuilding the vault of the crypt for no one to enter in it again.

At the end of the debate, there were presented the restoration work of the grave and the placing of the precious relics into a reliquary, in order to be worshipped with other holy relics belonging to the most precious spiritual treasure of the Church and they are exposed in the narthex of the Church inside the Lavra from Neamț.

Text translated by Ana-Monica Cojocărescu

Abbreviations

AMB = Archives of Monastery Bistrița
 ANI = National Archives Iași
 ANNț = National Archives Neamț-Secu
 ANRM = National Archives of the Republic of Moldova
 BAR = Romanian Academy Library
 BMM = Library of the Metropolitan of Moldavia
 BMN = Library of Monastery Neamț
 BMNN = Library of Monastery Noul Neamț