

Ion GUMENĂI

## ARCHIMANDRITE ANDRONIC POPOVICI AS A SPIRITUAL AND HISTORICAL CRITIC

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### Rezumat

#### Arhimandritul Andronic Popovici ca critic spiritual și istoric

În articol se dă o analiză a operei fundamentale a arhimandritului Andronic Popovici: „Istoria Sfintelor Mănăstiri Secu și Neamț”. Manuscrisul operei sale este păstrat în Arhiva Națională a Republicii Moldova. În lucrarea sa, el s-a oprit la problema legată de neînțelegerile și conflictele care apăreau uneori între călugării diferitelor mănăstiri, inclusiv Neamț și Secu. Pentru cercetarea acestor probleme, Andronic Popovici a folosit o abordare istorico-critică. Popovici evidențiază, de asemenea, problemele legate de donațiile făcute mănăstirilor de către domnitorii Țării Moldovei.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Andronic Popovici, mănăstire, arhimandrit, Basarabia, Biserica.

### Резюме

#### Архимандрит Андроник Попович как духовный и исторический критик

В статье осуществлен анализ фундаментальной работы архимандрита Андроника Поповича: «История святых монастырей Нямц и Секу». Данная рукопись хранится в Национальном архиве Республики Молдова. В своем труде он останавливался на проблеме, связанной с недоразумениями и конфликтами, которые иногда возникали между монахами разных монастырей, включая Нямц и Секу. При освещении данного вопроса Андроник Попович использовал историко-критический подход. Также он рассматривает вопросы, относящиеся к пожертвованиям, которые делали монастырям молдавские господа.

**Ключевые слова:** Андроник Попович, монастырь, архимандрит, Бессарабия, Церковь.

### Summary

#### Archimandrite Andronic Popovici as a spiritual and historical critic

The article provides an analysis of the fundamental work of Archimandrite Andronic Popovici: “The History of the Holy Monasteries of Neamt and Secu”. The manuscript of his work is stored in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova. In his work, he dwelt on the problem associated with misunderstandings and conflicts that sometimes arose between the monks of different monasteries, including Neamt and Seku. In covering this issue, Andronic Popovici used a historically critical approach. Popovici also highlights issues related to donations made to the monasteries by the Moldavian rulers.

**Key words:** Andronic Popovici, monastery, archimandrite, Bessarabia, Church.

Starting from the stated title, we will refer only to the historical works of Archimandrite Andronic Popovici also called “the last chronicler of the monastic life”, given that they comprise both spiritual and historical aspects, and even more, we will refer only to his fundamental work, which is “The History of the Holy Monasteries Neamt and Secu”, and after going through the entire work of this great scholar, who worked on both sides of the Prut, we will expose our research, perhaps, in a much larger study.

The idea of writing this material appeared for two reasons. First of all, to be honest, we were impressed by the immense work and, in fact, by the self-dedication of the author of the work “The History of the Holy Monasteries Neamt and Secu” – Andronic Popovici. Until a while ago, we heard nothing about him, but this time we got to know him through the work he created and which, in our opinion, deserves all the attention due to the immense material and the information gathered.

On the other hand, the recent emergence of a huge number of people trying to establish themselves in so-called “historians” group, but also an even larger number of so-called “true Christians” has served as cause for writing this material. In recent times, many people appeared who are trying to present themselves as specialists in the field of history, knowing neither the tools nor the working methods. Some people find that simply quoting passages from newspapers or reading a document is enough to call themselves “historians”. On the other hand, in everyday life, we meet many people trying to teach us how to be “a good Christian”, without understanding the essence of Orthodox faith. Precisely for these reasons, we decided to quote a series of passages from the aforementioned history to demonstrate what an interpretation of history and a devotion to the orthodox faith, by a monk, in the first instance, would have meant by the end of the 19th century.

