

Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului. Biographic milestones

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ABSTRACT

While, in the 19th century, many servants of the monastic settlements left Wallachia and Moldova, because of the measures taken there, the situation was nevertheless different in the 18th century, when monks from different areas inhabited by Orthodox Christians came to the Romanian Countries, where they encountered an uninterrupted reality of hesychastic renewal started by Saint Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346), due to the fact that the Romanians had known another cultural continuity, different from what had happened, until that century, in the Greek Byzantine or in the Slav world. This reality explains why the revitalization of the hesychastic and spiritual life in the areas north of the Danube is related, in the 18th century, to the Saints Basil of Poiana Mărului (1692-1767) and Paisius Velichkovsky or Wieliczkowski of Neamț (1722-1794), both of them arrived from the Slav world in the Romanian extra-Carpathian territories. Saint Basil founded many hermitages and trained many disciples in the practice of the prayer of the mind or of the heart, becoming known as a great teacher of this prayer, in the modern times. Just as the Holy Fathers of Mount Sinai (Gregory, Philotheos, Hesychios), but also from other parts of the Byzantine world (Saint Symeon the New Theologian, Saint Gregory Palamas etc.), once again, he draws the attention not just of the monks but also of the lay people on the prayer of the heart, so that in the 19th century it was not the teaching of Saint Paisius on the practice of the prayer of the heart that prevailed, but the teaching of Saint Basil, followed especially in the Romanian and in the Russian tradition. Regarding the monastic life, the activity of Starets Basil can be characterized by the ecumenicity of the Orthodox faith, due to the fact that, on the one hand, he brought together monks from the Romanian and the Slav area, and, on the other hand, he contributed to the enrichment of the Romanian monasticism through the cultivation of the spirit of two Holy Mounts, Athos and Sinai.

Keywords: Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului; Paisius Velichkovsky or Wieliczkowski; hesychasm; Wallachia; Moldova; monasticism; Orthodox faith; ecumenicity;

1. Commemoratio

In the year 2013, 10 years had elapsed¹ since the hesychast Basil of the Skete of Poiana Mărului officially joined the ranks of the Saints honoured in the Orthodox Church of Romania, his commemoration day being the date of 25 April.

* The text represents the reviewed variant of the study in Romanian entitled *Sfântul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Repere biografice*, which was printed in *Păstori și păstorire în trecutul Bisericii noastre. Simpozion Național, Deva, 25-26 septembrie 2015*, Editura Argonaut & Editura Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, Cluj-Napoca & Deva, 2015, pp. 285-307.

Thus, in 2003 a fact was actually confirmed, because Elder Basil had been honoured as a Saint even since his life, enjoying great respect among the Christians of the Orthodox world, who have called him and continue to call him to their help².

2. Social-political and ecclesial situation at the beginning of the 18th century

Saint Basil carried the *cross* of the monastic life and of the service as a starets in the 18th century, a century full of turmoil and attacks against the Orthodox Church around the Romanian Countries situated near the Danube³. In Ukraine, the native country of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, the Orthodoxy was, at the beginning of the 18th century, under the oppression of the Romano-Catholicism and Uniatism, and in Russia it was being submitted to a policy of westernization or, rather, lutheranization, under the pressures of Tzar Peter I or the Great (1682-1725)⁴. Due to this policy (*Spiritual Regulation* of 1721, *Proclamation of Monasticism* of 1724), not few were the Russian Church servants and believers who reacted, especially the monks. The last ones hid themselves in the sketes and hermitages of the Siberian wilderness or left for Moldova or Wallachia, being attracted to these Countries situated near the Danube *by the reputation of the hesychastic life of the Moldavian and Wallachian monasteries and sketes, where, beside the Romanian monks, there were also foreign monks (Greeks, Serbians, Russians, Bulgarians etc.), as a proof of the ecumenicity of the Orthodox spirituality, which knows no boundaries and frontiers, nor is it limited, as the peoples and the countries are*⁵.

3. The monastic life in the Romanian Countries during the life of Elder Basil of Poiana Mărului

The coming and the settlement of Elder Basil in Wallachia was determined by a climate favorable to the ascetic life, whose origins are closely related to the genesis and the particularities of Christianity with the Romanians⁶. These particularities facilitated the

¹ The pages of this study represent a fragment of the course given by the author in Athens, as part of the Erasmus Programme, precisely in the month of May of the year 2013.

² Epifanie, episcopul Buzăului și Vrancei, “Cuvânt înainte”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare*, Editura Sfintei Episcopii a Buzăului și Vrancei, 2003, pp. 10, 13-14.

³ During those times, the Romanians were living separated in three countries: the two Reigns situated near the Danube, namely Wallachia, also known under the names of *Ungrovlahia*, *Țara Românească* (*Romanian Country*) or *Vlahia*, and Moldavia, known as *Moldova* or *Moldovlahia*, and the Principality of Transylvania or Ardeal, on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains. As far as the Orthodox Church is concerned, she had a privileged situation in the Countries near the Danube, whereas in Transylvania she was submitted to the Western propagandas, which culminated with the episode of Uniatism (1699-1701), see Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Uniația în Transilvania în trecut și astăzi*, Editura “Episcop Nicolae Popovici”, Oradea, 2006; Prof. Dr. Liviu Patachi, “Românii ortodocși în lupta cu Catolicismul după 1700”, in *Studii Teologice* 2/3-6 (1950), pp. 218-235.

⁴ Pr. Conf. Univ. Dr. Ionel Ene, “Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Legături și influențe asupra schiturilor și mănăstirilor din zonă. Renașterea monahismului de la curbura Carpaților în secolul al XVIII-lea”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 41; Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., “Starețul Vasile și cheile «Filocaliei» – de la Poiana Mărului în canonul Ortodoxiei românești și ecumenice”, in *Sfântul stareț Vasile de la Poiana Mărului, Introduceri în rugăciunea lui Iisus și isihasm*, studiu de Dario Raccanello, argument de diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, traducere de diac. Ioan și Maria-Cornelia Ică jr, Edit. Deisis, Sibiu, 2009, p. 7.

⁵ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 7.

⁶ A people which was born of the symbiosis of the Getho-Dacians with the Romans. The first were extremely religious, having religious groups with ascetic life lived in solitude, celibacy and vegetarianism, inspired by the cult of Zamolxis. For this reason, one can say about the Romanians that they had eremitic monks even before Christ, and Zalmoxis was the only barbarian religious personage that stirred the interest of the Greek and Roman elite during the Antiquity, see Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr, “Monahismul românesc și spiritualitatea lui”, in idem, *Mărturie de sfințenie românească. Monahi îmbunătățiți din secolele trecute*, Sibiu, 2002, pp. 5-11; Pr. Prof. Dr. Nicolae Dură, “Monahismul din Dacia Pontică. «Călugării sciți» (daco-romani) și contribuția lor la afirmarea

penetration of hesychasm in the 14th century among the Romanians as well⁷, and it had a great influence on them, maybe in a special way, namely it reinforced the Romanians' preference for living in hermitages⁸.

