

**WORKS OF RENEWAL AND MODERNIZATION  
AT DINTR-UN LEMN MONASTERY.  
THE ROLE OF GENERAL PAUL TEODORESCU<sup>1</sup>**

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In the summer of 1938, the situation of the monuments at Dintr-un Lemn Monastery was worrying. They all required works of reparation, preservation and modernization. The aid was to come from General Paul Teodorescu (1888-1981), from 1938, the head of the Ministry of Air and Marine. General Paul Teodorescu was about to tell the context in which he came to Dintr-un Lemn Monastery to his doctor, I. Ciucă. The doctor was brought on pilgrimage at the Holy Place from the summer of 1932 when he was 11 years old. The general knew him in 1938 when great works were being done at the monastery. In the biographical notes left to the monastery, Dr. I. Ciucă writes that General Paul Teodorescu told him: “*One day I was invited by Queen Mary at the Palace. To his surprise, she did not discuss any professional issue, she only asked for his opinion on a series of historical monuments. At the end of the meeting, seeming to have remembered something, she asked him if he knew the Oltenian monasteries. He confessed that he did not know all of them, and the Queen continued: ‘There is a monastery in Vâlcea County, which is called Dintr-un Lemn, with a beautiful legend, studied and published by Odobescu in his short story, Mrs. Chiajna.’*”

*Intimidated, he replied that he did not know the monastery and did not even hear of it. Instead he knows Odobescu's short story, Mrs Chiajna. The Queen told him that in one of her trips to several monasteries in Oltenia she accidentally came across this monastery, which is actually isolated.*

*‘General, when you go through Oltenia, visit this monastery. I'd love you to tell me your impressions at a new meeting. As I know you a man of faith, seek to speak with the abbess of the monastery. She is a nun who has a great charm and a mystery and great intelligence. What destiny may have hidden it in this corner of the forest?’*

*I remember that the general continued his confession.*

*I left the queen puzzled, not understanding why she was sending me to this monastery I had not heard of, where the queen had met a nun who had impressed*

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<sup>1</sup> Pages from the work *Dintr-un Lemn Monastery. A Unique Monastic Complex in Romania. Historical Monograph* under press at the publishing house of the Academy of Romanian Scientists.

her. I was having a difficult month at the time. Leaving the palace I told myself that in the meanwhile I would ask my services for complete information about the monastery and, if possible, from the Cults, all that was known about this abbess. After about ten days I had on my desk information about the Monastery from the Historical Monuments Commission and from the Patriarchy a note sent by the Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding the abbess Paisia Vasilescu (...) I decided to interrupt my program and I went there the next day with my aide. When I arrived in the courtyard of the monastery, I was impressed by the main building, the Brancovan Palace, which had numerous large cracks from the top to the foundations and was held at its inclination to the princely church by about ten big and strong pillars.”<sup>1</sup>

In the *Chronicles of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery since its Reparations in the Year of its Salvation 1939*, inscribed in the *Golden Book of the Monastery*, made by the artist Cecilia Lita Botez, the buildings were recorded as such. The head buildings: “had a fallen roof and such big cracks in the walls that a human foot could walk in. Everyone in the room looked horrified when they saw the hall vaults collapsed and propped-up with wooden poles, some of the walls down to the floor, the ceilings fallen and you could see the sky.”<sup>2</sup>

About the state in which he found the monastery in 1938 General Paul Teodorescu brought testimonies in a document he addressed on February 8, 1977, to the Archdiocese of Râmnic and Severin: “We found this settlement, a historical monument, in a pitiful ruin, starting with to the stables to the Lord’s House, with destroyed roofs housing only hundreds of crows. Deeply impressed by the depressing image that surrounded the palace and at the hot prayer of the nuns to help them not to allow the historic place to perish, we establish the following: the restoration, the exterior and interior reconstructions, as well as a three-room arrangement and a proper hall for the monastery’s museum. The building from foundation of three multi-room buildings and three bathrooms for travellers, using in particular the free hand of the soldiers and officers in the Aeronautics and Marine, of which almost half were craftsmen.”<sup>3</sup>

The very difficult situation of the monastery is also described by the architect Anastasescu, the head of Oltenia Regional Office of the Historical

<sup>1</sup> Alexandru Ciucă, *Note biografice [Biographical Notes]*. Manuscript of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery.

<sup>2</sup> *Cartea de aura Mănăstirii Dintr-un Lemn [Golden Book of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery]* Dintr-un Lemn Monastery.

