

FATHER ARSENIE BOCA - *WONDERFULLY EXCEPTIONAL*



Father Arsenie Boca  
*Wonderfully Exceptional*

Georgeta Germina Punga-Herbreteau

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## CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Like A Light Bulb's Glowing Filament	9
Autobiography	12
A Remarkable Event	17
Testimonials	32
ZOE DAIAN	32
FATHER PANTELIMON MUNTEANU	38
DAN LUCINESCU	44
FATHER STEFAN NEGREANU	63
ASPAZIA OTEL PETRESCU	67
FATHER PETRU VAMVULESCU	82
IRINEU DUVLEA	85
FATHER IOAN PEANA	92
SIMION TODORAN	97
DANIIL STOENESCU	106
BOGDAN JUNCU	118
GEORGE VALCEA	129
DIONISIE IGNAT	138
SEVER VOINESCU	141
DUMITRU CONSTANTIN-DULCAN	146
GERMINA GEORGETA PUNGA-HERBRETEAU	168
Short Biography	177



## FOREWORD

I have issued this present collection of testimonials on the advice and with the blessing of Bishop Daniil Stoenescu of the Diocese of Dacia Felix. It follows my publication of the Dutch translation of the book ‘The Path to the Kingdom’ by Father Arsenie Boca – an overview of what Father Arsenie had counselled and taught the Romanian faithful through his talks, writings and homilies. The current collection is an attempt to portray this ardent monk who shaped the Orthodox Faith in a unique way and who, to this day, is a guiding source of inspiration to many. Bishop Daniil rightly praises Father Arsenie as ‘an Everest Mountain to the Romanian people.’

Dan Lucinescu, renowned author of multiple bestsellers, assured me that every publication on Father Boca, without any doubt, will influence every reader in sublime and mysterious ways. Just as the Christian Faith was a beacon of hope for people during the dark days of the communist occupation of Romania, so too can the teachings and the life of Father Arsenie Boca be a shining example for people today who are weary and crave for a refreshing purification of the soul.

I am grateful to these friends for their encouraging exhortations and practical pieces of advice and I hope that this issue may be an addition to ‘The Path to The Kingdom’, so that Father

Arsenie can be the man here, as he ever was in Romania:  
**wonderfully exceptional!**

Finally, I want to thank Neil B. Nucup for his assistance in proofreading and editing my work, Nikodim and my husband Dominique for his patience and trust. Without their valuable cooperation, this work would not have been possible. My unconditional gratitude also goes to Rebeca Bărbulescu, Antonio Gavriluță, Romain Herbreteau and Iulia Nicolau (contributions to the translation), Florin Duțu (photography) and Cezar Buterez (cartography).

Georgeta Germina Punga-Herbreteau  
Rijswijk, the Netherlands

Spring 2020



## LIKE A LIGHT BULB'S GLOWING FILAMENT

Our all-beloved Father Arsenie Boca (1910-1989) is one of the brightest shining filaments of today's Romanian spiritual 'enlightenment'. Indeed, his charismatic appearance is reflected to this day as 'a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.' (Revelation 22:1) In his book *Revelation*, or the *Apocalypse*, the apostle John writes, on behalf of Jesus Christ, seven letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 2-3) in which he repeatedly makes in one final verse a divine promise to those who triumphantly end the invisible, spiritual battle.

Father Arsenie has undeniably achieved such a victory through his unwavering faith, his indefatigable commitment and his exemplary life, following the lives of the Egyptian Desert Fathers and the Philokalia.

That is why Father Arsenie is blessed, because 'To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.' (Revelation 2:7)

Another reason why Father Arsenie is blessed, is reflected on the verse 'He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.' (Revelation 2:11)

Father Arsenie is blessed a third time because ‘To him who overcomes I will give a white stone and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.’ (Revelation 2:17)

Father Arsenie is blessed a fourth time because ‘He who overcomes, and keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.’ (Revelation 2:26-28) Here, the light of the morning star can be interpreted as the Uncreated<sup>1</sup>, Divine Light that shines through the soul.