These hermitages represented points of attraction for the believers. Desiring hesychia, the zealous believer would leave his village, go to the woods and settle near an old ascetic. After a while, they would build a small wooden church and were sought by the villagers of the area for prayer and spiritual counsel. When the number of the people aspiring to hesychia multiplied, a skete was formed and, around it, in two generations, a village. Then the hesychasts would leave the small church to the villagers and would go deeper in the woods, to found another hermitage. In this way, it has been affirmed that at least 3,000 hermitages gave their name to just as many villages in the three countries lived by the Romanians, and most of the monasteries were built on the place of hermitages, this origin being demonstrable for 800 of them⁹. The richest areas or precincts in hesychastic settlements were Putna – Voroneț – Rarău in Moldova, the Mountains of Tismana, Polovragi, Bistrița, Cozia and Buzău in Wallachia, and the Râmeți Mountains in Transylvania, so that it has been affirmed that the Carpathian Mountains had become a second Athos¹⁰. Saint Nicodemus († 1406) reorganized only the Romanian monasticism, introducing, at the rulers' initiative, the cenobitic monastic life, by founding several large monasteries. However, the Romanian monasticism will remain faithful to hermitism and its hesychastic inspiration¹¹.

The measures undertaken by certain rulers and metropolitans of the Romanians, who wanted to group the hermitages into large monasteries, were rejected by the hesychasts, who foresaw the danger of their subjection to the economic preoccupations imposed by the administration of large properties. The hesychasts' reaction favoured the surprising multiplication of the hermitages, a fact signalling the inner crisis of the cenobitic life of the large monasteries, which were under the burden of the administration of extended estates and in the framework of an exploitation regime generated by the *dedication* of their own revenues to certain monasteries and holy places of Greece and the Near East. One can notice, therefore, that in the 18th century in Moldova there were 83 hermitages and only 4 monasteries, and in Wallachia 93 hermitages (of which 28 in the area of Buzău) and 14 monasteries¹².

unității ecumenice și la dezvoltarea culturii umanist creștine-europene”, in *Studii Teologice* 66/3-4 (2004), pp. 3-14.

⁷ See Drd. Corneliu Zăvoianu, “Rugăciunea lui Iisus în Imperiul Bizantin. Răspândirea ei în Peninsula Balcanică și în Țările Române”, in *Glăsuțul Bisericii* 40/11-12 (1981), pp. 1100-1130; Magistrand Dumitru Dima, “Contribuția românească la cunoașterea isihasmului (secolul al XIV-lea)”, in *Studii Teologice* 17/9-10 (1965), pp. 571-580.

⁸ Ierom. Ioanichie Bălan, *Vetre de sihăstrie românească, secolele IV-XX*, București, 1982, p. 16.

⁹ Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, pp. 17-19; Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, p. 17.

¹⁰ Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, p. 20.

¹¹ Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, p. 20.

¹² Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 30; Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, p. 21. In Transylvania, the monasteries and the hermitages were massively destroyed, given their resistance to the Roman-Catholic propaganda and to the uniatist movement. Thus, over 150 monasteries and hermitages were burnt or destroyed by cannon by General Bucow, on Maria Theresa's order, in the years 1761-1762, an action continued until the end of the 18th century. In Bukovina, which entered under the dominion of the Austrian Empire beginning with 1775, over 25 monasteries and hermitages were closed, left to ruin or turned into parishes, which lead to a massive exodus of hundreds of monks of Transylvania and Bukovina towards Moldavia and Wallachia (Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 32).

The revitalization of the hesychastic and spiritual life is related, in the 18th century, to the Startsy¹³ Basil of Poiana Mărului (1692-1767) and Paisius of Neamț (1722-1794)¹⁴, arrived from the area of the Slavic or Moldo-Slavic world to the extra-Carpathian Romanian Countries. However, we ought to mention that the hesychast renewal started by Saint Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) remained in the Romanian Countries an *uninterrupted reality*, found there by the two above-mentioned startsy. This reality arrived up to them *due to a series of numerous spiritual personalities*, and thanks to the fact that the *Romanian Principalities have also known an important cultural continuity, different from what happened in the Greek Byzantine world, or in the Russian one*¹⁵.

4. Biographic milestones in the life of Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului

In the context of those times of the Christian Orthodox world concerning the spiritual life and the freedom of circulation¹⁶, monk Basil came from the area of Russia to Wallachia, in 1713¹⁷, being attracted by the reputation of the elder hermits of the region of Buzău, abounding in sketes and monasteries, with a long Christian tradition and monastic life¹⁸.

¹³ The Old Slavic term *starets* (pl. *startsy*) is the equivalent of the Greek term *gheron* (γέρον) and not of that of *hegumen* (ἡγούμενος), namely it refers to a person not in the administrative sense, but in that of spiritually improved person guiding several disciples (Dario Raccanello, “Rugăciunea lui Iisus în Scrierile starețului Vasile de la Poiana Mărului”, in Sfântul stareț Vasile de la Poiana Mărului, *Introducere în rugăciunea lui Iisus și isihasm...*, p. 265).

¹⁴ Pr. prof. univ. dr. Ioan Moldoveanu, “Cuv. Vasile de la Poiana Mărului, Muntele Athos și curentul filocalic”, in Pr. prof. univ. dr. Vasile Stanciu, Pr. lect. univ. dr. Cristian Sonea (coord.), *Misiunea parohiei și a mănăstirii într-o lume în continuă schimbare. Lucrările simpozionului internațional de Teologie, Istorie, Muzicologie și Artă, 3-4 noiembrie, 2015*, vol. I, Cluj-Napoca, 2016, pp. 409-410. In the 19th century, the opposite phenomenon happens, when improved monks were obliged, because of the measures taken [*The Organic Regulations (Regulamentele organice)* of 1830, the secularization of Alexandru Ioan Cuza of the years 1859, 1860 and 1863; following this measure, out of the 250 monasteries and sketes of Wallachia and Moldavia only 75 survived, the rest being transformed into parish churches, prisons or mental asylums], given the foundation of modern Romania (*The 1848 Revolution and the Union of the Romanian Principalities of 1859*), but based on a secular anticlerical conception, to leave their country and settle themselves in Russia, Palestine or Athos (Ică, *Monahismul românesc*, pp. 23, 31; Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 12).

