**Pious Antipas of Calapodesti - a**

**less known Romanian Saint (1816-1882)**

**(PhD thesis abstract)**

A Christian's life can be compared to a pilgrimage in spirit, but especially in the Holy Spirit and in Christ, towards the Kingdom of God, an idea confirmed by the very words of our Saviour: "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn. 18:36), or "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33), or "The kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17:21).

The thirst for God and His Kingdom, has always been in the hands of one of the blessed ancestors of the land of Moldavia, Father Antipas of Calapodești, whose life and activity is the central theme of this research work. The motivation for this theme was, on the one hand, the attempt to bring to light many unknown aspects of the life of this lesser-known, but loved Romanian holy father by the Romanian, Greek and Russian Orthodox faithful, and on the other hand, the desire to know and learn more about the Prayer of Jesus and how it succeeds in helping and changing man, leading him away from the vain world, towards God. Last but not least, we would like to emphasize that researching and reconstructing, as far as possible, the biography of the Pious Antipas of Calapodești is also a moral duty of the Romanians, as he is one of the most chosen ancestors born and raised in Moldavia, who honoured the Orthodox Church in all the places of his pilgrimages, both at home and abroad.

Saint Antipas of Calapodești was born in a very difficult historical context for the Romanian Countries, the Ottoman Empire being on the defensive on all fronts, losing ground to the Russian Empire, which was in continuous expansion. Internally, in the Romanian Principalities, the political trend towards liberation and the creation of an independent, modern and European state was gaining ground.

Saint Antipa's parents were simple, faithful people, accustomed to poverty and deprivation, having had no children for a long time. God would hear the prayers of the couple and give them a "baby boy", their only child, named Alexander. The unknown disciple of Father Antipas, the Schemamonk Antony, writes in his work on the life of Pious Antipas that at the age of 7 he was shepherding the family sheep, and after three years his father died. We can thus deduce that his mother was widowed and he orphaned when he was 10, around the year 1826.

At the age of 20, around the year 1836, he decided to follow the monastic life, following a wonderful discovery. After an unsuccessful attempt to be received into the Monastery of Neamt, the young Brother Alexander went to two monasteries in Wallachia. With regard to these monastic places in Wallachia where young Alexandru lived as a monastery brother, we can say that the first of them, according to some testimonies discovered in the correspondence of Reverend Antipas, although not very clear and direct, is the Monastery of Dalhăuți, and the second, the Monastery of Brazi, both in the county of Vrancea. In these places of need he went through many temptations, tribulations and sorrows, as is confessed in his biography.

Desiring very much peace and spiritual life, Brother Alexandru wishes to go to Mount Athos. Being present at the discovery of the relics of the Holy Martyr Theodosius of Brazi, an event that took place in the year 1842, we can affirm that he went to Mount Athos in that very year, following evidence found in the biography written by Schemamonk Antony. The period spent by Father Antipas as a brother of the monastery was about 4 years, since in 1840 his tonsure took place, receiving the name Alipie. He lived in Muntenia as a monk for at least 2 years, after which he received the blessing to go to the Holy Mountain Athos.

Once in Mount Athos, he spent 4 years at the Esfigmenu Monastery. He was then tonsured as a schemamonk by Father Nifon, receiving the name Antipas, and left to live as a hermit. Seeing Father Antipa's organizational and housekeeping skills, Father Nifon appointed him Administrator of the "All Saints" Methochion in Bucium, Iasi, in 1856, where he stayed for three and a half years. Thus, Father Antipas spent about 14 years in the Holy Mountain, between 1842-1856, of which 4 years he spent in the Monastery of Esfigmenu, 2 years and a half as a hermit, and the rest of almost 8 years in obedience to Father Nifon, the first abbot and founder of the Prodromu Hermitage.

During his stay at the "All Saints" Metochion in Bucium, Iasi, together with Father Antipas, Father Egumen Nifon also appointed the monk Anastasie (Anastasă) Pogor as administrator, a person who had a difficult character and a questionable behavior and with whom Father Antipas had a hard time getting along.

In making all decisions regarding the proper functioning of the Bucium Metochion and the proper administration of material funds, Father Antipas consulted with his confessor, Bishop Filaret Scriban, as well as with the Metropolitan of Moldova, Sofronie Miclescu, both of whom are mentioned among the great founders of the Prodromu Hermitage. It is also presented a small set of rules that Father Antipas used during his service as administrator, for a good organization of the metochion.

In the correspondence of Reverend Antipas during his stay at the Bucium Metochion we discover that he suffered greatly from sea sickness, needing companions to help him get by, preferring instead to travel by land.

