

## Contributions to the knowledge of the decree 8570/1860 and the abolition of some hermitages, in 1860, from Moldova\*

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**Abstract:**

*The issue of the secularization of monastic assets or their transfer to the ownership and administration of the young State was a topic of great interest to the society of those times and later to historians.*

*However, regarding the non-dedicated Romanian monasteries, many episodes and aspects were overlooked, such as the decree of the abolition of many hermitages and the transfer of their wealth to the management of the State, which was an interference with important consequences in the life of the Church.*

*This study attempts to provide brief, unpublished catagraphic descriptions of some of these monastic settlements as part of a process of secularization that is still insufficiently understood today.*

**Keywords:**

*secularization, decree 8570, hermitage, monastic fortunes, estate, Commission*

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## 1. Introduction

Starting with 1859, all the actions and legislative projects elaborated for the purpose of a control of the Church assets by the State, will be taken over by the Ministry of Cults and Public Instruction (M.C.I.P), and the first approach was represented by the composition of a body called “Commission regulating monastic fortunes”, being proposed as project coordinator by Colonel Iancu Ghica, and President Grigorie Cozadini (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 49/1859, ff. 30-31).

The Commission began its work in the summer of 1859 with the task of researching the monasteries on site, followed by the preparation of charts of documents, the gathering of information and testimonies on the shortcomings, abuses or dissatisfaction in the community. We do not know if the task of the project to a military cadre, namely Colonel Iancu Ghica, was related to the fact that in the subsequent investigations of the commission, it will be accompanied by Gendarmerie troops, but it is certain that Grigorie Cozadini, former tenant of various monastic estates, will be a consistent figure in the committee, holding various positions or as a simple member.

This commission was most often accompanied by the Minister of Cults and even the Prime Minister, and a report was drawn up following the investigation, and diaries of the actions taken.

One of the first works of the commission was summarized in a report prepared on June 20 and is related to the irregularities found at the Vărativ monastery. In this report, the allegations were made: that the products were unfairly distributed; that the old women live in miserable conditions, following the example of a 90-year-old mother; she is accused of indifference to the helpless and sick, presenting the testimony of a sick woman who complained of hunger and that she had only once met her mother and lived at the mercy and generosity of other nuns.

One of the dominant questions in these questionnaires was related to the monastery's fortune, giving an illustrative passage in this regard: to the Minister's question,

[...] what to do with the fortune of the Monastery ? That it is not used for holding the community? some answer with simplicity that since they have been in

Monastery they know that Monastery is poor, others that their wealth is spent more with the cattle and the employees of the monastery but what to do with the cattle product? Not to know..." (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 49/1859, f. 55).

A nun claimed the fact that in the past years an estate was sold for 40,000 lei [Starting with 1867 these are Romanian coins], money that was also spent on keeping the cattle, which led the commission to find that the significant number of cattle is useless, and the lack of livelihood and search of the helpless and old is the cause of the "of decay of the community." However, we note that in this report, the answers from the community leadership are missing, as well as the names of these nuns who complain and testify about the shortcomings of the monastery, important aspects in terms of legitimacy and credibility of the case studies presented.

## **2. A decree of sad memory for the history of monasticism: 8570/1860**

Law for the abolition of two Monasteries and a number of Hermitages

Art.I The monasteries Doljești, Roman district, and Zagavia, Iași district, and Hermitages: Lipova - Vaslui district, Orgoeștii - Tutova district, Ghereasca - Covurlui district, Tissa – Bacău district, Buciumenii – Tecuciu district, Vânătorii – Neamț district, Preuteștii Suceava district, Brădicești – Fălciu district, Brazii, Troțușanul and Moșunoaale Putna district, are abolished;

Art. II The Hermitages are also abolished: Cruceanul, Pârvești, Bogdănița, Cârțiabași – Tutova district, Agatonul - Botoșani district, Goroveiu - Dorohoiu district, Mera, Cetatea Mică, Porcărețul, Mălinești, Delenii and Golgota or Hușenii – Vaslui district, Zgura and Grumăzoae Fălciu district, Giurgenii – Roman district, and Scânteea – Putna district;

Art. III The churches of these Monasteries and Hermitages will be transformed into parochial churches and will be maintained for the needs of the villages in the House of the Clergy;