¹⁵ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 243, 271; see also Pr. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Din istoria isihasmului în Ortodoxia română*, București, 1992, pp. 6-20.

¹⁶ By virtue of this freedom, memorable exchanges of personalities of the spiritual life take place in the Churches of South-Eastern Europe, during the first half of the 18th century, see Pr. Dr. Paul Mihail, “Schitul Poiana Mărului, un centru ortodox cărturăresc”, in *Spiritualitate și istorie la întorsura Carpaților*, I, Buzău, 1983, p. 355; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 268.

¹⁷ Protos. Prof. Chiril Lovin, “Cuviosul Vasile de Poiana Mărului, mare povățuitor al vieții duhovnicești”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 60, note 1. Other researchers propose the year 1724, following the promulgation in Russia of the *Proclamation of Monasticism* (1724), by which drastic measures of suppression of the monastic life in the Russian Empire were foreseen (Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 7).

¹⁸ Signalled by archeological vestiges, the activity of certain missionaries and bishops (Ulphilas etc.), persecutions against the Christians, the existence of old sketes and hermitages etc. For instance, Saint Sabbas the Martyr received the crown of martyrdom on 12 April 372, and Saint Basil the Great asked that the latter’s Holy Relics be sent to him to Cappadocia. In the *Epistle 164*, probably written in 374, he confirmed their reception. For more details, see Epifanie, episcopul Buzăului, “Sfântul Mucenic Sava”, in *Sfinți români și apărători ai legii strămoșești*, București, 1987, pp. 194-200; Prof. Dr. Ioan G. Coman, “Elemente de continuitate spirituală geto-daco-romană și creștină în regiunea râului Mousaios-Buzău după mărturiile patristice și arheologice”, in *Spiritualitate și istorie...*, pp. 231-258; Prof. Dr. Emilian Popescu, “Creștinismul în Eparhia Buzăului până în secolul al VII-lea”, in *op. cit.*, pp. 259-277; Horia Constantinescu, “Schituri sau sihăstrie rupestre buzoiene, mărturiile ale vechimii creștinismului și continuității noastre pe aceste meleaguri”, in *op. cit.*, pp. 321-340.

Born in 1692, in a pious Russian family¹⁹, Basil joined the monastic life at an early age²⁰ and spent several years of his youth in the hermitages of Russia, and then in the Moshenski Mountains, near Kiev, visiting for his spiritual profit all the improved monks of those places and copying writings of the Holy Fathers on prayer and the monastic life²¹.

Because of the difficult ecclesial situation of Russia, but also of Ukraine²², Elder Basil came to the Romanian Countries near the Danube. He did not stop in Moldova, which he crossed, and went on to Wallachia, in the area of Buzău-Focșani, being attracted by the monastic and theological tradition of this area²³, where over 40 hermitages are attested by the end of the 17th century²⁴. For this reason, it is affirmed that the area of Buzău-Focșani was, along with that of Neamț in Moldova and that of Oltenia in Wallachia, one of the centers of more intense dissemination and living of the hesychastic spirituality from the 14th century²⁵. Accompanied by his disciple Michael the Hieroschemamonk, and by other monks²⁶, Elder Basil settles first at Valea Șchiopului Skete (1713), then at Dălhăuți Skete in the area of Focșani²⁷, where he remained for 20 years (1713-1733)²⁸.

In the hesychastic atmosphere of this skete, which had had a century of existence and a strong heremital life²⁹, Elder Basil became a *great spiritual father and teacher of the Jesus Prayer*, gathering around himself over 50 disciples of all the Romanian areas, but also Ukrainians and Russians³⁰. For the *cleanliness of his life full of endeavours*, he was ordained

¹⁹ In the Romanian historiography also circulated the opinion that Starets Basil was a Romanian, according to some, born in Ukraine and even a relative of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky (see Diac. P. I. David, *Cuviosul Paisie cel Mare, un desăvârșit monah român*, București, 1975, p. 8; Pr. Prof. Dr. Mihail Milea, “Cuviosul Vasile de la Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului”, in *Almanah bisericesc*, Buzău, 1995, pp. 92-93; Ierom. Ioanichie Bălan, *Paterice românească ce cuprinde viața și cuvintele unor Cuvioși Părinți ce s-au nevoit în mănăstirile românești. Secolele XIV-XX*, București, 1908, p. 213). Yet, most researchers do not share this opinion [Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 40; Protos Paisie Fantaziu, “Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului. 270 de ani de la întemeierea sa de către Cuviosul Stareț Vasile Ieroschimonașul”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 91; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 255-256].

²⁰ Protos. Prof. Chiril Lovin, “Cinstirea ca Sfânt a Cuviosului Vasile de la Poiana Mărului”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 22; Pr. Gabriel Cocora, “Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului”, in *Sfinți români și apărători...*, p. 422; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 89-90.

²¹ Irineu Slătineanu, Arhiepiscop-Vicar al Episcopiei Râmnicului (today, Metropolitan of Oltenia), “Viața Sfântului Prea Cuviosului Părintelui nostru Vasile de la Poiana Mărului”, in *Cuviosul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului. Propuneri de canonizare...*, p. 17; Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 22; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 40-41; see also Pr. Prof. Dr. Mircea Păcurariu, *Sfinți daco-români și români*, Iași, 2007, pp. 103-105.

²² Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 41.

²³ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 41.

²⁴ Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 206.

²⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. D. Stăniloae, “Momente din vechea spiritualitate a ținutului buzoian”, in *Spiritualitate și istorie...*, pp. 342-343.

²⁶ One of them was even his spiritual father, *Stephen the Hieroschemamonk, who had been living for many years as a hermit*. It seems that he remained at Valea Șchiopului Skete and did not follow Elder Basil at Dălhăuți Skete (Lovin, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 61).

²⁷ Dălhăuți Skete was situated towards the border between Wallachia and Moldova (Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 422).

²⁸ Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 22; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 42; Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, pp. 61-62; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 422; Stăniloae, *Momente*, p. 344; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 258.

²⁹ Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 202; Stăniloae, *Din istoria isihasmului*, p. 20.

³⁰ Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, pp. 202-203, 206; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 42-43. The number of disciples varies, some researchers mentioning over 40 (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 62), the others approximately 40-50 (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 91).

a priest in 1715³¹, when Bishop of Buzău³² was Ioasaf (1708-1716). It ought to be mentioned that at Dălhăuți Skete, which he enriched by the donations received and by buying properties³³, Starets Basil also set up a school for translating and copying certain writings of the Holy Fathers³⁴.