From the very beginning of the work, Andronic Popovici affirmed that: “Such a craving awaited me – the very sinner, it rooted in some way deep inside me and somehow forced me to start this holy thing of telling the world a clear insight about the beginning of our holy monasteries Neamt and Secu and about those pious and venerable hegumens who erected those monasteries and those who became

their founders by God's pronouncement. In these conditions, I took the quill and started telling the "History", then I understood that it is necessary for me to bring old evidence as fulfilling for everyone's knowledge about what happened before us, adapting oral stories or historical tradition that are considered not good for being received from the elders and old handwritten notes, even the small ones to preserve this history from any kind of doubt both on its comprehension and composition within and outside it.

Being free of all kinds of scholastic sciences, that could bewilder readers and confuse the historical range that is encompassed by letters from past times so that they can provide evidence, as they say, by the believable faith in what was written and to attract the mind of every knowledgeable human for history" [1, f. 3v.-4].

So in this passage, one can clearly see the two "Beginnings" that pushed Archimandrite Andronic to proceed with the writing of this work – on the one hand "I understood that it is very necessary for me to bring old evidence as fulfilling for everyone's knowledge about what happened before us, adapting oral stories or historical tradition", here we deal with the author's tendency for historical spirit, and on the other hand, which is natural, if we consider that being a child of a priest he also received religious education in the main monastic centers of the Principality of Moldova, in Neamț and Secu, that is why he says: "the Lord God and the Blessed Mother of God helped me to do these things that you see" [1, f. 2v.].

In order to introduce readers to the topic and to show that the work actually had an initial, shorter variant that became the basis for the larger work we got to know, which needed a long time for the understanding of the phenomenon, to write a history, even of a monastery, the author shows in turn that: "I wrote a short joint History of these two Holy Monasteries, Neamt and Secul, in a hurry, and on 1857, March 20, it was printed on four sheets and a half of paper, which means 9 pages, and sent in a few copies to the Holy Metropolitan, where such a story was requested, but because I was in a hurry, I wrote it vaguely through several places and I decided to write a more extensive history of the monastery and then I wrote another more extensive story than the printed one, in the same year" [1, f. 5v.].

He then shows us that: "And I did not cease, nor will I cease until the end of my life to write down those that I have not learned from anyone, but only the true light that Christ and God had brought into my mind, the light that illuminates and sanctifies all the people who come into this world, with such discernment I have collected knowledge, as some

flowers needed for this kind of stories, through many other books and notes, small sciences worth believing through all the hindrances and the eases and the sores and the diseases that I suffered for all the years of my life from the time I joined the line of people who are committed to gather these treasures as one who was not specially trained, as I said before" [1, f. 1].

So, a first version was drawn up in 1857, and already when he was in Noul Neamt monastery from 1863 to 1887, he could review all materials and write the fourth version (the largest one) in 10 volumes using all the knowledge, notes and of course the critical spirit.

Referring to other critics, the scholarly priest indicates the following: "Apart of all this, since the work was assembled and written hastily, there arise many philologists who allow themselves to criticize the works of fools like me and perhaps even say that it would have been better if these historical books were completed according their own considerations, by naming them not histories but schedules of various charters and documents of the monastic estate and other words that were said to me by many. So to all these, in the name of the Lord God, I answer them all so: those who learned in seminars, academies and other schools can compile and write in whatever way they want, according to the knowledge set into their minds by those who have taught them through fixed forms. Because I know how to work and craft such writings, as I said so I confess again: that I never thought about philology when I was gathering and writing a story because I never learned from anyone, and now when there are a lot of grammarians and thousands of educated people – minds enlightened by the gift of God poured out over all mankind and also through teaching, after 71 years of my life, when I almost lost my body strength and my vision, striving to reconcile the philology by such immeasurable obstinacy that I could judge a wise man sometimes, at least to begin with, but I cannot do it because in all my works I have avoided being praised by someone knowing my limits and grossness of mind, knowing how one does something in order to be praised means that he has all the means for it, but I am very thankful for the Lord God and the Blessed Mother of God who helped me to do these things that you see. And what I did in the time of my youth, I continue to do in my old age, because I put my youth and old age at ease in these literary and historical works, at the same time, I hated idling and wanderings, and I spared my health being convinced that most of people like me were understood and truly appreciated by the right thinkers and only after death, so for me

after my death they will judge whether I have labored in vain while living the life given to me by Lord, I am entrusted with a clean mind that those who would criticize my hardships, no matter how erudite they be, would not be able to speak about this kind of story, not even a little, if they had not seen them at least for a while" [1, f. 2-2v.]