<sup>3</sup> Memoriu adresat, la 8 februarie 1977, Episcopiei Râmnicului și Argeșului [Memoir addressed on 8 February 1977 to the Archdiocese of Râmnic și Argeș], in *Generalul adjutant Paul (Pavel) Teodorescu (1888-1981). Vocația creativității. 125 de ani de la naștere [General Adjutant Paul (Pavel) Teodorescu (1888-1981). The Vocation of Creativity. 125 Years from His Birth]*(coord. Prof. univ. dr. Valentin Ciorbea, P.S. dr. Emilian Lovișteanu, comandor dr. Marian Moșneagu, Editura Ex Ponto, 2013, p. 392).

Monuments Commission, on October 17, 1938, in an address to the president of the respective institution: "*The incomes are a small part, in this monastery, of the enormous expenses they have to bear, for the following reasons.*" Out of the 46 nuns "*who have to be fed,*" only 18 receive wages, most of the population was aged, many nuns were powerless for various duties. The architect concludes that at Dintr-un Lemn Monastery "*there was a higher consumer than the productive element.*" The expert concluded that "*the monastery is unable to come with financial help to restore the premises, but only with their work and arms.*"<sup>1</sup>

The project of General Paul Teodorescu at Dintr-un Lemn Monastery first started with the overall assessment of the monastic complex, the setting of the objectives for renewal and modernization, the improvement of the living conditions of the community and the settlement of the Holy Place on a special place with a unique role which opened a new page in the chronicle of the Romanian Army's collaboration with the Romanian Orthodox Church. In the *Memoirs* he left to posterity he stresses that he was always "*deeply grateful to the Church for its important role in the development of the Country,*" a fact that prompted him to propose to support the institution "*up to the end of his life.*"<sup>2</sup>

After obtaining the necessary approvals from the authorities for the performance of the works, General Paul Teodorescu brought to Dintr-un Lemn Monastery masons, carpenters, painters, stonemasons and workers from Aviation and Marine, but also from "Michael the Brave" Guard Regiment, as he states and in the *Memoirs*.<sup>3</sup> Some of the soldiers were accommodated in the monastery, others with the more well-off families from the village of Frâncești, with the care of the mayor Alexandru Măciuceanu, of the school head and the church priest in the locality. We find out from a report on the activity of the Holy Monastery signed by Paisia Vasilescu that in the years 1935-1948 from the Forests of Sevestreni wood was sold in the years 1938-1939 worth 267440 lei. Of the sum, expenses were incurred "*with the food for the military and civilian workers on the occasion of the restoration that took place at this Holy Monastery in the years 1938-1940.*" The 100 military and civilian soldiers needed additional food, the ration of the unit was insufficient, so that "*the monastery improved its food with polentas, cooked food from vegetables, meat, occasionally milk.*"<sup>4</sup>

The expenses made from the proceeds of the sale of the wood were not discharged by Office of the Monasteries on the grounds that they had incurred unforeseen costs. Ultimately, the financial situation cleared up. Various works in

<sup>1</sup> Arhiva Institutului Național al Patrimoniului (A.I.N.P.) [Archive of the National Institute of Heritage], dosar 1919-1935 [file 1919-1935], f. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Generalul adjutant Paul (Pavel) Teodorescu (1888-1981)*, p. 127.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> Arhiva Arhiepiscopiei Râmnicului (A.A.R.) [Archive of the Archdiocese of Râmnic], Mănăstirea Dintr-un Lemn, anii 1935-1938 [Dintr-un Lemn Monastery, years 1935-1938], inventariat – 250 [inventory – 250] (nenumerotat [not numbered]).

the monastery attracted villagers and students. The children, for example, gathered under the supervision of their teachers, stones from the Otăsău River used to pave the monastery's courtyard.

The funds for the materials and the payment of some works came from the Ministry of Air and Marine. Paul Teodorescu allocated 134,000 lei out of his strong sense of devotion "*for the places of worship where the flame of our saving faith burns forever,*"<sup>1</sup> from donations made by different people and businesses. General Paul Teodorescu himself donated money from his salary. "Solvig" company, which produced military supplies, gave 20,000 lei. Another 20,000 lei was received from C. Tășulescu, who made accessories for the army. 20,000 lei was received from "Vulcan" Workshops, and I. Stănescu company, which produced military uniforms, subscribed with 5,000 lei. "Scherg" paid for works and invoices worth 88,746 lei. Retired Air Force Commander A. Petrovici made available to General Paul Teodorescu a wagon with various materials: concrete, sashes and skylights, a cooler, 3,000 bricks, electrical materials and tools. 37 toolkits were received from Leo Mihailovici.

