

The Romanian - Greek Litigation Regarding the Dedicated Monasteries Wealth, from 1821 until the Secularization

Ion Tutuianu¹

Abstract: The events of 1821 put an end to the Phanariot century in the Romanian Principalities. Immediately, the Romanians protested against the situation of the monasteries dedicated to the Holy Places of the Orient and especially because a quarter of the Wallachia and Moldavia, belonged to the Greek monks. Resentment of the Romanian against the Greek monks and the privileges of the Holy Places, were intensified. The Organic Regulations forced the Greek monks to pay some land taxes, especially in Wallachia, being concern to limit Greeks abuse. Then, the revolutionaries of 1848, just wanted to stop Greeks abuses. Sometimes, Turkey and Russia have sustained together the Greeks interests in Romanian Principalities and, at the Paris Conference in 1858, the Romanians did not give up of their desire to regain their rights and national dignity and, under the reign of the great ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza, they enacted secularization of religious goods on 13th of December, 1863. The Holy Places did not understood to accept any limitation on the use of the property like monastic wealth, nor could their protectors in the Principalities, the Russians, no longer support their demands. The provisions of the Organic Regulations, despite the dissatisfaction of the Holy Places, constitutes a legislative progress which determines Kiseleff to order the monasteries inventory and ordered these to state debt repayment, thereby inducing the idea of the supremacy of state authority, which Cuza Voda completes with a strong hand.

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The Romanian antique tradition of dedicating fortunes to The Holy Places of the Orient made these donations to reach numerous and highly significant. These pious gifts, made especially by the rulers and the Romanian boyars over the centuries, until the early nineteenth century, would displease much the Romanians because of the because of proven abuse of the Greek monks, who had forgotten the desire of the founders and of the donors, defying the Romanian hospitality. Because many Greeks arrived in the Romanian Principalities, besides the monks, especially during the Phanariot century, it was natural that conflicts arise. Ee can say that all Romanian reactions were caused not so much because of the alienation of the

¹ Senior Lecturer, PhD, Vasile Alecsandri University, Romania. Address: Calea Mărășești 158, Bacău 600115, Romania. Corresponding author: tutuianuion@yahoo.com.

assets through worship, but because of the demands of the Greeks, who came here especially for their personal interest, to take advantage of all these goods that did not belong to them by only by the Romanians goodwill or naivety. The problem of the cancellation of the benefits that Greeks had from the use of Romanian goods has become public consciousness in Wallachia and Moldavia during Tudor Vladimirescu's movement that rose against all that was alien to the nation and the Romanian interests.

Tudor Vladimirescu's movement resulted in the departure of Greek monks, both during the revolution, and especially after the revolution. The Romanian boyars and clergy took advantage of this and the subsequent provisions taken by the Sublime Porte against the Greeks, so they invested Metropolitans bishops, bishops and hegumens only among the Romanians. Romanians have decided that the income of the monasteries rented to be considered as a guarantee for the debts of the country left by the hetaerist Alexandru Ipsilanti and a compensation for damages produced by the Turkish invasion on the Principalities to defeat the munity of the Greeks hetaerist, which had started even with the blessing of guns of Ipsilanti in the Metropolitan Cathedral of Iasi, by Veniamin Costachi, Metropolitan of Moldavia, the feast of the Annunciation in 1821.

The national awake current, born from Tudor Vladimirescu's movement, was aimed at the smartness of the Romanian patriotism and brought into attention the issue of Romanian goods dedicated to the Greek Holy Places in a different approach than that seen until that moment. The critical conscience of this situation appeared, the conscience of the nation deceived because of its own generosity, and the feeling of an immediate reaction to cast away the foreign elements which exploited the energy and strength of the county. They called for an action of collective justice and of national pride. This explains the fact that, in 1821, Moldavians boyards join together and protest against the Greeks, demanding to give back the possessions of monasteries rented to the governmental administration, which should have the obligation to pay a yearly charge to the Holy Places all hegumens of the monasteries should have wages and supporting charges, and the administration of the monasteries' income should be done by the layman economists and with the exclusion of the Greek clerics. (Erbiceanu, 1888, p. 214)

Wrathfully on the Greeks for the mutiny form 1821, Turkey decided not only for the rehabilitation of inland administration, but also to cast away all the Greeks —from the administration of the country and to take the dedicated estates in

exchange for compensation granted to the Holy Places. But the joy was short-lived by the Romanians, because of the Turks, who, resuming diplomatic relations with Russia, the protector of the Christians in the East, change their attitude.