Art. IV The monks and nuns who are alive today in the mentioned Monasteries and Hermitages will be relocated to the classified Monasteries, by the law of 1835 and will enjoy the same benefits as members of their communities;

The monks and nuns from the Hermitages included in art.II who will have their own cells at these hermitages, will not be able to be displaced from them, except with their consent, without the provision of art. 6 of this project;

Art.V. The rooms of the monasteries and hermitages abolished, as they will be able to be repaired and, where the need arises, will be transformed into village schools or other settlements for public use;

Article VI From those shown in art. II The hermitages that will have stalls and will prove to have an annual income of 1000 gold coins, will follow until the final organization (...) of communities, but the administration of their fortunes will be offered to the Ministry of Cults according to the rule on classified monasteries;

Article VII They will not use the advantages provided by art. IV all the monks and nuns of the abolished Monasteries and Hermitages, who from 1855 will have become monks against the civil laws and the approbations communicated by the then spiritual authorities;

Article VIII. Until the final reform of monasticism, the monk will be allowed only in the classified Monasteries, and this, in accordance with the civil and religious legislation and with the special authorization of the Ministry of Cults;

We make it known to all and order that these, invested with the seal of the State and entered in the Official Gazette, be executed exactly; for which, our ad-interim Minister of State Secretary to the Department of Cults and Public Instruction, has the responsibility of the execution of this Ordinance.

They gave in our royal residence Iași, the month of August in 9 days, the year of Salvation 1860, and of our second reign in the United Principalities.

Signed Alexander I

Counter-signed Minister of State ad-interim at the Department of Cults and Public Instruction Mihail Kogălniceanu (M.O., 1860, 905).

This ordinance deserves the attention of the researchers of the history of law in the Romanian space, for the novelty given by sharp and incisive formulations that constitute “legal” interferences of the State in the life of the Church.

We note a few elements: in art. I and II it is communicated in an imperative tone the abolition of a number of monastic establishments without other normative formulations or explanatory notes, but only with two mentions - the first in art. VI which refers to the possibility of functioning for a period, in case an annual income of 1000 gold coins per year would be proved, but these will remain in the administration of the State and the other is found in art. IV and exempts from evacuation the

nuns who will prove the ownership of the cells; in art. III orders the transformation of the churches of the settlements into parochial churches that will be maintained from the House of the Clergy, an organism that would be “dissolved” in the State Treasury; in art. V it is planned to repair and reuse buildings as schools or other settlements for the benefit of the community, or in many of the settlements schools already functioned, and subsequent developments have shown us abandonment to the point of ruining buildings (a well-known example in this sense is Doljești-Roman), and in art. VIII provides for the conditioning of entry into monasticism with the authorization of the state.

### 3. Hermitages abolished in the Diocese of Huși

*Lipova Hermitage.* The monastic complex included the abbot's houses in which 16 people lived, endowed with 4 rooms and 2 pantries; the cells “behind the abbot's houses”; the guest cells, in which 12 people lived (6 rooms and 6 pantries) and other cells occupied by the school and the teacher; the cells of the dining room with 3 rooms in which 8 people lived; cells in the orchard with a small stone cellar with 2 rooms and 2 pantries inhabited by 4 people and 5 monks' own cells (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f.2). The numerous cells and the numerous community composed of 73 inhabitants, indicate the existence of an intense monastic life with a household comparable to that of the classified monasteries: 246 “fălci” [„Fălci” it is an old unit of measure representing the equivalent of about 1.5 hectares] farmland, 144 fălci of hay, 169 fălci pasture and 700 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, ff.12-13).

In terms of the movable assets, the household had 9 head of cattle, 4 harness horses and 102 bee families.

*Golgotha or the Hușenii Hermitage.* Here there were many cells: two cells with 4 and 3 rooms, the archondaric with 2 rooms and another 5 cells of the nuns (a cell of the nun Agafia with 2 rooms, one of the nun Paisia Grosu with 3 rooms, a cell with a room of the nun Fevronia Urzică, another with 4 rooms of the nun Zanoide, with 3 rooms and “special” 2 rooms of the nun Agafia Panu and another with 2 rooms) (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 4). The community administered 15 cattle and real estate in Ivănești in the

form of 72 fălci of farmland, 16 fălci of hay, 43 fălci of pasture and 40 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, ff.12-13).

