



**The Life of Our Righteous Father John (Iacob) the Romanian  
of the Monastery of St. George the Chozevite in the Desert of Jordan  
Whom the Holy Church Celebrates on August 5.**

Saint John, who is a miracle for all true Orthodox Christians of today, urges us, for the benefit of the many, to put in writing what we have seen and heard about his holy life.

Saint John (Iacob) was born in Romania in 1913 in the county of Dorohoi (today, the county of Botosani, in the northeastern part of Romania) and the village of Horodistea. His parents, Maxim and Ecaterina, were poor but very pious Orthodox Christians. In baptism, he was given the name Elias, but no one suspected then that the little Elias would one day live where the holy Prophet Elias once lived.

The mother of little Elias died when he was six months old, and three years later, his father also died in the First World War. The orphan was then taken by his aunt Maria. She desired very much to spend the rest of her life in a monastery, but she had to renounce this plan because of having to look after Elias. The small baby had to be fed tea; and, only from time to time, a neighbor gave him milk, so that the future monk was used to fasting from infancy.

Aunt Maria wept constantly, as much because she could not go to a monastery as because of pity for the child. When the boy grew a little older, he used to read to his aunt about the Passions of the Saviour, the Mother of the Lord, and the saints; and, all the time that he read, she cried.

One evening, Elias was reading as usual and, seeing her crying so profusely, the boy became very sad and asked her, "Mama, why do you cry so hard when I am reading, especially about the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ?" "O, my child," she said, "you do not know the sorrow of our house? I am not your mother. Your mother has died." And she told him everything in detail, including her sorrow that she could not go to a monastery. She told him to pray to God, so that she could obtain

salvation through him. After this confession, every time the boy read from the holy books, he cried, too, knowing that he was alone in the world. When he reached the age of ten, the woman, who was for him both mother and aunt, died; she entrusted him to an uncle, who was married a second time to a woman with many children.

Since Elias was a clever boy in school, unlike his uncle's children, he was constantly envied and unjustly treated. He felt as a stranger at the table with the other children. He ate very little and left the table almost hungry. So often he wept and fasted and, in consequence, acquired the virtues of an accomplished monk — humility, fasting, tears, prayer, poverty and, finally, homelessness.

He went to grade school in his native village. After graduating, the teacher urged Elias's uncle Alecu to send the boy for further study, saying, "Uncle Alecu, it is a pity for this clever boy not to continue his studies." Taking his advice, Uncle Alecu sent Elias to the *gymnasium* of Cotsmani in Bukovina; where he studied for three years, and another four years at the Cantemir College in Cernauti, where he received his baccalaureate in 1932, as first of his class.

At school, Elias had much to endure. As an orphan, he did not have to pay school fees. However, Uncle Alecu never sent him a penny for books, school uniforms and other expenses. He slept and ate at the college *gymnasium*. For seven years, Elias would borrow a professor's book, read it through the night and return it the next day. He did not participate in school excursions and festivities, for he did not have a school uniform. He had only the clothes which he was wearing. He did not have any pocket money to spend on food when he went to town with the other boys. Naturally, he was sad when the other classmates went on school trips and he remained alone at the school. Yet, he did not waste time; he studied, thought, prayed continually.

During summer vacation, Elias went to his uncle and helped him in the field with tilling, haying, and other farm chores. No one saw him just visiting with the village priest and the professors, or chatting with people.

After receiving his baccalaureate at Cernauti, Elias went to confession to an archimandrite, who advised him to continue his studies at the University for a Degree in theology. But, after a short time, because of misunderstandings between the archimandrite and other priests, the archimandrite had to leave, and he advised Elias not to remain either, but to go to the Neamts Monastery, and he even gave him a letter of recommendation to the abbot. Bishop Nicodem Munteanu (later Metropolitan of Moldavia at Iassi and Patriarch of Romania).



### ΔΡΑΓΟΜΙΡΝΑ ΜΟΝΑΣΤΗΡΙΟ

The young Elias thought long about what he should do. His colleagues went off to the university — but, after long prayers, one day he heard a voice saying, "Monastery." Feeling in his soul a special call from God for a pure life in monasticism, he went straight to the Neamts Monastery and was received by Bishop Nicodem. He remained here during 1933, fulfilling different obediences, among them assistant to the pharmacist, schemamonk Iob, then as librarian of the monastery. Sorting damp and mouldy books and exposed to draft from windows and the cracks in the floor, he caught rheumatism from which he was to suffer all the rest of his life.

At the monastery, he befriended the oldest and most learned fathers, with whom he discussed the salvation of the soul and, also, the calendar change which then constituted a major topic. He befriended a brother from Bukovina, which for many years was an Austrian-occupied territory where the Orthodox suffered violent persecution from the Latins. This brother, whom the abbot wanted to enter the monastic order, desired first that he should be truly Baptized by immersion, as the Holy Apostles directed, and not by sprinkling with water, as it was then the custom in Bukovina.

After his Baptism, Elias was tonsured a monk. He decided to go to Mount Athos where the true Orthodox Calendar was observed. He was not, however, able to obtain a passport since he was told he must first do military service. Believing that he might better be able to obtain a passport as a civilian, Father Elias shaved off his beard, but it was in vain. Ashamed, he did not return to Neamts Monastery.

After that, he visited Petrache Lupu at Maglavit (South Romania), a Romanian peasant who had a miraculous vision of God. Returning from Maglavit, he passed by the Turnu Monastery in the Olt Valley. Only a few days earlier, the church there had burned.

When the monastery fathers saw him (there were only six of them), they asked him to remain with them since there was no young man to help them. Brother Elias was overjoyed and remained there a year. The monastery had an orchard with fruit trees which Brother Elias could eat, and his health improved. The fathers of the monastery wanted to rebuild the burnt church and counseled Brother Elias to go through the villages

with a nun from another monastery for donations, but Brother Elias could not accept this obedience.

The time for his induction into the military service was approaching, and the fathers advised him to become a deacon in order to avoid the army. Brother Elias, however, preferred to go into the army. During his military service he did not shave his beard.

After his discharge, he became a monk and received the name of John. It was around Pascha of 1936 that he dedicated all his life to monasticism. Abbot Valerie (Moglan) of the Neamts Monastery was now head, and Father John became his assistant and taught Romanian to the monastery brothers.