One of the conditions of the Russian-Turkish reconciliation was made by the Russians, namely the authorization of the Greek monks to return to the Principalities and reinstatement their old rights.

In June 1824, the Metropolitan Bishop Grigorie Dascalul of Ungro-Wallachia gives an anaphora in the question of the dedicated monasteries because the Greeks were complained of stopping incomes, showing that „ the spirit of those deceased founders of the wills look to guard these whole places forever... It was usually followed and kept here in the country in its indebted to any chance of civic need and these monasteries, too”. Forced, they have used to pay the country’s debts from the monasteries income “strengthen the bones of the dead lying founders” (Moisescu, 1934, p. 422). In 1825, the boyars meetings were held at the Metropolitan Church to respond to complaints of the Greek clergy, namely that in four years were paid “318,200 thalers for leaseholds monasteries of the Holy Grave, the monasteries of Sinai and Sfetagoria and 30,000 thalers for leaseholds monasteries in Rumelia and for Cisla monasteries in 1825 was 710,947 thalers”. After the peace of Adrianople, the Russians brought into the country “mix in their luggages invasion” the Greek monks, now more cautious, who were set up in the “Community of the Holy Places”. On August 29th, 1827 already appears the Sultan’s Order as the monasteries dedicated to be governed by the hegumens of the places where they are obedient. The Romanian bishops have tried to resist, but the Greek monks were immediately addressed to the Russian General Kiseleff, ruler of the Principalities appointed by the Protectorate Tsarist Court, who ordered that the monasteries must be returned to the Greek monks. The Romanians do not rush to execute the orders, but the Russian authority over the Romanian Principalities gives severes orders to surrender their monasteries and wealth, so that restitution was made in 1830, reaching the Greeks as masters again. (Bolliac, 1862, p. 34)

The Romanians’ pride makes the boyars of Wallachia to protest in the National Assembly, only that the Russo-Turkish pressure leads to formal recognition of the Community of the Holy Places. As always, is set up a committee of the Assembly that must examine the property rights of the Greeks, together with the Commission. This mixed Committee, composed of the metropolitan bishop, the church affairs scribe, four boyars of the Royal Divan and four representatives of the Greek, met

with no results, because the Greeks “insisted till the end of considering these monasteries as their absolute property” refusing to contribute to pay in any form the state expenses or charitable establishments.

The National Assembly, in May 1833, fixed the monks’ salaries, the repairs of the monasteries and help shares due to the Holy Places, “according to the true spirit of the wills”.

The Greek monks vehemently oppose to this decision, and General Pavel Kiseleff, downright indignant, dispose that they are obliged to pay debts to the state. On 22nd of June, 1833 the Administrative Council, calculating the incomes of all monasteries, appreciate them of 605,000 Wallachia piastres, and in February 1834, applying the Organic Regulations, revenue is calculated at 1,400,000 Wallachia piastres, which dedicated monasteries were required tax payments of 450,000 old piastres in Muntenia and 12,500 ducats in Moldavia. But the Greek monks’ action was supported secretly by the Russians, so that nothing could be done (Xenopol, p. 178)

Therefore, the Romanians extortions during the reigns of Ionita Sandu Sturza (1822 - 1828) in Moldavia and Grigore Ghica (1822 - 1828) in Muntenia, as well those of the Russian administration of the general Kiseleff, were in vain.

After the Convention of Petersburg, in January 1834, there was appointed the regular Voivodes, Alexandru Ghica (1834 - 1842), in Muntenia and Mihail Sturza (1834 - 1849) in Moldavia, which had to solve the difficult problem of the dedicated monasteries. In Muntenia, the church lord chancellor was the boyar Barbu Stirbei, man of good intentions concerning the Romanian church organization, which declares on 16th of November, 1834 in the City Assembling the difficulty in regulating the lease earthly possession of the monasteries, but also the difficult solving of those dedicated.