*Delenii Hermitage.* The settlement had a wooden church built on a stone foundation, a cellar and a wooden stable, a cellar near the priest's house, a barn and a "fountain" all in "poor condition". Next to them there was the abbess's cell and another 11 cells, all built of beams (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f.7 ).

The property, movable and immovable, was modest, totaling 2 oxen, a cow and a few fălci of farmland (2 fălci), 4 fălci of hay, 5 fălci of pasture, 2 fălci of forest but also 120 cuttings of vineyard, an orchard with trees, small plots of land in the Ivăneștii and Cioranu estate, in the Tutova district (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 19).

*Mălinești Hermitage.* Here there is a church built of oak wood "simple inside", a wooden bell tower on a stone foundation with three bells, a barn of beams, all in poor condition.

Overall, there were three cells, one of which was the abbot's house with 4 rooms, another two cells outside the yard and what is a feature, two huts covered with earth, one of which had 3 rooms (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 9).

The community here took care of raising 6 heifers, 2 calves and two cows, a total of 10 cattle, and managed part of the Gorceni estate from the Vaslui district: 4 fălci of farmland and 2 fălci of pasture, and the Bosinca estate from the Roman district: 3 fălci of farmland, 3 fălci of hay and 14 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 19).

*Porcăreți Hermitage.* Although the bell tower was built of wood, a peculiarity among the other hermitages was that the church of this settlement was built of brick. There were 6 cells, one belonging to the abbot, with 2 rooms and a "hall in the middle", a "barn" and a spacious cellar (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, f. 11).

The movable and immovable property was modest consisting of 2 heads of cattle, respectively 22 fălci of farmland, 15 fălci of hay and 6 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 374, ff.111-112).

#### 4. The Diocese of Roman and Bacău

If for Vaslui district, the prefect who was responsible for the record of monastic property, does not provide information on the cultic heritage, in the Episcopate of Roman and Bacău this aspect is different, so that most hermitages under the legal effect of the decree of abolition, have a description of heritage cultic.

*Scânteia Hermitage.* The settlement had a wall church and a bell tower with 4 forks that housed two large and three small bells, and the annexes consisted of three houses, one of the abbey, with three rooms, porch and wooden tile roof, another served as a living room, which the third was a barn and stable, covered with reeds .

In the catagraphic situations, the cultic patrimony is highlighted, being mentioned an icon of the Mother of God dressed in silver with a crown polished with gold; a large icon in front of the Mother of God with a silver crown and hands, and "on the back" the icon of St. George with a silver crown; the icon of the "Ascension of the Lord" also clad in silver; a silver censer; a chalice and a silver disk and many garments (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 369, f. 25).

The immovable property of the hermitage consisted of 36 cells and numerous estates: the surrounding estate or the Scânteia estate with 8 fălci of farmland and 28 fălci of forest; Căpotesei estate with 2 fălci of farmland and 2 fălci of pasture; Pătesei's estate with 3 fălci farmland; ()rosesei with 10 fălci farmland and Dăbesei with unspecified surface.

*Trotușianu and St. John hermitages.* We remember the icons existing in the patrimony of these two hermitages at the time of their abolition, so that in the Trotușianu hermitage there was an icon of the Mother of God with silver crown and hands, a necklace with money and gold chain and a cross clad in silver, and in the hermitage "St. John" were inventoried two icons of the Mother of God with the Savior, with a silver crown; an icon of the Savior with a silver crown; an icon of St. John with a silver crown; an icon of St. George and another of St. Nicholas also with silver crowns (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 369, f. 24). The property of the Trotușianu hermitage was a modest one, having under administration 4 fălci of farmland, 6 farmland of hay and 7 cattle (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 369, ff. 18-20).

*Tissa Hermitage* (Bacău). It was also called Silvestri due to the property of the same name, belonging to the Doljești monastery, on which the settlement had its second church (D.J.A.N.I., dos.179, f.59).

If the movable fortune was a modest one, the immovable one included considerable tracts of land: 135 fălci of farmland, 30 fălci of hay, 50 fălci of pasture and 160 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 179, f. 4) .

