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# Review of the Book “O scurta istorie a bibliotecilor bizantine” [A Brief History of Byzantine Libraries], Author - Silviu-Constantin Nedelcu, Lumen Publishing House, Iasi, 2020

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**Abstract:** Author of more than 80 studies and articles of theology and bibliothecology and of the book: *Cenzurarea presei ortodoxe în comunism* (The Censorship of the Orthodox press during the communist period) (Nedelcu 2019), but also PhD in philology and member of important associations and cultural institutions, Silviu-Constantin Nedelcu is already a name known in the Romanian cultural space. His recent book, entitled: *O scurtă istorie a bibliotecilor bizantine* (A short history of the Byzantine Libraries) (Nedelcu 2020), published by the acclaimed Lumen Publishing House from Iassy, comes to offer a new testimony of the quality of his investigations.

**Keywords:** *Byzantine cultural history, Byzantine libraries, Silviu Constantin Nedelcu.*

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Segmented in 8 big parts and forwarded by Fr. Maxim Vlad, assistant professor at the Faculty of the Orthodox Theology from „Ovidius” University in Constanța (p. 9-14), the book (Nedelcu 2020) comes to fulfil the „History of Ideas” collections of the aforementioned Publishing House, together with books like the one of Daniel Cojanu (Cojanu 2019) or Dragoș Obreja (Obreja 2019) and comes together with books from other collections (see, for example: Sandu, Frunză, Huidu, 2021; Sandu 2020; Sandu 2020a; Morariu 2019), to increase the visibility and the value of the publisher. As Fr. Maxim Vlad shows in the foreword of the work:

„The *History of Libraries in the Byzantine Empire* written by Mr. Nedelcu Silviu Constantin, represents an investigation in the library space of Late Antiquity Greco-Roman and the Byzantine Middle Ages, as necessary so current for the Romanian literature of specialty. The study presented as a Bachelor Thesis comes to covers a vacuum of information regarding the status you have they had libraries both in the sphere of public life and in that of private education in political, religious and social settings of an Empire that lasted more than a thousand years.” (Vlad 2020:9).

Later, in the introductory part (Nedelcu 2020: 15-24), the author speaks about the story that can be found beyond the book, brings in to attention the bibliography existing in the Romanian space that is related to the topic (Nedelcu 2020: 17-19), realizing a critical investigation of it, together with the foreign one (Nedelcu 2020:19-21), speaks about the structure of the work, the aspects of novelty that can be found there, but also offers acknowledgements to the ones who have helped him to realize such a demarche.

Then, the first chapter of the work is dedicated to the historical and political context of the foundation of the Byzantine empire (Nedelcu 2020:25-32). The author speaks there about the election of Constantin the Great as the unique ruler of the Roman Empire, about the inauguration of the new capital, namely Constantinople and the periodization of the history of the topic. Later, in the second section of the work (Nedelcu 2020:33-46), he speaks about the cultural fundaments of the Byzantine space, emphasizing the way how the byzantine teaching, the Constantinople University or the literature from this area have impacted the world and contributed to the development of the libraries and of the cultural area there. About the late history of this university, he therefore underlines:

"Emperor Manuel II the Palaeologus (1391-1425), reorganized the University by bringing together all the faculties in one place, namely in the building of the Studion monastery or of St. John the Baptist in

Constantinople<sup>58</sup>. The university was named Katholicon Museion, which Filelfo, one of those who studied here, translated as "Universitas litterarum et scientiarum, publicus discendis ludus" meaning "University of letters and sciences, public school for learning." The courses were aimed at the liberal arts. These formed the structure of philosophical studies that had been revived by the revival of Plato's philosophy. The University of Constantinople officially ceased to exist on May 29, 1453, with the fall of the Byzantine Empire. (Nedelcu 2020: 43).

The 3rd chapter (Nedelcu 2020:47-74) is eventually dedicated to the libraries from the Byzantine Empire. The author presents there the types of library existing in this society, the imperial one and its history from the beginning and until its end, speaking about aspect like the localisation, its collection, its evolution in time or its impact on the culture of the time, the Patriarchal library, following the same structure, the university one, but also the particularly ones. Here, he presents the one belonging to the emperors, to certain byzantine personalities or the ones of the monasteries (offering case studies like the ones of Studion Monastery, Chora Monastery, Christ the Merciful Monastery, the one of „Saint John Monastery” from Patmos, the one of „Saint Ecaterina” Monastery from Sinai or the ones from Mount Athos).

The institutional aspects are not neglected either. Therefore, in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter (Nedelcu 2020:75-100), Silviu-Constantin Nedelcu speaks about the Church administration that can be seen in the libraries from the Byzantine Empire and its role, about the chartophylax (Nedelcu 2020:75-76), his ecclesiastical and librarian role, the most important representatives of this category and other similar aspects. In the conclusions (Nedelcu 2020:101-102), the author comes to focus again on the main aspects presented and to speak about the fact that the Byzantine libraries are part of an amazing word and they contributed to its evolution.

Using a rich bibliography, mostly consisting in foreign sources, the book dedicated by Silviu-Constantin Nedelcu to the Byzantine libraries is for sure something new in the Romanian research of the topic. For a nation that can be considered, as the most important Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga shows, a *Byzance after Byzance* (Iorga 2002), knowing the history of this important empire and its impact on the world of his time comes as something necessary. The bibliographical effort of the author, that surely can bring his demarche close to other more famous like the one of Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen (Johnston, Van Dussen 2017), the one of Leonora Neville, who suggested a guide of the Byzantine historical writing (Neville 2018) or the one of Donald M. Nicol, who focused on the last

centuries of Byzantium (Nicol 1993), Theresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Shawcross, Toth 2018). Alexandre Kazhdan and Simon Franklin (Kadzhan, Franklin 2009), Olaf Pedersen (Pedersen 2009), or the expected books of Julie Barrau and David Bates (Barrau, Bates 2021) and Stratis Papaioannou (Papaioannou 2021) is important for the Romanian culture and will surely consecrate him among the relevant voices that offer a credible and well-documented perspective on such a relevant topic and is capable to create bridges of dialogue with other cultural areas and spaces. For this reason, the work must be recommended and considered as a relevant one both for the contemporary research, like also for the outside readers who want to discover a dynamic world and its mechanisms and to become part of an interesting story that will surely help them to develop their imagination and to see with more respect the past and the role played by his or her ancestors in its evolution. Part of a biblioeconomical approach, Nedelcu's book is in the same time an inter-disciplinary work written according to the contemporary standards, that can for sure constitute a model for future investigations of the field.

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