It is a remarkable fact that as Brother Elias and as Monk John, he had the names of the two great prophets, St. Elias the Zealot and St. John the Baptist, and he became worthy of living in the places where these great prophets had lived, having them always as a mirror before him and as supporters in all his temptations and trials. Yet, there was a powerful fire burning in his heart, an unchanging desire to go to the Holy Land and to worship and tread in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. His desire was realized, and he received the blessing of Bishop Nicodem, now Metropolitan of Moldavia, who gave him also the first blessing when he entered the Neamts Monastery.

In the fall of 1936, he was on his way to the Holy Land, where they keep the Orthodox Calendar unchanged, as it was inherited from the Holy Fathers and the Eastern Church. In Jerusalem, he met with two other monks from the Neamts Monastery — Claudie and Damaschin, who, after visiting the Holy Land, returned to Romania, but our Saint John was accepted, after some difficulty, into the Lavra of St. Sabbas, situated between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea. There he was elevated to the schema. The difficulty of his entering the Lavra of St. Sabbas came from the Abbot Nicholas for two reasons — in 1962, Cuza-Voda, the prince of Romania, had expropriated the lands of the Romanian monasteries, and their monastery of the Holy Land also had suffered losses — and, secondly, there was already in St. Sabbas a monk who spoke Romanian well, and another Romanian monk who could have formed a "party" with Father John (which, of course, did not happen). Nevertheless, the monastery badly needed younger personnel, and the Abbot Nicholas went to the Patriarch of Jerusalem and personally asked for help.

The Patriarch said to him, "Here you have a young one, and you don't want to accept him." Only after that was Father John accepted. Father John also used to speak a little Greek, which he learned in school. He read much, searched the famous monastery library and made many translations from Greek into Romanian for his own reading. He became sexton, assistant manager, and he cared for the sick (which took a lot of his time). As sexton, he had to light the lamps of two churches and at four chapels. He came back to his cell at ten in the evening for some rest; and, as he was falling asleep, his neighbor, old and sick in body and mind, who already had slept enough, woke him up by singing Troparia and Kontakia. Father John had to get up at eleven to light the lamps and

ring the bells to awaken the monks. He took great care of the lamps which were always kept burning.

Once, Father John was making the four-hour journey returning from Jerusalem with an Arab and a donkey. Half way to the monastery, on a hill, he saw many Arabs who were lying in wait for the manager of the monastery, Hieromonk Paul, who was in Jerusalem. On his return, they wanted to kill him. They were angry because he had suspended them from bringing the food supplies to the monastery, replacing them with others.

When they saw Father John, a young Arab, thinking that he was the manager, raised a chunk of wood to hit him on the head — but, as he was about to hit him, his father shouted, "Stop! It is not he!" Thus, Father John was saved from certain death. Since Father John also cared for the sick at the monastery, the Arabs found out that he was skilled and began to visit him, seeking his help; and, soon, all called him "the doctor of the monastery." When the Arabs revolted against the British, they brought their wounded to the monastery, and there was no more peace there.

Saint John was very tired and weakened, since he had not had a moment's rest. He suffered from kidney disease, from improper diet, and the harsh climate — so he decided to retreat into the desert, both for rest and peace. He went to his confessor, Father Sabbas, who gave him his blessing to go. This was in 1939.

Father John went with a brother, newly-arrived from Romania (after three months, he would return to Romania on account of the rigors of the desert). On their departure from the monastery, an Arab accompanied them part of the way. The two went further through the desert to Fesca. Today, it is called Qumran. There, fragments of the Septuagint were found, where the Essenes had lived. A long road lay ahead through the wilderness. Night was approaching, the water in their jug was gone, and they were very tired. The temperature was 40 degrees centigrade, and they did not know how to find water.



### **The Qumran Caves Where Some of the Dead Sea Scrolls Were Discovered.**

Sitting down, not far away, they saw many hornets flying to and from a deep gorge between the rocks. They looked more closely and saw water glimmering below. But how to get to it? They had a rope, and one tied it around his waist, while the other held on to the rope and descended to the bottom where there was a little water left from the winter rains. They drank, strengthened themselves, and also took water in their jug. The next day they reached the desired cave, where they

spent only two weeks because the water was salty and, furthermore, Bedouins invaded the place with their flocks.

They moved on to the Cave of Calomena, which was one kilometer from the Monastery of St. Gerasimus, toward the Dead Sea and Jordan. They left during the night in order not to be seen from the Dead Sea, crossing the desert through valleys and hills. Suddenly, on a hill near them, they saw a beast as large as a donkey. It constantly stopped and looked at them. God protected them, and the beast did not attack. It was a hyena, very dangerous, but also cowardly. It attacks at midnight.

Calomena Cave was humid, and water was brought from the St. Gerasimus Monastery. Meanwhile, the brother from Romania had left, but another old monk of Romanian descent came — Ioanichie, who remained with Saint John until his death. They remained there for a year and a half under very difficult conditions. Father John translated the "Akathist of the Dormition of the Mother of God," and he finished it on August 5, the day on which Saint John also died. Here, Saint John contracted dysentery and suffered from this for eighteen months.

At that time, the Second World War was in full force. The Germans were approaching Alexandria — and, since, the Romanians were allied with the Germans, the British rounded up all Romanians into a camp with Germans and Italians. Father John, although ill, was kept in the camp for nine months, longer than all the others because of his knowledge of many languages. After liberation from the camp, he returned to the St. Sabbas Monastery. On the feast day of St. Theodosius (the founder of the coenobitic life), Saint John went to his monastery. Father Ioanichie also went to the feast of St. Theodosius and fervently prayed at the holy relics of the founder of the community and felt great relief from his suffering and was healed by the gift of St. Theodosius.

When he returned to St. Sabbas Monastery, Father John resumed his previous obediences, although he was now much weakened and anemic. The climate was dragging him down. He was constantly thinking about how to find some rest. Yet, the monastery did not have another young monk to take over his obediences.