Father Antipas did not limit himself only to collecting alms for the building of the Prodromu Hermitage and the administration of the Bucium Metochion, but he was close to the noblemen and the simple people of Moldavia, who often came to him, asking his advice and even inviting him into their homes, to help them to solve quickly, peacefully and spiritually the problems that arose in their families. There were cases when Father Antipas lived for several days in the midst of these families, thus helping to ease tensions. However, there were also situations when Father Antipas and the other fathers of the metochion who collected alms from the Romanian faithful, were confronted and scolded, especially by some influential boyars, annoyed by their insistence. In this circumstances, Father Antipas, as a spiritual man, knowing the temptation of the evil one, endured with great peace the confrontations and reproaches from the faithful.

The pressing need for material funds, led Father Nifon to undertake a trip to Russia to collect more substantial donations, taking with him Father Antipas. This would happen in 1859.

The election of Father Antipas by the Abbot Niphon to go to Russia was unexpected, both by the prodromite community, who would have liked to have a completely different person in Russia, and by Father Antipas himself, who received this surprising news with humility and obedience, taking it as an obedience to be fulfilled. Moreover, Father Antipas admits that he did his best to escape from this journey to Russia, proposing another priest from the prodromite community, because he considered himself, with great humility, uncaring and unprepared. For this reason, there was opposition in the Prodromu Hermitage to this unexpected decision of the Father Abbot, asking for the speedy return of Father Antipas to the Holy Mountain, since his stay in Russia was seen as totally unproductive for the Hermitage.

As in Moldova, Father Antipas managed to gather around him believers from all social classes, lay people, clerics, monks, nuns, landlords, officials, kings, counts, archbishops, people of good material wealth, but also those less wealthy, with the help of his spiritual character, simple, honest and liked by those around him. He recounts in great detail the marvellous assistance of God and Our Lady, who worked great miracles with him in Russia, for the good of the Prodromu Hermitage, both in the period 1860-1864, when he received in a marvellous way four registries of donation from the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church to collect alms from the Russian faithful, and after 1865, when he was accepted in the comunity of the Valaam Monastery. There are even accounts of marvellous deeds worked by Father Antipa in the homes of the Russian faithful, marvellous cures, or the banishment of evil spirits, through which his holiness came even closer to the hearts of his spiritual sons.

In order to highlight even more the attachment, trust, obedience and love of the spiritual sons and daughters of Moscow and of the Valaam Monastery towards their spiritual father, the Venerable Hieroschemamonk Antipas, we recall an astonishing detail, found in the correspondence of the Venerable during his life in Russia. He urged the prodromite fathers to write his name in the letters they were to send him, confessing that his spiritual sons and daughters of Moscow loved and respected him very much. If they read those letters and did not find his name together with the confession of love and respect of the senders for Pios Antipas, then they were very sad, wept and threw the letters away, or returned them to Father Antipas, considering them of no spiritual use.

Father Antipa was greatly helped in collecting and sending alms from Russia to the Prodromu Hermitage by several spiritual sons and daughters, laymen, monks and nuns, often mentioned in his correspondence. Regarding the impressive sums of money sent by Father Antipas to the Romanian Hermitage Prodromu (gold and silver coins), as well as the very important, but also very expensive objects purchased from Russia, we can state with certainty that they exceed in value any help received by the prodromite fathers both from the Romanian countries and from abroad, throughout the history of this monastic settlement. In these circumstances, we can say, without any possibility of error, that Saint Antipas of Calapodesti, helped by his spiritual sons and daughters from Russia and Romania, is the most important benefactor of the Prodromu Hermitage in Mount Athos, demonstrating this by the generosity with which he helped this place of prayer with time and without time, resisting with spiritual judgment, with great manliness and with a mind enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the difficulties of all kinds that threatened the existence, the good organization and the peaceful functioning of the Romanian Establishment in Mount Athos.

It should be mentioned that Saint Antipas of Calapodesti not only helped the Prodromu Hermitage with very substantial material resources, but especially strengthened it by the power of his personal example and his letters full of spiritual advice. He is the one who insisted a lot and succeeded in determining the beginning of the uninterrupted reading of the Psalter in the Prodromu Hermitage, except on Sundays and on the royal holidays, as it was customary in Russian monasteries and especially in the Valaam Monastery, where he lived since 1865.