Father Arsenie is blessed a fifth time because ‘He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Lives, but I shall confess his name to My Father and to His angels.’ (Revelation 3:5)

Father Arsenie is blessed a sixth time since ‘He who overcomes, I shall make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall no more go out of it and I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.’ (Revelation 3:12)

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<sup>1</sup> It is the Light of Tabor in which Christ appeared with Moses and Elijah. Sometimes believers see it manifested through their human eyes, as “a touch of Divine Eternity on their spirit” (Father Sophrony of Maldon, See God as He Is, Editions du Cerf, 2004).

Indeed, how great is the happiness of those who may dwell eternally in God's House and bear His Name!

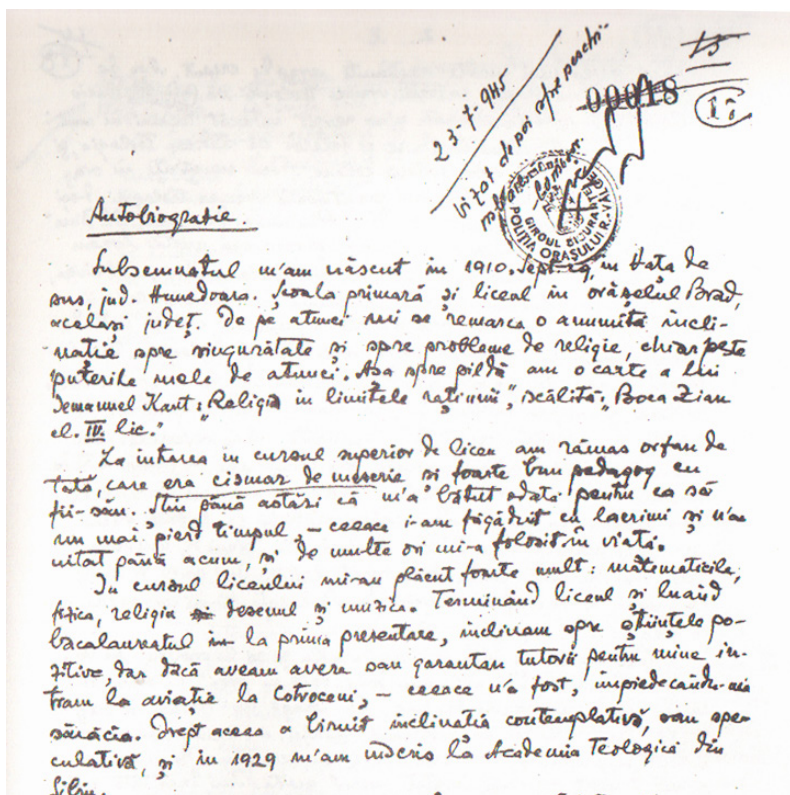
Father Arsenie is blessed a seventh time because 'To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.'  
(Revelation 3:21)

+Daniil

Bishop of Dacia Felix

Hățăgel, 26 September 2018

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY



I was born on 29 September 1910 in Vața de Sus, a village in the district Hunedoara. I got my first name 'Zian Vălean'<sup>1</sup> from my parents. I went to school in Brad, a town in the same county. By then, I already realized that I enjoyed being on my own. That is why I frequently withdrew into the loneliness of the forests and

<sup>1</sup> Zian, Transylvanian given name is the abbreviation of Sânzienelor (the feast day on which the birth of Saint John the Baptist is celebrated). According to his biography he was thus baptized, says his biography, because he was the fruit of the prayer of his parents, like Saint John the Baptist.

fields of my village. Religion fascinated me immensely so much so that I asked myself many questions and always went looking for answers. I also had another copy of ‘The Religion within the Limits of Pure Reasoning’, a book written by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and published in 1793. I signed it with ‘Boca Zian, fourth class Lyceum’.

While I was at secondary school, my father Joseph died. He was a hardworking shoemaker who brought me up really well. I still remember how he disciplined me for wasting time. I then promised him, with tears in my eyes, that it would never happen again. It was an unforgettable and helpful lesson for the rest of my life. At the Avram Iancu Lyceum, I enjoyed math, physics, religion, art and music. That is why, after obtaining my diploma, I thought about specializing in the natural sciences and registering for a course at the Aviation School in Cotroceni. However, this course was too expensive, for which reason I decided to follow my religious calling. In 1929, I enrolled in a course at the Theological Academy in Sibiu.