Then, the superior of the Romanian Church in Jerusalem, Archimandrite Victorin, who knew Father John from the Neamts Monastery — without asking him — wrote, asking Patriarch Nicodem to intervene with the Patriarch of Jerusalem and consecrate Father John as a hieromonk for the Romanian Skete of Jordan, dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Twice before, Father John was urged to become a deacon — once at Tumu and the second time at the Neamts Monastery, but he did not accept. Now, in order to get some rest, he accepted. The Patriarch of Jerusalem approved the ordination; and, on May 13, 1947, the feast day of holy martyr Glicheria, he was ordained hierodeacon by Bishop Irinarch. On the 14th of September of the same year, he was consecrated hieromonk and appointed hegemonikos for the Romanian Church of Jordan. The ordination took place in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. After the ordination, the superior of the Romanian Church still delayed sending him to Jordan, but Father John told him that he would not stay in the city of Jerusalem and would return to the Monastery of St. Sabbas. Realizing the new situation, Archimandrite Victorin let him go to Jordan,

but without food or any kind of assistance. Saint John went to Jordan together with his disciple, schemamonk Ioanichie.



### **Saint John Hieroschemamonk**

It was December, 1948, when the war between Jews and Arabs was at its height. At the Skete of Jordan, the River Jordan and the brook which was flowing next to the Monastery of St. George the Chozevite had overflowed, and the whole garden was covered with dirt and sand, The house in which they were supposed to live consisted of two small rooms, full of mud. The church was covered with broken tiles, and it rained through to the flooring stones, where grass grew. They improvised a stove out of three casks with dirt on top, which served also as a bed! A Romanian brother from Jericho brought them bread from his own portion, and he also made them a small shack from wood found in the skete's garden.

After some time, the Patriarch Nicodem passed away and, according to tradition, all Orthodox patriarchs were to offer forty days of memorial services. When the Patriarch of Jerusalem also was to offer a panikhida, Archimandrite Victorin called on Father John to take part in it. He did not go; however, because Patriarch Nicodem had persecuted those who continued to follow the truly Orthodox calendar. Father John had received his ordination here in Jerusalem, where the true Orthodox calendar is celebrated; and, for the zeal of keeping pure and undefiled his vows, he refused to serve or to communicate with other priests who did not follow the true calendar. Also—out of the same burning zeal and love for Christ—all his life, he never gave the Holy Mysteries to unconfessed or unrepenting people. That attitude very much angered the archimandrite, and he did not want to go to Jordan anymore. He went to Lebanon because of the Israeli War; and, on his return, he sent to Jordan the father, who had been there before, to the Jordan Monastery.

Father John had great respect for the canons of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which is why he suffered very much. Once Archimandrite Victorin came to Jordan with a rich man from America, who wanted to see the skete and help it with some money. When they sat at the table, Archimandrite Victorin also invited the man's driver, who was a Moslem Arab, to the table. Father John left the table. The rich American got angry and did not give anything for the church. Father John thought that it was "better poor, but clean."

When the previous abbot came to Jordan; Father John and his disciple moved to St. Anna's Skete to calm themselves in the caves there. He had good relations with the abbot of the Monastery of St. George the

Chozevite, who had approved of him and provided food. He came to that monastery in November, 1952. He remained there one year, until a



## THE SACRED MONASTERY OF SAINT GEORGE OF CHOZEVITE

monk from Cyprus, named Paul, arrived, and both monks agreed to go to the caves of St. Anna's Skete. Monk Paul helped him install a door and windows in the small cell, where he spent the next seven years without going to the monastery or to Jericho, suffering the heat of the day. During summer, the heat reached 40 degrees Centigrade, or 104° Fahrenheit. He suffered greatly from rheumatism. Day and night, he was tormented by wet flannel shirts, which were full of sweat. His food was "posmag" and, rarely, bread, brought to him by the Romanian brother from Jericho. All his life, Father John lived in poverty in order to be enriched by God after passing from this life.

Saint John's cell was in the Chozeva Valley, further down from the St. George the Chozevite's Monastery, perched on a slip of the valley some fifty meters from the monastery, among the cliffs, like a swallow's nest. The cell of Monk Paul, Saint John's friend, was in the vicinity and had a small chapel where the holy liturgy was celebrated.



Saint John's Cell is at the top of this picture (right of center).  
He used a ladder over 40 feet in length to reach his cell.

Saint John suffered also from the Bedouin Arabs, who threw stones at him to chase him away, but he endured everything with joy and humility. Access to Father John's cave was difficult. Beyond a certain spot, the climb was almost vertical. There, he placed a five-meter ladder

which he pulled up so that he received only whom he wished. As long as he lived in the cave, he never received a woman.

Saint John busied himself in his cell with writing and translations from Greek into Romanian. He translated the most beneficial books in order to make them useful and beneficial to all Christians who would read them. He wrote both in verse and prose. Everything that he wrote was imbued with such a spirit of humility and meekness that all who read shed tears, however hard their hearts may have been. Part of his works was published under the title of "Spiritual Food." From his writings, one may learn that his life was full of want and that his mind and heart were always turned to the One Crucified on Golgotha for the salvation of the world. Thus he thought, day and night, until the end.

Two weeks before he gave up his soul into the hands of the Lord, at noon, in the clear sky to the right, he had seen a crown of palm leaves and written, "Blessed . . ." and other words; and, on the left, "Accursed . . ." and other words, as well as lightning and thunder. He told this vision to his disciple, schemamonk Ioanichie, who was constantly taking care of him. He also told him that if his temperature went down and he could talk, he would tell him more of what he had seen in the sky. He would not say that the writing "Blessed. . ." was for him, so that he would not appear to be praising himself. Knowing that his end was approaching, he took Holy Communion alone on Wednesday morning, having the Holy Gifts with him. However, his temperature rose constantly, and he was visibly weakening and did not say the other words from his vision. It was August, and the temperature outside was 40 degrees centigrade.

In the night, Saint John rose up a little, as if he wanted to say something, but he could not do so and fell back again in bed. After an hour, he raised his right hand and gave a blessing to all directions in the sign of the Cross, probably the benediction of the Holy Fathers whom he praised in his writings. After that, at dawn of Thursday, August 5, 1960, he was called to eternity. The only Romanian father who remained in the Holy Land of Jordan Valley had been Saint Hieroschemamonk John.

