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Section: REVIEWS

MANIAVA SKETE AS A CITADEL OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND SELFLESSNESS

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Review of the monograph "The Great Skete in the Carpathians. In three volumes." / Ed. by M. V. Kuhutiak. Volume 1. Ivano-Frankivsk: Manuscript-Lviv, 2013. 728 p. Volume 2. Ivano-Frankivsk: Manuscript-Lviv, 2015. 514 p. Volume 3. Ivano-Frankivsk, 2017. 576 p.

Ancient Maniava Skete emerged in the Carpathian Mountains as a center for Christian values, an upholder of the lofty ideals of spiritual and religious selflessness. This is a pilgrimage destination for thousands of our predecessors and contemporaries, a stronghold of enlightenment. Prepared by professors of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University and edited by Dr. Mykola Kuhutiak, the fundamental three-volume publication *The Great Skete in the Carpathians* explores the origins and development of the monastery as a national and cultural center for spirituality and describes its legacy of manuscripts. M. V. Kuhutiak, the project organizer and executor, compiler of the manuscripts and author of the third volume, has done an outstanding job of collecting documents, materials and other sources from the archives and libraries of Ukraine, Romania, Poland, and Austria and prepared the book for publication. This meticulous study was a joint endeavor of researchers (Volodymyr Havadzyn, Iryna Solonets, and Volodymyr Staryk), translators, editors, artists – a big creative team of enthusiasts.

Worthy of special mention are the historiographic materials such as the sacred scriptures used for research purposes for the first time; in fact, whenever religious documents are published, this in itself is a matter of great interest. The researchers' commentaries provide an extensive and insightful analysis. It should not go unmentioned that the authors had to overcome considerable difficulties associated with raw data: some of the texts were written in old church Slavonic, Latin, or old Ukrainian, which necessitated the involvement of other specialists. The authors of the publication acquired skills of archival research, perusal of ancient texts and their preparation for publication – all with remarkable patience and perseverance.

Particularly conspicuous is the architectonics of the book, its structure and composition. The first volume publishes the oldest manuscripts created in the Great Skete, the *Skete Patericon* and the *Synodyk*, supplemented with a translation into modern Ukrainian and commentaries. It is no accident that these documents are placed at the beginning of the book because the *Skete Patericon* contains biographical details about Ivan (Job) Kniahynytskyi, the founder of the monastery, and the *Spiritual Testament* written by Theodosius, the first hegumen of the monastery, as well as other manuscripts describing the

canonical and ecclesiastical traditions of monastic selflessness. The 17-18th-century *Synodyk* included in the first volume is a discovery of a hitherto unknown manuscript.

The second volume contains extensive data, including documentary evidence, about the Skete's mission of spiritual enlightenment. The examples obtained from the archival documents illustrate the struggle of Galician monks to prevent the monastery from closure as well as their subsequent efforts to restore it during the time of Ukraine's independence. The third volume provides a theoretical analysis of the historic mission of the Great Skete with an insight into its religious and spiritual significance in reviving Ukrainian national culture; this study was written by Dr. Mykola Kuhutiak. The volume also includes the documents discovered after the publication of the first two volumes. Structured in this way, the book enables the interested reader to gradually move from exploring ancient manuscripts, delving into the lives of the monks and their selfless service to the generalized perception of their austerity as a commitment to the lofty ideals of the Christian faith.

The authors' main objective was to explore the mystical ideology underlying monastic self-sacrifice, to analyze the philosophical ontological sense hidden behind the high-flown language of the ancient manuscripts in question. The researchers conducted a careful examination of an enormous corpus of handwritten and printed materials on the history of the Great Skete and studied the papers of Ukrainian and foreign researchers.

Thus particularly noteworthy is Yu. Tselevych's fundamental paper *История Скиту Манявского: вразь зь Зборникомь грамоть, листовь и деяких судових документовь, дотычных того монастыря* (*A History of Maniava Skete: together with a Collection of Enfeoffments, Letters, and Certain Court Documents Pertaining to That Monastery*) published in Lviv in 1887. Analyzing the achievements of this scholar, M. Kuhutiak notes: "The greatest contribution to collecting source materials about the Great Skete was made <...> by the famous Galician researcher Yulian Tselevych" [Vol. 3, p. 34].