In the correspondence of St. Antipas during his stay in Russia, a totally unprecedented thing is mentioned: the very great desire of Abbot Damaschin, that the Valaam Monastery in Russia and the Romanian Hermitage Prodromu in Mount Athos, to be spiritually twinned, one of the steps towards this great achievement, being the beginning of the unceasing reading of the Psalter in the Hermitage Prodromu, as it existed in the Valaam Monastery for a long time.

The steps for the fulfilment of his wish to be officially accepted in the community of the Valaam Monastery will be prolonged until his departure from this life, since the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decided to fulfil this request only after receiving Russian citizenship, and the complex and very heavy bureaucracy of granting Russian citizenship, as well as the suspicions of the Russian authorities in this case, did not allow the fulfilment of the wish of Pious Antipas during his lifetime.

He remained in the Valaam Monastery for over 16 years, from November 1865 to January 10, 1882, when he passed away on a Sunday, after receiving the Holy Communion and while the Annunciation akathist was being recited by his disciple Agapie Schimonahul. He was buried on 12 January.

Unlike the Russian authorities, the faithful in this country, however, had a very great devotion and trust in Father Antipas. We recall that on his departure to the Valaam Monastery, several of Father Antipa's disciples gave him a large sum of money, which he deposited in a Russian bank, and from the interest on that deposit, Father Antipas was able to receive a great deal of support. Also, after his departure from this life, the money remained to Valaam Monastery, his holiness having taken care to pay in advance (as early as 1865) even the services ordered for his departure from this world, thus avoiding any discussion concerning his maintenance, thus revealing to us once again his sensitivity, attention and care not to disturb those around him with his presence.

We have information on the biography of Schemamonk Elizabeth, mother of Reverend Antipas of Calapodesti, who in the world was called Catherine, from three sources, two unpublished and one edited. Father Antipa writes in his correspondence that his old mother Schemamonk Elizabeth, lived in the monastery of Adam, from where she moved from this life at the end of 1862 or at the beginning of 1863. Also in a letter of Father Antipas, we discovered with regard to Schemamonk Elizabeth, that she cared for and brought up as her own children, two persons named Dimitrie and John, whom Pious Antipas calls "sons" or "brothers" in his letters and homilies.

The miracle-working icon of Our Lady "Sweet Kiss", which Father Antipa found in his hermit's hut in the Holy Mountain, which accompanied him from that moment on in all his pilgrimages, working amazing miracles at the turning points of his life, was left to the Valaam Monastery after his death, being placed in the Church of Saints Serghie and Gherman, in a place less visible to the faithful. In 1940 it was taken by the monks of the Valaam Monastery and brought to the New Valaam Monastery in Finland, where it was kept for a while in the cell of a hieromonk priest named Foti, after which it was moved to a storeroom, losing track of it until it was wonderfully found on the 10th of May 2006. Nowadays it is placed in a place of great honour in the Cathedral of the Transfiguration of the New Valaam Monastery in Finland, and is celebrated in the Orthodox Church of Finland every year from 9th August 2020 on 11th January, the day after the feast of the Romanian Saint Antipas. Noting the great devotion of Father Hieromonk Antipas of Calapodesti to the miracle-working Icon of Our Lady "Sweet Kissing", found by His Holiness in the hermit's cell of the Holy Mountain Athos where he lived for two and a half years, as well as Our Lady's wonderful assistance to the pious father from Moldova throughout his life, we express our wish and hope that in the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as in the Orthodox Church of Finland, the feast of this miracle-working Icon of Our Lady will be introduced in the near future.

Having a wonderful, exemplary and virtuous life, a fact testified by all his disciples, but also by the people with whom he came into contact or corresponded, Father Antipas the Romanian will be canonized shortly after his departure from this world, by the community of Saint Panteleimon Monastery in Mount Athos. The very high interest in the book written by Hieromonk Pimen Gavrilov, which covers the amazing life of the Abbot Antipas, printed in 3 successive editions, shows how highly Father Antipas was esteemed by the Russian faithful. In 1992, on 19th/20th June, the Romanian Orthodox Church will officially canonize Father Antipas of Calapodesti. At the request of Father Egumen Pancratie of the Valaam Monastery, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Alexei the Second, approved on the 24th of July 2000, the extension of the honouring of the Venerable Antipas of Calapodesti to the Russian Patriarchate, thus bringing much joy to the community of the Valaam Monastery and to the Russian faithful in general.

The Abbot Antipas of Calapodesti remains the only Romanian monk canonized in Mount Athos, being honored as a saint, both by the Romanian faithful and by the Russian and Greek faithful, this being a clear testimony of the holiness of his life, felt and recognized by all those who knew him, regardless of the place, time or conditions in which he lived.