I was able to afford my theological schooling, thanks to the proceeds from the sale of my parents’ house. Moreover, I also had a scholarship. I never asked my mother Christina for help. My parents got divorced in 1922 and my mother lived by herself since then. Under the divorce decree – I was 12 years old at that time – custody over me was granted to my father. He had a fixed income and could pay for my education.

While studying theology, I discovered the beauty of monkhood and through practice I wanted to focus on the mystical side of life. That was why I left my mother and she got used to a life without me. I took as little contact with her as possible. I thought that if I slowly disappeared out of her life, that would at least alleviate the pain the moment I finally withdrew from the world as a monk. During those days, I also imposed upon myself the discipline of austerity. I decided not to meet any more girls. I accomplished this partially, as at the beginning of my theological studies, the ministry also allowed girls to follow the theological course. I never had girlfriends in the city. I consciously abstained from any opportunity to go out. I would only meet up with friends upon the invitation from the Academy and in the presence of a professor. I could not dance nor did I want to learn how to. In fact, I never did. I found it to be inappropriate for a theologian. I also had no interest in what others did outside of class hours, leaving me completely indifferent.

I was mainly concerned with the relationship between the senses, the will and the comparative study of mysticism in world religions. Through study and experience, I wanted to understand how and to what extent willpower can influence the spiritual and biological aspects of life and whether reflexes and instincts could not be controlled by one's consciousness, as the textbooks at that time wrongly stated. During this self-study, I was tremendously helped by the writings and findings

of Mircea Eliade who was sent to Calcutta by the University of Bucharest to follow Eastern studies. I saw this study as preparation for the monkhood.

All my activities then, just like today, were purely focused on the inner, never on the outer. That is why I chose and still do, to remain silent over talking. That is why I also carry Arsenie as monk name: I aspire to live spiritually according to the example of Abba Arsenios<sup>2</sup> who had chosen the asceticism of silence, thereby acquiring inner perfection. My efforts resulted in a thesis 'Challenges of the Spiritual Life' (*Încercări asupra vieții duhovnicești*), with which I successfully finished my theological education in Sibiu in 1933.

During the holidays, I dedicated my time to painting, a talent given by God and which was noticed by Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan of Transylvania. He sent me to the Art Academy in Bucharest where I finished the painting course in 1938 without skipping one class. After that, with the blessing of Metropolitan Nicolae, I departed for the Mountain Athos where I stayed for a few months in the Romanian skete Prodomos<sup>3</sup> to further immerse myself into the Orthodox monastic life. (...) Back in Romania I travelled to Chișinău to learn the technique of gilding.

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2 Holy Abba Arsenios the Great (+ 449, Rome) was a Desert Father in Egypt.

3 The Romanian skete of Prodomos [dedicated to Saint John the Baptist] is a dependance of the Monastery of the Great Lavra of Mount Athos.

Then, I entered the Brâncoveanu Monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus in the county Braşov where I was ordained a monk on the first Friday after Easter in 1939. For two years' time I was the only monk and therefore, I was held responsible for all jobs. For painting there was not enough time. I feared that my talent would be fruitless and that my education in Bucharest was in vain.

Many people came to visit the monastery to find solace and wisdom. Thank God! There came reinforcement. Serafim Popescu became my fellow monk. I asked him to accept the ordination of the priest in my place, for I felt unworthy. The flow of visitors continued and the monastery experienced a spiritual revival. Countrymen came to visit us from far and wide to relay their spiritual problems to us. That was why I, too, was ordained a priest in 1942 and was able to show them the Path to the Kingdom. I could tell them about Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the God-man who showed the way to salvation and sanctification in word and in deed. I was able to teach people to get up after falling into sin and to further complete their path of life with boundless love for others and above all, God Almighty.

That was my only aspiration. That is also my only job.