It was an urgent need to solve this problem by the Romanian authorities, as the abuses of the Greek monks in the administration of the monasteries dressed unknown forms until then. The Greek hegumens rented the monastic possessions before the deadline, took the pledge before the deadline, that another hegumen, who was sent meanwhile, had to rent them again. Also the hegumens were secretly hurrying to sell movable properties and forests were outright destroyed outright. In this situation, the National Assembly decides that the hegumens Greeks, before being strengthened in their posts, to promise the officers (ministry) in writing that

it"shall be obedient in everything according to the law and habits of this earth." But all these measures were not taken into account by the Greek monks, who were doing various transactions in the detriment to the country, often with the complicity of the Romanian authorities.

On 3rd of July 1837 the Assembly asks the Voivodes "to fix the due share to give, after the old law of the country and the documents of the builders of dedicated monasteries because during the period of six years, this work, after all movements which were made cannot be seen finished." Voivode Alexandru Ghica answer is that "there have been plenty of movement from the ruler part, both before and in my throne, but there were resistances from the tenants of the places that have raised objections, which they have not yet put an end".

In 1838, having examined the accounts of the Central House, it was found that the dedicated monasteries did not contributed of anything to the state tasks, which is why, in 1840, a commission is fixed by the law to keep the evidence of all monasteries, especially their incomes, with the purpose that the Greek hegumens to be force to submit property to the church Department. Under the influence of Russia and some philhellenist feeling, the Greek monks were secretly or openly sustained sometimes even by some Romanian, including the Voivodes Alexandru Ghica himself, whom the Assembly addressed many protests between 1837 and 1838. He, however, turns duplicitous, since intercedes in the favour of the Greeks besides the Russian consul in Bucharest and besides the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, whom complained of the attitude of the National Assembly concerning the Greek problem (Filliti, 1985, p. 384)

After Alexandru Ghica Voda's disinterest and duplicity in the question of the dedicated monasteries, his successor to the throne of Wallachia, George Bibescu (1842- 1848), from the beginning of the reign is interested with power and authority of this situation. Starting May 20, 1843, Bibescu Voda send more memories to the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, Nesselrode, in which he is showing that since 1829 the dedicated monasteries have not contributed with anything to the tasks of the state. On 15th of May, 1843 he sanctioned the law voted by the Assembly to stop for the future the hegumens to lease more land without the consent of the State. During a visit to Constantinople, Bibescu Voda hope in solving this problem. Russia agreed with the law from May 1843 by the consent given on the 1st/13th of August 1843, called "the Memorandum of Buiuc-Dere". The Holy Places were obliged to give annually 20,000 ducats to the philanthropic

houses and to remain annually 250,000 Wallachia piastres for Greek schools and asylums of Constantinople and of the Orient, named one Exarch in every Principality to supervise the monasteries activities, having rights state within the state. Bibescu Voda was forced to protest when he found that the exarchs appointed by Turkey and Russia, but, in fact, imposed by Russia, were the representatives of the Holy Places. The monks required that the renting of the estates to be done without the government knowledge. This caused Bibescu Voda to send another statement, which suggests that the Holy Places must quit once and for all of their claims on property in return for a lump sum, because what happens with the monasteries "is never seen even in the most miserable periods of principalities. Today, the monks will not recognize any law or government, no ecclesiastical hierarchy, they face it and no matter what measures wants the government to take in the interest of the monasteries or of the peasants living on their estates, they rebel and become aggressive." Although he address to Kiseleff, given their old collaboration from when the last one was in charge of the Principalities asking for his support, because he had no favourable response to any approach he made, Bibescu, on February 23, 1845 asked for the dissolution of the Holy Grave trusteeship, appeared under Kiseleff and tolerated by Ghica, acting that "no ordinance cannot be done on a stated term of more than three years, no other conditions than those which have been received by us for the dedicated monasteries." Soon Bibescu Voda yield pressures and agrees that public auction of the estates to begin in 1852 and dedicated monasteries do not pay until then more than 20,000 ducats to the charitable establishments. He made one last attempt concerning this issue, calling his agent in Constantinople, Aristarchis, to defend the country's interests. But the accusations that occur inside that he has personal benefits from the exploitation of monastic estates, so the Metropolitan Bishop, Nifon was the exponent of the opponents of the Voivodes, saying that "the Greek monasteries became the subject of a shameful speculation", since "the hegumens consenting to give competition sins steering on, were maintained and protected, and the others were removed or prevented." At the intervention of the Assembly in February 1847, as the Voivodes compel compliance monasteries founders wills, laws and customs, Bibescu Voda answered that he "did not escape any circumstances to acquire this legitimate desire". It was given a law in 1847, which fixed the lease; by auction and for five years and a ban on sale of forests." Now the government becomes more dynamic and expels two Greek monks who refused the state control in the renting of the estates, stating that "it will give news to Sinai