Thus, through this passage, the author comes to demonstrate his way of writing this work, showing that he does not claim to certain studies, which he acknowledges that he did not have, but showing that it is based on documentary testimonies, which we think is most important for a historian, and of which many historians today actually forget, writing or better said, compiling two or three other works, thus creating a so-called "new work".

Father Andronic himself points out that: "I am entrusted with a clean mind that those who would criticize my hardships, no matter how erudite they be, would not be able to speak about this kind of story, not even a little, if they had not seen them at least for a while", and stresses not for the first time that "I am very thankful for the Lord God and the Blessed Mother of God helped who me to do these things that you see".

Moreover, in order to increase the intensity of the moment Andronic Popovici says: "All these annoyances, as I said before, were made only for the knowledge of God, who is the beholder of all, and I did not want to be praised by anyone on earth, but I saw how Mr. Eleverteriu Mihaleviciu spoke honestly and somehow truthfully in his review on the History written by me in the first version, from January 26, 1888, but the comments from page 4 verso row 13 till the end represent pure criticism and inter alia he calls me an illiterate. Even if this is true, and even I myself speak through all the books and stories I wrote that I do not have proper education, why it was necessary for Him – a wise, enlightened and instructed man, to annoy the words of my monastic humility, as I have made my habit from childhood and will be all my life as Lord God will give me, and as I have explained at number 10 if I did not study in any school, then how could I write with my hand more than ten thousand four hundred of book sheets in Bessarabia" [1, f. 3v.-4].

However, it should be mentioned that the Archimandrite had a problem to solve in his writings, namely that related to the misunderstandings and conflicts that sometimes arose between the monks of different monasteries, including between Neamt and Secu, and in this situation, a historical-critical spirit was needed and a Christian one too. And in this case, Andronic Popovici, used a method that began

to be applied by the first church historian – Eusebius of Caesarea. We refer here to the fact of introducing the character of devil – who represents the forces of evil for the whole of Christianity. Thusm the author tells that: "At all these, in the year 7100, there sparkled disagreements regarding the limits of the boundary at the Muntii estate that separates the holy Neamt monastery and the hermitage of Zosima and quarells and many sorrows from both sides arose due to the devil's work. For this reason, on September 1, the same year, our pious parents Dosidai the abbot of this holy hermitage with Serafim, the abbot of the holy monastery Neamt, in order to conclude peace between the two, they signed an act of a decisive understanding that these two groups of the brethren of those gathered in the name of the Lord under the banner of salvation with the mercy of God would spend forever in love and in peace, and so followed" [2, f. 5v.-6].

Or in another passage: "And in the time of his hegumen service, as we can see from the historical acts of the monastery, from the devil's exertion, the great sorrow arose between the holy monasteries Neamt and Secu for the true boundary of monastic domains on the Muntii estate, for this reason there hapened many disturbances from both parts, Reverend Paul from his methany with the Reverend Mitrofan the bishop who also was at his methany in the holy monastery Secu and with the preception of our father Varlaam the hegumen of Secu monastery and with the hieromonachs Nichifor, Theofan, Ioann and Sivestru, and with the monk Athanasie and all the brothers from the holy monastery Secu had an advisory council in this regard, for how they could reassure that there will be eternal peace and brotherly love according to the will of God as is appropriate for the monks in these two holy places" [1, f. 70]