In a note made on July 12, 1977 in *the Pilgrims' Book of Impressions*, Admiral Horia Macellariu, states that in 1940, as Secretary General of the Ministry of Air and Navy, God "*made me worthy to allocate and approve funds for repairs and maintenance.*"<sup>2</sup>

From the correspondence carried by Mother Paisia Vasilescu with the Command and Materials Department of the Ministry of Air and Marine, it is revealed that in 1938 there were works worth 255,861 lei, in 1939 - 605,531 lei and in 1940 - 42,060 lei.<sup>3</sup>

The works began on August 18, 1938. All the monastery's compartments were restored. At the Brancovan Palace there were connections with iron bars, all the cracks were filled, and the chimneys of the new terracotta stoves were taken out of the roof, plasters were made, the refectory was enlarged, the sashes were changed, a drain bathroom was installed, the electricity produced by a special plant was introduced and the floors and beams were replaced. The shingle and the roofing were restored. The main works were received on April 20, 1939 by I.L. Anastasescu, costing 60.667 lei.

At the bell tower, cells and stables, the roofs were restored. In the nuns' bedroom area there was a bathroom and a washer with running water and drainage. The cells were repaired through masonry and carpentry, the windows

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<sup>1</sup> Apud Ioan Opreș, *Monumentele istorice din România (1850-1950) [Romanian Historical Monuments]*, Editura Vremea, București, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> Arhiva Mănăstirii Dintr-un Lemn (A.M.D.L.) [Archive of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery], *Caiet de impresii [Impressions Notebook]*, 1977 (nenumerotat [not numbered]).

<sup>3</sup> Ion Giurcă, *Generalul Paul Teodorescu și marea ctitorie voievodală de la Frâncești [General Paul Teodorescu and the Great Princely Construction in Frâncești]*, in „Misiunea” [Mission], year I, no. 1, 2014, p. 22-23.

and doors were changed. Window shutters were set. Works were also done at the cell in front of the stone church. The storehouse was raised. The stable was repaired from the ground. There were stone floors over which planks with drainage through the tubes were mounted. The kitchen was enlarged and fitted with two plaster and terracotta hobs, with drainage space. A four-room house with a hall room in the middle of it, stood at the entrance in the first yard on the right of the gate. The closure wall was made, linking it to the old one, and gates were mounted. The wells were repaired. The outer yard was enclosed with fences and wire, including the cemetery. The alley from the entrance to the monastery was cobbled and separated with tiles. At the entrance to the monastic complex was mounted an oak door, and on the alley that starts from here and up to the first enclosure crying willows were planted, at the idea of General Paul Teodorescu, and in the first yard a conifer that could be moulded by trimming.

A phone was installed. Pavements were made around all the buildings. There were two large stairs, one at the bell tower and the other at the Brancovan Palace. Locks were built so that the water of the Otăsău would no longer flood the garden, the yard and the cellars. In the large church there was a new tile stove, and in the wooden church the brick floor was replaced.

General Paul Teodorescu made donations of household items: table and chairs, sofas for all living quarters in the Brancovan Palace, a cupboard for the dishes, a smaller chest of drawers and two tables for the refectory, a telephone, two boxes with medicines.

Before the end of the rebuilding that took place in November 1939, General Paul Teodorescu initiated the spiritual bonding of the monastery with two categories of armed forces, the Marine and Aviation. On 24 October 1939, in his capacity as Minister of Air and Navy, General Paul Teodorescu addressed the President of the Historical Monuments Commission in a letter in which he expressed his wish and arguments that Dintr-un Lemn Monastery became a prayer place for pilots and sailors: *“The Ministry of Air and Navy from a sense of devotion to the places where the flame of our saving faith always burns repaired the princely establishment, with the churches, the cells and all the settlements of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery in Vâlcea County.*

*In the desire to continue in the future to take care of the maintenance of this monastery and the desire to have a place of prayer for aviators and sailors whose life is so dangerous, I would be pleased to ask you, Mr President, to suggest the idea that Dintr-un Lemn Monastery was declared the Monastery of the Aviators and Sailors.*

*If I took the liberty of making this proposal is to have the legal opportunity to enter in the budget of the Ministry of Air and Marine an annual sum to serve to preserve this beautiful historical monument.*"<sup>1</sup>

Through the Secretary of the Air and Navy, Rear Admiral Al. Gheorghiu, the leadership of the Holy Monastery was notified at the beginning of December 1939 that "*following the intervention of the Minister of Air and Marine, General adjutant Paul Teodorescu, along with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Committee of Historical Monuments, it was approved that Dintr-un Lemn Monastery was the aviators and sailors' monastery (...), we kindly ask that religious services at the monastery also include prayers for aviators and sailors.*"<sup>2</sup>