Enduring illness with great fortitude during his lifetime and a rigorous regimen of food and drink, Saint John had his mind constantly fixed on the sufferings of the One Crucified on Golgotha. He passed beyond his material body and united with God in prayer. He knew that he was going to the Lord fairly young, but he was not sad and prepared himself in the evening of August 4. His disciple, schemamonk Ioanichie, says that he laid a wet cloth on father's body to cool it because he was burning with fever and outside the temperature reached 40 degrees centigrade; yet, he never uttered a sound of pain, but only thanked him in a pleasant way.

Saint John tried all his life to respect the canons of the Orthodox Church from the very smallest things to the greatest. When he was celebrating the holy liturgy at the Monastery of St. George the Chozevite on the day of St. John the Baptist, he refused to give the Holy Communion to a priest's wife from the village Taibe because she had eaten meat one day before, i.e., on Epiphany, and did not keep the fast at least three days. Then the abbot, who may have been her confessor and

knew her situation, had donned the epitachelion and communicated her. From the moment he was consecrated to the end of his life, Saint John had not concelebrated with another priest. When he was celebrating the holy liturgy, he did not mention at Proskomide the names of certain priests who, he had heard, were Masons. After his death, Father John was buried in an old grave which was in his cave, and where many hermits were buried in the past. It was covered with boards and, on top, was placed a cement lid.

In 1968, his disciple, schemamonk Ioanichie, succeeded in publishing part of Father's writings in two volumes, under the title "Spiritual Food," a work with the most wonderful and humble reflections that take the human soul to heaven. They were written in verse and reflect the life of Father John, which was one of profound spiritual feeling.

After a long time, Father John showed Father Ioanichie, in a dream, that his grave must be opened. The abbot and the fathers decided to leave it as it was forever. A year passed, and the abbot finally agreed to open it, but to leave the remains in the same place. This was in 1980, twenty years after he was buried. When they opened the grave, there was a miracle. The body of Father John was found to be incorrupt, and complete, with a pleasant fragrance. His vestments were intact, the epitrachilion and schema also were not decomposed, and the skin was dried up on the bones, so that he appeared to be sleeping. His face was clean with his black beard complete. His face was pleasant, as if he were about to speak.



† THE INCORRUPT RELICS OF  
SAINT JOHN THE ROMANIAN

The abbot, having seen this miracle, decided to bring him to the monastery in a temporary coffin of poor quality, which could not be displayed to worshippers. As yet there was no money to buy another. During the time the coffin was at the monastery, a woman from Australia, the mother of the priest Haralampus, had a dream. An unknown person appeared to her in monk's garb, and told her to collect money and make a reliquary for a saint with an incorrupt body. However, she was not told who he was and in what place. She told her vision to others, but nobody knew what it meant. Not long thereafter, a person came to worship and, seeing Father John, said that now he knows for whom this reliquary was supposed to be. It was to be for the new Saint John of the Chozeva Monastery. With the money collected in Australia, a beautiful reliquary was made and placed in the small church of St. Stephen, near the grave of St. George the Chozevite. Worshippers now come here to bow with much devotion and faith, kissing the coffin and being very impressed with the miracle.

After the relics were brought to the church, the abbot departed to Greece to get some donations to repair the road that leads to the monastery, since it was in very dangerous condition. After his departure, some priests from the Patriarchate decided that it is not fitting for the relics of a new saint and, at that, from a different nation, to remain there. They consulted with the Patriarch and decided that a commission should come to the place and take the relics to another spot. The local bishop, however, did not want to move it in the absence of the abbot and waited for his return from Greece. Meanwhile, the Patriarch died, the bishop had to undergo a kidney operation, another suffered a heart attack. All the members of the commission were being punished.

After these occurrences, the abbot was afraid of punishment from the Saint, and nobody came anymore. The holy relics rest in peace in the monastery of St. George the Chozevite, without being disturbed.



† THE INCORRUPT RELICS OF SAINT JOHN THE ROMANIAN  
WITH FATHER IOANICHIE, SAINT JOHN'S FELLOW ASCETIC

During Father John's lifetime, a priest by the name of Mitrophan came to the cave. He was a painter and, seeing and appreciating the solitude of the site of St. Anna's Skete, he decided to leave Mount Athos and to come and live there, telling Father John that he would go home to arrange something and then return. Father John said to him, "If you come, come now as you are—but, if you want to put your home in order, do not come at all." It was as he had said. Going back to Mount Athos, Father Mitrophan began to work with his painting. Two years passed. A disciple of his who had an inclination for stealing, had taken some valuable brushes from him. Father Mitrophan had scolded him. The disciple got angry, and, one evening, he killed him. The words of Father John, that if he did not remain now, he would not come at all, proved true.

A pious woman from Greece, who had come to the Chozeva Monastery, having seen the holy relics of Father John, was impressed and saddened; and then she was sorry that she had come, saying, "It would have been better if I had not seen them." She had come with a group of visitors. Returning to the inn where she stayed, she fell asleep, and the blessed John appeared to her, saying: "Ileana, why were you frightened of me? I am John. What evil did I do to you?" After this dream, Ileana wanted to go back to the monastery and ask forgiveness from the blessed one, but she had to return home with the group. After a year, she returned especially to ask forgiveness and to get a picture of the saintly John to put it in a place of honor.

The locations where Blessed John the Romanian had lived as a hermit, in the desert, on the mount, and in the Chozeva Valley, have

played an important role since antiquity. The Prophet Joshua, the successor to the Prophet Moses, after the fall of Jericho, took the road winding along the valley of the Wadi Kelt, or — as it is called today — the Chozeva Valley, and arrived at the spot where Jerusalem is today.

Ss. Joachim and Anna had a flock to tend in the Chozeva Valley. Being very sad that they had no children, they left home. St. Joachim came to the Chozeva Valley, and he climbed to the cave in which St. Elias once lived, and there he prayed for forty days to ask the Lord to have pity on him and grant him a child. St. Anna remained home in Jerusalem, in the neighborhood of the Lion's Gates (or of St. Stephen) where there was also a cave, and prayed much to the Lord. After those forty days of fasting and prayer, both were told by the Archangel Gabriel that they would have a child, which was St. Mary, the Mother of our Lord and God Jesus Christ. After her parents brought the infant Mary, when she was three years old, to the Temple (where now stands the mosque of Omar), St. Anna returned to the Chozeva Valley to a cave situated about one kilometer from the cave of St. Elias in the direction of Jericho. She retired there with a group of pious women — and, from that time, this cave has been called in Arabic "Der Benat," the Monastery of Women, or St. Anna's Skete.