monastery, with covetousness, to send others with fear of God and qualities that are due". One such a situation, Turkey and Russia decide that the dedicated monasteries to pay annually, since in 1848, to each Principality a part of the income (Popescu - Spineni, 1936, p. 40). The Revolution of 1848 was to give a more concrete form of the emancipator aspirations of the national economy which was in hands of the strangers, and the proclamation of Islaz of 9th of June 1849 mentioned: *"The Romanian people, in his generosity and piety, worship the Holy Places and will send to the Holy Grave henceforth and to other religious establishments oil, incense, candles and even money to keeping of the schools, of the priests, to the praise God, and all true praise to Him who was crucified for the liberation of the poor, decreed that surplus revenues to the country's monasteries, to the liberation and helping the poor requires estates of the dedicated monasteries to removing them from any sapping. Romanian people give to God what belongs to God and take from the Pharisees which is does not belong to the Pharisees. This is not to the detriment of the Romanians, but for their salvation and for the praise of the Holy Places"*.

The Greek monks in the monasteries were a constant threat of conflict, in addition to big troubles of the Romanians. Since the Romanian Principalities great danger was the intention of annex them by the Russians, the protectors of the Romanians, would not have had them, the problem of the monastic estates, without being lost from the sight, had to go for a time on a second plan. But those who, following this Romanian -Greek issue would be puzzled by the fact that, in the whirl of events of 1848 "the Greek nation" through its consul, C.I. Rizos, makes a declaration of sympathy to the deputy of the hospodar; considering the Romanians as brothers, it wanted "ardently the prosperity, the progress and the advancement of a liberal institutions of a people who deserve a better fate "should not be seen this just a false gesture of diplomatic courtesy. We will see that in all this Greek - Romanian disputes about the monasteries estates, the Greek State do not mix in any way and does not endorse in any way the monks so unhappy and that because the Greek Church has proclaimed her autocephaly in 1833, reason to be in conflict with the Patriarchate of Constantinople, till the reconciliation of 1852, through Russian intermediation. Then Greece, as well all modern states, secularized the church and the monastic possessions. If in 1830 the Greek kingdom had 593 monasteries, with the secularization of 1833 the Greek government left only 85 monasteries (Popescu & Stanescu, 1956, p. 420).

But the Greek monks and the Greek patriarchates and all Greek holy places, that does so much noise for wealth they ruled in the Romanian Principalities did not revolted for what their Greek State had made.