On December 11, 1939 Mother Paisia Vasilescu noted on an address: "*We have taken note and with great care the names of our sailors and aviators will be mentioned at the Holy Mass.*"<sup>3</sup>

Following the approval of the Commission for Historical Monuments, the Metropolitan Church of Oltenia, Banat and Severin submitted an official statement signed by Archbishop Lieutenant Irineu:

*"Dear devout Mother,*

*Since this Holy monastery was restored by the Ministry of Air and Marine, it is made known to you that we have agreed to say prayers here for the rest of the souls of the heroes, of the aviators and sailors, as well for guarding the ones alive.*

*With Holy blessings!"*

In this context, Nifon Criveanu, the Metropolitan of Oltenia "*offered the monastery as a resting place for the sick and convalescents of the two arms*"<sup>4</sup> and until he retired in 1945, he held yearly religious services naming the sailors and aviators.

On December 21, 1939, the Ministry of Air and Marine sent the monastery "*The list of the dead aviators and sailors for prayer for the rest of their souls.*"<sup>5</sup>

In the *Chronicles of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery since its Restoration in the Year of its Salvation 1939, the Gold Book*, are included all those who had given

<sup>1</sup> A.I.N.P., Fond Comisia Monumentelor Istorice, Mănăstirea Dintr-un Lemn [File of the Commission of Historical Monuments, Dintr-un Lemn Monastery], f. 100.

<sup>2</sup> A.M.D.L., File I A5, with various administrative correspondence, 2 January 1939 - 30 December 1939, f. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Valentin Ciorbea, *Rolul Mănăstirii Dintr-un Lemn în conlucrarea Armatei României cu Biserica Ortodoxă. Proiectul generalului Paul (Pavel) Teodorescu 1938-1977* [The Role of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery in the Cooperation between the Romanian Army and the Orthodox Church. The Project of Paul (Pavel) Teodorescu 1938-1977], in „Misiunea” [Mission], year I, no. 1, 2014, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> *General adjutant Paul Teodorescu*, p. 249.

<sup>5</sup> A.M.D.L., File I, A5, with various administrative correspondence, 2 January 1939 - 30 December 1939, f. 70.

money and other donations and contributed to the monument's saving by works of restoration and erection of new buildings in one word RENEWAL, which defined the project made in the years 1938-1939 at Dintr-un Lemn Monastery. The craftsmen, the community of mothers headed by Paisia Vasilescu, the four priests and a deacon, as well as two grooms, a cowherd and a caretaker and children were written down.

In order to inform the pilgrims and visitors about the special mission assumed by the monastery, with the consent of Mother Abbess Paisia Vasilescu and of the Archdiocese of Râmnic, General Paul Teodorescu completed the project. Visitors who will look carefully at the space above the gate at the entrance will admire a composition made by Mrs. Captain Botez, a painter sent by General Paul Teodorescu about which, on completion of the painting, the abbess informed on October 7, 1940 the Historical Monuments Commission: "*At the gate of the entrance in the courtyard outside the monastery were painted two icons by Mrs. Captain Botez. One represents the Mother of God with a boat in her hand, depicting the Patron of the Navy, and another - Saint Prophet Elijah - the Patron of Aviation, with the inscription 'FOR THOSE THAT GO TO THE SEA AND IN THE AIR, WE PRAY TO GOD.'*"<sup>1</sup>

He ordered the creation and laying on the belfry wall of two symbols specific to the Navy and the Aviation, an anchor and an eagle with the wings spread holding a globe and two plates in the claw with the following content:

DINTR-UN LEMN MONASTERY  
PRAYER PLACE  
FOR AVIATORS AND SAILORS

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WITH GOD'S HELP  
AND HUMAN ENDEVOUR  
THIS CONSTRUCTION WAS RESTORED  
WITH ITS CELLS  
AND ALL THE OTHER BUILDINGS  
BY THE MINISTRY OF AIR  
AND SEA IN 1938-1939  
NOT TO LEAVE THE HOLY PLACE  
IN THE HANDS OF RUIN  
BUT KEEP IT FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

By General Paul Teodorescu's care, two cardboard boxes were placed on the walls of the bell tower, with the names of the aviators and sailors fallen on duty but also of those alive. Those who were written on the panels were also in the prayer list. When most of the works were completed, General Paul Teodorescu