Tradition says that the right foot of St. Anna was preserved at the skete until the fifteenth century, when the monks fled from there to Mount Athos because of fear of persecution, and they took with them St. Anna's foot, establishing a St. Anna's Skete on Mount Athos on the southern slope,

The holy Prophet Elias, who was persecuted by Jezebel, found shelter here and stayed for three and a half years, being fed by a raven; who brought him meat in the morning and bread in the evening. This cave remained intact from the time of St. Elias until that of St. Joachim, and even until today, despite the destruction of the monastery in 614 by the Persian emperor.

Saint John took great care for his own soul and for that of others, as can be seen from his book, *Readings and Meditations on the Divine Scripture*. He says:

"Many times I have written words for the benefit of my own soul, and I believed that those words would also benefit other persons who do not have time to open books and, perhaps, do not even have the books at hand. I know that today all are in a hurry, and the thick books of the Holy Fathers remain forgotten, and rarely does anyone read them. Such is the spirit or the times, such are the occupations of men, such is the invisible war, that the spiritual work and especially the reading of the holy books have little place in the life of laymen, but even monks have begun to adjust their lives to the new fashion. The care for earthly things keeps them shackled, and they do not find time for reading and meditating upon the Divine Scripture.

"They hardly have time to listen to Vespers and Matins in the Church; and, even then, their minds are burdened with care for the body and with the vexations of life. It is difficult to find time in this century for the sweetening of the soul. But this harms us more than anything else. Having no respite to look toward those heavenly things, we forget

the meaning of life, we weaken spiritually, and many times we begin to despair when we see that our life has been spent in a useless manner; in spite of the promise we made to God.

“This is how the Saint Nicodemus the Haghiorite advises us in this respect: "All literate Christians have the obligation to read the Holy Scripture because; as St. John Chrysostom says, 'Without reading the Holy Scripture, one cannot be saved.' In his sermon about St. Lazarus, St. John Chrysostom says: "It is impossible for someone to be saved without often sweetening himself with spiritual reading." Then, St. John of the Ladder instructs us that reading enlightens and collects the mind, and diminishes erroneous habits and vices. And St. Ephraim the Syrian says: "Just as the sound of the trumpet in time of war arouses the zeal of the brave fighters against the enemy, so the Holy Scripture encourages you to fight against the passions.”

“Thus, my brother, be full of strength and strive always to apply yourself to reading the Holy Scripture in order to learn well how to avoid the snares of the enemy and so achieve eternal life. But there are some who read and still do not strive to understand the written things.

“The holy Apostle Paul writes to his disciple Timothy: 'Pay attention to what you read.' And of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory the Theologian, the historian Rufinus says that they remained in the desert for thirteen years, meditating upon the Scriptures. Now, let us think of ourselves who live in this century and ask: 'If there was an absolute need for reading the Scripture in olden times, how much more so today when the evils in the world have increased, and the good pastors have decreased, when you hardly find an example of clean life or spiritual advice; how much more we should strive to read the Holy Scripture, since only in them shall we find consolation and enlightenment.”

Father John has selected the following from Homily 36 of St. Isaac the Syrian, which will greatly benefit all:

“This is the will of the Holy Spirit, to be His beloved in continual reality. The Spirit of God does not dwell in those who live in rest because the Most-Good God wished that His beloved servants should not have rest in this life, but rather live in suffering, difficulties, worries, poverty, and nakedness, in solitude and debts, in sicknesses and defamations, in battles and crushing of heart, with sickly body and image detested by others, in a state which does not compare to other people's, and a lonely, peaceful, and quiet dwelling, completely invisible to men and free of anything that produces earthly consolation. Therefore, these people weep, and the world laughs; these sigh, but the world enjoys; these fast but the world amuses itself. During the day, they wear themselves out; and, during the night, they prepare for deprivation. There are some who offer themselves to weariness voluntarily and also submit to afflictions; some are persecuted, while others were killed, and some hid in cellars. In them was fulfilled the word that says, 'You will have afflictions, but in Me you will have joy,' because the Lord knows that the ones who live in rest cannot remain in His love. Therefore, Christ the Saviour has prevented these from rest and satisfaction. He Whose love is more powerful than death of the body wanted to show also in us the power of His love. Amen.”

Among the writings of Blessed John is to be found this very important thought concerning the salvation of souls:

“Not to make ourselves judges of the servants of God, according to the words of the Gospel — 'Judge not, that ye be not judged' (Matt. 7:1). In the *History of the Church* by the most-wise hierarch Meletius, it says that when the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea ended, the Emperor St. Constantine the Great rejoiced greatly at the victory of the Church against the slanderers. The emperor was present at the Council and honored the Holy Fathers with rich gifts, according to their merit, piously kissing the plucked eyes of the devoted Paphnutius with zeal, as well as the hands maimed by the tyrants. He also devoutly kissed all the other confessors, in order to sanctify himself through their wounds, which they suffered in the time of the persecution.

“Some of the Council's fathers handed the emperor some complaints against a number of bishops of bad conduct. But the great Emperor Constantine did not even read their papers, nor was he interested in the identity of the accused clerics; but burned the papers in the presence of all, saying: "If with my own eyes I were to see a cleric sin, I would cover him with my mantle," that is, with the mantle of the emperor.

“The emperor-saint tried to give an example to all in not denouncing the hidden sins and wickedness of the clerics. Those who divulge the sins or shortcomings of clerics become detainers of the law, since all clerics are servants of the Law of God.

“There are some Christians who do not judge or divulge the wickedness of clerics, but instead avoid taking a blessing from those whom they know have human shortcomings or passions. If, however, some happen to pay for the celebration of a liturgy or take Holy Communion from such clerics and afterwards find out that they smoke tobacco or drink or are given to other passions, then these Christians repent because they have asked sanctification of such sinners. Some, like these, although they do not judge with words, become judges by their behavior. Brothers, if the priest or bishop is Orthodox, then let us be assured that the gift of the Holy Spirit works through him in every Church mystery, regardless of how sinful he is. Only when he is under interdiction by the Council or by the bishop of the diocese, or when he preaches a wrong faith, then indeed the gift of the Holy Spirit does not work through him. Then you should avoid such clerics.