Lacking the desired hesychia at Dălhăuți, because many laymen were looking for him for their spiritual profit³⁵, Elder Basil sought out a remote place, and chose Poiana Mărului of Buzău Mountains, where a hermitage was present since earlier times. There, he had a church and cells built, during the period 1730-1733, being also helped by the reigning Prince of Wallachia Nicholas Mavrocordatos³⁶, and then also by his son and inheritor of the throne, Constantine Mavrocordatos³⁷, during his second reign (1731-1733)³⁸. He settled there with a community of 12 Russian disciples³⁹, later joined by Romanians as well⁴⁰, and their ascetic rule was the following: meat consumption was forbidden, while wine consumption was permitted very rarely; during the week, fasting food was eaten, and only on Saturdays and Sundays was the consumption of eggs, milk and cheese allowed; the access to this skete was forbidden for women and nuns, similarly to the rule of the Holy Mount Athos⁴¹.

³¹ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 8; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 42; Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 62; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 89. Other researchers (Deacon Ioan I. Ică jr) contest the ordination of Elder Basil as a priest and affirm that he was only Schemamonk (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 258, note 39).

³² This Eparchy was, during that time, as now, under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Wallachia.

³³ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 42.

³⁴ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 42-43; Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 66.

³⁵ The skete was a place of pilgrimage, having a miracle-making icon of the Theotokos. This explains the presence of copies of this holy icon in many of the monastic settlements (Poiana Mărului, Rătești, Ciolanu) that used to be under the spiritual guidance of Starets Basil (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 63, note 9).

³⁶ He was first the ruler of Moldova twice (1709-1710, 1711-1716), and then of Wallachia, also two times [1716 (January-November), 1719-1730].

³⁷ He was a ruler of Wallachia six times [1730 (Sept.-Oct.), 1731-1733, 1735-1741, 1744-1748, 1756-1758, 1761-1763], and of Moldova four times [(1733-1735, 1741-1743, 1748-1749, 1769 (Jun.-Dec.))].

³⁸ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 44-45; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 422; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 253-254. The sanctification of the skete, with the dedication day the *Birth of the Theotokos*, was realized by the Bishop of Buzău of those times, Misail (1732-1739) (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 84, 92); for more details regarding the Skete of Poiana Mărului see Pr. Horia Constantinescu, Pr. Gabriel Cocora, "Poiana Mărului", in *Glăsurile Bisericii* 23/5-6 (1964), pp. 466-500; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 95-113. We shall mention only that the skete burned down to the ground on 14th of April 1771, and was rebuilt during the period 1771-1784, when the current small church was built, with the dedication day the *Birth of the Theotokos*, whereas between 1810-1812 the big church with the dedication day *All the Saints* was constructed, both of them out of wood. In 1879, the skete goes through a new fire, which engulfs the cells near the guesthouse and refectory, along with the abbey. The skete was closed in 1893, yet it was not deserted, as some of its inhabitants remained there until 1913, when the last five monks moved to Găvanu Skete. The Skete of Poiana Mărului remains under the care of a layman, and in 1938 it is reopened but as a monastic settlement for nuns. Between the years 1959-1960, the skete was closed again, remaining under the protection of a few old nuns. After 1982, the skete was semi-active, and after 1989, it was reopened, first as a monastic settlement for nuns, for a short while (1990-1991), and then as a monastery for monks (1991-2010), becoming, beginning with 2010, a monastery for nuns with two main dedication days: 8 September, the Birth of the Theotokos; and 25 April, the day of Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului.

³⁹ Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 17; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 43. The local tradition was that a hermitage or a skete would have a number of maximum 12 inhabitants. Going over this number meant declaring that hermitage or skete a monastery (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 313).

⁴⁰ Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 89.

⁴¹ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 11; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 424. The Skete of Poiana Mărului was considered in its time *the second holy mountain* after Athos (Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 423). The community did not grow cattle and its food was assured by villagers specially exempted from any other taxes by princely *Charter*. At the

In point of its canonic jurisdiction, the skete enjoyed a special regime, in the sense that it was a *stavropighia*, namely it was under the direct guidance of the metropolitan of the country, with no intervention from the bishops of Buzău⁴², and had not been dedicated to the Holy Places, being devoid of properties, but also of other revenues⁴³. It is believed that it is precisely the lacks and needs that made Starets Basil go to Iași for relief, in 1757, where he made a great impression on the reigning Prince Constantine Racovița⁴⁴ and his contemporaries⁴⁵.

Material poverty was compensated by the richness of the ascetic life, doubled by the love for the writings of the Holy Fathers. By the care of Starets Basil, a library was founded in the skete, with many manuscripts and books in the languages: Old Slavic, Ukrainean, Russian and Romanian⁴⁶, and to have all these at hand for the other communities under his spiritual supervision, he took care of the dissemination of these books in numerous copies. Several manuscripts are known, coming precisely from the hands of Elder Basil⁴⁷, who also founded a school for translators and copyers at the Skete of Poiana Mărului. The activity of this school allowed the dissemination in Old Slavic and Romanian⁴⁸ of the writings of some great endeavourers unto spiritual and pneumatic perfection, such as Saints Isaac the Syrian, John Climacus, Hesychius the Sinaite⁴⁹, Gregory the Sinaite, Philotheos the Sinaite, Nilus of Sora⁵⁰ and Dimitry of Rostov⁵¹. Thus, Starets Basil accentuated in the Romanian culture

same time, their clothes were received via princely *Charters* annually, see Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 423-note 5, 424-note 12. It is also affirmed that the Poiana Mărului Skete of Wallachia had the same spiritual role in the 18th century hesychastic renewal as the Pocrov-Neamț and Vorona-Botoșani Sketes of Moldova (Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, p. 207).

⁴² Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 422-423.

⁴³ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 273. The skete was built on the estate of Râmnic Monastery, on condition, however, that the monks of Poiana Mărului would work something for Sinai Monastery, to which Râmnic Monastery was dedicated. The situation was regulated in 1754, when the community of the Skete of Poiana Mărului gets to own the land the skete had been built on, thanks to the generosity of Iordache Neculescu, who gave Râmnic Monastery 33 fathoms (Rom. *stânjeni*) of his estate, in exchange for the precincts of the skete founded by Elder Basil (Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, 45 and note 30).

⁴⁴ He was a ruler in Moldova (1753, 1756-1757), but also in Wallachia (1753-1756, 1763-1764).

⁴⁵ On this occasion, Elder Basil received from the ruler *settled alms* (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 102; Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, pp. 10-11; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 46). In 1765, the Great Logothete Nicholas Dudescu donated the Gabricina estate to the Skete of Poiana Mărului (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 64).