The monograph depicts the outstanding figures of the Ukrainian Church – the founder of the Great Skete, Job Knyhynytskyi; the builder of the monastery, Theodosius of Maniava; as well as the other priests doing their selfless bit to promote religious life in their homeland. In this respect, the central figure is Venerable Job, whom M. Kuhutiak holds in high esteem not only as a religious activist but also as a remarkable participant in the historic events of his time, an upholder of Ukrainian religious and cultural revival: "The personality of I. Kniahynytskyi per se is without exaggeration historic, famous not only for his devoutness but also for his remarkable personal role in the historic future of the Ukrainian nation, the revival of the Orthodox Church, culture, the Ukrainian ascetic ideal" [Vol. 3, p. 94]. (It must be noted, however, that this characterization is repeated in the same wording on p.385.)

The author traces the stages in the life of the great religious activist. By the standards of that time, Kniahynytskyi got a very good education, particularly in Ostroh Academy, where he was subsequently invited to teach; then he studied the Word of God on Mount Athos, later returning to his homeland. While depicting historic events – Ukraine being under pressure from Muscovite tsars and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Eastern and the Western Church becoming united after signing the Union of Brest – the author promotes the religious and cultural tradition of objectivism in describing the origin, religious life and work of the Great Skete. Having been given the ecclesiastical name of Job, Kniahynytskyi settles in a remote mountainous area in Markova Pustyn; in 1605-1610, he embarks on his lofty mission of creating a new Vatopedi monastery in the Carpathians.

M. Kuhutiak leads the reader to think that "the appearance of the Skete monastery in the Carpathians was a natural event considering the historical epoch, the acuteness of ecclesiastical and religious controversy caused by a deep crisis in the Orthodox Church itself, the advance of Catholicism and transition to the Union" [Vol. 3, p. 385]. The author's position is confirmed by a brief (albeit informative) analysis of the religious and spiritual life not only in Galicia and Bukovyna but also in the Ukrainian lands of that time in general.

Noteworthy are the author's descriptions of Kniahynytskyi's followers; for instance, the outstanding Ukrainian religious activist and writer, Ivan Vyshenskyi, is portrayed with due consideration to both his polemic against Uniatism and his commitment to Christian values: "the main idea of Vyshenskyi's creative work was to preserve Ruthenian olden times, the Orthodox traditions of

forefathers, the loss of which he perceived as a threat to the ecclesiastical, religious and ethnocultural identity of the nation" [Vol. 3, p. 106]. One cannot but support this objective view of historic and cultural, spiritual and religious practices.

In his monograph, Dr. Kuhutiak presents the results of his comprehensive study of monastic living, whose roots go back to the emergence of Christian monasticism and can be observed in the ascetic tradition of Ukrainian religious houses, for instance the Kyiv-Pechersk Monastery. The researcher draws on the novel studies of the sacred heritage of the Dniester-Carpathian region examining various instances of cloistered asceticism and applies the term *hesychasm* to ethno-enlightening hermitism, submission to strict rules of life. In search of spiritual perfection, Job Kniahynytskyi was more inclined to the solitary tradition, though he did not exclude the possibility of a communal monastic lifestyle. Discussing the canonical rules of the Great Skete, M. Kuhutiak notes that commitment to hermitism, to severe norms of monastic living "was a natural and reasonable reaction to the secularization of the church and monasteries, the relaxation of moral and canonical laws of monastic asceticism" [Vol.3, p. 387]. It would be worthy to note that these aspirations of Job and Theodosius of Maniava also reflect psychological factors stemming from their spiritual upbringing, their life on Athos, as well as their deep, all-consuming faith in the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The monograph argues that following the strict rules of monastic life was not an end in itself because the purpose of monasticism was to turn to God's Commandments; this interpretation of the teachings left by the founders of the Skete is based on the fact that the Skete's texts contain numerous references to the Holy Scriptures, the commandments of the Holy Fathers. Such a perspective on canonical monastic laws is particularly important considering the priority of the philosophical and religious aspects of monastic service over temporal affairs. It should be noted that every opinion expressed by the author is supported with references to the source materials such as scripted texts, research papers of renowned theologians, pastoral workers, and public figures.