Finally, to argue they way the behaved, Andronic says: "and of other well-doers and endowers of their Holy Gods places for better proof of the truth related in the history, as I have also said, and for the good knowledge of how and in what way the works were done in the past beginnig from year 6905, both in the first book and in the others that included the original version and some frightened curses by the very founders of the monasteries, I did not even think here that it could be considered by anyone that I have dealt with those frightened curses for a very bad purpose, such as overturns Mr. Eleverteriu Mihailovici, because if this examples upset someone as Mr. Elevatorie Mihaleviciu considered in his review then I will silence those curses in my books, but if with God's help I can prescribe them all, but again as I said above I ask one and every reader that if they find out

anything offensive in the writings that I have done, then I humble myself as a monk and show that I am as foolish as I am real, then be sure that this is my way of understanding of like someone praised me, and knowing that the envy of the seen and the unseen enemies, which fight against me is intensive and mighty, what hurts me very much" [1, f. 5]. And if we are going to refer to the issue regarding the curses, which are reproduced in the work by Andronic Popovici, we will see that the author really does not do it intentionally, but is faithful to the Orthodox Christian tradition, by enunciating them, on the one hand, and on the other, he remains precise with the historical document, so that he reproduces them exactly.

To convince us of this we will render two fragments of the acts cited by the archimandrite. Thus, quoting the endowment act of Ieremia Movila voivode to the monastery of Secu, he concludes the document with the following passage: "forever to remain of this holy monastery Secu and saying that if anyone will break this mercy and ruin his remembrance then that one will be seized by the wrath of God stronger than the rest and all the dust and God will lose his remembrance on earth, from all his root, and to the frightful judgment of Christ, mercilessly, will find out the great walker and baptist of Christ Joann together with the countless of the illuminated angels and archangels, and with the multitude of apostles and prophets, and with many holy martyrs. Especially let him have the precocious and innocent pure Mother of Christ whom Orthodox Christians pray with good hope, the assent and all the saints whose praise of salvation is the holy church will have him as the enemy of the truth and the church-breaker and will take part in the endless work with Judas the seller of the Lord and with other heretical lawbreakers without shame and without Deity the church-goers Dioclitian, Maximian and Julian and others like them and the curse of Arie who had him taken from those three hundred and eighteen holy bearers of God, parents from the Council of Nicaea, and from the other council will descend upon his head, and will be cursed and accursed three times by the Lord God and by all the saints of God. Amen" [2, f. 23v.-24].

Another passage, which refers to the same category, is from the letter of Metropolitan Savva, regarding the restoration of the documents lost by the Secu Monastery: "and he that will know, and will not say, let that man be cursed and accursed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the beloved virgin Mary, the mother of his holiness, and have the curse of three hundred and eighteen parents who have spent

in the citadel of Nicaea and of four evangelists, and to have a place with Judas the seller of Christ and to inherit the wickedness of Ghiazi and let be his accuser at the frightful court of our Lord Jesus Christ, Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, who is the saint of this Church, and that who will know and confess with great justice and the fear of God, not observing the will of anyone, let he be forgiven by God and our blessing" [1, f. 86]

As an argument that the truth is on his side, the scholar monk presents us a true example here: "Another conclusion made by Elevation Mihaleviciu, which is alongside with the truth of the holy work of the same review, says that neither my real desire nor the command of Metropolitan Sofronie to Reverend Archimandrite and hegumen Gerasim, caused writing the History, but the words of the priest Grigorie Musceleanu made me to write. And because I show that I wrote the first book in 1864, he concludes: "and this year coincides with the year in which the Romanian government brought up the issue of monastery estates" therefore, based on this consideration, Mr. Elevation Mihaleviciu wrote his incomprehensible assumption without believing how little the ones really seen and told by me because the Romanian ruler Alexandru Cuza overturned his tyranny act with lots of soldiers on the Holy Monasteries and monks in 1859 on June 11, as will be seen in the 7th book, and if, according to Mr. Elevation Mihaleviciu's opinion, I would have had reason to write these stories from the beginning because of the unjust words of the priest Gregory Muscelean, and even with those words, he there refers to the brief history that was gathered by me, as I showed the ancient calendar gave light to the 8th book in the year 1863, so how could I take this reason to write at the beginning of 1857: the short History was printed in March, and Alexandru Cuza entered the reign of Romania in January 1859..." [1, f. 5v.]