Voivode Barbu Stirbei (1849 - 1856), who had a very good preparation for running the country (long time minister, and even minister of the cults – chancellor of the church) concerned about his immediate reforms, neglect the monasteries problem that continues to remain in the same state. Greek monks speculate this situation and declare themselves as the monastery estates owners. Then, Stirbei Voda protests, saying that since they could not sell or mortgage, they were not owners. The answer of the monks was that it cannot be contesting their ownership because no children or married women cannot sell or mortgage and are not disputed of that right. Barbu Stirbei sent a memorandum to the Patriarch of Constantinople, in which he describes the situation, asking of providing an amount of income for the state because the state's expenses are greater than the income. The Ecumenical Patriarch has been slow to take account the memorandum of the Voivodes, but the Wallachia ruler seen himself betrayed even by his diplomatic agent in Constantinople, the Greek Aristarchis, which he inherited this position from the time of Bibescu Voda. This diplomatic agent of Bucharest, in a memorandum addressed to the Grand Vizier Fuad Pasa, made the history of the issue in dispute, showing that the Romanian royal governments claims are unfounded, as the Greek clergy's right, because “the Greek ecclesiastical property enjoys all the protection and common right and of the ancient immunities granted by the sultans”. Aristarchis proposes that the problem of the dedicated monasteries that will worsen, “be postponed until the great powers will handle the Principalities”. So, Stirbei Voda's intentions to take off of the hand of the Greek monks the estates and emancipate the serfs were thwarted (Bolliac, 1862, p. 120).

In Moldavia the Romanian situation was no different. Resentment on the Phanariot rulers and on the Greek monks were able to show immediately after the defeat of the hetaerist by the Turks, when the Moldavian boyars began to ask directed requests to the Sublime Porte for the expulsion of the Greeks from their country. Both sides boyars, of the boyars remained in Moldavia during the hetaeria rebellion, and those who were living in Bukovina and Bessarabia, met to discuss about the expulsion of the Greeks. Each group of boyars sent to the Porte a claim, through the pasha of Silistra, demanding “*for the restoration of old gifts which were most of all lost from the bad use of the Greek rulers and alms to the Sublime Porte to uprooted from the land and never dwell with us the Greek mercenaries,*

with richness of houses and other outbuildings". It was also asked for the returned of the monasteries fill with Greeks, for making the codices in the language of the statutes, to give alms and have in the prince a protector of the country, from the Moldovan nation, which we shall choose, on the basis of faith and confidence of all earthlings, and the "kapikâhya to be all Moldavians" (Xenopol, p. 25). After these two claims of 1821, well received by the Turks as a result of the bloody events that took place the following year, in 1822, appears the new project of wing of Moldavia, meaning a Constitution project, that provided in the article 63 that the monasteries mastery passage from the Greeks to earthlings (Xenopol, p. 29). Here, in Moldavia, the monasteries were divided into three categories: some were considered property of the Holy Places, other dioceses were property of Iasi, Roman and Husi, but there were autonomous monasteries that had led and independent of their possessions. Until the Organic Statute, the monasteries did not pay any tax to the state, but now will be imposed on certain taxes. A committee of four clergy and four boyars, chaired by the Metropolitan Bishop, had to compile the inventory of monasteries estates and report their income and obliged to state and charitable establishments the annual aid: seminars, public schools etc. The Government interfere not in the administration of these fortunes, than receiving its due share.

In April 1834, Prince Mihail Sturza promises his father-in-law, Vogoridi, Principle of Samos, that for ten years he will not raise the issue of the dedicated monasteries, taking into account his help for acquiring the reign. The project of organization of Moldavia in 1839 prepared by the official Leonte Radu, provided that all steering on church property in the local mastering, the Greek hegunens to be banished and replaced with Moldovans, fair paid, to reorganize the monasteries, but nothing materialized, all expressing only a state of mind. On 6th of December 1841 Voda Sturza write to Constantinople that the dedicated monasteries to enter in the system for all monasteries, according to the Organic Regulations, because they are discontent in the country, but the response was that the solving of the problem can be done by an agreement between Russia and the Sublime Porte. At one point, the Voivodes forms a project of secularization of the wealth of the dedicated monasteries, which unleashed a lot of monks' protests. Although he gain control of the wealth of the diocesan monasteries, when he was trying to extend the authority of the Department of church on the dedicated monasteries, in November 1844, he fails because of the categorical Russian veto. In 1846 the Moldavian Voivodes asks permission of the Russian Protective Power that the dedicated monasteries

establishments are obliged to subsidize charity and public utility. But appeared the cholera epidemic, and the Voivodes took the opportunity to impose to the dedicated monasteries, without the consent of Russia, to give 10,000 ducats for anti-epidemic measures.

