

## Pilgrimage to Orthodox Romania

### **The Resplendent Celebration of the Transfiguration of the Savior and of St. Niphon, Patriarch of Constantinople**

*A renewal and deepening of unity and brotherhood  
between Greek and Romanian Orthodox anti-ecumenists*

**A** group of faithful belonging to the Holy Synod in Resistance made a pilgrimage—which can be characterized without reservation as a great blessing from God—to our Sister Orthodox Church of Romania for the celebration of the Transfiguration of our Savior and the five-hundredth anniversary of the repose of St. Niphon, who was Archbishop of Dacia and Vlachia (Wallachia) towards the end of the fifteenth century.

With synodal approval, Their Graces, Bishops Cyprian of Oreoi (Acting President of the Holy Synod), Ambrose of Methone, and Klemes of Gardikion acted as representatives of our ailing Metropolitan Cyprian. They were accompanied by Archimandrite Gregory Hagiokyprianites (from Pyrgos, Eleia), Hierodeacon Pachomios Hagiokyprianites, Mother Taxiarchia, Abbess of the Convent of the Holy Angels (Aphidnai, Attica), with two of the Convent's sisters, two nuns from the Convent of St. Paraskeve (Acharnai, Attica), a nun from the *Hesychnasterion* of the *Panagia Hodegetria* (Acharnai, Attica), and around thirty-five lay brothers and sisters, primarily from Attica.

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**On Monday**, August 5/18, 2008, the group arrived by air in Bucharest and then set off by bus for Suceava, in northern Romania (Moldavia-Bukovina). During the journey, they made a stop in the city of Adjud, where, at the Old Calendar Church of the Holy Archangels (a *Metochion* of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, in Cucova), a splendid *agape* meal was provided for the pilgrims from



from

Greece. Late that afternoon, the delegation arrived in Suceava, where they lodged at a hotel in the city.

**1. On Tuesday** morning, August 6/19, the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Savior, the pilgrims from Greece went by road to the Monastery of the Transfiguration, headquarters of our Sister Old Calendar Church of Romania.



• His Eminence, Metropolitan Vlasie, President of the Holy Synod, was the principal celebrant at the open-air Festal Divine Liturgy, with nine other Romanian Hierarchs concelebrating (Bishops Demosten of Neamț, Ghenadie of Bacău, Sofronie of Suceava, Teodosie of Brașov, Iosif of Botoșani, Flavian of Ilfov, Glicherie of Iași, Dionisie of Galați, and Evloghie of Sibiu [Antonie of Ploiești was away on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land]), along with His Eminence, Bishop Photii of Triaditza (from Bulgaria) and His Grace, Bishop Andronik of Ottawa and North America, under Bishop Agafangel of Odessa and Tauris, First Hierarch of the Provisional Supreme Ecclesiastical Administration of the ROCA, and dozens of Deacons and Priests. Thousands of devout faithful were in prayerful attendance.



The three Hierarchs from Greece—Bishops Cyprian, Ambrose, and Klemes—took part with great joy in this inter-Orthodox celebration, which constituted tangible evidence of the unity among Orthodox anti-ecumenists around the world.

- Everyone was especially impressed by the outstanding chanting of the Byzantine Choir, comprised of twenty young members of the Old Calendar Church of Romania, who rendered the festal hymns with great melodiousness and exultation. The festivities were honored by the presence of a member of Parliament from the city of Suceava and the Mayor of the neighboring city of Râșca.

After the Divine Liturgy, in which a total of fifteen Hierarchs took part, His Eminence, Metropolitan Vlasie delivered a festal homily and Bishop Ambrose then read, in Romanian translation, a festal message by Bishop Cyprian, entitled: [“The Divine Transfiguration and Orthodox Hesychasm.”](#) Bishop Photii and Bishop Andronik also greeted the crowd with brief addresses.



A procession was then made around the monastery *Katholikon*, preceded by the Holy Relics of St. Glicherie the Confessor (†1985), which were carried by Priests and which rendered the atmosphere fragrant. At the same time, the devout Romanian faithful literally thronged to receive the blessing of the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs.

- At the festal meal that followed, Metropolitan Vlasie and Bishop Cyprian exchanged spiritual messages full of love, spiritual wisdom, and brotherhood. As a token of appreciation, respect, and unity, Bishop Cyprian then presented a beautiful Icon of the *Theotokos* to the Metropolitan. The member of Parliament from Suceava and the Mayor of Râșca, who were seated beside them, likewise expressed warm wishes of respect and solidarity. The Byzantine Choir then sang patriotic Romanian folk songs with feeling and verve, closing with an impressive

rendition of “It is truly meet,” in Greek—a truly difficult arrangement by Michael Hadjiathanasiou in the Plagal of the First Tone (and from memory, at that!), which delighted and overwhelmed everyone.