“In the *Patericon* there is an example of not judging the servants of God. Abba Mark the Egyptian spent thirty years in his cell. He used to ask the priest of the Skete to come to his cell on certain days and celebrate the holy liturgy. The devil, seeing the increased patience of the abbot, devised a way to tempt him by judging. Thus, the sly devil urged a possessed brother to go to the abbot to ask a blessing. Arriving at the hermit's, without saying another word, he yelled, 'Your priest stinks of sin — do not let him come to you!' The abbot, inspired by God, answered, 'Son, all people leave their filth outside, but you have brought it inside to me!' It is written, 'Judge not that ye be not judged' (Matt. 7:1). Even though the priest is sinful, the Lord will save him, since it is written, 'And pray for one another that ye may be healed' (James 5:16).

After pronouncing these words, the saintly man prayed and chased the demon out of the possessed and healed him. And the good God, seeing the goodness of the old man, revealed to him a miraculous sign. And here is his own testimony: "When the priest wanted to begin the holy liturgy, I saw an angel of God descending from heaven and placing his hand on the priest's head. In that moment, the priest became like a fire-column. But I, being amazed at this sight, heard a voice saying to me, 'Why are you astonished at this?' For, if the earthly emperor does not let his noblemen stand soiled before him, but all are dressed in great glory, how much more does the Divine Power cleanse the servants of the holy Mysteries, when they stand before the heavenly glory? Hearing such angelic words, the poor hero Mark strove much more to honor the holy persons. Behold, what wonderful gifts do those who do not judge clerics receive!"

The life of Father John is a living example of a steady climb to perfection and mystical union of the soul with God. By rigorous asceticism, he freed himself of passions and strengthened his nature with the most distinguished virtues, which carried him to the highest life possible for the human powers of knowledge and love. He made a titanic effort to extract from the writings of the Holy Fathers the most essential teachings, beneficial to all those who will read them; and, in order to be most attractive, he wrote them in verse — some of which are already published in the book *Spiritual Food*.

All the instructions in the writings of Father John are meant for the salvation of those who will read them and apply them in their lives, but especially for the believing Romanians everywhere. In the poem "Care of the Soul" is evident the role of repentance, confession, and the thought of death. In the poem "The Voice of the Good Pastor" are described the Incarnation and the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who calls all of us to Him, so that finally He will give us rest. In the poem "The Longing of the Grandmother" we see Blessed John's own life when he was little and was being raised by his Aunt Maria, to whom he used to read concerning the Passion of the Lord.

Father John stood at the foot of the Cross since the time he was a little boy; with his mind fixed upon the One Crucified, Who always helped him until he reached the peak of divine transformation of his nature, purified and illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

The works of Saint John and his life present a good model for faithful Christians to follow, according to the commandments of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and for climbing the ladder of spiritual values to a passion-free state of love.

The life of the holy Father John Iacob the Romanian was written by his disciple, schemamonk Ioanichie of the Monastery of St George the Chozevite, hermit in St. Anna's Skete.

There is at least one more miracle of Saint John not mentioned, here. Related by Archimandrite Panteleimon of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston; it describes how Father John, being troubled by thieves, prayed; and the mountains slope fell down, covering the nearby old graves of the hermits.\*

Translated from the Romanian by Borislav P. Svrakov. We are deeply grateful to Fr. Dimitrie I. Tatulescu and John Shaw for their assistance in editing and correcting the text.

\* See *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 30, No. 6, November-December, 1980, pp. 14-20.

## **THE CENSORED LIFE OF ST. JOHN THE ROMANIAN**

*{Orthodox Christian Witness, October 2001, Vol. XXXVI, No. 2/1509}*

It's strange. Some people recognize the holiness of the men and women of God, but they don't keep their teachings or emulate their lives. "Ye call me Lord, Lord, but ye do not the things which I say" (Luke 6:46). And in addition, they sometimes muzzle the teachings of the Saints in a very provocative way

The Life of our holy father John the Romanian was published recently in Greek by the Sacred Monastery of Gregoriou of the Holy Mountain, Athos. Since the good fathers of the monastery are educated and erudite, they did a very commendable job to a certain degree.

Our holy father, Saint John, was one of the rare spiritual personalities of the twentieth century. His holy relics were fragrant when they were uncovered from the earth, and to this very day they remain incorrupt.

The new calendar Patriarchate of Romania has recognized him as a saint and included his name in the canonical list of saints of the Romanian Church. This, however, is quite ironic. Saint John was a zealot. Neither in Romania, nor later in Jerusalem, did he ever give the Holy Mysteries to new calendarists. He told everyone that the new calendar churches had no grace, and he considered their sacraments invalid—and this at a time when the heresy of Ecumenism had not yet progressed as it has today.

Consequently, when the Patriarchate of Romania declared him a saint, it signed its own condemnation. The Athonite fathers of the Monastery of Gregoriou also signed their own condemnation since, although they recognize his sanctity, they do not follow his teachings or example. They include themselves among all those whom Saint John—for the entire span of his brief life—declared to be schismatics and out of the Church.

Let us, however, return to the purpose of this article. The Athonite fathers translated most of the biographical details of Saint John's life. Nonetheless, there are significant omissions in this translation, and these are worthy of note, especially since they deal with matters of the calendar issue and the Orthodox Christian Faith. Saint John considered these matters to be extremely important and he was absolutely consistent in applying his beliefs in these issues. This, apparently, presented some difficulties to the Athonite translators of his life—especially since many Athonites are "old calendarists" only out of necessity. So, strangely (or perhaps, not so strangely), our Athonites decided to conceal some facts under the bushel. Obviously, these facts

bothered the Athonite commemorators of the ecumenistic, new calendar Ecumenical Patriarch.

For the sake of our readers, we would like to supply these omitted portions. These details, which are part and parcel of the original Life of Saint John, were recorded by his disciple, Father Joannicius, and it was this Life precisely which the Athonite translators had before them when they prepared the Greek edition. This Life, by the way, has been translated in its complete form into English.