In 1848, the Wises of the nationalist boyars asked for the secularization of the dedicated monasteries, and the revenue of the dedicated monasteries to pass budgets of all cities in Moldavia, wishes which were public sustained by the Voivodes. On 26th of July, 1848 Mihail Sturza gives "The Wonderful Constitution", which provided in the article 28 that "all the monasteries of the Principality to account for use of the revenue that they have, to not miss any small portion of the legal taxes". And boyars publish a booklet at the arrivals in Moldavia of the royal commissioners Efendi and Duhamel, about the need of the return of the wealth of the dedicated monasteries", Then, the Constitution project of the exiled boyars, written by Mihail Kogalniceanu stipulates "the secularisation of the monasteries estates".

Voivode Grigore Ghica (1849 - 1856) sent a memorandum in Constantinople showing that the state, being strait, the dedicated monasteries to be responsible to contribute to the country's budget, but still without any result. In 1851, the Voivodes auction the monastic estates, but the Crimean War broke out and the Voivodes runs in Austria and when he returned, he did not have time to deal with the problem monasteries (Spineni, 1936, p. 51).

In 1857 the Greek hierarchs submit a memorandum to the Sublime Porte in which they claim their ownership of the monasteries in the Romanian Principalities and require the cessation of abuses against them. It seems that it was a good directed memoir by monks and Porte since it was taken care by the International Commission of Bucharest, the seven commissioners of the guarantor powers of the future organization of the Principalities. Consequently, on 30rd of March, 1858, the Conference in Paris, examining the conflict between Greek monks and Principalities in the XII protocol provides a solution suitable for stakeholders to understand one with another in a year from the investiture of the Voivodes that will be at that time in the Principalities. The Ad-hoc Divan decided that all churches and monasteries will depend on bishops and council, and the next government will have to solve the problem of the dedicated monasteries (Xenopol, p. 192).

The Romanian generosity toward the Holy Places of the Orient, which meant the survival of Byzantium (Iorga, 1972, p. 132) after the fall of Constantinople to the

Turks in 1453, would return against the benefactors. The godliness of the Voivodes and of the boyars, united with mercy would be so unfortunate for the descendants of the benefactors, who had to find just press and contempt from those to which their ancestors were given their generosity. The irony of the history has made that the Romanian traditions, made for the Holy Places, to survive the Turkish pressing, to be transformed by their unworthy beneficiaries in an opportunity to shake hands with their persecutors themselves for centuries, whom will be allies against the Romanian Principalities. The two Imperial Courts, one suzerain and other protective, both harmful to the Romanians, were attracted by the Greek monks against the Romanians until seven major foreign powers were to be involved in the life of the Principalities, just when they were trying to decide their fate. However, the Romanians union will again, after many efforts, to the final expulsion of the pious Greek monks, the act of the secularization to which they were so strapped and forgetting their real purpose. (Otetea, 1971, p. 86)

Conclusions

The fortunes of the monasteries donated due to the belief of the Romanians towards the holy places of the Orient was since the beginnings a gesture of tenderness and Christian solidarity for the remaining Byzantines, already in lurch and stateless. Through the Patriarch of Constantinople is being maintained the memory of the emperor, as leader of the Christians from the Turkish Empire and undeniable spiritual leader of the Christian east. For five centuries Romanian aids were highly appreciated, than because of this act of mercy they regretted the deception of expectations. In fact, Romanian monasteries had no importance for Greek monks, but the lands of the monasteries were highly appreciated by the holy places devoted. To repair the betrayed belief, Romanians had to fight tenaciously almost 4 decades until they could perform the act of secularization of these fortunes.

Then, still so many decades have been followed by the venerable Greek tediousness until the historic act of December 13, 1863 has not been disputed by anyone. The Romanian mercy for centuries, made on the altar of the Christian faith has generated so much ungrateful of the merciful, that Romanians have seen themselves for many decades involved in an international dispute, harmful for the Romanian nation in times of historic crossroads for it.

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