The customary principle of monastic asceticism consisted in strictly limited interaction with the outside world, solitary confinement and silence; the monks were forbidden to leave their cloisters without the hegumen's permission. Renunciation of material possessions was combined with humility and the duty to work. Though ascetic diet reduced food consumption to a minimum, it was still necessary for the monks to replenish their food supplies, so they had to come in contact with the villagers while selling their handicrafts. Therefore, despite being prohibited from communicating with strangers, the monks could not avoid coming in contact with the local population. It is understandable that the author, having no scriptural sources, could not describe the relationships between the monastic community and the local villagers. We can only hypothesize the possibility of contacts between the monks and pilgrims, inhabitants of Maniava Village; it is even more likely that in such a way the surroundings of the monastery tried to get involved in spiritual life, to ask God's blessing in the monastery.

The history of the Great Skete throughout the 16-17th centuries – from its origins to its heyday – is reproduced in the monograph in the context of the historic events faced by the society of Galicia at that time. There was an attack on the religious and cultural self-identity of the Ukrainian population. At that time, the Great Skete, which M. Kuhutiak refers to as "a kind of spiritual academy", served as the foundation for building the self-awareness of Ukrainians, the cultural and spiritual revival of the region. The author provides extensive evidence for the growing authority of the monastery, reproduces the circumstances under which the Skete obtained public support, gained possession of much property, and extended the circle of its benefactors.

The monastery expands its ties with Kyiv monks; its selfless service was highly valued by Metropolitan Petro Mohyla. The Skete's community perceived Kyiv – despite the pressure from Moscovia – as "a new Jerusalem", a sacred center. Having explored a great number of historical materials, M. Kuhutiak summarizes the facts and evidence about the monastery's life of that time making the following crucially important conclusion: "The historical destiny of the 17th-century Great Skete was inextricably connected with the heroic and dramatic history of Galicia and the whole of

Ukraine with its ups and downs, big victories and losses, numerous wars and epidemics" [Vol. 3, p. 191].

Drawing on historical documents and analyzing the spiritual and religious life of the monastery, M. Kuhutiak examines the complicated relations between the monastery's community and the Greek Catholic Church, emphasizing the commitment of the Great Skete to the old Kyiv Galician Orthodox, not Moscovian, tradition. The ties of the Great Skete with the Patriarchate of Constantinople and with Greek monasteries indicated the stability of its spiritual and religious priorities. At the same time, the author notes that the monastery was faced with difficulties caused by attacks from the Uniate communities and the Austro-Hungarian government. However, as stated in the monograph, thousands of believers, including both Uniates and Catholics, attended worship services at the Great Skete [Vol. 3, p. 229].

The monograph's findings about the persecution of the Ukrainian Church by the Russian and the Austro-Hungarian empires have great social and political significance. The author's opinions and conclusions go beyond depicting the circumstances which led to the closure of the Great Skete – they rise to the level of a scientific theoretical generalization that the invasive imperialistic policy of that time was intended to stifle any attempts by Ukrainian thinkers to express independent opinions and distance themselves from the pressure of forces hostile to Ukraine. M. Kuhutiak's commentaries and claims are supported with references to new documents, which were unknown to earlier researchers of the Skete's history such as Yulian Tselevych, among others; he provides a detailed analysis of the decisions made by the Austro-Hungarian government which limited the rights and privileges of the monastery in every way; incidentally, such policy was pursued with consideration for the attitude of Russia [Vol. 3, p. 227].

In the 1780s, foreign governments made repeated attempts to reduce the number of monasteries and monks in Galicia and Bukovyna, to limit their proprietary rights, to control the hegumens' managerial decisions, which provoked severe protests from the monastic community. The Great Skete came to be threatened with closure. Despite the Skete's numerous attempts to remain independent, it was closed by imperial viceroys in 1786. The Skete's monks continued to struggle for their rights and, as stated by the author, they proved that "a centralized empire is not omnipotent" [Vol. 3, p. 266]. Is it not likely that these opposition efforts were precursors of the struggle of the Ukrainian Church for its independence and self-sufficiency?