So now the pieces, which are missing from the puzzle (in the Greek translation), are put into their place and we get the complete picture. Note the content of the missing pieces. They may be the most important part of Saint John's life and message to us:

The following was omitted from page 15 of the Greek edition:

*At the monastery, [Father John] befriended the oldest and most learned fathers, with whom he discussed the salvation of the soul and, also, the calendar change, which then constituted a major topic. He befriended a brother from Bukovina, which for many years was an Austrian-occupied territory where the Orthodox suffered violent persecution from the Latins. This brother, whom the abbot wanted to allow into the monastic order, desired first that he should be truly baptized by immersion, as the Holy Apostles directed, and not by sprinkling with water, as was then the custom in Bukovina. After his baptism, Elias [Father John's secular name] was tonsured a monk. He decided to go to Mount Athos where the true Orthodox Calendar was observed.*

The following was omitted from page 16 of the Greek edition:

*In the fall of 1936, he was on his way to the Holy Land, where they keep the Orthodox Calendar unchanged, as it was inherited from the Holy Fathers and the Eastern Church.*

The following was omitted from page 20 of the Greek edition:

*After some time, Patriarch Nikodim [of Romania] passed away and, according to tradition, all Orthodox patriarchs were to offer forty days of memorial services. When the Patriarch of Jerusalem also was to offer a panikhida, Archimandrite Victorin called on Father John to take part in it. He did not go, however, because Patriarch Nikodim had persecuted those who continued to follow the truly Orthodox calendar. Father John had received his ordination here in Jerusalem, where the true Orthodox calendar is celebrated—and out of zeal to keep his vows pure, he refused to serve or to communicate with other priests who did not follow the true calendar.*

The following was omitted from page 23 of the Greek edition:

*From the moment he was ordained to the end of his life, Father John had not concelebrated with another priest when he was celebrating the holy liturgy; he did not mention at Proskomide the names of certain priests who, he had heard, were Masons.*

As far as we can ascertain, these are the parts that were left out—censored? by the Athonite translators.

The truth sometimes slips by the censors and reveals itself. And those who wish to call themselves Orthodox are left with empty titles! They claim that they "follow steadfastly in the steps of the Holy Fathers," but in actuality, they cut and paste the teachings of the Saints according to their own heterodox measure.

Note: In the *Life* which precedes the note above there are no omissions. The caution about censorship is still relevant. Be on your guard as you read.

### MIRACLES OF SAINT JOHN THE ROMANIAN

The following account is taken from a talk given by Archimandrite Panteleimon, Abbot of Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Fr. Panteleimon visited Fr. John not long before the latter's blessed repose, having been taken to him by Fr. Ioannikios, the disciple of Fr. John who used to bring him bread from the Monastery of St. George. When they arrived at the caves, Fr. John was there to meet them, for in his clairvoyance he had known of their coming without having been informed of it. In addition to the fact of Fr. John's clairvoyance, we here describe one of the miracles which have been wrought by the power of his prayer.

The area in which Fr. John lived was very mountainous. However, near the cave which served as his dwelling there was a place which was composed principally of gravel banks. As he was about to depart, Fr. Panteleimon asked Fr. John whether there had been any earthquakes in those parts which could have caused a mountain to crumble. He was told the following, and it was later confirmed by many in Jerusalem. One night, while at prayer, Fr. John heard much noise outside his cave. Many times before, the demons had attempted to frighten him by hurling boulders down the cliffs. Or it might also have been caused by wild animals. So Fr. John continued to say his prayers and was not at all distracted by the noises. In the morning, however, he saw that the noise had not been caused by demons, wild animals, or the many birds that have for centuries made their abode in some of the caves.

Equipped with small lanterns, men had worked during the night, putting up rope ladders and climbing into the caves. They had begun to dig down under the bird dung which had accumulated in the caves to find whatever they could. They especially wished to uncover the mosaic floors, crosses on the walls, and tools that the fathers of old might have used. Such objects, if found, could then be sold for a great deal in antique shops.

In one cave they had come upon the remains of the fathers. Indeed, many skulls and bones of the holy fathers are to be found in this group of caves. The men were upset that their efforts had yielded only bones, for one could not get any money for mere bones; so they cast the skulls and bones down into the gully.

On beholding the evidence of this sacrilege the following morning, Fr. John was terribly grieved, for the bones of the fathers had rested there undisturbed for as many as twelve or fourteen centuries. After

reflecting on the psalms: "O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance, they have defiled Thy holy temple", and further: "They have made the dead bodies of Thy servants to be food for the birds of heaven, the flesh of Thy saints for the beasts of the earth" [Ps. 79], he then lifted up his hands and wept before the Lord. "O Lord," he said, "Cover us and our transgressions, for we are sinful, and forgive us for our indolence and our audacity which has not left even the fathers buried. Cover again the bones of Thy holy ones so that they receive no further desecration." Then, the mountain moved and covered all the bones of those holy fathers. And now they will not again be disturbed until the general resurrection, for they now lie covered by a grave of gravel.



Saint John spent one year in the monastery itself, serving as one of its priests; but afterwards he received the blessing of the abbot, Archimandrite Amphilochios, to settle in one of the caves of the Skete of St. Anne, which is located five kilometers down the stony gorge.

In the Skete of St. Anne at that time there was a struggling iconographer, the schema monk Paul, a great expert in, and lover of, Byzantine chant. This circumstance afforded favorable conditions for comparatively frequent services in the ancient cave church of the skete, with Fr. Ioannikios assisting.

From the moment of his arrival at the skete, Saint. John remained continually in that lofty aerie among the cliffs until his repose five years later. Continuing in the strictest fasting, he wrote articles on spiritual subjects in the Romanian language, in both prose and verse. Despite the difficulty of the path, many, even hierarchs, began to come to him for counsel and to be confessed by him. His extreme simplicity and modesty, together with his child-like sincerity and guilelessness inclined each visitor towards him from the first. Finally, in 1960, the time of his blessed repose arrived, possibly caused by a disease of the kidneys with which he had been afflicted from his youth. After his funeral his body was interred in the cave's burial vault and was covered, as is the custom, with earth.