After the meal, the Greek faithful had the opportunity to venerate the Holy Relics of St. Glicherie in the Church, and also his sacred vestments in his small, ascetic and sanctified cell alongside the Church. They were then given a tour of this historic and martyric monastery (the tombs of Hierarchs and Fathers, the Metropolitan’s office, the newly-built Church outside of the monastery precinct, etc).

- During the drive back to Suceava, the Greek delegation stopped at the Old Calender Convent of the Holy Myrrhbearers, in the region of Buda, near Slătioara, where they were received with especial love. The Convent, headed by the Reverend Mother Amfilohia, numbers around thirty nuns. Founded in 1960, it was able to grow substantially only after 1990. The sisters occupy themselves primarily with raising livestock.



The pilgrims then made a stop at the large, recently-built Old Calendar Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, in the city of Fălticeni. Finally, they venerated the incorrupt Relics of St. John the New of Trebizond, one of the first of the New Martyrs of our Holy Faith (†1330), which are preserved in a historical monastery Church in Suceava. St. John is considered to be the Patron Saint of this city.



**2. On Wednesday**, August 7/20, they visited the Convent of the Life-giving Spring, in Brădăţel, where His Grace, Bishop Demosten resides as spiritual Father. Greetings were exchanged in the Convent Church and, at Bishop Demosten's request, Bishops Cyprian, Klemes,



and Andronik offered words of spiritual counsel. They were then given a tour of the large, newly-built Church, dedicated to the Holy Great Martyr Demetrios the Myrrh-Streaming. The Sisterhood then provided the guests with a fine *agape* meal, at which they were joined by Metropolitan Vlasie and Bishop Dionisie.

- Visits were then made to the remarkable historic (fifteenth-century) monasteries in Bukovina: Humor, Voroneţ (where the grave of the



local Saint, Daniel the Hesychast, is located), and Moldovița, which are famous for the exterior frescos that adorn their Churches.

**3. On Thursday,** August 8/2, the pilgrims from Greece visited the Old Calendar Monastery of the Holy Great Martyr Menas of Egypt, which is being built in Roșiori, on a panoramic hillside near the com-



munity of Forăști, in the county of Suceava. The visitors marvelled at the impressive expansion of the monastery buildings and were shown generous hospitality and love by the outstandingly enterprising Abbot, Archimandrite Varnava, and his small brotherhood.

- The Greek faithful then visited the historic monastery of Neamț, where they venerated wonderworking Icons of the *Theotokos* and of various Saints, and also the Holy Relics of an unknown Saint that were recently discovered (in 1986)—probably those of the renowned Staretz Paissy (Velichkovsky)—and the skull of St. Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain. They also admired the monastery’s museum exhibit and its grounds and surroundings, so rich in history and sanctity, as shown forth primarily by St. Paissy.



• A visit was then made to the large historic Convent of Agapia (with 350 nuns), where a Greek-speaking nun gave the delegation from Greece a guided tour. In general, this sisterhood showed the pilgrims exceptional warmth and love.



• This blessed day closed with a visit to the newly-built Old Calendar Church of the Holy Prophet Elias, in the city of Bacău, where the region's clergy and a large number of devout Romanians accorded them a gracious welcome.



Inside the Church, its Rector, Protopresbyter Mihail Martsintan, and Bishops Cyprian and Klemes exchanged greetings of love. Bishop Ambrose read, in Romanian translation, a lengthy address, specially prepared for this occasion, entitled: “St. Niphon Dionysiates, Patriarch of Constantinople and Archbishop of Dacia and Vlachia (1418-1508): His Neptic and Apostolic Legacy.” The text was simultaneously read in Greek for the sake of the pilgrims from Greece.

Those gathered in the Church then venerated the large Icon of St. Niphon, which had been brought for



this purpose from the *Metochion* of St. Niphon in Bucharest, and also a small portion of the Saint's Holy Relics, brought from the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, Phyle, Attica, to be left as a blessing for the parish in Bacău.

The visitors were then offered refreshments in the parish hall and given a tour of the large building complex (a Priest's residence, guests rooms, bell tower) that is under construction at this exemplary parish.

**4. On Friday**, August 9/22, the Greek delegation visited the martyric Old Calendar Monastery of the Holy Trinity, in Cucova. Bishop Teodosie of Braşov welcomed the pilgrims with great kindness, and



a *Trisagion* was performed at the grave of the reposed founder of the Monastery, Bishop Pahomie of Vrancea (†2007), which is located inside the Church. The visitors were offered an *agape* meal, given a tour, etc.

- That afternoon, the delegation went to the historic Monastery of Cernica, where they venerated the Holy Relics of the Holy Hierarch Calinic—a great wonderworking Saint of Romania—and the skull of St. George of Cernica, a disciple of St. Paissy (Velichkovsky).