*Ghereasca Hermitage* (Covurlui). This settlement, dedicated to "Saint George", had 4 monks who took care of large properties: 104 fălci of farmland, 30 fălci of hay, 113 fălci of pasture and 280 fălci of forest (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 181, f. 11).

The monastic complex consisted of 17 cells, of which the house of the abbot and three other houses were composed of 4 rooms and had walls of twigs and a thatched roof. Some houses were described as "deserted" and other annexes were represented by two fountains with thatched roofs, stables and barns (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 181, f. 11).

## 5. Metropolitan of Iași

*Zagavia and Doljești monasteries*. These settlements are the only ones in the numerous series of hermitages abolished in 1860, which were in fact monasteries and which represented, one by the secular presence, the other by a dynamic activism, important centers of culture, or their abolition also meant the destruction of an ecclesiastical heritage with material and immaterial value.

*Zagavia*. Upon hearing the news of the dissolution of the monastery and the relocation of the monks to the Cosula monastery, in the first reply-address, the abbot of the Zagavia monastery requests permission, both for him and for the rest of his parents, to continue living in Zagavia until the feast of St. George next year because winter is approaching, but a short telegraphic reply is answered in a hasty tone that the other monks cannot stay there.

This dissension will deepen until the beginning of February 1861, when the abbot Veniamin will demand the compensation of a sum of 10,000 gold coins, the equivalent of the sums invested in building the church and the cells but also the debt of the Central House to the



monastery, since 1840, instead of the annual sum of 24,000 lei, only 19,000 were received by the monastery, and the debt of the monastery of 1000 gold coins had been paid by Veniamin upon entering the abbot. Even if sometimes the abbot claims that he paid this debt invoked by the authorities, when entering the abbothood, and other times, that it is in fact the money invested in the construction of the monastery, it is certain that at the time of the monastery's dissolution, the state owes at least 102,000 lei (approx. 3,300 gold coins) only from the difference accumulated in 20 years from the incomplete subsidy given from the central budget (Matei 2021, 441-450).

The annual income, based on the balance sheet for 1859, obtained by the Zagavia monastery was 24,000 lei (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 549), a gain obtained through the estates of Zberenii and Cârjoae, Cârliții (?), Parts of Todirești and the estate around the monastery.

*Doljești-Roman.* Although built in 1764, the monastic settlement soon became " *the pride of Roman County and the nest of peace and even culture of the region* " (Vasilescu 1901, 994). From the beginning of the monastic life here, many founders and believers endowed the settlement with many properties (estates) from which came the income of the monastery. With some unfortunate periods caused by less dedicated abbots under which the estates were lost, the monastery had reached an annual income of 95,596 lei in 1859 (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 549). The estates that the Doljești monastery owned at the time of their dissolution, and passed into the administration of the State are Bu(?)ulucu, Silivestrii, Cordărenii, Șipotenii and the surrounding estate (D.J.A.N.I., dos. 131, f. 6 v.).

## 6. Conclusions

The establishment of structure such as the "Commission regulating monastic fortunes" within the M.C.I.P. and well-defined tasks indicate a major interest in the secularization of monastic wealth.

The activity of this commission will be used as a justifying support both in the wider process of secularization and for the immediate actions such as decree 8570 by which numerous monastic establishments were abolished. The state thus came into possession of the entire estate of

these settlements classified as hermitages, to which were added two important monasteries in historical, cultural or material terms: Zagavia and Doljești.

This ordinance, structured on 8 articles, which can in turn constitute a distinct research topic, marks the emergence of important dissensions in the Church-State relationship, generated by the rigid and imperative actions of the State, by the attempt to monopolize the secular factor in issues of the internal life of the Church (for example, the conditioning of the entry into monasticism by the authorization of the Ministry).

Lipova, Golgota, Delenii, Mălinești, Porcăreți (Vaslui), Scânteia, Troțușianu with "St. Ioan" (Putna), Tissa (Bacău) and Ghereasca (Covurlui) represents a part of the series of hermitages that came under the legal effects of the decree, hermitages about whose material situation at the time of its abolition are known very little or nothing, and this study presents, in this sense, new catagraphic situations.

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