Though the Great Skete was prevented from serving as a spiritual and religious stronghold for two hundred years, the folk memory of the monastic mountain in the Carpathians survived, so thousands of believers visited the buildings of the monastery on religious holidays. During Soviet rule, the Great Skete fell into disrepair. Later, its premises were renovated, and there appeared a sanctuary and a museum of history and ethnography, *Skyt Maniavskyi*. After Ukraine gained independence, the priests and monks of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate began to hold services in the monastery. Only in 1998, in response to the demand of the Maniava Village community and Ivano-Frankivsk Diocese, did the church gain possession of the museum's facilities. The sacred monastery began its revival. The detailed description of the renovation of the Great Skete given by M. Kuhutiak will serve as a foundation for a new historical account of the famous monastery.

The chapter entitled *Sakralna Spadshchyna (Sacred Heritage)* provides an in-depth analysis of the spiritual and religious ideals of the Great Skete. In fact, this research is the first effort to examine the philosophical theology and the ontological attitudes of the Skete's monastic community, which can be regarded as a foundation for the traditional doctrine of Orthodox asceticism. According to M. Kuhutiak, the spiritual and religious practices of the Skete's monks stemmed from Near Eastern early Christian monasticism but developed original features. The author stresses that through their selfless service the Skete's Hesychasts acted as agents of spiritual enlightenment [Vol. 3, p. 305], and their mystical beliefs served as a gnoseological doctrine reflecting clear socio-ethical norms. The selfless service of the Skete's community gave a push to the development of the spiritual and religious life in Ukraine and beyond. The Great Skete created unique philosophical theological literature, with the *Skete*

Patericon being its brilliant example. The monastery, as argued by the author, became an important center for spreading booklore by creating numerous scriptural works.

Worthy of special mention is the scope of objectives pursued and fulfilled by the monograph's authors, as well as the great body of source materials, scriptural texts involved, which allows for the possibility of extending the range of research issues, including commentaries and descriptions of many additional historical facts. The material of the book reflects, on the one hand, the authors' scientific worldview and fundamental approaches to doing the responsible job of creating a historical account of the Great Skete; on the other hand, the researchers' profound knowledge and competence, their willingness to fully familiarize the reader with their findings.

An account of the spiritual and religious activity of only one monastery, be it as powerful as Maniava Skete, cannot, of course, reflect a wider range of issues related to the religious life in Galicia, such as ones caused by the adoption of the Union of Brest. However, the authors' desire to extend the scope of research, to introduce the socio-political factor deserves every praise. Avenues for further research include, for instance, the interaction of Galician Orthodox churches with the Byzantine Patriarchy, Chernivtsi Metropolis, Greek monasteries. It is also noteworthy that the monograph contains a tremendous range of data reflecting the spiritual and religious life in the Galicia of the 16th-18th centuries.

It cannot escape attention that the monograph is written in a sophisticated scientific style without being overloaded with technical terms, particularly theological ones, and, as it seems, can be regarded as an example of confessional discourse to be used if need be. To illustrate, let us consider the following textual fragment: "The phenomenon of the Skete's monastic selfless service was based on a harmonious combination of two forms of monastic asceticism – communal cenobitism and cloistered hermitage – which complied with the ancient Christian norms of spiritual practice, as well as with the moral and ethical ideals of the mystical experience of God" [Vol. 1, p. 11]. This combination of common and theological vocabulary creates a highly scholastic manner of expression, quite understandable from the context.

The volumes of the *Great Skete in the Carpathians* are of interest not only to historians, theologians, culturologists, or ethnologists but also, as supposed by the authors, to linguists, philosophers, psychologists since the scriptural sources published in the monograph provide fertile research material. It appears probable that, for instance, this book may offer a new perspective on the literary merits of the famous poem by A. Mohylnytskyi *Skyt Maniavskyyi (Maniava Skete)*. The authors of this unique book have, without a doubt, proved that the Ukrainian Church, the secular clergy have always pursued the lofty mission of spiritual revival; and churches and monasteries, such as the glorious Great Skete, used to be and still are a powerful source of establishing Christian values, maintaining traditions of cultural enlightenment, service to God and Ukraine.

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