⁴⁶ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 274. The library was destroyed in the fire of the year 1771 (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 95-96). In 1867, the library still had 543 volumes (manuscripts and printings), of which 396 Russian, namely in the languages Old Slavic and Russian (Pr. Horia Constantinescu, Pr. Gabriel Cocora, *op. cit.*, p. 493; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 278). On the manuscripts and books saved not from fire, but thanks to the donations made even since the time of Starets Basil see, for instance, Pr. Dr. Paul Mihail, Prof. Univ. Dr. Zamfira Mihail, "Biblioteca dăruită de la mănăstirea Poiana Mărului", in *Glasul adevărului* 14 (2003), pp. 84-87.

⁴⁷ Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 19.

⁴⁸ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 66; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 245-246, 279.

⁴⁹ It can be noticed that Starets Basil, just as the authors of the Greek *Philocaly*, mistakenly takes Hesychius the Sinaite (7th-8th century) for Hesychius the Priest of Jerusalem (5th century), see Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 285, note 94.

⁵⁰ Saint Basil is attributed the merit of having made known, in the Romanian tradition, the work and personality of Saint Nilus of Sora (Nil Sorsky) (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 280).

⁵¹ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 66; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 427; Mihail, *Schitul Poiana Mărului*, pp. 355-384. It is not impossible that an influence may have come as well from the spiritual renaissance trend initiated by Saint Dimitry of Rostov (1651-1709), made known to the Romanians by Bishop Pachomius of Roman (1671-1724). A disciple of Saint Dimitry, Pachomius initiated in 1714, almost at the same time as Starets Basil, a similar movement in Moldova: he edified the Skete of Pocrov, where he imposed

exactly the spiritual writings of which some will become part of the great anthology of the *Philocaly*⁵².

From the analysis of the manuscripts preserved one can notice the combination between artistic taste and *scientific* concern. In order to reproduce the text faithfully, with no modifications or lexical substitutes, and also to transcribe and to use the foreign expressions that did not follow the Old Slavic orthograph, it was attempted to establish common rules, put together in a *Grammar*⁵³. Another feature of the scriptorium of Poiana Mărului, which reflects the spiritual qualities and the openness of Starets Basil, is the copying of a Roman-Catholic work, attributed to an unknown Western author. In an Old Slavic manuscript copied precisely by Starets Basil, was found, along with texts of the Saints Basil the Great, Symeon the New Theologian, Anastasius the Sinaite, Peter of Damascus and others, the allegorical writing *Desiderie*⁵⁴, then translated as well into Romanian based on an Old Slavic manuscript⁵⁵.

Starets Basil brought together, in order to clarify some passages hard to understand, *Forewords* to the writings of the Saints Gregory the Sinaite, Philotheos the Sinaite, Hesychius the Sinaite⁵⁶ and Nile of Sora, an *Addendum* to the book of Saint Nile, *On the Way We Should Straighten Ourselves by Repentance*, and a writing against those monks claiming that they are allowed to eat meat⁵⁷. To collect the texts, Elder Basil sent his disciple Michael, who had become starets of the Skete of Trăisteni⁵⁸, to Ukraine, a moment when, according to certain researchers, the latter met the Rassophore Platon (Plato)⁵⁹, who, in this way, found out about Starets Basil⁶⁰. Certainly, many patristic writings were found as well in the monasteries of Moldova and Wallachia⁶¹.

The activity of Starets Basil at the two sketes, Dălhăuți and Poiana Mărului, can be characterized by the ecumenicity of the Orthodox faith, due to the gathering of monks from the Romanian and Slav area, then by the enrichment of the Romanian monasticism, by the cultivation of the Athonite spirit⁶², but also of the Sinaite one. Elder Basil made this renewal felt at the other sketes of the area of Buzău as well, either sending to them disciples and

a life according to the ascetic rule of Mount Athos, and founded in the skete's community a school for translating and copying the patristic manuscripts in Romanian (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, pp. 61, 64; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 270). The best known copyers of the scriptorium of Poiana Mărului were the monks: Mitrofanis, Ananias and Timothy (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 279).

⁵² Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 280.

⁵³ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 279.

⁵⁴ The text is that of an edition appeared in Moscow, in 1688, by the care of Hierodeacon Teofan, who translated it from Polish. For more details regarding the Latin original see Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 281.

⁵⁵ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 282 and note 90; Mihail, *Schitul Poiana Mărului*, pp. 364-365.

⁵⁶ See above, note 49.

⁵⁷ Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 20. This writing, entitled in Romanian *Întrebătoare răspunsuri adunate din sfințita Scriptură, pentru depărtarea de bucatele ceale oprite făgăduinței călugărești cei de bună voie* (*Questioning-Answers gathered from the sacred Scriptures in order to avoid the Foods Forbidden to Those Who Willingly Take a Monk's Vows*), circulated in manuscript and was printed in 1816, at Neamțu Monastery, with the blessing of Veniamin Costache, Metropolitan of Moldavia (Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 424; Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 10, note 5).

⁵⁸ There are testimonies as well about Michael's holiness, characterized as having become *like Starets Basil* and used as grounds for comparison regarding other fathers of his time, see Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 430-431.

⁵⁹ It is the rassophore name of Saint Paisius Velichkovsky.

⁶⁰ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 65; Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 65.

⁶² Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 43.

some of his writings or visiting them personally⁶³, but also at the parishes⁶⁴. The fact that Starets Basil came to have under his spiritual guidance a large number of monastic communities represents *a rarity in the Romanian hesychastic tradition*⁶⁵. It has been affirmed that he *knew to awaken new spiritual seeds, relying mainly on two elements: the Holy Fathers' writings and the Jesus prayer*⁶⁶. However, he did not ordain the Jesus prayer only for the monks, but also for the lay believers⁶⁷.

In 1749, Saint Basil was in Bucharest, *in the presence* of the Ruler Constantine Nicholas Mavrocordatos as well⁶⁸, where he met Patriarch Silvester of Antioch⁶⁹, while Neophyte I the Cretan (1738-1753), Metropolitan of Walachia, must have been present too, due to his position of host of a hierarch of the Eastern Orthodox world, but also because the Skete of Poiana Mărului was a stavropighia of the Metropolitanate. We can find the reason of this meeting in the *Prologue* of his work *On Refraining from Foods*, namely, the debate regarding the consumption of meat by monks. Saint Basil receives on this occasion the blessing of Patriarch Silvester to preach and write against those who were teaching that monks can eat meat, and after that meeting he understood that he must gather the right teaching on this matter *from the sacred Scripture, from the Church teachers and from the Typika of the great monasteries, received and kept by the holy sobornical Church*⁷⁰. The

⁶³ Situated in the area of Buzău-Focșani, these sketes, of which some have been preserved to this day, either as sketes or transformed into monasteries, were: Trăisteni, Gârlași-Buzău, Cârnu, Rogozu, Rătești, Valea Neagră, Ciolanu, Bonțești, Cotești, Pometul Broșteanului, Găvanu, to which one can add the Skete of Dălhăuți and the Monastery of Căldărușani, near Bucharest, which took over the influence of the monastic lifestyle lived by Elder Basil and his community (Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 44, note 27; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 423, note 7).