After the repose of Fr. John, Fr. Ioannikios continued to reside in the skete, and to put into order the manuscripts of his young elder (they were practically of the same age) and to dream of someday seeing them in print. With this end in mind he saved up a little store of donations, but the matter dragged on, for in Jerusalem no one thought that articles in the little-known Romanian language were of any real value. Only

after the "Six-day War" in 1967, with the help of Archpriest Sergei Chertkov, who has a fine command of Romanian and was the acting head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, was Fr. Ioannikios finally able to publish two little books of the works of his abba. However, because of the language in which they were written, these books did not acquire popularity.

At about the same time, the monk Paul's right arm became paralyzed, depriving him of all possibility of painting any more icons, and he soon departed to his homeland, the island of Cyprus. There, using his left hand and a typewriter, he began to publish that island's sole Old Calendarist magazine (the Church of Cyprus is officially on the New Calendar). As a result, Fr. Ioannikios was left all alone, and Archimandrite Amphilochios summoned him to return to the monastery.

Many years later, in 1978, Fr. Ioannikios suddenly began to have a recurrent dream: Saint John would appear to him and ask: "And where now?" Describing this dream to his sister, the schema nun Magdalena, who lived at the Romanian metochion in Jericho and had known Fr. John personally from the days when he lived by the Jordan, he was amazed to hear that she had had the very same dream herself.

Furthermore, Fr. Ioannikios related this strange occurrence to Archimandrite Amphilochios, but the latter was overloaded with concerns relative to the extensive restoration being conducted at his monastery and was in no position to spare his attention for the visions seen by Fr. Ioannikios.

At that time the Greek Archimandrite Panteleimon arrived from Boston with a group of pilgrims, and on hearing of Fr. Ioannikios' dream was the first to maintain the necessity of opening the crypt. However, a full year passed, and Fr. Panteleimon, who had arrived again from America, received the abbot's blessing. He went to the Skete of St. Anne with Fr. Ioannikios and, having opened the crypt, found the relics within incorrupt. Having served a panikhida with compunction, they left the relics in place and informed Fr. Amphilochios of what had occurred. The latter, for his part, made a report to Patriarch Benedictus.



**INCORRUPT RELICS OF  
SAINT JOHN THE ROMANIAN**

Finally, almost a year later, Fr. Amphilochios received an order from the patriarch to transfer the incorrupt relics to the monastery itself. This was accomplished on July 26/August 8 of the current year (1980), on the feast of the venerable-martyr Paraskeve, and the relics were placed in a tomb in the little Church of St. George the Khozevite (where the relics of the saint himself rest). Soon afterwards, Fr. Amphilochios had a glass reliquary fashioned, similar to that which contains the relics of St. Savva the Sanctified, thus affording visitors the possibility of seeing with their own eyes this remarkable phenomenon. Among the first of such visitors were His Grace, Bishop Laurus of Syracuse and his pilgrims from America and Australia.

Saint John's visage is emaciated. The skin on his face is of a light color, his little beard is quite dark. The nails on his fingers and toes remain intact. In general, all of his garments are in a state of perfect preservation, including his shoes. Many now expect miracles to begin to take place. However, as always, there are skeptics who hasten to attribute the incorruption to the dry climate and favorable geological conditions.

Time will tell who is right.



**SAINT JOHN'S PHOTOGRAPH  
ON A  
ROMANIAN FLAG**

**SAINT† JOHN PRAY FOR US.**

## AUGUST 5

Our Righteous Father John the Romanian  
of Hozeva Monastery

### VESPERS

*Of the Righteous one. Fourth Tone. Unto them that fear Thee*

**D**WELLING in a cleft bereft of comfort, thou leapest clean across \* that great gulf which was fixed between \* the rich man and Lazarus, \* John, our righteous Father; \* therefore have the Angels upon their shoulders borne thee hence \* unto the bosom of Abraham with joy; \* but we who are tormented in the flame of passions cry unto thee: \* Show us mercy and cool our souls \* with the water of grace divine.

**B**URNING with the fervor of the Thesbite and Zacharias' son, \* thou didst dwell in the wilderness, escaping the spiritual \* Herods and the Ahabs \* who defiled the purity of the Israel of God, \* and thou didst keep thy confession free of spot, \* that in that gentle breeze thou mightiest hear the Lord God of Sabaoth \* speaking in thee the words of life, \* which transfigured thee utterly.

**C**RUCIFIED with Christ and dead to all the pleasures of earthly life, \* thou, O John, daily wentest up \* not to that Jerusalem \* which all men may enter, \* but to that which only they who are purified in mind \* can enter into with many hard travails; \* and now, thy suff'rings ended, Christ hath raised thee up as He promised thee \* to His Father and unto thine, \* to the Kingdom that hath no end.

**A**LL the choirs of righteous Fathers leap for joy, taking unto them \* him that worthily followed them \* through sorrows and penury \* and bitter temptations, \* labouring to form in himself the image lost of old, \* which Christ restoreth in them that bear His Cross. \* And as we keep his memory, our kind protector and Father John \* intercedeth with God for us, \* to deliver us through the Cross.

#### DISMISSAL HYMN

*Of Saint John the Romanian. Third Tone*

**F**LEEING the clamour of the godless authority and embracing the peaceful solitude of the desert, thou didst strive with fasting and ceaseless tears to cleanse thy heart. By thy prayers the earth shook and the mountain moved to cover the holy bones of the cave-dwelling Fathers. Having acquired unceasing prayer in a pure heart, thou didst intelligently speak of the many woes of the last times. By the gift of thine incorrupt relics, our Saviour hath taught us to flee unto thee. Wherefore, we cry out: Purify our hearts and keep us faithful unto death, O our God-bearing Father John the Romanian.

KONTAKION

*Third Tone. On this day the Virgin*

CLOTHED with ceaseless prayer. O John, \* as with Elias's mantle, \*  
thou didst sojourn in a cave, \* bringing down fire from the Heavens;  
\* striving in thy cleft, like Moses, \* thou didst behold God, \* yet thou  
sawest not His back parts in darkness only, \* but in light and awesome  
vision, \* thou wast transfigured \* seeing the face of the Lord.



† THE † RANSFIGURATION OF OUR CHRIST  
ON MOUNT † ABOR.