Finally, in order to be believed and to demonstrate his critical and Christian opinion to the reader regarding those written, Father Andronic Popovici states: "Praise be everlasting to the Good God and thanks from all my soul and from all my thoughts and all my feelings for helping me in all the life he gave me with the Most High goodness and illuminated my mind and charged me with the celestial but I have gathered useful knowledge and felt necessity and I wrote what I wrote and here I make it known for every beloved reader that only when one of the well acquainted with history and Moldovan language will read on all the historical books that I have gathered and wrote then he will get to understand very well and with clarity on everything contained



in them because all these are set in their place after years and periods with very good evidence put together, because each man has five senses, that is seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, but more true than all the senses is seeing, because through hearing, how much a man hears cannot be fully dealt with the thought whether it is right what he hears or is not because not all heard is true. Likewise the smell is often misleading because many spices from the beginning are hard to receive, and then they come to be great and tasty scents, and the taste is still so – first we feel some things like they are sweet and later we feel bitter and on the contrary many seem to us to be bitter but they are sweet. And yet the touching, again we touch many thinking of some and there are others and we cannot know perfectly only by palpation without seeing them and the sight itself gives them all settled in the truth of our thought and what is seen with our eyes cannot be doubted in reality. Just like this it seems to us, oh dear reader, it is much easier for us to write those that our eyes have seen than those we have heard and now the thinker, kissing you with much humility, please receive all these little efforts of mine when you will read and know clearly from them that as I was from my youth so I am until now and I will still be until the end of my life here, good hunter for good things, wishing from the bottom of my soul to make others know all those things that are hitherto completely unknown” [1, f. 6-6v.]

At last, instead of ending, we will also refer to the words of Andronic Popovici, which can be rendered as an understanding of history or as a tribute to the historian's labor, which shows: "But again I let you know, that even though sitting on the chair I have collected this very precious treasure and holy history, but I cannot give you in writing how much trouble I suffered because first I had to make drafts and sketches through many notes and put each one in their proper place, after years and months and days to see such story book again completed and special of all these things, then comes the anxiety and hopelessness of the yard again with not a little trouble made me write again all that I know very well and only those which collect such historical books know it, and only those alone understand the trustworthy witnesses of the efforts of the one who gathers historical facts in a spirit of small scribes, and can prove

that he will not remain unpaid by the builder of all, or all such writers's bodies get covered by countless infirmities and weaknesses. Because the eyes are sometimes covered with the spider's tail like looking for and counting the countless number of words, the mind weakens and often stays at other tasks, the right hand weakens and often freezes holding and carrying the pen, his head hurts because of bending a lot, his back still hurts, clinging to his bent state, his head twitching as he lifts it up like a dizzy one, the chest is bleeding and is in pain because the table on which he writes ties him like a knife, finally his feet remain numb when they return to the ground, the chair is known to all as a place of rest, and the writer does not rest on it but torments his body, the stomach inside does not work because of steady sitting. And so these often incomparable body pains snatched sometimes the pen from writer's hand and throws the writer into bed, forcing him to moan awfully, but the whole body is not straight until it stretches as the ship gains shelter only when it reaches the shore. As well as the writer and the gatherer of all historical facts, even with all the pains we described, he gains some spiritual comfort when he struggles with such writings, and rejoices even more when he reaches the end of the book that he began and says Amen!"

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**Ion Gumenai** (Chișinău, Republica Moldova). Doctor habilitat în istorie, conferențiar, Institutul de Istorie.

**Ион Гуменный** (Кишинев, Республика Молдова). Доктор хабилитат истории, конференциар, Институт истории.

**Ion Gumenai** (Chisinau, Republic of Moldova), Doctor of History, Associate Professor, Institute of History.

**E-mail:** gumenai@yahoo.com

**ORCID:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4501-3855>