⁶⁴ The parishes mentioned in this sense are the church *Saint Demeter-Bagdat* of Râmnicu-Sărat and the church *Valea Fântâni* of Buzău County (Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 44, note 27; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 104).

⁶⁵ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 57; Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 64; Ioanichie, *Vetre de sihăstrie*, pp. 206-207; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 245, 259.

⁶⁶ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 277.

⁶⁷ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 57-58.

⁶⁸ In the specialized studies dedicated to Saint Basil it is affirmed that, during the respective year, ruler of Wallachia was Constantine Nicholas Mavrocordatos, yet, according to *Cronologia de domni și guvernatori în Țările Române* (1711-1821), it is Gregory II Ghica (1748-1752) who was ruler at that time. He had been a reigning prince of Wallachia before (1733-1735), and in Moldova he ruled four times (1726-1733, 1735-1739, 1739-1741, 1747-1748). Constantine Nicholas Mavrocordatos was a reigning prince of Wallachia six times [1730 (Sept.-Oct.), 1731-1733, 1735-1741, 1744-1748, 1756-1758, 1761-1763], and in Moldavia four times [1733-1735, 1741-1743, 1748-1749, 1769 (Jun.-Dec.)], see *Istoria românilor, vol. VI, Românii între Europa clasică și Europa luminilor (1711-1821)*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2002, pp. 975-976. It is possible that the reigning Prince Constantine Nicholas Mavrocordatos, who during that year (the months January-August) was on the throne of Moldavia, may have been visiting Bucharest, in the presence of the Ruler Gregory II Ghica and of the Eastern patriarchs, and the meeting with Saint Basil may have been the consequence of their spiritual relation.

⁶⁹ Arrived in Wallachia for several problems, including the sanctification of the Monastery *Saint Spiridon the Old* of Bucharest, dedicated to the Patriarchate of Antioch (Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 94). On the connections of the Patriarch of Antioch, Silvester (1724-1766), with the extra-Carpathian Romanian Countries, where he travelled twice, between the years 1729-1730 and 1744-1749, see Ion I. Croitoru, *Ortodoxia și Apusul în tradiția spirituală a românilor. Unitatea Ortodoxiei și apărarea credinței ortodoxe în fața propagandei protestante din secolul al XVII-lea*, I, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2012, pp. 260-261.

⁷⁰ Sfântul Vasile de la Poiana Mărului, *Despre abținerea de la mâncărurile oprite făgăduinței de bunăvoie a monahilor*, in idem, *Introduceri în rugăciunea lui Iisus și în isihasm...*, p. 177.

place where he could have found those *Typika* was the Holy Mount Athos, to which he will also travel during the following year⁷¹.

In the same year 1749, also in Bucharest, Saint Basil is interrogated by the same Patriarch Silvester, together with the Patriarchs Matthew of Alexandria and Parthenius of Jerusalem, regarding the orthodoxy of *his teachings*. It seems that a polemic had emerged concerning certain aspects of Saint Basil's teaching, especially in relation to the introduction of a new element in the practice of the Jesus prayer, namely, going beyond the psychosomatic methods and the advice to focus the attention *above the heart*⁷². Finding no trace of error in the teachings and writings of Elder Basil, the three patriarchs testified in front of the Synod reunited in Bucharest that no one was to doubt these teachings and writings, being recommended to all the monks and all the believers⁷³. Although it is not known if the two events took place simultaneously or during different periods of the same year or if the three patriarchs exhorted him together to go to the Holy Mount Athos, it is important to note the existence of the two polemics, namely regarding the consumption of meat by the monks and the practice of the prayer of the heart, for whose solution there were debates in Bucharest and a local Synod was convoked, yet of ecumenical dimensions, including the participation not just of rulers and Eastern hierarchs, but also of representatives of the ecclesial and intellectual life of Wallachia, but maybe also of Moldavia.

Even since that time, the news about the holiness of Elder Basil spread throughout the Orthodox world. Leaving Ukraina, the rassophore Platon (Peter) Velichkovsky comes as well to Wallachia (1742)⁷⁴, visiting Dălhăuți Skete first, where he discovered the hesychastic life⁷⁵, but he settles in 1743 at Trăisteni Skete, from where he goes to Cârnu Skete as well⁷⁶, all these sketes being under the spiritual guidance of Starets Basil⁷⁷. During one of his pastoral visits, Starets Basil met Platon at Trăisteni Skete (1743), and the latter became his disciple⁷⁸. Platon did not follow Starets Basil at Poiana Mărului⁷⁹, but they were going to

⁷¹ Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 424; Mihail, *Schitul Poiana Mărului*, p. 375; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 260-261.

⁷² Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 448.

⁷³ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 11; Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 18-19; Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 58; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 93- note 23, 94; Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 430. This event was related by Saint Paisius Velichkovsky in a letter to the Moldavian monk Athanasius the Kafsokalyvitis of Mount Athos, see *Scrisorile unor monahi*, ediție îngrijită de Ț. Dr. Antim Anghelescu, episcopul Buzăului, Editura Episcopiei Buzăului, 1947, pp. 66-67.

⁷⁴ Stăniloae, *Momente*, p. 344; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 266.

⁷⁵ Stăniloae, *Momente*, p. 344.

⁷⁶ Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povățuitor*, p. 62; Stăniloae, *Momente*, pp. 344-345; Stăniloae, *Din istoria isihasmului*, pp. 22-23; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 93; Arhim. Macarie Ciolan, *Neoisihasmul paisian. Reînduhovnicirea vieții noastre bisericești*, Iași, 2004, p. 112; Diac. P. I. David, "Cuviosul Paisie cel Mare (Velicicovski). Un desăvârșit monah român! – noi cercetări și ipoteze –", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 93/1-2 (1975), p. 168. It has been affirmed that Saint Paisius visited the Skete of Poiana Mărului, from where he came to Cârnu Skete, where he remained during the period 1744-1746, and from this skete he left for the Holy Mount Athos, going through Moldavia, see Pr. Prof. Dr. Vasile Gh. Sibiescu, "Paisie Velicicovski vițeitor la schitul Cârnu (jud. Buzău) între anii 1744-1746", in *Sfinți români și apărători...*, pp. 347-354. It should be mentioned that Saint Paisius himself reminds of Starets Mihail of Trăisteni and of Skemamonk Onufrie of Cârnu, see Sfântul Paisie de la Neamț, *Autobiografia unui stareț*, Sibiu, 1996, pp. 189, 190-note 4; Stăniloae, *Din istoria isihasmului*, pp. 22-23.