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, f. 102.

addressed Mother Paisia Vasilescu, a letter revealing the progress made in the monastery and adding some suggestions: *“The order, the cleanliness and the good mood that reigns all over, thanks to the wise leadership of your sacredness, of the relentless effort of Mother Zenaida and to the devotion of the whole community encourages me even more so that together we will complete the work that has begun.*

*My desire as well as Yours is that the Holy Dintr-un Lemn Monastery is an example of monastic life and preaching of the Ancestral Faith, under the sign of which our country always prevailed.*

*Please, therefore, see in me a supporter and forever guardian of the Holy place. In this good start I dared give my opinion and help you with advice, especially in the issue of organization. I think, as it is now, the household of the monastery is as clear as possible and shows a judicious conception. We really have:*

*1. The head building which symbolically represents in an elevated and telling manner the Christian atmosphere reigning in the settlement.*

*2. The Mother Paisia House, repaired, will be the most dignified position for the leading of the monastery and for dwelling.*

*3. On the other hand, the workshops with the bedroom, the washing rooms, the house of the supervising nun, the beekeeper mother, the mother with the silk worms, the mother with the fruit garden, and the chancellery. All these last three in the house of the beehives, to have in this part all that relates to the production and the activity of the monastery.*

*4. The infirmary with the nursing nun and the pharmacy.*

*5. All the household in one place: the kitchens, the dining room, the supplies rooms (beside the kitchen), the stables, the workshops (that will be made), the barn and the shelter of the carriages, the garden tools, etc.*

*6. The house of the priests and perhaps of the nuns (and of the couple) with the gardens.*

*7. The gardens, as they were now sorted by categories: hay, vegetable, fruit.*

*8. The poultry and pigs yard.*

*9. At last, the mill.*

*I think it could not have been any better, and when, passing over all, we reached this point, we must thank God, the entire assembly, headed by Your Eminence, and all the good people who long endeavoured to renew it ...”<sup>1</sup> (Sic). Still, the general suggested the abbess to organize the nuns so that everyone could handle something and specialize in a sector such as electricity, water pipes, bees*

<sup>1</sup> Rasofora Tecla Fuioga, rasofora Ecaterina Fermeșan, *Din tezaurul documentar al Mănăstirii Dintr-un Lemn [From the Documentary Sources of Dintr-un Lemn Monastery]* in „Misiunea” [Mission], year V, no. 1(5), 2018, p. 106-108.



and silkworms, weaving workshops, vegetable gardens and hay, the mill, the infirmary.

On the occasion of the pastoral visit made by His Eminence Nifon Criveanul, the Metropolitan of Oltenia (1939-1945) on July 18, 1940, the High Archbishop noted in the visitors' register: "*Through the improvements made, the historical Dintr-un Lemn Monastery is among the most beautiful and well-kept the monasteries of Oltenia. Glory to Our Lord for what He had given us.*"<sup>1</sup> (Sic)

As stated in a report by the Commission of Historical Monuments, dated 18 February 1943, to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers: "*Dintr-un Lemn Monastery was almost completely restored by General Paul Teodorescu. The monastery's abbess still needs help for urgent maintenance and repair expenses.*"<sup>2</sup>

On May 11, 1940, the second Gheorghe Tătărescu government (May 11 - July 3, 1940) was reshuffled, the Ministry of Air and Marine reorganized into two state subsecretaries, the Aviation led by Commander Achile Duculescu and the Marine taken over by Admiral Nicolae Păiș. General Paul Teodorescu was appointed commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Guard Division, a post from which he could no longer be officially involved in conducting works at Dintr-un Lemn Monastery. That task was taken over by the two undersecretaries as he had wanted.

After Romania's entry on June 22, 1941, during the Second World War, in the Eastern Campaign for Territorial Reconciliation, at Dintr-un Lemn Monastery there were held special services for sailors and aviators. The State Air Undersecretariat thanked Abbess Paisia Vasilescu for the prayers "*made to protect our brave soldiers, pilots and sailors who sacrifice for a holy cause 'The Reunion of the Country'; also to mention the ones fallen on the field of honor, whose names will remain immortal in the History Book of our Nation.*"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.M.D.L., File No. I, B. 28 - Miscellenea. Correspondence: visitors, January 1932 – 23 May 1944 (nenumerotat [not numbered]).

<sup>2</sup> A.I.N.P., *loc.cit.*, f. 152.

<sup>3</sup> A.M.D.L., File I A5, volume I, no. 129. Administrative correspondence, 31 December 1941 (nenumerotată [not numbered]).