**5. On Saturday**, August 10/23, the pilgrims venerated the incorrupt Relics of St. Demetrios of Basarabov, Patron Saint of Bucharest, at the Church of St. Spyridon, where they have been temporarily placed

because of the renovation work being done on the Patriarchal Church. In the same Church, portions of the Relics of St. Spyridon and of Sts. Constantine and Helen are on display for veneration. They also visited the historic Monastery of the Holy Hieromartyr Anthimos the Iberian (in Bucharest) and were given a tour of the library located there, which belongs to the Romanian Patriarchate.

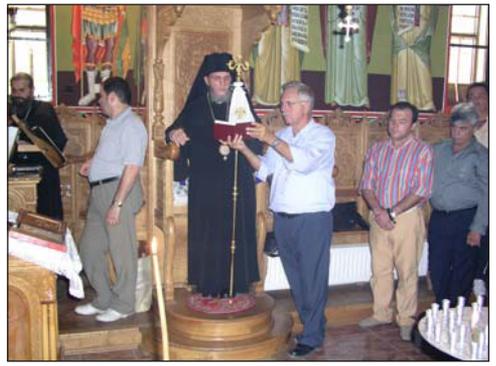


- The delegation was then enthusiastically welcomed at the Old Calendar Monastery of the Dormition of the *Theotokos*, in Bucharest, by Bishop Flavian of Ilfov, Abbot Eftimie, and monastery brothers. In the newly-built and marvelously frescoed monastery Church, the Bishops



exchanged greetings of a spiritual nature. This was followed by a delicious *agape* meal and a tour of the monastery's print shop, handicraft exhibit, and marble workshop.

- That afternoon, festal Vespers and Orthros were served for the Patronal Feast of the Church of St. Niphon Dionysiates, Patriarch of Constantinople, which is a *Metochion* (in Bucharest) of the Monastery of



Sts. Cyprian and Justina, Phyle, Attica. Bishop Cyprian presided, with hymns chanted in Romanian and Greek.

**6. On Sunday morning,** August 11/24 (commemoration of St. Niphon), Metropolitan Vlasie was the principle celebrant at the festal Divine Liturgy, joined by Bishops Cyprian and Klemes, Priests, and Deacons. A large crowd of faithful was in prayerful attendance, as were Bishop Ambrose and Bishop Flavian (in the Altar).



- During the Liturgy, at Bishop Cyprian's request, Metropolitan Vlasie ordained Hierodeacon Pachomios Hagiokyprianites a Priest, to the great joy of the congregation. Father Pachomios, who is Romanian, came to Greece a number of years ago to work, ultimately entering the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina in Phyle two years ago. A few months previously, he was tonsured a Rasophore Monk and ordained a Deacon. As a Hieromonk, he will serve the liturgical needs of the monastery of his repentance. This Ordination was yet another demonstration of the brotherly love and strengthening of the ties between Greek and Romanian traditionalists.





Before Holy Communion, Bishop Ambrose read, in Romanian, the address about St. Niphon which he had first read in the parish in Bacău. After the Liturgy, Bishops Cyprian and Klemes duly spoke to the large congregation. Those in attendance then received antidoron, venerated the small portion of the Relics of St. Niphon that had been brought from Greece, and were each given a laminated Icon of the Saint, while nuns from the Greek delegation chanted Resurrectional hymns.

A meal was then provided for the clergy and the pilgrims from Greece, prepared by nuns under Mother Teodosia, Abbess of the Convent of the Annunciation of the *Theotokos* (in Valea Roși), the spiritual Father of which is Bishop Flavian.

- After the meal, the faithful informed the Bishops about an extraordinary, miraculous event. The large Icon of St. Niphon—a work of the Icon Studio of the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina—located in the Church manifested a sign from God, witnessed by all of the Romanian and Greek clergy and laypeople present: **a slight secretion appeared from the right hand of St. Niphon (held in a blessing position), which began to give off an exquisite Divine fragrance!** Thanksgiving, compunction, and spiritual emotion and joy



filled everyone's heart at the appearance of this Divine gift. This was indisputable evidence that St. Niphon participated in the humble anniversary celebration in his honor, in his Church in Bucharest, and was expressing his pleasure at the albeit unworthy, though nevertheless sincere, continuation of his confessional course and, in general, of his anti-Papist and pro-Hesychastic stand by the anti-innovationists of Greece and Romania. Glory to Thee, O God!



• Following a brief visit to the “Village Museum” in Bucharest, with its impressive exhibition of traditional folk art, history, and culture, the Greek delegation headed for the international airport of Bucharest, landing late Sunday night in Athens, filled with sacred memories and enthusiasm about the many Divine gifts granted them in the space of just one week in Romania.

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**Personal** spiritual benefit was perfectly bound up with an ecclesiastical mission that was crowned with complete success, by the Grace of God, since the ties of unity and love between our Sister Churches have been renewed in a strong and wondrous way, through the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

For all these things, thanksgiving is due to the Divine Founder of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen!