⁷⁷ Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 23.

⁷⁸ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 47, 49; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 92; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 260, 276.

meet again in Athos, in 1750⁸⁰. On this occasion, Starets Basil will tonsure the rassophore Plato into monasticism at Kapsala Kelli, and the latter will receive the name of Paisius⁸¹. He was in Athos in 1746 and had not interrupted his relations with Starets Basil⁸². Saint Paisius will invoke later on (before 1758, when he was ordained a priest), the authority of Starets Basil, answering the unjust accusations brought against him by monk Athanasius the Kafsokalyvitis of Moldavia, living in Mount Athos, mainly regarding the Jesus prayer⁸³. He brings as an argument precisely the meeting with the three Eastern Patriarchs, but also the honour that Starets Basil was enjoying *in the Russian country, and Wallachia and Moldavia, and in Sveta Gora (Athos)*⁸⁴.

A few years after 1753, Elder Basil took the initiative of re-foundation of Ciolanu Skete, sending there 12 more monks, Wallachians and Moldavians⁸⁵. *The insistent petitions* of re-foundation were considered only by the reigning Prince Alexander Scarlat Ghica (1766-1768), by the *Charter* of 12 February 1767⁸⁶.

In 1764, by his *Diata (Testament)*, Elder Basil placed a community of Romanian disciples in the Valea Neagră Skete of Vrancea, founded by Father Maftei of Spinești and edified between the years 1755-1757⁸⁷. This *Diata* mentions the reason for which this skete was created, namely, around Starets Basil there were also Romanians gathered at Poiana Mărului. Yet, since the Romanian brothers wanted to have the hymns also in Romanian, because they could not understand them in Old Slavic, they decided to leave for Valea Neagră or Vrancea Skete, which, at that time, was under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitanate of Moldavia⁸⁸.

⁷⁹ Out of the fear not to be made a priest, because he did not want the canons to be disrespected (for instance, the minimum age for priesthood, namely 30 years of age), preferring, therefore, to focus on a hesychastic life of solitude (Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 19; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 260).

⁸⁰ According to others, in 1754 (see Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 59) or even in 1756 (Cocora, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 423; Moldoveanu, *Cuv. Vasile*, p. 413, note 15). Another opinion goes for the year 1750, and the reason of the visit to Athos was given also as a consequence of the meeting with Patriarch Silvester of Antioch in Bucharest, in 1749 (Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 260-261).

⁸¹ Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 87, 89-note 17. It has been affirmed that Saint Paisius' tonsure into monasticism took place with the participation of his two spiritual fathers, Father Daniil of *Saint Demeter* Skete of Athos and Starets Basil, *one receiving him under his mantle, and the other one carrying out the holy service, according to the order*. Out of the *Autobiography* of Saint Paisius, it results that Father Daniil was also the confessor of Starets Basil (Chiril, *Cuviosul Vasile mare povătuitor*, p. 62).

⁸² Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 11; Irineu Slătineanu, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 18; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, pp. 93-94.

⁸³ Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 261, note 49.

⁸⁴ See *Scrisorile unor monahi...*, pp. 66-67; Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 26, note 5.

⁸⁵ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 52-53. Sometimes monastery, at other times skete, the monastic settlement of Ciolanu had been dedicated even since the year 1625 to the Monastery Dusicon of Rumelia. Remaining without dwellers, the Greek monks of Bradu Monastery took its possessions, a fact testified by Elder Basil himself in the petition to Constantine Racoviță, twice ruler of Wallachia (1753-1756, 1763-1764), but also of Moldavia (1749-1753, 1756-1757), for its re-foundation (Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 51).

⁸⁶ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, p. 52; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, p. 276.

⁸⁷ Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 53-55.

⁸⁸ Out of his *Diata*, one can see the humility and the holiness of Starets Basil, who proposed to the Romanians to remain themselves at Poiana Mărului, while he would have returned to Dălhăuți, but also the Romanians' *delicacy and love*, because they refused, looking for a place for a new skete. After having found the place, Elder Basil shared his fortune to his sons, *both to the Russians and to the Wallachians*, giving them both books in their language and what they needed for the holy service, see Ene, *Cuviosul Vasile*, pp. 54-55; Fantaziu, *Mănăstirea Poiana Mărului*, p. 90; Raccanello, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 254-255.

On 25 April 1767, Elder Basil stepped into the life from beyond the grave also going through the trial of enduring physical disease⁸⁹. His tomb is still not known to this day, and his Holy Relics remain hidden, out of God's will and, maybe, out of his own will⁹⁰.

5. Honouring Elder Basil of Poiana Mărului as a Saint

Starets Basil was considered, *doubtlessly, the most famous hesychast of Romania before [Saint] Paisius and profoundly aware of the Byzantine ascetic and mystic literature translated into Old Slavic up to his time*⁹¹, and the *first teacher, in the Orthodox East, of the prayer of the mind in the modern times, [the Saints] Paisius Velichkovsky and Nicodemus the Hagiorite standing out after him, chronologically*⁹².

Saint Paisius Velichkovsky, starets of three monasteries of Moldavia, namely Dragomirna, Secu and Neamț, wrote about his spiritual father, following his meeting with him at the Skete of Trăisteni, in 1743: *This man well-pleasing to God was at that time matchless among all in the understanding of the divine Scriptures, of the teachings of the God-bearing Fathers, in the spiritual discernment and the all-perfect knowledge of the Holy Canons of the Church and in the understanding of their correct interpretation... The news about his teaching and about his advice well-pleasing to God on the way to salvation had spread everywhere. When I saw him, I glorified God with all my soul for having made me worthy to see such a holy man... While the Starets remained there, on several occasions I have been made worthy to listen to his words useful for the soul and full of spiritual judgment that he was saying to the brothers, which, being very useful to me, I considered to be words of eternal life*⁹³. Saint Paisius Velicicovski reminds Starets Basil on several occasions in his *Autobiography*, using praising expressions, and out of the Saints he met during his stay in the sketes of the area of Buzău he reminds of Basil of Poiana Mărului, but also, among others, of Mihail of Trăisteni and Onufrie of Cârnău⁹⁴.