Monk Arsenie

Râmnicu Vâlcea

17 July 1945

Source: [www.fundatiaarsenieboca.ro/biografie](http://www.fundatiaarsenieboca.ro/biografie)



## A REMARKABLE EVENT IN THE HOLY MOUNTAIN OF ATHOS



### ANNOTATION OF ZIAN BOCA

*The following description of an exceptional event was found among the manuscripts of Zian Boca, who would be tonsured as Father Arsenie a couple of months later during his stay on Mount Athos. There he stayed in the cell that was consecrated to the Holy Hypatius and worked together with Father Dometius Trihenia, who was ordained a priest in 1937. Zian Boca was also working in the Romanian Skete Prodromos where he helped rebuild the stairs that lead to the cave of the Holy Athanasius the Athonite.*

I was working for a few days to reconstruct the stairs that descended from Prodromos Skete to St. Athanasius the Athonite cave. The cave was situated close to the sea, only about fifty stairs above the sea. We were using local materials – pieces of rock quite hard that we shaped with chisel and hammer. I was working with Father Porphyry and Dometius from Holy

Hypatius cell and we would obey Father Arsenie Mandrea, the abbot of Prodromos. For me, that was sort of payment or exchange for allowing me to copy Philokalia from the library of the monastery, very rich in manuscripts. It was a mission that I got from Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan and Professor Dumitru Stăniloiaie.

The labor was reminiscent of the slavery that the Israelites had to go through. After modelling and carving the step from a boulder, we then had to pull the rock up from the valley. For that we used club-shaped branches from chestnut trees, on which we pulled up the rock with mooring ropes that we had found, and that stank of algae and fish.

Spring was slow to get off the ground. The sun didn't scorch our bodies, but I was very hungry and thirsty. My lips were sticking together, my mouth had a bitter and nasty taste. I was thinking of all those who had built the steps on Mount Sinai all the way to the top, where Moses received the Law, the Torah, from God's hands. Didn't I learn in secondary school that there were three hundred steps? Porphyry, who was built more strongly than I, suddenly interrupted my musings:

- Zian, help me! This rock will break my foot. Dometius, what are you doing? Don't let go! Have you gone mad? Stop this rock, quickly!

I woke up from my daydreaming and struggled with all my strength. It was a tough mission we had. I started to pray to God's Mother, our Lady and Landlady of the Holy Mountain. Dometius started to sing: Axion Estin, sort of Ave Maria:

- It is truly right to bless thee, O Theotokos, thou the ever blessed, and most pure, and the Mother of our God.

A few more prayers followed, including St. Athanasius the Athonite who died when the scaffolding broke down and fell on his head. Of course, the unceasing prayer of the pilgrim: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, sinner..'

Father Dometius consoled me with the thought of a hearty meal:

- Go ahead, Zian. Tonight we are eating sweet carrot soup with honey from Brother Gabriel's barrel.

Porphyry replied enthusiastically 'Amen'. He added:

- Father Dometius, would you like to become a second John Koukouzelis of Athos? Me too, but I think it's absolutely wrong that we have nothing to drink. Doctor Silouan in Vatopedi claims that a person should drink two liters of water every day. We have not even drunk one liter! Please get us some seawater to rinse our mouths with!

Father Dometius hurried down. His skinny figure seemed to fly to the swirling sea that crashed into the rocky coast. I thought of a refreshing bath in the seawater after the hard day's work and the blissful effect that this would have on my painful bones, which seemed to be affected by rheumatism when painting cold, damp walls for a long time.

- Father Porphyry, what job did you have before becoming a monk?

- I was a mechanic on heavy equipment (expert in tools). Abbot Arsenie asked me about what I've worked and so I started to carve stairs out of stone. Watch out Zian how you steady on that hook. If you break it, I don't have here another one and I will send you in the forest to cut a new one.

- I've cut around five piles, which I have put to dry at the sawmill next to the Iviron Monastery. We can install two boat hooks tomorrow.

- I like you, deacon from Sibiu. You don't really have a voice for singing, but you do have a head for thinking!

- I wanted to become a pilot, but to follow the training in Cotroceni is very expensive. A lot of money was needed, but my mother and I did not have enough. Even our house was not worth the amount that the training cost. The only education for which I could get a scholarship was theology. I was a very religious child and religion has always fascinated me, but I felt unworthy to become a priest. My mother wanted me to get married.