The proposition that Elder Basil ought to be honoured among the Saints was made in the year 1992 and brought to completion only in 2003⁹⁵. The reasons of this act of the Orthodox Church of Romania are given by: Saint Basil's ascetic life and his work, examined and found faultless, regarding the prayer of the heart; *the gift of advising and guiding souls*; his drafting of writings on the prayer of the heart and his pieces of advice for monks; the honour he enjoyed as a *follower by his acts and by his writings of the great endeavurers on*

⁸⁹ Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 23.

⁹⁰ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, p. 12.

⁹¹ *Ἀναμφιβόλως ὁ Βασίλειος ὑπῆρξεν ὁ διαπρεπέστατος ἡσυχαστὴς ἐν Ρουμανίᾳ πρὸ τοῦ Παΐσιου καὶ βαθὺς γνώστης τῆς μέχρι τῆς ἐποχῆς του μετεφρασμένης εἰς τὴν σλαβονικὴν βυζαντινῆς ἀσκητικῆς καὶ μυστικῆς γραμματείας* (Αντωνίου Αἰμιλιανοῦ Ταχιάου, *Ὁ Παΐσιος Βελιτσικόφσκι (1722-1794) καὶ ἡ ἀσκητοφιλολογικὴ σχολή του*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1964, p. 34).

⁹² ... ὁ πρῶτος ἐν τῇ ὀρθοδόξῳ Ἀνατολῇ διδάσκαλος τῆς νοερᾶς προσευχῆς κατὰ τοὺς νεωτέρους χρόνους, τοῦ Παΐσιου Βελιτσκόφσκι καὶ τοῦ Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου διαπρεψάντων μετ' αὐτὸν χρονολογικῶς (*ibidem*).

⁹³ Sfântul Paisie de la Neamț, *Autobiografia unui stareț...*, pp. 170-171; *Ἡ αὐτογραφία τοῦ Ὁσίου Παΐσιου Βελιτσκόφσκι*, ἴν Ἀντώνιος-Αἰμίλιος Ταχιάος, *Ὁ Ὁσιος Παΐσιος Βελιτσκόφσκι*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2009, pp. 157-158.

⁹⁴ Sfântul Paisie de la Neamț, *Autobiografia unui stareț...*, pp. 189, 190-note 4; *Ἡ αὐτογραφία τοῦ Ὁσίου Παΐσιου Βελιτσκόφσκι...*, pp. 169-171. Saint Paisius refers to Basil of Poiana Mărului and Mihail of Trăisteni also in a *Letter* to the Archimandrite Theodosius of Sofroniev Monastery, the latter being also a disciple of Elder Basil, calling them *our startsy* (Sfântul Paisie de la Neamț, *Cuvinte și scrisori duhovnicești*, I, Chișinău, 1998, p. 39). Shortly after the assumption of Elder Basil, Saint Paisius addressed the community of Poiana Mărului, calling him *the blessed into memory* (*ibidem*, pp. 17-18).

⁹⁵ Epifanie, *Cuvânt*, pp. 12-14; Pr. Prof. Dr. Nicolae Nicula, "Noi canonizări de Sfinți în Biserica Ortodoxă Română. Eparhia Buzăului și Vrancei în mare sărbătoare", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 121/7-12 (2003), pp. 149-165.

*the way to perfection*⁹⁶. It is not by chance that the great scholar Nicholas Iorga called him *a great preacher of culture*⁹⁷.

The memory of Starets Basil had been honoured up to the date of his proclamation among the Saints not just by Orthodox monks, nuns and believers from different places, but also by the rulers of Romanians who gave various *Charters* either to the Skete of Poiana Mărului, or to some of the sketes that had been under his spiritual leadership⁹⁸. Actually, the scriptorium of Poiana Mărului Skete continued for a long time its activity of copying manuscripts containing the writings of Starets Basil, in their titles appearing the appellatives *The very Elder Basil the Starets, The Blessed Basil the Starets, The Elder among Skemamonks Basil the Starets*, which show the honour he enjoyed in the course of time⁹⁹.

In the first *Holy Service* composed to honour Saint Paisius of Neamț on 15 November, written precisely in the year of his assumption (1794) by hieroschemamonk John Diacovschi in Slavo-Russian, is also mentioned the honouring of Starets Basil as a Saint, along with the other Holy monks whose advice was useful for Elder Paisius, during his first stay in Wallachia¹⁰⁰. For this reason, the local honour for Starets Basil never ceased and he was painted, as a Saint, in many churches of the Archbishopric of Buzău and Vrancea, even before the year of his proclamation in the ranks of the Saints (2003)¹⁰¹.

One can notice, therefore, that Saint Basil stood out in the Romanians' Church life, but also in that of other peoples of the Orthodox world, as a *teacher of the Jesus prayer* for the modern times, and by his teachings he went deeper into the hesychastic tradition that he found in Wallachia, at the curvature of the Carpathians in the Buzău area. Saint Basil's choice to come in this place was not by chance, but through the divine oikonomia, and the studies dedicated to his life demonstrate the spiritual reasons he had in this concern.

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⁹⁶ See "Tomos sinodal al Bisericii Ortodoxe Autocefale Române privind canonizarea Sfântului Cuviosului Vasile de la Poiana Mărului (5 martie 2003)", in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 121/7-12 (2003), p. 155; Ică, *Starețul Vasile*, pp. 53-54.

⁹⁷ N. Iorga, *Istoria literaturii române în sec. XVIII*, București, 1901, p. 391.

⁹⁸ For instance, the *Charters* of the reigning Princes of Wallachia Alexander Scarlat Ghica (1766), Gregory III Ghica (1769), Alexander Ipsilanti (1775, 1796) and Alexander Moruzi (1793) for the monastic settlement of Ciolanu, mentioning the re-foundation of Ciolanu Skete by Elder Basil, see Protos. Chiril Dobre, Pamfil Georgian *Mănăstirea Ciolanu, monografie istorică*, București, 1930, pp. 94-99.

⁹⁹ Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance, *Prima sedeală după cântarea a III-a la Utrenie, Primul tropar al cântării a VI-a din Canonul cel dintâi al Sfântului Paisie la Utrenie, Sinaxarul slujbei* (Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, pp. 30-31). *The Holy Service of Saint Paisius of Neamț* circulated in numerous manuscripts and was printed in 1836, at Neamț Monastery. The translation of this *Holy Service* into Romanian was realized and printed only in 1992 (*Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 1-3/1992, pp. 141-157), see Chiril, *Cinstirea ca Sfânt*, p. 30, note 16.

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